

Paul Poplawski, ed., *Writing the Body in D.H. Lawrence: Essays on Language, Representation, and Sexuality*, London: Greenwood Press, 2001. Pp. 240, hardback, ISBN 0 313 31517 5, £51.95

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Paul Poplawski's editorial work makes it possible to navigate the vast range of views and approaches (from stylistics to psychoanalysis, structuralism etc.) grouped together under this broad title. Some essays are in fact much more concerned with language or representation than with the body itself. But they never lose sight of the main theme, which is certainly crucial in Lawrence's work: 'The realization of the body [in Lawrence's] writing comes to represent an instantiation of reality itself...that makes the body real and the real bodily' (Introduction, p. xiv). Whether the body is seen as a dramatic vehicle of meaning (Helen Baron), as a fascinating futuristic biomachine (Harrison – neologism mine), or as a perceptive and self-perceptive system of *six* senses (Sargent), all of these essays address the long overlooked question: 'why write the body?'

The human body is now so commonly shown and referred to, for both creative and commercial purposes, that future generations of Lawrentians (including myself) may find it difficult to relate to the extremes of indignation and prurience his 'writing of the body' once stirred. Therefore I particularly welcome Jay A. Gertzman's tongue-in-cheek crime story (who turned this well-meaning author into a filthy pornographer?) set during the American Prohibition. The other twelve essays, by contrast, show how much more profound and complex Lawrence's use of the body really was. In the process, they enhance our understanding of Lawrence in two ways. First, they further define his literary practice, through close readings of major texts (and their earlier ver-

sions – see Helen Baron on *Paul Morel* and *Sons and Lovers*) as well as lesser-known pieces ('A Dream of Life', 'The Undying Man' in Ferreira's essay). Secondly, the essays tend to re-endow Lawrence's texts with a sense of contemporary relevance, as they (on the whole) successfully test his insights against the most recent developments in gender studies (Siegel, Gramich, Ferreira) or postmodern theory (Watson), or against actual *praxis* in the educational (Sargent) or the political sphere. As regards the latter, I especially recommend Watson's well-supported linkage of 'Introduction to These Paintings' with the Weberian theory of the capitalist harnessing of the body.

The reader will find some essays more inspiring than others, for reasons of content or form. It is unfortunate that Stefania Michelucci's essay on the visual arts should be devoid of iconographic support, for example. As for the presence or not of allegory in *Women in Love* (K. Kay Kondo), I must remind other readers of Gilles Deleuze's 'Nietzsche and Saint Paul, Lawrence and John of Patmos', which describes allegory as a moral and 'judgmental' vehicle of power (as opposed to symbolic *puissance*), an 'intellectual and linear process' which seems to me at odds with the vitality and openness of *Women in Love*.

In spite of their differences, the essays converge in that they all ultimately seem to ask the very question Lou asks herself in *St. Mawr* (Poplawski): 'What is real?' It is the same question that Lawrence was confronted with throughout his life (what is 'quick'? What is 'dead'?). It takes on various forms: is there a supersensuous, 'true world' beyond the tomb that encloses our postmodern lives (Watson)? What is it like to be 'thinking at the edge' of the real, the truly *original* (Sargent)? Is there an invisible *Ungrund* which is the matrix of all the 'signatures' we have to rely on (See Young-Park), or a neutral (muddy) *ground* where individuals can meet in regenerating conjunction (Gramich)?

Lawrence's was, and increasingly is, a world of the virtual, where 'all we know is shadows' (Watson, quoting 'Introduction to these Paintings', p. 268). In this context, the living body, desiring or quiescent (Ferreira), repulsively abject or pleasurably attractive (Watson), is all one feels to be real. This book pays deserved tribute to Lawrence's commitment to writing the body, which indeed may be 'the first tiny step back to real substance' (Watson, p. 265).

Notes on Contributors

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