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Author: Michael Bell

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Donna Krolik Hollenberg's biography of H. D. Susan McCabe's dual biography of H.D. and Bryher tells another story or stories.

James Moran, *Modernists and the Theatre: The Drama of W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf*.
London: Bloomsbury, 2022.
Pp. vi+241. £75 (hardcover). ISBN 978 1 3501 4549 8

Robert McParland, *Cultural Memory, Consciousness and the Modernist Novel*.
Washington: Academica Press, 2022.
Pp. viii+189. £142 (hardcover), ISBN 978 1 6805 3883 0, £82.90 (e-book), ISBN 978 1 6805 3883 7

Reviewed by Michael Bell

Each of these books includes a chapter on Lawrence as part of a more general coverage of modernist writers in the light of a chosen theme. James Moran has traced the theatrical aspirations and mutual influences of six major writers either from, or practising in, the British Isles. The sub-title is significant in indicating the scope. It is not a study of the great revolutions in modern drama and has only passing references to continental European or American theatre. Moran's contention is that, since all these writers did their most significant work in other genres, their interest and investment in theatre has constantly been underestimated. The charge of critical neglect is perhaps a little overdrawn: it is after all a matter of proportion and Joyce's *Exiles* rightly attracts less attention than *Ulysses* while Lawrence's drama has surely been acknowledged since Peter Gill's illuminating productions of the 1960s. But Moran's positive contribution is to explore the comparative ambitions and possible mutual influences of these writers as they reacted to each other's work.

The book offers accounts of these writers' thoughts about theatre, and their early or incomplete attempts, as well as the occasions on which their performed works were seen by others. This documentation is useful but presents a problem of significant organisation as the parallels and contrasts are often rather inert and substitute for a more searching analysis, or appreciation, of the work in hand. A principal linking theme is the "choice" of elite coterie drama as opposed to popular impact and possible commercial success. This is a well-recognised theme in the discussion of modernism, as in Andreas Huyssen's classic study *After the Great Divide* (1986). A paradox in much modernist writing, as in *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, is that works seeking to honour the common man ("where fishmen lounge at noon", as Eliot puts it) were notoriously opaque to the common reader. The question is whether this theme illuminates what is most important in all these writers.

It is true enough, however, that theatre exposes this dual ambition in a very immediate way to the extra-textual reality of an audience and in that respect the discussion starts very suitably with Yeats whose discovery of the Japanese Noh theatre provided him with a prestigious model of elite form. Japan had long institutionalised the Great Divide by having the distinct popular tradition of Kabuki whereas Shakespeare presented to Anglophone writers the inescapable example of the highest art in a truly popular theatre. Hence, while Yeats's elite poetic mode remained a significant model for later writers, all are haunted by the ambition to combine great art with popular impact. But this theme is often pursued through lateral comparisons across the chosen writers, positioning them on the spectrum of elite to popular, at the expense of close internal analysis or critique. In the case of Yeats, after the account of his earliest theatrical experience and expression, the mature drama is left virtually undiscussed.

Yeats also brings up a possible off-shoot of the theatrical theme. The great mature poems on which his reputation rests are highly dramatic as might be inferred from his remark "We make out of the

quarrel with others, rhetoric, out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry". These poems are also highly accessible: 'Easter 1916' has arguably provided the nationally institutionalised formula by which those once controversial events are now memorialised in Yeats's home country, yet the poem itself is a soliloquy dramatically negotiating competing uncertainties. The notion of dramatising was vital to all these writers in their major "non-dramatic" works but in a sense distinct from, even perhaps opposed to, the theatrical. Henry James is the most striking case of one whose novels are highly dramatic and performative, but whose theatrical writing proved too undramatic to stage. It is as if the dramatic propensity found its true home in the internal drama of the narrative or lyrical voice. This would throw a different light on the comparatively minor part played by theatrical writing as such in their respective *oeuvres*. Moran touches on this question briefly at the end of the Joyce chapter but clearly sees it as lying outside his present purview.

The chapter on Yeats's close collaborator, Ezra Pound, shows his continuing interest in theatre including his two brief spells as theatre critic. In both cases his tenure was abruptly terminated showing how, not just the theatrical author, but the theatre critic must brave the public. The chapter concludes with an account of the quite vicious antisemitism in these reviews, long antedating the wartime, pro-fascist broadcasts from Italy. This documentation is sobering, and it is surely right to keep it in mind whenever Pound is in question, although it is not clear how it bears significantly on the theatrical theme as such.

Pound's early friendship with Lawrence provides a way into the discussion of Lawrence's engagement with the theatre. To the now well-known story of his frustrations with regard to securing performance of his work, Moran adds reflection on the possible influence of Yeats and the likely influence of Synge. Once again, the concern is with lateral comparisons and influences suggesting why, having written accomplished naturalistic drama such as *The Daughter-in-Law*, he turned in late life to the more Yeatsian poetic

and musical mode of *David*. The contextualising is useful but some readers might appreciate a pay-off in closer analysis and fresh critique of the works themselves. Similarly with Joyce: Ibsen was a towering example for the young Joyce and his being a playwright was a significant aspect of his iconoclasm. Moran suggests the influence of *Ghosts* on both Joyce and Lawrence and finds evidence for this in the way their dramatic writing challenged sexual taboos and gender assumptions although this applies throughout their respective *oeuvres*. It is not peculiar to their works in the theatre.

Eliot is perhaps the figure most significantly approachable through the problematic of the coterie versus the popular since he reflected on it at length and tried the gamut of theatrical modes. This question was especially focused for him in the question of verse. The possibility of poetic theatre is perhaps too narrowly conceived as verse drama and in that form surely provided for several decades a distracting chimera. Moran does not mention Christopher Frye who was for a long time the poster boy for this possibility. Eventually, the generation of Pinter and Beckett brought poetic resonance and strangeness to the stage through their use of popular speech forms. Like Eliot's own poetry much earlier in the century, this drama found renewal by grounding itself in the common tongue. Moran notes the great commercial success of *Murder in the Cathedral* initially written for an ecclesiastical occasion and then of *The Cocktail Party* which came in its wake. But Eliot's theatre was also strongly criticised from the outset and, apart from *Murder in the Cathedral*, has not worn well. It seems likely that his initial success was partly an effect of his immense prestige in the cultural establishment of the day; a mirror image of Lawrence's effective exclusion. This is where some intrinsic critical judgement would be most valuable. British theatre had in Lawrence a remarkable naturalist playwright who remained effectively unknown till decades after his death. Moran also notes how Eliot's response to Yeats's *Purgatory* was determined by his religious belief rather than dramatic criteria. Eliot is well known for his privileging religious conviction over aesthetic consideration and

this surely bears upon the limited impact of his dramatic work. Moran offers no personal judgement but seems to acquiesce in the general fading of Eliot's reputation as a dramatist. Once again, he provides contextual co-ordinates but virtually no critical engagement with the plays.

Overall, this study provides useful information about the dramatic texts, theories and aspirations of these writers but is a missed opportunity for critical assessment of the works themselves. For readers of Lawrence it may offer some useful information but little fresh insight into his plays.

The purpose, and intended readership, of Robert McParland's book are hard to gauge. He also covers Joyce, Yeats, Lawrence and Woolf but in chapters that read rather as reading notes for an as yet innocent student. Although the opening chapter surveys some contemporary theories of consciousness, the following chapters are largely general surveys of the given writer's career. The expository norm is short declarative sentences often relying heavily on quotations from critics. These latter are sometimes merely substitutes for the author's own words; anodyne observations that could be culled from any one of countless critics in the way that undergraduate essayists do when seeking to show they have done their reading. At other times it seems a way of informing the reader that a given view exists without either endorsement or disagreement by the author. The brief asseverative sentences do not lend themselves to nuance or to developed argument. In the middle of a discussion of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* comes a passing reference to Flaubert: "Like Flaubert's Madame Bovary, who was bored and petulant and romanticized life, Connie, troubled emotionally, seeks new life" (134). Without benefit of a developed comparison, the implied reader of this book is surely likely to read this as attributing petulance and romanticizing to Connie although the sentence does not strictly say this. A more sophisticated reader will be left wondering if the author indeed intends this attribution which seems quite inappropriate to Lawrence's heroine. A similar moment occurs on page 128 when Ramón Carrasco is passingly compared to

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