

*The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol.5, 1924-27, edited by James T. Boulton and Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; pp. xxxiii + 686; cloth £45.00)

This volume maintains the standards that we have learned to expect of the Cambridge Edition of Lawrence's letters. It is no part of this review to summarise the editors' brilliant Introduction, which realises the well-nigh impossible aim of outlining both the geographical pilgrimage covered by these 890 letters and the mercurial mental states of their writer. Suffice to say that the letters date from 12 March 1924 to 19 March 1927 and are written from Taos, Mexico City, Oaxaca, (pronounced 'Wa-ha-ha' like 'tomato', as Lorenzo explains to his sister), New York, London, Baden-Baden, Spotorno, Florence, Capri, Ravello, Chelsea, Newtonmore, Skye, Sutton-on-Sea, Hampstead, Paris and finally Florence once more. About 350 had not been previously published, so that the work involved in collecting them must have been prodigious. The illustrations consist of an interesting group of photographs and drawings well reproduced.

The footnotes, mercifully placed in the main body of the text, represent another enormous labour. They seem to me to be more plentiful than ever, which is not surprising when one realises that this is the period of Lawrence becoming acknowledged as a leading man of letters and the focus of much public attention, so that his circle of acquaintances expands continuously, and newcomers have to be noted. One aspect of editorial policy that we should be grateful for is the inclusion of replies by correspondents, where these are relevant and available, though it involves the reader in much perusal of fine print. It is particularly interesting to read letters from Secker and David Jester, which throw light on Lawrence's professional relationships and the respect in which he was held by people like his American bibliographer, Dr. Edward McDonald. On the other hand, letters from personal friends like Mabel Luhan and Dorothy Brett illuminate their roles in the tortuous relationships which gripped the four main protagonists. As in the previous volume, bitter personal feuds which marked the earlier pages, such as those with Mabel Luhan and Murry, are resolved by the end.

The theme, or ground-base, on which these innumerable variations are overlaid, is the question of health, which dominates more and more of the letters as the volume advances. But to begin with, Lawrence appears as an energetic and practical man addressing himself to the minute particulars of restoring 'three filthy and primitive dwellings on the ranch (4) - ordering timber, adobe tools, whitewash, tin-tacks and putty, hinges and screws, and a sack of fine straw for plaster. 'As for wrestling with material, try a foul well' (51). But by August 1924 he was ill in bed, 'feeling raggy with a sore chest and a thick throat' (89). According to Brett he was already by this time spitting blood, though he continued to write euphemistically about his condition. Ill-health was to dog him from now on, and colds and flu, whether in writer or recipients, become a constant theme.

Lawrence is at his tenderest and most concerned when writing to Gertie Cooper, at that time facing a possible operation on her tubercular lung. Here is Lawrence's

attitude to sickness and death: 'While we live we must be game. And when we come to die, we'll die game too' (23 January 1927; 632-4). This letter contains vivid reminiscences about early Eastwood friendships, which complement his expressed joy at the previous year's visit to Lincolnshire. Much has been made by critics of Lawrence's ambivalent attitude to his homeland and perhaps not enough of those sun-lit letters from 'Dunneville, Trusthorpe Rd., Sutton-on-Sea'. To Arthur Wilkinson, his neighbour at the Villa Miranda, he writes, 'I like the Lincolnshire coast - knew it when I was a boy. It is so very bracing and tonic' (picks me up like a shot' (29 August 1926; 518). And to Else he talks of 'big smooth sands that gleam when they are wet and little people that seem gone in the gleam - and a hoarse sea' (26 August 1926; 515). Finally to Martin Secker he says, 'The Midlands are still much more alive than London' (2 September 1926; 522). But of course Lawrence's moods are notoriously fitful.

Lawrence's famous ability to evoke a sense of place while in absence from that place is illustrated in a letter to Brett from Italy, bringing the Ranch vividly alive and wishing he could stride across the Atlantic to it. 'Is the messiness of the old corral passing away? Are there very many flowers? Will there be many raspberries? Were there still humming birds round the squawberry bushes or are they gone? Does the ditch run a nice stream?' (23 June 1926; 478). There are of course vivid on-the-spot sentences about flowery Tuscany, about a 'blue and iridescent day' in Skye, as well as the flowers and sights of Mexico. And suddenly one finds the familiar letter to Rolf Gardiner with its long paean on the 'country of my heart' (3 December 1926; 592).

Much has been said about Lawrence's capacity for varying the tone and style of his letters to suit his recipients. Yet in this volume we find flurries of post-cards and notes couched in almost identical language. These usually occur when the Lawrences are on the move, and Lorenzo must apprise everyone of his next address. Altogether he is inordinately dependent on letters from family and close friends, a constant cry being, 'I have had no news for weeks'.

Let me finish this review with a selection of choice quotations illustrating Lawrence's style, wit and wisdom: 'Winter returns for all old ladies unfortunately' (139); 'It's much better if I'm not popular: you'll get much more from me later' (91); 'They say the next revolution begins on Monday' (156); 'Here the grass is only just moving green out of the sere earth, and the hairy pale mauve anemones that the Indians call Owl flowers stand strange and alone among the dead pine needles under the wintry trees' (236); 'There are so many places in the world that, thank God, one need not go to' (263); 'The longer I live the more I realise it would shatter the nerves of an Aristotle or a Socrates, to have to think deeply about this world we've got ourselves into' (466).

Rosemary Howard