

Anne Fernihough, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to D.H. Lawrence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp xx+292, paperback, ISBN 052162617X, £15.99

*Andrew Harrison*

This important collection of essays on Lawrence is a significant addition to the Cambridge Companions to Literature series. Like the other Companions, it aims to appeal to readers across the full range of the academic spectrum, providing undergraduates with a succinct introductory guide to Lawrence's writings and allowing postgraduates and specialist scholars to reflect on the latest developments in the academic study of the author.

As editor of the volume, Anne Fernihough provides an admirable introduction, in which she outlines the writer's changing critical fortunes from Leavis through his New Critical heyday to the feminist attacks and beyond. Fernihough presents Lawrence as having benefited from the recent movement towards interdisciplinary cultural studies in English departments: his complex eclecticism and cultural liminality lend themselves to a critical approach which no longer feels the need to tie up loose ends. The fourteen essays which follow concern themselves in different ways with how Lawrence's writing 'crosses lines, between linguistic and social registers, between literary genres and traditions, between whole discourses and disciplines'. The contributors largely comprise established Lawrence scholars and those who have come to write on Lawrence through an interest in modernist writings and their cultural and political contexts.

The first section, on 'Texts', contains eight essays: the first five are primarily concerned with Lawrence's novels, while the following three consider the tales, the poetry, and Lawrence's engagement with drama and use of the dra-

matic in his work. In the excellent opening essay, Rick Rylance shows how the perplexity occasioned in the minds of Lawrence's early reviewers by *The White Peacock* and *The Trespasser* can be accounted for in part by their author's attempt to negotiate between a nihilistic materialism and some residual form of spirituality: Lawrence's intellectual uncertainty is filtered through his characters and through the use of shifting perspectives and imagery. In essay 2, Marianna Torgovnick identifies the difficulty of assessing Lawrence's treatment of sex and marriage without succumbing to a complacent 'Lawrentian' vocabulary and mindset. She argues, via a consideration of selected scenes from *The Rainbow*, that Lawrence's unique contribution to writings on sex and sexuality resides in his ability to *narrate* these aspects of the self as a tissue of thoughts, fantasies and emotions impacting upon broader social relationships. Essays 3 and 4 concern themselves with Lawrence's responses to racial and cultural otherness. Hugh Stevens argues that Lawrence's subjection to the English state during the war intensified an existing tendency in him to celebrate a foreign masculinity and homoerotic freedom, and, in contrast, caused him to view the northern races as contaminated and degenerate. He then reads 'The Prussian Officer' as 'a story of subjection' and traces the highly ambivalent images of racial and sexual alterity in *Women in Love*. Mark Kinkead-Weekes examines the 'decolonisation' of Lawrence's vision through his open, honest and imaginative responses to the peoples of New Mexico and Mexico in his fiction, essays and travel writings of the 1920s. Next, Morag Shiach discusses Lawrence's changing attitudes to different forms of work, before tracing the various representations of labour (academic, industrial and manual) in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Con Coroneos and Trudi Tate reconsider the tales and argue that Lawrence's early use of theatrical or portentous endings gives way to a more seamless modulation between naturalistic, psychological, symbolic

and mythic elements in the later works. Helen Sword stresses the range and unevenness of Lawrence's poetic output and evaluates his idiosyncratic contribution to the disparate traditions of confessional, nature and visionary poetry. In essay 8, John Worthen assesses Lawrence's curtailed work as a dramatist and calls for a new awareness of the dramatic and self-dramatising qualities of the prose fiction and letters.

The book offers a good coverage of Lawrence's texts, and, whilst the absence of any sustained attention to *The Lost Girl*, *Mr Noon*, the Australian novels and some of the travel writings is unfortunate, it was doubtless necessitated by considerations of space and the needs of an element of its intended audience.

The second section considers 'Contexts and Critical Issues'. The chosen contexts are modernism and psychoanalysis. Michael Bell argues that Lawrence was engaged in a parallel project to the mainstream modernists, inflecting their central preoccupations through his more implicit approach to (for instance) impersonality and myth. Fiona Becket shows how Lawrence, implicated in Freudian thought through his contacts and a broader cultural osmosis, addressed what he took to be its discrediting of the unconscious through his development in the psychology books of a metaphorical language associating the unconscious with various bodily nerve-centres. This metaphorical language is also traced in his other non-fictional and fictional writings, where it is shown to be reflecting a pressing personal concern with the tendency to over-intellectualise, with the re-birth of the self, and with masculine independence and sickness. In the critical issues under debate, Drew Milne argues against conflating politics and sexual politics in Lawrence's case, claiming that, in *St. Mawr* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence self-critically problematizes his characters' escape from political contradiction and class struggle into sexual individualism. Sandra M. Gilbert considers Lawrence's gendering of apocalyptic mo-

ments in his writing and links his concerns for apocalyptic transformation and the sexual mysteries of metamorphosis, measuring the distance between our millennial irony or cynicism and his committed spiritual honesty. Paul Eggert assesses the biographical fascination with Lawrence in the light of the changing role of biography in literary criticism. Looking at the newly-complex portrait of Lawrence's writing life offered by the Cambridge biography, he reflects on the challenge to criticism of confronting the writer's paradoxical qualities afresh: Lawrence is 'depressed and solipsistic, but also wickedly joyous, outward-looking and fearless in the most intellectually ambitious ways', his writing full of 'risk-taking polarisations and extremes', yet marked by 'its liability to revision under new stimulus, its tricksiness, its sardonic comedy, its idiosyncrasies'. In the concluding essay, Chris Baldick considers Lawrence's critical and cultural legacy, ending with a call for more discriminating stylistic and historicising approaches to his writings, and with a rather bleak vision of his possible fate outside academic circles. Baldick's somewhat sketchy sense of Lawrence criticism post-1980 is offset by Paul Poplawski's exemplary guide to further reading, which will prove invaluable to undergraduate students needing an overview of the main critical landmarks in Lawrence scholarship.

The essays in this volume share a concern to dispense with preconceptions of Lawrence and to eschew the critical complacency which such preconceptions foster. They stress Lawrence's continuing capacity to disturb, unsettle, puzzle and irritate. The Lawrence who emerges from their pages is an innovative and complexly self-reflexive writer and cultural critic, who worked in parallel to the movements and systems of thought of his time, and whose resistance to easy classification is only now beginning to be fully acknowledged and explored. The popular and academic currency of *this*

Lawrence in the coming years will require a new section in future accounts of his critical and cultural presence.