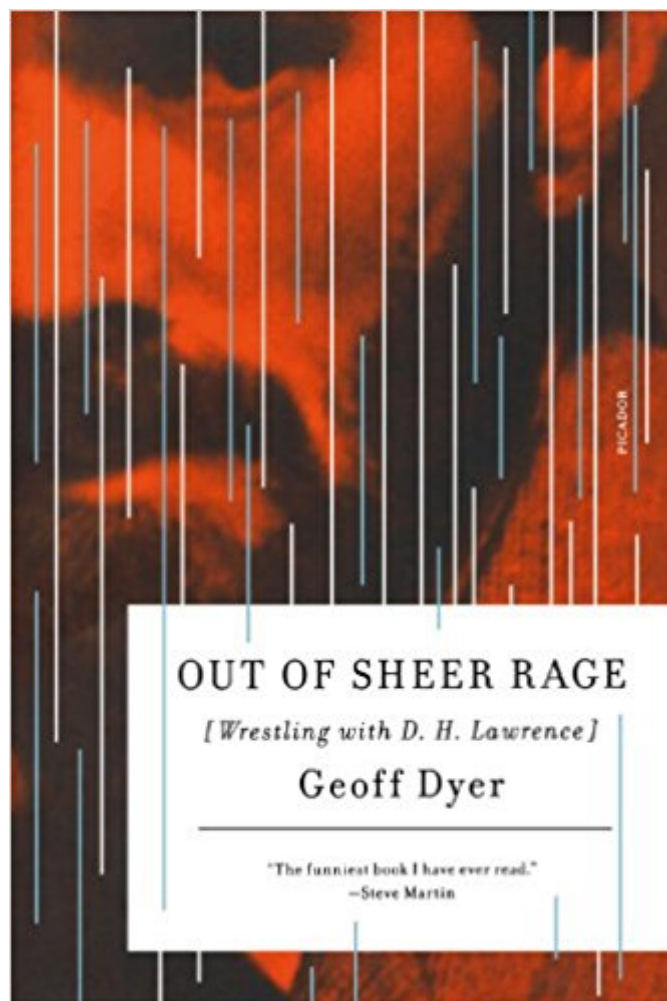


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Out Of Sheer Rage: Wrestling With D. H. Lawrence



Synopsis

FINALIST FOR THE NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD "In the spirit of Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* and Alain de Botton's *How Proust Can Change Your Life*, Mr. Dyer's *Out of Sheer Rage* keeps circling its subject in widening loops and then darting at it when you least expect it . . . a wild book."--Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, *The New York Times* Geoff Dyer was a talented young writer, full of energy and reverence for the craft, and determined to write a study of D. H. Lawrence. But he was also thinking about a novel, and about leaving Paris, and maybe moving in with his girlfriend in Rome, or perhaps traveling around for a while. *Out of Sheer Rage* is Dyer's account of his struggle to write the Lawrence book--a portrait of a man tormented, exhilarated, and exhausted. Dyer travels all over the world, grappling not only with his fascinating subject but with all the glorious distractions and needling anxieties that define the life of a writer.

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Customer Reviews

Geoff Dyer was the award-winning UK author of five other books, some novels and nonfiction, before he set out to write a critical study of D.H. Lawrence. It is, according to his personal codex, a rite of passage every serious author eventually must pass, writing a critical study of an important muse. He readied himself. He stocked up on books by and about Lawrence. Not good enough. He built shelves for the books. Not good enough. He went to places Lawrence went to. Not good enough. He read Lawrence's letters, many volumes of them, but not in such a way to organize his study. Instead, he behaved badly, very badly at times. His Lawrence study, *OUT OF SHEER RAGE*, thus became a chronicle of how not to write a book, or at least, how not to write the book you intend

to write. Ordinarily, I am not a fan of people behaving badly or whining about the nest they built and then sullied, but this book is absolutely delightful for many reasons: 1) The narrative is a study in rhythm and precise language that conveys the mania of the title. 2) Dyer actually does get off a study of Lawrence, however oblique, that is insightful and invites wonder; it's just not the particularly detailed or deadly stuff of conventional biographies, hagiographies or academic studies. It is a telescope into the soul of a man far more tortured by his own sensibilities than Dyer, who nonetheless produced an appreciable oeuvre in a short life, who was, when said and done, comic in his anxieties. 3) It is a fine meditation on the attempt to get as close to a writer as possible, through the works and through the material detritus of a person's life. 4) It is a ripping, emperor's-not-wearing-clothes indictment of academic studies, which delights me and probably continues to offend academe big time.

I suppose one could only write a really decent, insightful review of Geoff Dyer's genre-defying *Out of Sheer Rage* by following the same wonderfully tortuous path taken by the author himself: procrastinate, delay, evade and travel to the far-flung places as Mr. Dyer once did, while constantly examining and re-examining one's own unique array of neuroses. Perhaps, like Geoff Dyer, by failing to write a solid review, one succeeds by taking a circular route, never diving straight to the heart of the matter and recognizing the triumph inherent in such a futile enterprise. Having said all that, one must keep one's day job after all and what follows will have to pass for a circular route. Geoff Dyer's *Out of Sheer Rage: Wrestling with D.H. Lawrence* is a book within a book about trying, failing and succeeding at writing a biography of D.H. Lawrence (in a roundabout way) while simultaneously (quite by accident) employing one's personal and literary failures to gain access to one's own true self. Dyer leads the reader on a dizzying ride, we travel along with him and his long-suffering, multilingual girlfriend Laura in an effort to gain inspiration by way of the ritual of movement and a sense of place. We visit Italy, (Taormina, Rome) New Mexico, (Taos) Mexico (Oaxaca) and Oxford, all places where Lawrence once worked and lived. Nothing tangible realized there except some brilliant discoveries about the author's interior life. Observations usually unearthed by quoting Lawrence himself; "Freedom is a gift inside one's soul, Lawrence declared, you can't have it if it isn't in you." Dyer observes in a moment of self-awareness; "A gift it may be but it is not there for the taking. To realize this capacity in yourself is a struggle.

Dyer has written an entertaining, informative, imaginative, and philosophically-revealing view of his struggle to motivate himself to write a book about one of his idols, D. H. Lawrence. I felt an

immediate closeness with Dyer when he said on p. 16 that "The Complete Poems" was probably the single most important book of Lawrence's. I have always been drawn more to DHL's poems and essays than to his novels. And yet in Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, DHL is referred to as a "British novelist," and not as a "British author." As the work goes on, it becomes clear that Dyer's preferred source of material are DHL's Letters. The most positive aspect of the book is the nine-page index given at the end of the book, mostly to quotes from Lawrence's letters. Dyer's description of trying to pace himself through the seven volumes of letters is a minor masterpiece of hilarity. Also humorous are his descriptions of sitting across from a lady with a cold on the train, and his childhood health problems. I have never read a book when I burst out laughing as often as in reading this one. Dyer likes to draw parallels between himself and DHL, physically as well as emotionally and spiritually, because DHL is one of his heroes. Or is he? How could he have made the statement on p. 207 that "...once I have finished this book...Lawrence will become a closed book to me. That's what I look forward to: no longer having anything to do with Lawrence." Or is he, in the heat of his authorship, lost in one of his mazes of contradiction. Dyer says his favorite photograph of DHL is one of him sitting under a tree "doing nothing."

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