

Spring 2010

**Book review of David Ellis's Death & the Author: How D. H. Lawrence Died, and Was Remembered. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. 273 Pages. (Hardback, \$39.95). ISBN: 978-0-19-954665-7**

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#### **Recommended Citation**

Keese, A. (2010). Death & the Author: How D. H. Lawrence Died, and Was Remembered. Jostes: Journal of South Texas English Studies, 1(2), 1–2.

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*By Andrew Keese*

For the most part, this is an entertaining and informative book that covers more just the life of D. H. Lawrence. David Ellis brings in information about other authors and their similar struggles with tuberculosis, such as Anton Chekov and Katherine Mansfield. The idea of limiting the biography to a narrow subject, such as the last years of the author, is novel. Unfortunately, Ellis, who is also the author of the third volume of the definitive Cambridge biography on Lawrence, does not provide a complete listing of his references. He has an Acknowledgements and Sources section, but it is haphazard. Perhaps Ellis simply meant the book as a long essay on dying, but it is pointless not to provide a complete listing of his sources. Despite the reputation of the author, it raises a major red flag on the reliability of the information contained within his book. While it is a good read, there are other concerns that detract from its successes.

In at least one instance, Ellis relies on secondhand information that would be dubious in court. At an unspecified time after Frieda Lawrence's death (August 11, 1956), Angelo Ravagli is reported to have been visited by Baron Prosper de Haulleville, brother of Rose Huxley's husband (227). Huxley was the sister of Maria Huxley, who was married to Lawrence's friend and fellow author Aldous Huxley. In this conversation, Ravagli is reported to have said that he did not follow through with Frieda's wish to have Lawrence's ashes brought from France to New Mexico. Ellis writes that "He said that in order to avoid complications he had left these in Marseilles and filled an appropriate urn with substitute material once he was back in New York" (228). In order to make sure that readers believed this account of Lawrence's remains, Ellis is sure to include that people who knew de Haulleville "described him as entirely trustworthy" and that "it is hard to see what purpose Angelo could have had in telling him a story which was not true" (228). Of course, just like anyone telling a sensational tale, de Haulleville has reason enough: namely being able to tell a more exciting story. Notes or the source of his citation about this meeting between Haulleville and Ravagli are not included in Ellis's bibliographical section, which makes it difficult for the skeptical reader to verify this weak conspiracy theory.

While it is true that many excellent biographies are full of opinion, Ellis is a little out of line when he refers to Lawrence as "a fiercely non-academic writer" (242). What does it mean to be "non-academic?" Does the work need to be written with a tenth-grade vocabulary, use only simple sentences, and contain only the most basic of plots and concepts? Lawrence may have

been unpretentious, but his works certainly were not dumbed down for anyone, even if they are easier to follow than a Joyce novel. One also has to wonder how much the age when someone lived affects their biases. For instance, Ellis, a professor emeritus at the University of Kent in Canterbury, undoubtedly lived through the height of the Cold War in which people were fearful of all things socialist and communist. Ellis, of course, says that Lawrence was “never much interested in socialism” (161). This is the kind of false statement which hurts Ellis’s stature as one of the foremost Lawrence scholars in the world. At the very least, Lawrence was indeed interested in socialism as a young man. Not to belabor the point too much, but in John Worthen’s *Life of an Outsider* and *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years*, he notes that while in college, Lawrence was a founding member of the socialist group the Society for the Study of Social Reform and from 1908-9, he subscribed to the socialist publication *New Age*.

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