

Review by

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of

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

edited by Jim Phelps and Nigel Bell

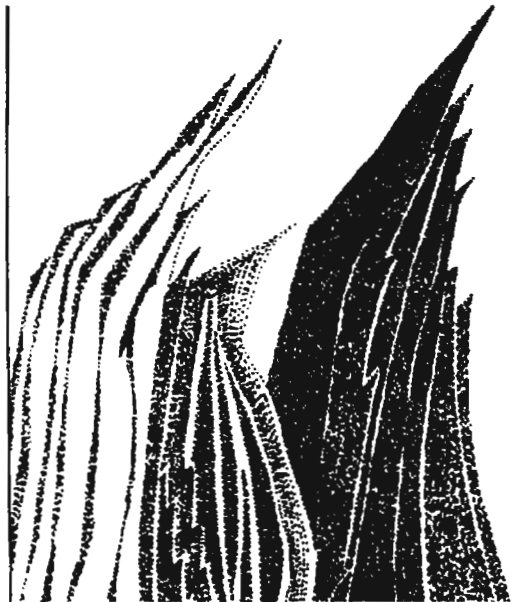
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D. H. Lawrence around the World introduces Lawrence scholars to the contribution of South Africa to Lawrence studies. Noting that there is "little contemporary sense in the world at large" of this contribution, Jim Phelps and his co-editor Nigel Bell point to the nation's "previous isolation" and also the fact that few South Africans have participated in international conferences. Indeed South Africa remains geographically and culturally isolated. One should add that South Africa's greatest Lawrence scholars—H. M. Daleski and Mark Kinkead-Weekes—left South Africa and made their careers abroad (Daleski in Israel, Kinkead-Weekes in England). As to the lack of South African participation in international conferences, thank heaven the agreeable Jim Phelps has become a regular fixture at such gatherings.

D. H. Lawrence around the World is an admirable, comprehensive attempt to recognize the accomplishments of South African Lawrence studies and to add South Africa to Lawrence's international scholarly map. The book "sends out tendrils in various directions towards South African and world-wide readers of Lawrence." It begins with an intriguing dialogue between Christina van Heyningen, a seminal figure in 20th-century South African literary studies, and the raging Leavisite J. C. F. Littlewood, who taught at the University of Stellenbosch for two years before being "relieved of his position for encouraging views which the university authorities found unacceptable." (The views in question could not have been about Lawrence.) Two critical snippets by van Heyningen precede Littlewood's essay "Lawrence, Last of the English," which is followed by an exchange of published letters by these two critics of Lawrence. The combative Littlewood essay is instantly recognizable as ventriloquized Leavis, complete with page-long quotations from *Lady Chatterley*, passive-aggressive nostalgia ("The England that could produce a Lawrence has passed"), Leavisite buzz-words ("amazing creative vitality," "purity of disinterestedness"), and even Leavis's idiosyncratic spelling ("Laurentian"). In another essay collected in the book W. H. Bizley refers to Littlewood's "polemicizing" as "Lawrence criticism at its worst." As you can tell, I believe that van Heyningen gets the best of her exchange with J. C. F. Littlewood. (The editors must be pleased to introduce this important South African figure to a wider audience.)

Part One of *D. H. Lawrence around the World* also features new reminiscences by Daleski, Kinkead-Weekes, and Christopher Heywood (another South African who left for England) plus very brief histories of Lawrence's place in the curricula of nine South African universities, from Cape Town to Zululand. The reminiscences allow the reader to fill in some blanks in the distinguished careers of Daleski and Kinkead-Weekes, both of whom have received the Harry T. Moore Award for Lifetime Contributions to Lawrence Studies. Kinkead-Weekes's anecdote about receiving a library science degree and going out on a "mobile library" with a remarkable black driver with whom he discussed English poetry is especially compelling. I wish that

all three reminiscences were longer.

The histories of the teaching of Lawrence in South Africa tell a discouraging but not surprising story. Lawrence was king of the cats during the 1950s and 1960s at a time when the central tradition of English literature enjoyed a powerfully vestigial colonial respect in South African English Departments. This was also the period when F. R. Leavis's dominant influence on the understanding of Lawrence throughout the English-speaking world made Lawrence a universally taught writer. In the past two decades, as Lawrence's reputation was diminishing, South African English Departments have also needed to make room for South African writers in their curricula. Furthermore, as Jim Phelps sadly points out, "since 2001 higher education in South Africa has undergone significant restructuring" in the direction of "more vocational and 'career-focused' education." At his own institution, the University of Zululand, "the study of Lawrence, and indeed of all literature in English, has virtually disappeared." This situation creates an elegiac resonance in *D. H. Lawrence around the World*. In the circumstances the book mostly feels as if it's looking backward.

Part Two ("Reprinted Articles") consists of essays originally published between 1969 and 2000. F. H. Langman, Trevor Whittock, and Jim Phelps all effectively engage with Lawrence's still undervalued poetry. In "Dramatic Form in the Poetry of D. H. Lawrence" Langman argues against R. P. Blackmur's influential dismissal of Lawrence's poetry by acknowledging that Lawrence, admittedly "not an impersonal poet," achieved success when he could give his poetic material "a dramatic structure." Both Whittock and Phelps write insightfully about Lawrence's underappreciated schoolmaster poems. It's a plus to have these two essays conversing with one another. Mark Kinkead-Weekes's essay, "Re-placing the Imagination: D. H. Lawrence and Bessie Head," is the strongest and most striking in this section. The essay analyzes Lawrence and Head as writers "for whom a particular region was uniquely important" but who left that region. Kinkead-Weekes perceives an "imaginative kinship" between Lawrence, who left Nottinghamshire for Italy and New Mexico but "never rooted himself anywhere again," and Head, who left South Africa for Botswana and who in the end "remained in some critical tension with her adopted country, as well as finally at home."

Christopher Heywood's "The Impact of Bleek and Lloyd's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore on Birds, Beasts and Flowers*," first published in slightly different form in this journal in 1982, is no doubt the best known essay among the "reprinted articles." Heywood cites (and makes too much of) the evidence that Lawrence read Jan Juta's copy of *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* when he was writing the *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* poems. Bleek and Lloyd's book is a "treasure-house of the mythological, cultural and poetic heritage of the San community of the north-western Cape on the eve of their extinction." Heywood engages in a series of astonishing leaps based on thin evidence. In the end this Lawrence has drifted implausibly "towards Bushman poetics and belief." His encounter with the Bushmen led to "changes in his poetic style and thematic content." This sort of getting-carried-away scholarship risks giv-

style and thematic content." This sort of getting-carried-away scholarship risks giving South African D. H. Lawrence studies a bad reputation.

Part Four includes five "new essays": François Hugo on *Sons and Lovers* and *The Fox* (rehashing a familiar argument about Lawrence's lack of distance from his protagonist), Dawid de Villiers on Lawrentian metaphysics, Jim Phelps on the primitive in Lawrence (offering a sentimental version of our prehistoric hunter-gatherer ancestors), Peter Merrington on "Lawrence, the Jutas, and the 'Mediterranean' Cape," and Christopher Thurman on Lawrence, Leavis, and Guy Butler, a South African academic, poet, and man of letters. Merrington's well researched essay, the most impressive of this quintet, explores (1) the late Victorian/ Edwardian desire to make the Cape somehow Mediterranean, (2) Lawrence's friendship with Jan Juta and his sister René (herself the author of two travel books illustrated by Jan), and (3) Jan Juta's own writings (including *Look Out for the Ostriches!*). Merrington's instructive essay enjoys the virtue of having a truly South African focus. Still, it is not always easy to see how its parts fit together.

D. H. Lawrence around the World: South African Perspectives concludes with two poems, several bibliographies, and a reprinted short biography of Christina van Heyningen that "gives readers a feel for the academic environment in which she shone during her lifetime's work at three major universities." This book is a labor of love, a statement of national pride, and a declaration of passionate commitment to the works of D. H. Lawrence. The high seriousness of Jim Phelps and Nigel Bell harkens back to society's belief in the value of literature back in those glory days when Lawrence was at the height of his reputation. Meanwhile today's Lawrence scholars will profit from visiting such a fascinating outpost of Lawrence studies.

D. H. Lawrence around the World is available at www.africabookcentre.com.

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