It is in the search for harmony that Sumner finds a link between Lawrence and Woolf. She argues that Woolf’s concern with the shape of her novels derives from her fear of allowing chaos to intrude. Threatened disharmony in Mrs Dalloway is tentatively restored by Peter Walsh’s final vision of Clarissa, while the closure of To the Lighthouse is almost too neat and controlled. Between the Acts ‘contains and expresses both discord and harmony’ in ‘a violently oscillating form’ (155), and Miss La Trobe’s experimental ‘ten minutes of now’ ‘leads out of the world into the whole of life’ (p.157). Like Hardy, Woolf wished to escape from the traditional concept of realism. Both are conscious of the unimaginable stretches of geological time: as Knight in Two on a Tower hangs from a cliff eye to eye with a trilobite, he feels time opening before him ‘like a fan’; and in the ‘Time Passes’ section of To the Lighthouse ten years easily become millennia. Both Hardy and Woolf allow their protagonists erratic thought patterns, although the latter makes more conscious efforts to render the inner consciousnesses of her characters mimetically, where Hardy stands at one remove.

All three writers are conscious of the mysteriousness of their characters. That essential otherness — symbolised by the old lady of whom Mrs Dalloway only ever has glimpses, through a window — marks Hardy’s work and is dramatised in the conflict between Lawrence’s characters. There is a great deal we don’t know about Sue, Tess, Jude, Angel or Bathsheba. Some of that unknowing was resolved by changes in the culture: Lawrence and Woolf were able to open doors against which Hardy could only beat his fists. Yet much of what they explore remains beyond the consolations and tidy structures of plot, beyond beauty, beyond language. In a way, what Sumner’s book defines and celebrates is a kind of heroism, a determination to carry on, a willingness to confront and work with the frightening, the challenging and the unknown, both within and beyond ourselves.


Paul Poplawski

This is a collection of previously published essays by Doherty dealing mainly with Lawrence’s major novels (Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow, Women in Love, Lady Chatterley’s Lover) and including one essay on the short fiction (concentrating on The Fox and The Virgin and the Gipsy, with some brief comments on ‘The White Stocking’ and ‘Daughters of the Vicar’). However, the stated aim of the book is not to provide self-contained intensive readings of any of these texts, but to explore the underlying patterns of Lawrence’s fictional rhetoric in general, focusing especially on the functions of metaphor and metonymy in the shaping of plots, characters, and themes. In Doherty’s own words:

[The general object of meditation is the total Lawrentian oeuvre...Its specific focus is on the major rhetorical figures (metaphor and metonymy), not primarily as linguistic devices, but as narratological tropes. It explores their plot-making capacities, their power to project character-types, to locate gender positions, and to discriminate motifs and themes (sex, death, psychosis, and cosmic space are among the central motifs that the book investigates). (p.2)]

This study of the ‘narratological tropes’ of metaphor and metonymy is effectively what is meant by the word ‘tropological’ in the book’s subtitle, and theories of rhetoric provide the underpinning principles of the book’s ‘theorizing’ of Lawrence. These principles are sketched out in an introduc-
tory overview, and in two general essays which range across several of the texts mentioned above. There is also a final essay on ‘Lawrence and Jacques Derrida’ which serves to bring the collection to a type of deconstructive conclusion (if that is not a contradiction in terms).

To a great extent, then, Doherty’s approach is a theoretical and formalist one (strongly influenced by structuralism), and he goes to great pains in his introduction to distance himself from the ‘long tradition of Lawrence criticism – descriptive, evaluative – that takes on itself the role of defining and refining the Lawrentian message in terms of its psychological, ethical or metaphysical truth’ (p.9). Such an apparently radical approach to Lawrence is to be welcomed for many of the reasons adumbrated by Doherty himself in his introduction, but principally because, as he says, ‘one needs new approaches to Lawrence which shift the critical terrain, and which prospect new perspectives in his vast novelistic domain’ (p.10). Doherty’s own ingenious ‘prospecting’ unearths a rich vein of critical rhetoric which thoroughly theatricalizes the clash between the two great rhetorical codes of metaphor and metonymy in Lawrence’s fiction (p.9); and this book is likely to be essential reading for anyone drawn to a theorised language that takes in, for example, ‘Mrs. Morel’s troping of Miriam’ (p.77), and questions such as the following:

How do you surmount the autodestructive impulse inherent in blinded metaphor as narratological trope, which reproduces the same collapsing modalities within shifting contexts of setting and character? (p.24)

However, although Doherty’s work certainly represents a novel approach to Lawrence, and although several of the essays do indeed open up the possibility of new perspectives on Lawrence’s fiction (and here I would single out the chapter on ‘Metaphor and Mental Disturbance’ in Lady Chatterley’s Lover as the most suggestive in the collection), the book never quite lives up to the forthright promise of its main title nor to the heady rhetoric of its introductory chapters. Few, if any, of the essays actually develop the new perspectives they hint at to any significant degree, partly because most of them are simply too short to do full justice to Lawrence’s ‘vast novelistic domain’, and partly because Doherty devotes only a relatively small portion of each essay to specifically textual analysis (the rest being taken up with more general tropological discussion). There is also insufficient continuity from essay to essay to allow for any larger-scale development in the overall progress of the book (Doherty claims this discontinuity as an integral part of the book’s non-teleological design, but I suspect it stems more from the practical fact that the essays were all originally written for separate publication).

Moreover, although in passing the essays invoke a variety of contemporary critical theories, the dominant approach remains that of ‘tropology’, which, in its more or less straightforward concern to analyse the workings of metaphor and metonymy, does not seem to me to be particularly new or particularly theoretical (except insofar as it draws on elements of structuralism and post-structuralism). Much of it seems to be related to the traditional explication of imagery in literature, and I am not entirely convinced that it is accurate, in terms of contemporary critical discourse, to describe this sort of analysis as ‘theorizing Lawrence’.

Be that as it may, perhaps a more serious criticism of the book is that many of Doherty’s textual discussions of Lawrence unwittingly traverse fairly well-worn ground in that ‘long tradition of Lawrence criticism’ from which Doherty is so concerned to detach himself. The fact that he seems unaware of the many intersections between his views and the views of other critics further reflects negatively on the book, and specifically on its lack of critical self-
contextualisation in relation to the existing body of Lawrence scholarship. Almost all the main topics covered in Doherty’s book (language, metaphor, rhetoric, sex, death, romance, theory) are indubitably and prominently represented within that body of scholarship (in both ‘traditional’ and ‘theoretical’ forms, and yet Doherty nowhere attempts to test and refine his ideas in serious dialogue with any of it. Instead, he rather proudly declares his essays to be suí generis (p.163) and makes only the most cursory references to other critics in the course of his arguments (the bibliography, by the way, contains a mere twenty Lawrence items, only three or four of which post-date 1990).

To some extent, this and my other criticisms of Doherty’s book might be deflected by pointing to its essentially essayistic nature as a series of brief and tentative ‘attempts’ at its subject (which is partly what Doherty wants to suggest by calling them ‘meditations’); and also by the fact that the writing of the original essays spanned a period of some sixteen years (the earliest essay was first published in 1984). In the end, I think this is the best way of approaching the book – as a loosely-connected ‘historical’ collection of short essays charting Doherty’s critical encounters with Lawrence over time. The problem is that Doherty does not quite present the book in this way, and rather insists on it as a type of critical monograph, with all that that implies in terms of overall continuity and cohesion. He certainly disavows any strong single line of interpretation, but he says that ‘these essays have been completely revised, rewritten and adapted to suit the argument and the ambience of the present book’ (x, my italics); and his introduction clearly strives to convince us that there is a crafted continuity and patterning in the book’s design, a ‘master trope’ that holds the whole thing together. We are thus left with a text which remains somewhat uncertainly poised between monograph and essay-collection.

Still, as I said at the start, this book is to be welcomed as a potentially valuable contribution to the ongoing renewal of Lawrentian criticism along theoretical lines. If some of my comments seem a little negative, they register my disappointment that the book does not sufficiently live up to its title’s promise of ‘theorizing Lawrence’ in a way that is either fully coherent or fully convincing for its date of publication; but that is not to say that the individual essays do not, in their own terms, live up to a similar potential when seen as individual essays reflecting particular moments in the theorising of Lawrence over the past two decades.

But perhaps we should leave the last disarming word to Gerald Doherty:

Do these meditations lead anywhere? Have they a follow-up? Are they likely to motivate new critical enterprises and undertakings? Is there a need for further theoretical work in this field? To these questions, the frank answer would seem to be ‘no’. (‘Conclusion’, Theorizing Lawrence, p. 163)