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Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Again, a significant comparison might perhaps be developed here but left hanging it suggests a grave judgement without quite specifying its gravamen. I would surmise that even readers unsympathetic to this novel will baulk at the comparison. On page 42 we learn that "*Women in Love* has received several post-colonial readings critical of Lawrence's African theme". As with some self-declared feminist readers, post-colonial readers have made ideological objections to Lawrence; objections which have been rebutted in their turn as reductive misreadings. The author gives no indication of what to make of such readings and that indeed seems not to be his purpose. He is just letting us know what is out there, or at least some of it. It is unlikely that Lawrence scholars will find benefit in this book.

**Anthony Pacitto, *of lizards & lovers & lunch with d. h. lawrence*.
Wine Jar Press, 2021.
Pp. 306. £10.99 (paperback). ISBN 978 1 9998 8383 6**

Reviewed by Susan Reid

Anthony Pacitto's second novel returns to the Abruzzi, in Italy, where the Lawrences stayed in December 1919: a visit vibrantly evoked in his debut novel, *A Sense of Ancient Gods* (2018; reviewed by Neil Roberts in *JDHLS* 2018). Lawrence features again, as advertised in the book's alliterative title, but in a very different way, and stylistically the two novels also differ. If the triumph of *A Sense of Ancient Gods* was Pacitto's skilful channelling of Lawrentian lyricism and the spirit of place, his new book is a weaving together of seemingly disparate threads (lizards and lovers and Lawrence, among others) to explore the interconnectedness of times, people and places – another quintessentially Lawrentian theme.

The main protagonist is Lapo (a diminutive of Giacomo), an aspiring art historian, who inherits his grandfather's villa in Pico (as

Lapo calls the village of Picinisco). Since he met his grandfather (the Cavaliere Caraceno) only once and there is a large, extended family, this inheritance is one of many mysteries in the book (even how Lapo “was given this name is a mystery”, 1). On his way to Pico, Lapo learns of the Lawrences’ visit and reads *The Lost Girl*, and on arrival soon discovers the house where they stayed and which features in Lawrence’s 1920 novel. Lapo also meets, and falls in love with, a mysterious Canadian girl called Silvana – a name, he notes, that has almost the same letters as Alvina, the heroine of *The Lost Girl* (106). Silvana takes him back to the Lawrences’ house to show him the mural she has discovered behind a wardrobe.

Two naked figures in a semi-desert landscape – a man with dark hair, moustache, half-crouched, leaning back against a rock, one leg drawn up in front ... He is looking away past the other figure – a young naked woman, dark shortish hair, small upturned breasts. She is half kneeling half sitting ... She is looking back at the man. Above them ... some sort of small goddess or Madonna figure, and at the bottom of the picture a curious little curled lizard watches on. (98–9)

Lapo is willing to stake his reputation that the mural has been painted by Lawrence.

But as foreshadowed in the book’s opening ‘Overture’ there are “Stories within stories, all mysteriously linked” (ii) and so, before Lapo can leave for Rome to establish his find, a mysterious old Colonello arrives in Pico searching for the grandson of the Cavaliere Caraceno. The colonel tells Lapo how his grandfather saved his life during the Great War and how, in return, the colonel protected his villa during the Second World War; he now returns a suitcase to Lapo that belonged to his grandfather (which remains unopened until the novel’s climax). As the colonel says, much of this conversation is like a history lesson; about the Italian Front that “was longer than all the Allied Fronts in France put together, and

not nice and flat like over there” (136), and the Gustav line that ran through Pico during the Second World War. Importantly, too, we are told that Lapo’s grandfather was a driver for Gabriele D’Annunzio in the Second World War.

Lapo then sets off to Rome to verify his Lawrence mural and while he is there sees Silvana with another man. He sets off again on a tour of Etruscan places (another nod to Lawrence) and returns to a postcard from Silvana saying she has returned to Canada but will remember him and that “The mural is all yours” (233). Lapo prepares to leave Pico and on his last day, he opens the suitcase and finds various papers of his grandfather and a silk dressing-gown belonging to D’Annunzio; the book takes a more overtly mystical turn when Lapo dons the robe and the book’s multiple timescales converge. For the sake of prospective readers, I won’t plot spoil this key scene – or disclose whether Lapo and Silvano live happily ever after.

At least some of the story is autobiographical, as Pacitto’s family has roots in the Abruzzi, and this adds another historical layer to this genre-defying book. There are repeated metafictional references to beginnings, middles and endings, and the role of the storyteller, but for me the interest was less in the fiction (or metafiction or biofiction) than in the history itself, of Italy in the two world wars, and the real lives that could or should have crossed but didn’t, notably those of Lawrence and D’Annunzio. Pacitto knows his Italy and his Lawrence, and his new book offers a novel and highly readable perspective on both.

