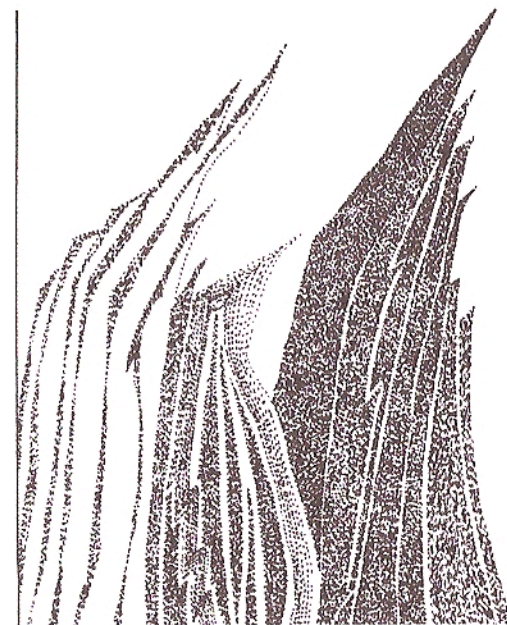


# D.H. Lawrence Review



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**Fiona Becket.** *The Complete Critical Guide to D.H. Lawrence.* London: Routledge, 2002. Pp. xvi + 186. \$19.95 (paper).

Fiona Becket's *Complete Critical Guide to D.H. Lawrence* contends with a difficult task cogently and succinctly and in the process provides a useful framework for the study of Lawrence. The structure of Becket's book is dictated by the requirements of the series it is part of as articulated in the "Series Editor's Preface." Organized in three sections ("Life and Contexts," "Work," and "Criticism"), each volume aims to be a useful tool for both beginning literary scholars and those with considerable expertise. Faithful to this proscribed structure, Becket nonetheless conveys subtle insights into Lawrence's work, into the interplay between his biography and writing, and into the tradition of criticism within Lawrence studies and the current application of relevant theoretical methodologies to the oeuvre.

In a "complete" critical guide of a mere 186 pages, Becket must show considerable restraint. The biographical section of the *Guide* breaks the principle phases of Lawrence's life, into six subsections ("Early Influences," "Women, Relationships, and Marriage," "A Literary Career: Lawrence and Modernism," "Leaving England: Italy, Ceylon, Australia," "America," and "The Return to Europe."). These subsections divide Lawrence's life in a way that illuminates his preoccupations as a writer. Becket insightfully presents his early relationship to women, to writing, to criticism, and to the nuances of the languages of prose and poetry. She also demonstrates the connection between his morality and his literary style.

Becket's commentary on Lawrence's commitment to infusing literary language with a new, vital life is presaged by her affirmation of Lawrence's relationship to British modernism—and indeed to other British (and expatriate) modernists. She observes that "Lawrence is central to our understanding of modernism although many view him in practice and in temperament as a figure at a distinct remove from intellectuals and practitioners like T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf, who themselves embody radically different approaches to their historical moment."

Despite many dissimilarities, Lawrence and the above-mentioned authors were influenced by abstract and radical philosophy as well as by the early-twentieth-century forays into the subconscious most famously conducted and explicated by Freud. According to Becket, despite his differences from his modernist contemporaries, Lawrence shared with them an interest in "the reformation of poetry and the novel. . . [T]his resulted in an increased interest in the writer's medium alongside a preoccupation with the modern human subject."

In the Section II discussions of Lawrence's works in various literary genres (essay, poetry, travel writing, novel), Becket concentrates on Lawrence's concerns with reforming culture as well as literature. Becket subdivides the "Work" section into eight categories: "The Early Writing," "The 'Serious English' Novels," "New Ground: the Novels after 1922," "Poetry," "The Novellas," "The Short Stories," "Discursive Writing," and "Travel Writing." At the onset of the "Work" section, Becket explains that her "commentary focuses on specific works in order to indicate Lawrence's main

preoccupations, and examines the development of certain constant themes[. . .]. She infuses her discussion of each text with a deft conflation of critical analyses while providing essential plot and biographical information to allow the reader to situate the work within Lawrence's body of writing. The *Complete Critical Guide* also includes cross-references throughout, a useful feature when trying to trace important themes across Lawrence's life and oeuvre.

In the *Guide*'s final section, "Criticism," Becket traces critical responses to Lawrence from his own day to the current revisitation of Lawrence by postmodernist critics. Becket's discussion of critical responses to Lawrence is remarkably thorough considering her limited space. She notes that T.S. Eliot was responsible for the "dominant view of Lawrence as a flawed, undisciplined writer with questionable values." F.R. Leavis must be given substantial credit for the establishment of Lawrence's reputation as a major writer. Becket devotes a subsection to discussing Leavis's contributions to Lawrence studies in the 1950s. She also illuminates the relevance of Lawrence to contemporary theoretical approaches. The subsection "Lawrence and Psychoanalytic Criticism" plots the trajectory of this type of criticism from initial accounts of Lawrence's use of Freud (or Freudian ideas) to more recent analyses of Lawrence and "theories of the gaze" (used to revisit Lawrence's sexual politics) and Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of "Lawrence as 'deoidipaliser'" in terms of "the radical metaphoricity of his language." In the final section of the *Guide* Becket skillfully situates Lawrence within current cultural studies, feminist literary criticism, and language studies discussions.

*The Complete Critical Guide to D.H. Lawrence* fulfills the goals of the Routledge Press series while offering readers of Lawrence quite a bit more than an overview. At the end of her book Becket points to emerging areas of inquiry, including ecocriticism and perhaps even science studies. Scholars concerned with Lawrence and postcolonialism (or those who study Lawrence's American works within American cultural studies) might find her decision to concentrate on his "Italian books" in the "Travel Writing" section neglectful of the increasing interest in his writings of the American Southwest and Mexico. Nevertheless, Becket serves as a helpful guide through Lawrence's body of literary work, as a knowledgeable narrator of his life, and as scholar who usefully synthesizes a wide array of critical and theoretical responses to Lawrence with commendable precision.

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**David Trotter.** *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society.* New York: Oxford UP, 2001. Pp. vi + 358. \$60.

I am disinclined to pathologize genius. There is a modern tendency to view artistic creativity as linked to neurosis, angst, and illness. Often, it is psychopathologized as