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**D. H. Lawrence**

**Summary**

David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930) was born in Eastwood, near Nottingham, England. He composed poetry, several travel books, expressionist paintings, short novels and stories, literary criticism and plays. However, he is best known for his novels: *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920), and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928). His non-fiction works include *Movements in European History* (1921)*, Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1922) and *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923). His fictional writing focuses on social class, the tensions between the rural and the industrialised landscape, issues of Englishness and nationhood, and gender and sexuality. In representing sexuality and a stern critique of war and imperialism, Lawrence endured the censorship and prohibition of some of his key texts. Unlike other writers, such as Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, Lawrence is often portrayed as being on the periphery of literary modernism. However, his marginalised social position and relationship with other writers of the time also makes him central to modernist criticism.

**Main Entry**

D. H. Lawrence was the fourth of five children. His father, Arthur John Lawrence, was a semi-literate coal-miner, and his mother, Lydia, was from the middle-classes: these parental influences contributed to Lawrence’s interrogation of social hierarchies which features throughout his work. He initially pursued a career as a teacher, but in 1909 published his first poems with Ford Madox Hueffer’s (later Ford Madox Ford) *English Review.* In 1911, *The White Peacock* was published. During March 1912, he met the German aristocrat Frieda von Richthofen, who was the wife of his former Professor at the University of Nottingham, where he studied for a teaching certificate in 1908. Following her divorce, Frieda and Lawrence married on 13 July 1914 and they remained together until Lawrence’s death, despite the frequent advice from their social circle. The marriage to Frieda was violent, and Katherine Mansfield remarked that the Lawrence marriage was troubled by domestic violence. Discussing Lawrence and his wife, Mansfield claimed he tried to ‘beat her to death’. Certainly in her autobiography, *Not I, But the Wind* (1934), Frieda idealises Lawrence, but with the advent of second-wave feminism, later criticism such as Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) would identify Lawrence and his writing as problematically misogynist. Various feminist critics, such as Simone de Beauvoir, have taken issue with Lawrence’s characterisation of women and his concept of ‘the supremacy of the male’, although others have read Lawrence more sympathetically. For instance, biographers such as Squires and Talbot (2002) have dismissed speculation that Frieda was threatened by her husband.

Lawrence’s marriage has also prompted critical speculation about his sexuality, with many scholars of the mid-twentieth century agreeing that he wrestled with latent homosexuality or bisexuality. However, Squires and Talbot (2002) refute any suggestions that Lawrence had at least one homosexual relationship, although many of his novels, such as *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love,* refer to lesbianism and homoeroticism. There is also some speculation about Lawrence’s infertility, following an illness in 1916. Both Frieda and Lawrence had extramarital affairs, though they maintained a lifelong commitment to each other.

Lawrence published his *Love Poems and Others* in 1913,although his first novel, *The White Peacock,* appeared in 1911. *Sons and Lovers* (1913), relates the story of Paul Morel, a young artist who is often identified with Lawrence (similarly, Gertrude Morel is frequently seen as a semi-autobiographical reflection on Lawrence’s own mother). In 1915 he finished *The Rainbow*, but reviews on publication were unfavourable, and the book was withdrawn from sale. The book addresses familiar Lawrencian ideas such as sexuality and class (including Ursula’s liaison with her schoolmistress). Through three generations of the Brangwen family, it also introduces historical detail such as the emergence of mass education, and the shift from a rural to an urban economy in England. *The Rainbow* was banned as obscene on 13 November 1915, leaving Lawrence feeling a profound sense of disenchantment with England. This sense was intensified by the First World War: for the pacifist Lawrence, the war was related to repression and British imperialism, and both his poetry and stories feature numerous references to the conflict. There are stories such as ‘Tickets Please’ and ‘The Blind Man’, as well as the poetic sequence *All of Us*, a collection of 31 war poems, which was only finally printed for the first time in 2013 as *The Poems*. Lawrence is also identified with the authoritarian politics common in certain modernist writers (W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound). In *Aaron’s Rod* (1922), *Kangaroo* (1923), and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926)*,* like other Modernists, Lawrence pursues the notion of a leader figure to counter the demands of the collective mass, and in such writings, there is the discernible influence of Friedrich Nietzsche on his work. Certainly his advocacy of male authority, and of a Messianic leader who would lead England from corruption to a new utopia (which he called Rananim) suggests his potential for espousing the politics of dictatorship.

In 1916 Lawrence finished the first version of *Women in Love,* the sequel to *The Rainbow,* which continues to follow the lives of two sisters, Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen*.* He originally plotted the two novels as one, but they were finally published separately. The novel was consistently rejected by publishers, and he rewrote the text in 1917. Lawrence’s health was often precarious, and in 1919 he was perilously ill with influenza. That year he left England for Italy, as he felt his home country could offer him nothing artistically. He began to write travel books, including *Sea and Sardinia* in 1921, whilst also working on several short novels. In February 1922, Lawrence and Frieda went to Ceylon, then toured Australia and America, which was to influence the landscape in his work at that time. In Mexico during 1924 Lawrence suffered another episode of ill health. In August he suffered a bronchial haemorrhage, and was later diagnosed with tuberculosis. Despite his illness, he revisited England during a coal strike in 1926, the experience provoking the first draft of what would become *Lady Chatterley’s Lover.* The novel was privately published in 1928 in Florence, but it was also pirated in the USA and Europe, which prompted Lawrence to pursue the publication of a cheap edition in Paris. At this time, the typescript of *Pansies* was seized by police, along with paintings from his art exhibition in London. He also finished *Apocalypse* and *Last Poems* (published posthumously by Frieda in 1932). Suffering from ill health, he attended the Ad Astra sanatorium in Vence, France, but discharged himself on 1 March 1930. He died the following day, and was buried in the local cemetery 4 March 1930.

Lawrence’s posthumous status is frequently linked with the problems of obscenity in relation to the literary representation of sexuality. In the essay ‘Pornography and Literature’ (1929), Lawrence offered a critique of the hypocrisies of twentieth-century censorship. *The Rainbow* was not the only novel by Lawrence which faced the accusation of obscenity. In 1960, Penguin Books printed *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* in accessible paperback form, resulting in the publisher facing criminal charges under The Obscene Publications Act (1959). C. H. Rolph’s *The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v Penguin Books Ltd* (1961) is still a valuable account of the court proceedings, including transcriptions from figures like Raymond Williams, Helen Gardner, E.M. Forster, Rebecca West, Kenneth Muir, and C. Day Lewis. The trial itself highlighted the sort of class prejudices which Lawrence addressed throughout his work: the Chief Prosecutor, Mervyn Griffith-Jones, maintained that this was not the sort of book ‘you would wish your wife or servants to read’ due to the use of four-letter words and explicit sex scenes. The prosecution was unsuccessful, thereby allowing Lawrence’s reputation to flourish. *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* also revisits a number of Lawrence’s key ideas: he returns to the coal-mining landscape of the Midlands, reflecting on the nature of class inequality, the problems of industrialisation, modernity, and the state of England question. In his representation of Clifford Chatterley’s disability, he addresses the consequences of the First World War and mechanisation, and in the highly-charged relationship between the gamekeeper, Oliver Mellors, and Lady Chatterley, Lawrence articulates his philosophy of the ‘democracy of touch’.

Even from within the culture of modernism, Lawrence maintained the novel was the most effective medium for reassessing culture and society. In 1925 he wrote ‘Why the Novel Matters’, where he maintained that a novel teaches the reader how to live, whilst also highlighting the subjectivity of human experience and morality. By the 1950s, Lawrence was lauded by critics such as F. R. Leavis, whose criticism secured Lawrence’s status in the English literary canon. Lawrence’s status has also been reconfigured due to the publication of *The* *Cambridge Edition of the Works of D. H. Lawrence* (1979-). This monumental, multi-volume work has uncovered Lawrence’s extensive revisions, and also published material (such as letters and poems) which were previously censored or had remained unpublished, and as such, it has opened up new critical readings for future scholars.

**Further reading**

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