

Brenda Maddox - *D.H. Lawrence: The story of a Marriage*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1994
 ISBN 0-671-68712-3
 Ginette Katz-Roy

What Brenda Maddox says of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* might very well apply to her own book: "It is beautifully plotted and tells a clear story. If it is sensational, it is also instructional" (429). Her impressive 620-page biography of Lawrence, based on an enormous amount of reading and research, reads like a novel teeming with original characters, all involved in innumerable sub-plots around the spicy story of an intriguing married couple, that of Lawrence and his wife. The book is lively and written in supple and informal prose. The tone and the interpretations are vigorously personal. In her introduction, the author clearly states that she is addressing "the non-academic reader" - especially "those who cannot read Lawrence but also those who love him too much to face the flaws in his personality and his work." The rhythm of the narrative is never slowed down by references or footnotes as it may be in more academic works. All the notes and sources are to be found at the end of the book - if you are curious or distrustful. Even the handling of the chronology at the beginning is strikingly unconventional. Instead of starting with the well-known story of Lawrence's family background, birth and early years in Eastwood, the first chapter entitled "New Age, Old Adam" covers the period 1908-1910 when Lawrence was already in his twenties. It serves as an introduction to the main theme of the first chapters which is Lawrence's quest for a wife. Just as Elaine Feinstein's *Lawrence's Women, The Intimate Life of D.H. Lawrence* (1993) focused on the writer's relationships with the women he knew, this biography centres on his incredible attachment to his wife. "Theirs was a mismatch made in heaven", the author asserts from the start. And she proceeds to prove it efficiently using the resources of the Cambridge edition of Lawrence's letters, new interviews, and all the recently discovered material (Otto Gross's letters to Frieda, unpublished letters from Elsa Jaffe to Gross's wife, Rosalind Baynes' memoir of her love affair with Lawrence in 1920, etc...).

The picture of Lawrence which Brenda Maddox gives us contains enough novelty to justify her enterprise. She excels at reconstituting the historical and sociological background of a particular special day through quotations from the media (see the report on the Weekley divorce on p179). With a wealth of little - often crude - material details and a certain amount of imagination, she attempts to reconstruct the image of the man of flesh and blood with his scrawny physique, his bad health, his sexual incompetence, his irritability, his ideological inconsistencies, his cruelty to women and animals, his thriftiness - and the genius which, according to her, he largely owed to his union with Frieda. Among other unexpected pieces of information, we learn that Lawrence kept his correspondents'

envelopes for spitting in. There is less insistence on his possible "homoeerotic" temptations than on his practice of heterosexual sodomy and "his delight in the dark smells and crevices of the body" (40). After asserting that Frieda and Lawrence were "sexually unmatched", the author explains why, in her opinion, their bond was nonetheless so durable: "Frieda's belief that nothing in the name of love was wrong liberated Lawrence, as a man and as a writer. Yet it obliged him to stay with her, the only woman who could satisfy him" (148). So much so for Lawrence's almost perfect fidelity, but what about Frieda? Unfaithful as she was, she seems to have remained devoted to her second husband for various bad reasons including her financial dependence and her pride in being a genius's wife.

Brenda Maddox is lavish with interpretations of biographical facts or of texts which she considers reveal some biographical truths. She gives us five possible reasons why Lawrence grew a beard in 1914 (193). Whenever a woman of the Lawrence circle fails to have children, she ascribes it to a possible venereal disease. There are also a few psychoanalytical touches here and there like "Lawrence's yearning for a man he could eat was less homosexual than infantile, it was the desperation of a frail and hypersensitive boy to incorporate a father to fend off the devouring mother" (230). Still more daring is the author's reading of the scene of the military examination in *Kangaroo* when Somers is asked to bend forward to show his backside to the doctors: "It is as if Lawrence had to travel halfway around the world to expose to his readers the dark door where he craved to be entered" (307). This strange mixture of precise scholarship, conjectures and challenging remarks certainly renders her book both titillating and slightly controversial. One could question her definition of *The White Peacock* as being essentially "a horrendous indictment of the destructiveness of mothers" (63) or her interpretation of *The Woman who rode away* as the tale of a man "who must kill the woman in himself before he can become a man" (352). She often accepts uncritically some of the testimonies she quotes, particularly the stories about Frieda's promiscuity like that borrowed from Willie Hopkins' or Mabel Luhan's memoirs at the beginning of chapter 6: "Within twenty minutes of meeting him, Frieda had Lawrence in bed". Some texts and reports are obviously used so as to serve the author's general purpose and to create the kind of sensation that keeps a reader pleasantly awake through such a thick book.

In her acknowledgments, Brenda Maddox thanks her publishers for their support and their belief that "there is no last word on anybody". This exciting book which sheds a new light on Lawrence's psychology but sometimes fails to do justice to his achievement as an artist is certainly not the last word on Lawrence either. Mark Kinkead-Weekes has already added a new contribution to the long list of biographical studies. As the writer's readership decreases, an increasing number of biographers try to keep his memory alive, and portray him from different angles. Brenda Maddox's Lawrence is a married man.

Her originality lies in her attempt to write the story of a couple and study the interaction of husband and wife. The attention she pays to Frieda's unusual personality is one of the strong points in her work. But I am not sure that Lawrence and Frieda really emerge more likeable or interesting in the end. Still more than Feinstein's biography, this book, with its many unflattering close-ups, gives us the image of a pathetic and infantile Lawrence which might very well confirm the opinion of "those who cannot read Lawrence" - whatever the amount of truth in this portrait. It is obvious Lawrence's female biographers of the end of this century would never have succumbed to his charm. Fortunately, if in real life his voice was high-pitched and unpleasant, the one that speaks through his published prose and poetry may still charm a number of readers. No matter if the man was a disappointing lover and the unpredictable husband of an unmanageable woman, as long as the writer retains some of his aura and remains the "priest of love" he had chosen to be.

Paul Poplawski - *D.H. Lawrence: A Reference Companion*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1996.
ISBN 0-313-28637-X
Bethan Jones

Stating his preference for Tylor's *Primitive Culture* over *The Golden Bough*, Lawrence once celebrated Tylor's volume as "sound and substantial". The sound and substantial nature of Paul Poplawski's new reference companion is undeniable: this is a volume that will undoubtedly prove to be an invaluable asset to students, critics and readers of Lawrence alike.

The volume may be best summarised in Poplawski's own words: it is a "comprehensive but easy-to-use guide to the life, works and critical reception of D.H. Lawrence". It is targeted at all breeds or brands of "Lawrentian" - from the beginning student and casual reader to the scholar or specialist - and claims to enable the reader to identify relevant material quickly and easily. The emphasis is on providing information rather than interpretation and critical commentary, so that subjectivity is kept to a minimum, and even in the more "interpretative" sections a counter-balance is provided or implied in the wealth of bibliographical details designated for future reading.

The "Preface", in which Poplawski postulates such claims as the above for the nature and purpose of the book, is a good indication of the scrupulous methodology that is adopted throughout. It is entitled: "How to Use This Book", and sets forth its precise way of formatting and categorising information for the ultimate coherence and ease of access. The book is divided into five main "Parts", with the titles: "Life", "Works", "Critical Reception", "Reference Bibliographies" and "Indexes". The first three parts are further subdivided into "Sections" so that "Part II. Works", for instance, is split into "Novels", "Short Fiction", "Poetry", "Plays" and "Other Works". Each of these sections incorporates yet more subdivisions, so that the sub-section entitled "Novels" can include a separate entry for *The White Peacock*, *The Trespasser* and *Sons and Lovers*, for instance. These entries are numbered sequentially throughout the entire book, from "1. Background and Youth: 1885-1908" (in Section A of Part I) to "48. Screen Adaptations of Lawrence by Nigel Morris" (in Section 3 of Part V). This system excludes bibliographies, which are numbered separately from 1 to 98.

The bibliographies are not copious but thoroughly researched and comprehensive. I will take as an example Bibliography 63: the "Master Bibliography of Criticism of Lawrence's Poetry", which relates to my own area of research. It is prefaced by a list of abbreviations - such as LPO for *Love Poems and Others*, A for *Amores* etc... - so that it is possible to identify at a glance the verse-book that is the focus of the listed critical work. As well as including the standard book-length studies of the poetry, such as Sandra Gilbert's *Acts of Attention*, Poplawski also incorporates lesser known but equally significant texts such as Holly Laird's *Self and Sequence*: a book which has been omitted