

CILIPS COVID-19 Book Reviews – The Rainbow

Reviewer name: Scott Main

Book title: The Rainbow

Author name: D. H. Lawrence

Genre: Classic Fiction

Overall Rating: Excellent

Brief summary: 'The Rainbow' (1915) shocked its first readers by its frankness about human carnal desire. The body and its impulsive needs are central to this inter-generational tale and the truth of these things rings out like a silver coin thrown down on stone. The author had broken decisively with Victorian fiction.

The novel is about three generations of the Brangwen family of Nottinghamshire from the 1840s to the early years of the twentieth century. The span of this narrative allows Lawrence ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D. H. Lawrence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D._H._Lawrence)) to show up the shaping forces that have sculpted the lives of individuals and families during that period. What he is most concerned to explore is the struggle of the individual towards growth and fulfilment. Marriage and changing social circumstances (industrialisation and urbanisation) are shown to be the particularly challenging contexts. Young Ursula Brangwen, whose story is continued in 'Women in Love' (1920), becomes the central character in this trajectory of how the Victorian age gave way to the modern period.

For my money this is the best of Lawrence. His language can saturate the reader in an almost visceral way. You find yourself re-reading passages for the palpable poetic richness of his expression.

Lawrence is still controversial and still divides opinion. For me his work is literature of the highest order.

What you liked: Masterful prose saturated with poetic expression.

Any additional comments?: If you've been impressed by 'The Rainbow', reading around Lawrence will be richly repaid.

Start with Keith Sagar (1985) 'D H Lawrence: Life into Art' (University of Georgia Press) (http://www.amazon.co.uk/D-H-Lawrence-Life-into-Keith-Sagar/dp/0140081054/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1389035804&sr=8-1&keywords=sagar+lawrence+life+art). This book is itself literary appreciation at its best.

Still useful is 'D.H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage' (1970) edited by R.P. Draper (http://www.amazon.co.uk/D-H-Lawrence-Critical-Heritage-R-Draper/dp/0710065914/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1389035985&sr=8-1&keywords=lawrence+critical+heritage).

Move on to 'The Cambridge Companion to D. H. Lawrence' (2001) edited by Anne Fernihough (http://www.amazon.co.uk/Cambridge-Companion-Lawrence-Companions-Literature/dp/052162617X/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1389036124&sr=8-2&keywords=lawrence+cambridge+companion). The bibliography in this volume will lead you to a lifetime appreciation of D. H. Lawrence.

For a recent life try 'D. H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider' (2006) by John Worthen (http://www.amazon.co.uk/D-H-Lawrence-Life-Outsider/dp/0141007311/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1389036444&sr=8-1&keywords=worthen+lawrence).

You will also be richly repaid by reading 'Out of Sheer Rage: In the Shadow of D. H. Lawrence' (1997) by Geoff Dyer. Sitting down to write a book on his hero, Dyer finds a way instead to write about much else besides. In Sicily he is more absorbed by his hatred of seafood than by the Lawrentian vibes; on the way to the D. H. Lawrence Birthplace Experience, he is sidetracked by the Ikea Experience; in Mexico to steep himself in the white-hot beauty of the landscape he cannot get beyond a drug-induced erotic fantasy on a nudist beach. 'Out of Sheer Rage' is a richly comic study of the combination of bad temper, prevarication and base appetite that go into a book. The work is as much a travelogue as a biography, as the author retraces Lawrence's journeys and, using Lawrence's own writings, life, and crucially, photographs as clues, learns much about matters close to his own heart as he does about Lawrence himself. Enquire at your local library or available at http://www.amazon.co.uk/Out-Sheer-Rage-Shadow-Lawrence/dp/0316640026/ref=tmm_hrd_title_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=&qid=

Highly recommended is the 1988 three episode BBC1 TV adaptation(http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095954/?ref=fn_al_tt_2) produced by Stuart Burge. Imogen Stubbs plays Ursula Brangwen and Martin Wrenner plays Anton Skrebensky. Atmospheric, sensuous and haunting, this production is widely considered one of the finest screen versions of any of D.H. Lawrence's controversial work. Available on DVD at http://www.amazon.co.uk/Rainbow-DVD-Imogen-Stubbs/dp/B00NPYQ5VQ/ref=sr_1_1?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1417899402&sr=1-1&keywords=the+rainbow. Please find a way to watch this. It will leave a lasting impression.

Ken Russell offers a 1989 interpretation on film (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098165/?ref=sr_3) with Sammi Davis as Ursula Brangwen, Paul McGann as Anton Skrebensky, Amanda Donohoe as Winifred Inger, Glenda Jackson as Anna Brangwen, and Jim Carter as Mr Harby. Available on DVD at http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Rainbow-DVD/dp/B000H8RW2E/ref=sr_1_1?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1374313613&sr=1-1&keywords=the+rainbow,

Do also listen to the BBC Radio 4 'Great Lives' episode (30 minutes) on Lawrence at the link <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00wldvg>. Presented by Matthew Parris, and with John Hegley and Geoff Dyer. First broadcast Fri 17 Dec 2010.

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