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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, 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 writing focuses on social class, the tensions between the rural and the industrialised landscape, issues of Englishness and nationhood, as well and gender and sexuality. In representing sexuality, Lawrence endured the censorship and prohibition of some of his key texts. Unlike other writers, such as Woolf or 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 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 *English Review.* In 1911, *The White Peacock* was published. During March 1912, he met Frieda von Richthofen, who was to become his wife on 13 July 1914.

Lawrence published his *Love Poems and Others* in 1913,and in 1915 he finished *The Rainbow*. However, reviews on publication were unfavourable, and the book was withdrawn from sale. It was banned for obscenity on 13 November 1915, which left Lawrence feeling a profound sense of disenchantment with England. In 1916 he finished the first version of *Women in Love.* This 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. It was in Mexico during 1924 that 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, which provoked 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 States 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 brought 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, C. Day Lewis. The trial itself highlighted the sort of class prejudices which Lawrence treated 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 were unsuccessful, thereby allowing Lawrence’s reputation to flourish. Various feminist critics, including Kate Millett in her critical work *Sexual Politics* (1970), have taken issue with Lawrence’s characterisation of women, whilst the publication of *The* *Cambridge Edition of the Works of D. H. Lawrence* (1979-) has revealed the extensive revisions which Lawrence conducted in relation to his work.

**Further reading**

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