

D. H. Lawrence

The author and his work



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David Herbert Lawrence was an important British writer of the twentieth century. However, aspects of his life and work were very shocking to society at that time. Many people did not approve of his books, especially of the way he wrote about men and women. They thought that Lawrence's work was pornographic because he wrote about romantic relationships in a new and shocking way. Lawrence's own life was unconventional and did not follow the usual pattern of people's lives at that time. He also suffered from health problems, especially diseases of the lungs, and died when still quite young.

Lawrence was born on September 11th, 1885, in the coal-mining town of Eastwood near the city of Nottingham. His parents were from very different backgrounds with different levels of education. His father was a coal miner from the working-class, and his mother was a former school teacher. Lawrence's background gave him the ideas for several of his books. He won a scholarship to Nottingham High School and later became a pupil teacher at the British School in Eastwood. Later he became a full-time student and received a teaching certificate from University College, Nottingham in 1908. He then left his childhood home for London, where he worked as a teacher.

A short story of Lawrence's, *Odour of Chrysanthemums*, was published in a magazine called *The English Review*. After this, the publishing company, Heinemann, asked Lawrence to do more work. At the same time, he was working on his first novel, *The White Peacock*. But in 1910, when the final proofs of the book were completed, Lawrence's mother died of cancer. Lawrence had a very close relationship with his mother and her death was a terrible shock. He was upset for a long time, and called the next few months his 'sick year'. He described his feelings about his mother's death later in his novel *Sons and Lovers*, when the hero's mother, Mrs Morel, dies.

In March 1912 Lawrence experienced another major turning point. He fell in love with Frieda Weekley, the German wife of his former modern languages professor at Nottingham University. Frieda was six years older than Lawrence and had three young children. She left her husband and ran away with Lawrence to her home town of Metz. However, this happened just before the First World War, when the Germans and British did not trust each other. Lawrence did not believe that countries needed strong armies if they wanted to have political power. So he was arrested by the Germans and accused of being a British spy, although he was later released.

Lawrence and Frieda then went to Italy, where Lawrence completed *Sons and Lovers*. They returned to England at the beginning of the First World War and were married on July 13th, 1914. But things were very difficult for them in England. British people did not trust Frieda because she was German. In addition, sales of Lawrence's novel, *The Rainbow*, were stopped because the book was thought to be pornographic. So the Lawrences had very little money. Later, when they were living in Cornwall, Lawrence wrote *Women in Love*, the novel that follows *The Rainbow*. But they were accused of spying for the Germans. Finally, the authorities ordered them to leave Cornwall.

After the war, Lawrence decided to leave England. He spent the rest of his life travelling in foreign countries with Frieda, and returned to England only twice for short visits. In November 1919 he went south to Italy, then Malta, Austria and southern Germany. He wrote a number of novels like *The Lost Girl* and *Aaron's Rod* and shorter novels like *The Captain's Doll*. He also wrote a number of

poems about nature in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, and travel books and non-fiction books. One of these, *Movements in European History*, was used by schools in England. But Lawrence could not use his real name for the book, because of his bad reputation.

In February 1922 the Lawrences left Europe. They went to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and then Australia where Lawrence finished his Australian novel, *Kangaroo*. Finally they went to America. Lawrence bought a 160-acre ranch high up in the mountains near Taos, New Mexico. He planned to turn it into a community where writers and artists could live together. Lawrence visited England briefly in 1923, but soon returned to Taos. He was now sure that his future as a writer was in America. But he was suffering from bad health problems. In March 1925 he became very ill and almost died from malaria and tuberculosis.

Lawrence and Frieda went to northern Italy and bought a villa near Florence. Here Lawrence wrote the short novel *The Virgin and the Gipsy* and his last major novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Meanwhile, he met other writers like the English writer Aldous Huxley and also produced some paintings. Although he continued to write, his health was getting worse. He died from tuberculosis in Vence, France, on March 2nd, 1930, at the age of forty-four.

Many people felt unsympathetic to Lawrence, and did not think that he was a great writer. But other people like Aldous Huxley defended him. The famous Cambridge literary critic, F. R. Leavis, also claimed that Lawrence was an important writer of English fiction. He said that *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and the short stories were major works of art. In 1960 Lawrence's name became famous all over the world. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had been published privately in 1928 but could not be sold in bookshops because of the love scenes. In 1960 Penguin Books published it, but they were taken to court for publishing a pornographic book. But Penguin fought the case and won. After that many people bought *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Lawrence was a realist. He wrote about everyday life as it really is. Sometimes this gives his work a depressing or sad quality. But his work also contains descriptions of beautiful places like the countryside around Eastwood. Lawrence lived much of his life abroad, but he never forgot England. His four most famous novels, *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, all take place near his birthplace, Eastwood. In spite of leaving Eastwood in real life, he continued to write about it, calling it 'the country of my heart'.

A selection of works by D. H. Lawrence

Novels

- 1911 *The White Peacock*
- 1913 *Sons and Lovers*
- 1915 *The Rainbow*
- 1920 *Women in Love*
- 1922 *Aaron's Rod*
- 1923 *Kangaroo*
- 1926 *The Plumed Serpent*
- 1928 *Lady Chatterley's Lover*
- 1930 *The Virgin and the Gipsy*

Short stories

- 1914 *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories*
- 1922 *England, my England and Other Stories*
- 1923 *The Fox, the Captain's Doll, the Ladybird*
- 1925 *St Mawr and Other Stories*
- 1928 *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories*
- 1930 *The Virgin and the Gipsy and Other Stories*
- 1930 *Love Among the Haystacks and Other Stories*

Poetry

- 1913 *Love Poems and Others*
- 1921 *Tortoises*
- 1923 *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*
- 1932 *Last Poems*

Non-fiction

- 1914 *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*
- 1921 *Movements in European History*

Travel books

- 1916 *Twilight in Italy and Other Essays*
- 1921 *Sea and Sardinia*
- 1927 *Mornings in Mexico*
- 1932 *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays*

Films and TV films

- 1969 *Women in Love*
Directed by Ken Russell
Starring Alan Bates, Oliver Reed, Glenda Jackson and Jennie Linden
- 1970 *The Virgin and the Gipsy*
Directed by Christopher Miles
Starring Joanna Shimkus and France Nero
- 1981 *Lady Chatterley's Lover*
Directed by Just Jaeckin
Starring Sylvia Kristel, Shane Briant and Nicholas Clay
- 1993 (TV) *Lady Chatterley's Lover*
Directed by Ken Russell
Starring Joely Richardson and Sean Bean