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BRIEF REVIEWS

The Achievement of D. H. Lawrence, Edited and with an introduction by Frederick J. Hoffman and Harry T. Moore. Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1953. 304 pp. \$4.

D. H. LAWRENCE combined in his complex and provocative way the most pungent condemnation of our culture with the profoundest reverence for life. Therefore a sound evaluation of this controversial writer would be especially germane today. The present anthology approaches, in parts, a firm criticism, but it does not qualify as the dependable guide hoped for by the editors. On the contrary, many of the contributions demand more critical agility than does the reading of Lawrence himself. The editors' characterization of the selections as "the best available" and "fullest possible" is more significant perhaps than intended. Not only do the essays point in different directions, often opposite, but also they are encumbered with flaws abundant in early criticism of Lawrence. These flaws appear not only in the six essays written more than fifteen years ago, but also in the recent studies. Indeed, the hardy tendency to overemphasize *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* survives here undiminished, even when little new is offered, and at the expense of less exploited material.

But the legacy from the past most confusing to readers unfamiliar with Lawrence, and most vexing to the informed, is the misty rhetoric exemplified by Undset's "His knowledge of humanity is boundless. His knowledge of other persons than D. H. Lawrence is a great deal less." Moore's recent study exhibits a similar airiness: "... it is by indicating Dostoyevsky and pointing out the Freudian deviations that we can best explain Ursula's vision of the horses." These perplexing statements can indicate only the critic's awareness of a problem, his intention to stake it out as his domain, and the postponement of the labor of solving it.

Huxley's contribution, and Gregory's somewhat less, though written over twenty years ago, are notably free of such flaws. This distinction coupled with the fact that their observations are not yet completely assimilated in subsequent criticism amply justifies their inclusion. Huxley's reference to what he termed Lawrence's "Doctrine of Cosmic Pointlessness" though crucial to understanding Lawrence has been generally ignored. The short reference to it in Tiverton's book on Lawrence is, unfortunately, not in the selection printed here.

On the other hand, Thurber's whimsy does not belong, and Eliot's ambivalence is dispensable. Also the book could bear the omission of Undset's impressions, which despite editorial assertion that hers is "one of the most comprehensive of all Lawrence studies," are commonplace, except for rare and unsupported flashes. Wilson looks at *Lady Chatterley's Lover* with, Moore says, "clear sanity"—a superb achievement for 1929 when the review was written, but more than that should be done for this novel today.

The choice of Tindall's scholarly cavorting from his tour-de-force, *D. H. Lawrence and Susan his Cow*, rather than his recent introduction to *The Later D. H. Lawrence*, is odd. Moore, though recognizing the levity of the book, was apparently impressed by its footnotes. There is a disturbing absence of realization that the source of the symbols in *The Plumed Serpent* is far less important than the profound originality of the context in which they were set. Tindall now knows this, after a singular conversion has prepared him to pack more important facts about Lawrence's writing into his recent introduction than in the entire *Susan* canard.

The more recent essays vary just as widely in value. The editors' superfluous concern that Lawrence criticism achieve status in the academic tradition is mirrored in some of these as it seems to have been in the excerpt from Tindall. Betsky, Moore, and Schorer utter the hallowed, cabalistic words like "structure," "rhythm," "symbol," and "tone," making valiant efforts to interpret material in these terms. Betsky, however, quickly reaches the limits of stress on "rhythms" as a principle for judging *Sons and Lovers* and reverts to more useful observations on substance and ideas. Moore has collected a mass of facts and suggestions on *The Rainbow* but failed to order them in terms of the book's basic meaning. Schorer, immersed deeper in the consideration of *Women in Love* than other critics, has developed salient insights, but unfortunately dimmed them by his compulsive preoccupation with technique. Leavis, Tiverton, and Hoffman, by examining some of Lawrence's ideas, counterbalance in a slight degree the premature, determined, and myopic concentration on technique. Leavis in his angry jottings directed against Eliot makes the sapient point that Lawrence practiced extremely effective cerebration even when he refused to call it thinking. Tiverton, while adding some breadth to discussion of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, has not delivered the enriched context promised by the book from which it is drawn: *D. H. Lawrence and Human Existence*. Hoffman makes a serious effort to highlight

significant differences between Lawrence and Freud, which should curb some of the unqualified references to "Freudian" elements in Lawrence's work. Unfortunately, it did not restrain Moore's flight regarding the horse symbol found in *The Rainbow* nor Betsky's statement that the several themes in *Sons and Lovers* are "kept rigorously subordinate to the Freudian." Even Hoffman has neglected salient facts essential to clarifying this common confusion, most notably the fact that Lawrence treated the incest wish not as an intrinsic factor, but as an artifact created by social forces.

The inevitable conflicts between contributors might have been related by a broad critical rather than historical perspective. Instead, the editors, like Moore in *The Life and Works of D. H. Lawrence*, excavate with greater enthusiasm than they organize. Spellbound by the vast diggings, they speed along indiscriminately among the heaps of Lawrence criticism—big, little, good, and bad. In their one marked effort to give direction to criticism they succumb to blandishment by the regalia of scholarship. They venture the prophecy that Nicholes' essay on sparrow symbolism, traced to Bede, is "the kind of scholarly research that will increasingly be applied to Lawrence." Thus will Lawrence be canonized! This archaeology is alien to Lawrence's achievement and can only graze, not penetrate, it. Several sapient asides—real eagles—show that Nicholes can do better, but she ignores them to hunt sparrows.

Since the editors too have set their sights on sparrows, they neglect to give Amon, West, Ellman, and Nehls the distinguishing comment they deserve. It is they who indicate the trend of Lawrence criticism if his achievement is not to be annihilated by a definitive autopsy. They are unique in combining recognition of important issues, consistent application of their insights, and, above all, skill in revealing rather than obscuring Lawrence's intent. Even when their conclusions can be challenged, something tangible remains. Having assimilated Lawrence's ideas, they are in a position to stress their interaction with techniques, and to trace them in structure and texture. Particularly arresting are Amon's handling of "The Prussian Officer," West's of "The Border Line," Nehl's of *Sea and Sardinia*, and Ellman's of Lawrence's larger aims.

In the essays of these four men are assembled all the significant points thinly scattered through the rest of the anthology. They note Lawrence's insistence on the relatedness of all things, his concern with "the flow and conflict of opposites" on all levels, particularly the life-

death conflict, and they recognize that even his stress on individual sensory awareness is linked with social, even universal, awareness. Ellman quotes from "Pansies": "The profoundest of all sensualities is the sense of truth/ And the next deepest sensual experience/ is the sense of justice." But these men have covered only some of Lawrence's poems, several short stories, and the Italian travel books. It remains for their several insights to be extended as effectively to the rest of Lawrence's work before an anthology of criticism can be a sound guide to his writing.

MARY FREEMAN

Southern Renaissance: the Literature of the Modern South, Edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953. 450 pp. \$5.

SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE: *The Literature of the Modern South* is a little Tower of Babel: twenty-six shrill tongues mingle in a chorus of self-deluding, dissonant jargon that is somehow supposed to define the mind of the South, the themes of Southern literature, and the poets and novelists of the South. What the critics who contribute to this symposium actually describe is not the achievement of Faulkner, Warren, Porter, Welty, Glasgow, Cabell, Caldwell, Ransom, Tate, and Brooks, but their own ennui, pedantry, and orthodoxy. Not one of their essays clearly formulates a distinctive Southern temper or philosophy, probably because such a unified outlook is just another provincial Southern myth.

"The Southern Temper," as Robert B. Heilman discovers it, is marked by "a sense of the concrete, a sense of the elemental, a sense of the ornamental, a sense of the representative, and a sense of totality." Although none of these "endowments is unshared," their concurrency is infrequent and is "a condition of major art and mature thought." Question: Does the concurrency of these endowments differentiate the Southerner from the Yankee? Do all Southern writers mysteriously possess all the endowments that are needed to produce major art? Instead of bothering to be specific, Heilman devotes his essay to defining his terminology, which is so general that it might be equally well applied to the work of Shakespeare, Donne, Melville, and Eliot.

Less general than Heilman's paper is the keynote essay of the sym-

posium, Richard M. Weaver's "Aspects of the Southern Philosophy." Weaver's Southerner is "an authentically religious being if one means by religion not a neat set of moralities but a deep and even frightening intuition of man's radical dependence in this world." Concomitants of the Southerner's "religious and ethical fundamentalism" are his "acceptance of the inscrutability of nature," his "antiscientific bias," "his virtual defiance of analysis and [his] cultivation of legend," his rejection of optimistic theories of progress, and his "discipline in tragedy." Question: Is the Southerner's anti-intellectual piety unique? Does it depend upon some special insight or experience not shared by other Americans? Yes, Weaver contends, the Southerner's position is unique because he alone "has had to taste a bitter cup which no American is supposed to know anything about, the cup of defeat." This is the paradox of the South's fortunate fall: "the Northerner is a child of the Enlightenment," an optimist whose "religion is to do good and [whose] mind is his own church," but the Southerner understands evil, has had "an education in tragedy, which is the profoundest education of man." Cognizant of the degradation of human life, of man's helplessness in a world of terror and defeat, only Weaver's Southerner confronts the "present drift toward tension and violence" with the "discipline in tragedy," the virtues "developed in the school of poverty and deprivation, and in that of rural living." (As an example of the Southerner's monopoly of the wisdom of tragic vision, Weaver cites the Southerner's marvelous "comparative absence of that modern spirit of envy which has so unsettled things in other parts of the world." This lack of envy, Weaver continues in the naïve, specious logic that reveals his motive, explains "the poor success of trade unionism in the South. . . . Trade unionism runs up against both the distrust of analysis and the hesitancy about tampering with a prevailing dispensation.")

The Southerner's unique awareness of defeat, of man's tragic limitations, of evil in human life—this is the principal dogma of *Southern Renaissance*. The South is "the only section of the country that knows the meaning of defeat, that is, the nature of the world," Andrew Nelson Lytle pontificates in his little religious tract, "How Many Miles to Babylon," and the disciples in the congregation echo the magical formula and shout Amen.

The only dissenting voice belongs to C. Van Woodward in "The Irony of Southern History." Although Woodward mentions the South's military defeat, "an experience that it could share with no

other part of America," he finds a different meaning in the historical event:

The knowledge that it was rapidly being isolated in the world community as the last champion of an outmoded system [of slavery] under concerted moral attack contributed to the South's feeling of insecurity and its conviction that it was being encircled and menaced from all sides. In place of its old eagerness for new ideas and its outgoing communicativeness the South developed a suspicious inhospitality toward the new and the foreign, a tendency to withdraw from what it felt to be a critical world. Because it identified the internal security of the whole society with the security of its labor system, it refused to permit criticism of that system. To guarantee conformity of thought it abandoned its tradition of tolerance and resorted to repression of dissent within its borders and to forceful exclusion of criticism from outside. And finally it set about to celebrate, glorify, and render all but sacrosanct with praise the very institution that was under attack and that was responsible for the isolation and insecurity of the South.

For Woodward the lesson of Southern history is that "there exists, in spite of obvious differences, a disquieting suggestion of similarity between the two crises," the plight of the ante-bellum South and that of contemporary America. Although Woodward's interest is in another and larger problem, we may derive our own lesson for this particular occasion from his description of Southern history.

Fearing to lose his vision of Arcadia (the ante-bellum South), the contemporary professional Southerner has constructed a dogmatic ideology that is intended to preserve his faith in the glory of the past. The dominant critics of *Southern Renaissance* value literary jargon, conformity, orthodoxy, and tradition. They do not want to hear or to think about new ideas. But their philosophy does not describe the position of individual major Southern writers; it is only an elaboration of the vague academic religion that for more than twenty years has provided some kind of philosophic reassurance for the polite Southern summerhouse-dwellers who still are sleep-walking but who can't really believe in their dreams.

EDWARD SCHWARTZ