

THE ENGLISH
ACADEMY
REVIEW



26 (1) May 2009

I

ISSN 1013-1752

 Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

UNISA | 
University of South Africa



Contents

Editorial

Culture, Identity and Spirituality

Michael Williams

1

Articles

Absented Presences in Recent Anglophone-Cameroon Poetry

George D. Nyamndi

3

Incultured Catholicisms in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Anthony Chennells

15

Contesting the Culture of Silence in Muslim Women's Writing: Women,

Sex and Marriage in Alifa Rifaat's *Distant View of a Minaret*

Naomi Nkealah

27

Apologia pro Ben Okri's *In Arcadia*: A neglected masterpiece?

Rosemary Gray

41

Johannesburg during the transition in Ivan Vladislavić's 'The WHITES ONLY

Bench' and *The Restless Supermarket*

Irikidzayi Manase

53

Separate Dynamisms: The impasse of communication in three of Beckett's

plays

Verna Brown

62

Interview

'Intellectual challenge is as necessary as breathing'

Laurence Wright interviewed by Brian Pearce

72

Poetry

Three Variations on the Theme of Prayer

Chris Mann

87

Book reviews

D. H. Lawrence around the World: South African Perspectives

Annie H. Gagiano

92

Manning the Nation: Father figures in Zimbabwean literature and society

Annie Gagiano

95

Fine Lines from the Box: Further Thoughts about Our Country

Johan Geertsema

97

*Narrating Our Healing: Perspectives on Working Through Trauma and
Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission*

Shane Graham

100

Book reviews

Jim Phelps and Nigel Bell. eds. 2007. *D. H. Lawrence around the World: South African Perspectives*. Empangeni: Echoing Green Press, xxii + 335 pp. ISBN: 9780980250114.

Reviewed by **A. H. Gagiano**
Department of English
University of Stellenbosch
South Africa
ahg@sun.ac.za

Let me state immediately that this is a fascinating and informative collection, as well as a challenging one. With about ninety pages each to its 'Retrospect' section and the section containing 'Reprinted Articles' (as against a little over a hundred pages for five 'New Essays'), *D. H. Lawrence around the World: South African Perspectives* might seem to lean heavily towards a type of academic nostalgia: an era in South African English Studies when our subject appeared to have a more evidently valid moral and political task in conjunction with — or in execution of — its academic duties. Yet the many voices this collection contains are in fact particularly and most usefully engaged with past *and present* teaching practices in South African university English Departments. I supply just two examples, the first referring to *The Rainbow* as

a fine text to use to sketch the evolution of history, in its broad strokes, to teach and dramatize history itself, the essential history of the last three hundred years or so. The novel opens in a pre-modern, feudal-agrarian, tribal, all but medieval social and actual landscape, and before the end has travelled like a roller coaster through to a modern urban age of disinheritance, the age of Eliot's wasteland; and students respond very directly to this trajectory and the force of the experiences in its path, because in South Africa a significant proportion of our students have travelled in their own lives a local equivalent of Ursula's journey. Many are the first of their families to have moved to a city, entered a university, and been uprooted literally and physically by the experiences engendered there. By their third year, they find themselves also in Ursula's chilled, final world; they are, like her, lone contemporary individuals. (p. 72)

The example above is taken from a **brief piece** by John van Wyngaard, and the one below from a somewhat longer **contribution** by W. H. (Bill) Bizley:

I don't say that Lawrence isn't **more in sympathy** with Ursula/Birkin at the end, but the dissociation linked with Gudrun is **not, as it were, marked** against her morally. (I have found it impossible to teach the novel **without my students finding** the Gerald-Gudrun-Loerke triangle more tangible and urgent **than Birkin-Ursula.**) Lawrence has the detachment not to polemicize, to let dissociation **take its course** so that it can exist as an "other," a hostile yet legitimate variation, in the ongoing **experiment.** Hence his refusal to be hostile toward his remarkable creation, the character **Loerke . . .** (p. 80)

Van Wyngaard's short piece is titled 'The Appropriateness of *Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow, and Women in Love* as Teaching Subjects' and Bizley's (equally tellingly) 'Tactics in Decline: Lawrence in a South African Classroom 1950–1990'. If both these academics evidently consider Lawrence worth teaching in South Africa, they perhaps also reveal the extent to which (in English Departments) we who teach tend to elicit the 'spontaneous' responses we are looking for. But if that is an irony attendant on the practice of our profession, it also draws attention to the rich multiplicities of meaning and connection (or what we used to term 'relevance') to be found in the texts to which the term 'canonical' has begun to be *pejoratively* applied. *D. H. Lawrence around the World* contains, indeed, a number of pieces that inspire one to reread Lawrence, and to bring him back into our classrooms as the enriching presence he can be.

The late Christina van Heyningen's influence permeates this book; five contributions from her are featured at or near the beginning of the collection, which concludes with a tribute to her life and work by Jacques Berthoud and Colin Gardner. Yet her presence in the text is not that of a mere Lawrencean enthusiast; rather that of a discerning reader and at times quite acerbic critic of his writing. In the Littlewood-Van Heyningen exchange about Lawrence's writing, the two argue somewhat past each other; J. C. F. Littlewood's is a wonderfully generous tribute to Lawrence as a social prophet and a profound thinker, whereas Van Heyningen warns against Lawrence's lapses in style and taste as revelations of bad judgment on the author's part. Elsewhere Van Heyningen's characteristic demand that students participate emotionally and imaginatively in the reading of texts like Lawrence's is fondly remembered (as inspirational) by a number of the other commentators, while W. H. Bizley (for one) balances this with the criticism that such an approach in other teachers 'eventually crudified literary judgement . . . to a moralizing polemic' (p.75).

About the best re-evaluation — in its carefully complex structuring of an inclusive and balanced assessment which takes on the metaphysical dimensions of Lawrence's thought — is built up in Dawid de Villiers's impressive essay, titled 'Following "the shifting pole-star": Frontier Metaphysics in Lawrence'. This is one of five essays especially commissioned for the collection. De Villiers explores the fascinating parallels in thought between the (to some, notorious) ideas of Oswald Spengler — whom the

widely-read Lawrence appears not to have encountered — and those of Lawrence, but demonstrates enlighteningly how the latter arrives at a very different conclusion than Spengler does — and why, despite Lawrence's occasionally hectoring tone, he perpetually reminds us of the available 'openness' of life. De Villiers quotes from Lawrence's essay titled 'Books':

It's no good leaving everything to fate . . . The venture is the venture: fate is the circumstance around the adventurer. The adventurer at the quick of his venture is the living germ inside the chaos of circumstance. (p. 200)

Several of the contributors in this volume (predictably, but most interestingly) establish links between Lawrence and South Africa. Mark Kinkead-Weekes's fine essay (reprinted from 1993/1994) explores parallels between Lawrence's and Bessie Head's writing in terms of their departures from the land of birth, whereas Christopher Heywood has two good pieces in which the influence of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (a text D. H. L. had borrowed from his South African friend, Jan Juta) on Lawrence's *Birds, Beast and Flowers* collection is meticulously traced. Of these, I found the more wide-ranging 'Discovering and Rediscovering Lawrence' piece especially fascinating as an account of an intellectual's sleuthing instincts, scholarly legwork and brilliant nose for clues — as well as demonstrating the delight of hunches confirmed. Peter Merrington's is a larger piece of archival excavation and historical placing as he describes the interesting connections (in terms of his essay title) among 'Lawrence, the Jutas, and the "Mediterranean" Cape' — with some nicely ironic touches. Christopher Thurman, in his article, carefully considers convergences and divergences among Guy Butler, Lawrence and F. R. Leavis; the latter's widely influential but sometimes overly enthusiastic championing of Lawrence comes under scrutiny in this (and several other) pieces.

A whole early section of the collection contains accounts of how Lawrence texts have been taught at a number of South African universities. There are pieces from the Universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Port Elizabeth, Natal (Pietermaritzburg), Zululand, Pretoria and Potchefstroom, most mentioning Lawrence's virtual disappearance from their courses — in matter-of-fact or melancholic tones. This section also gives well known Lawrence scholars H. M. Daleski, Kinkead-Weekes and Heywood the opportunity to describe the South African origins of their Lawrence studies.

An especially pleasing aspect of *D. H. Lawrence around the World* is the amount of space given to discussions of the value of Lawrence's poetry. Langman remarks on 'an ultimate serenity and sweetness' in the poetry despite occasional querulousness, and he notes that in the poems 'trees, creatures, and even inanimate things transcend their usually passive role as objects of contemplation and seem actively to challenge the mind' (p. 93; p. 97). In an excellent essay, Jim Phelps brings William Blake's 'The Schoolboy' into a discussion in which he analyses and broadly contextualises two of Lawrence's school poems: 'The Best of School' and 'Last Lesson of the Afternoon'.

Trevor Whittock's is another good essay on the poetry; he too writes on 'The Best of School', so that a rich reading of the poem is cumulatively established. Although it is concerned with a significant 'image pattern' in *Sons and Lovers* rather than with the poetry, Brian Green's perceptive essay can be seen to illustrate similarly rewarding techniques of detailed reading.

Two poetic tributes to Lawrence are printed towards the end of the book. Norman Morrissey's 'Owed to D. H. Lawrence' is charming and even moving, whereas Phelps's two visiting 'Green Mambas' are exterminated in what one cannot but feel is an unfortunate travesty (poetically as much as morally) of the encounter so beautifully evoked in Lawrence's own 'Snake'.

The collection contains (finally) a great deal of useful bibliographical information and is well edited and efficiently presented, though the rather dull, dark green cover could have done with some appropriate visual relief.