

D. H. Lawrence

Icon Critical Guides

The Rainbow
Women in Love

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EDITED BY RICHARD BEYNON

ICON CRITICAL GUIDES

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The Rainbow

Women in Love

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Series editor: Richard Beynon



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Introduction

THE CELEBRATION of Lawrence as a major creative talent is still a comparatively recent phenomenon. During his life, and despite the range and volume of his output, he earned very little money from his work and maintained a precarious existence on the borders of absolute poverty. More significant, though, is the fact that Lawrence's creative genius remained almost entirely unrecognised by critics and the general public, not only while he lived, but for twenty years after his death. It seems astonishing that a writer whose works are now considered as among the finest in the language should have seen two of his books banned, his paintings seized, his plans for travel hindered by the refusal of a passport, and the mass of his work neglected or ridiculed for nearly forty years. The very existence of this volume and its contents, however – which form but a brief snapshot of a vast and ongoing critical activity – offer testament to the fact that Lawrence's reputation *has* undergone a massive revaluation, such that his major works are now given a central place in any account of twentieth-century literature in English. It is the process of that revaluation which forms the core of this book.

Critical guides such as this will be read by students who have grown up with an awareness of certain 'great' English novelists, and amongst the familiar names will be Lawrence's. In the closing years of the 1990s, we naturally accept Lawrence as a major talent who occupies a place amongst the great writers of the century; we are able, now, to appreciate particularly the massive contribution Lawrence has made to the development of what he called 'the highest form of human expression so far attained' – the novel.¹ That this should be the case is, first, a tribute to the enduring qualities of Lawrence's work; second, a result of his determination to realise and articulate an original vision of art and its place in our society; third, the outcome of some meticulous scholarship and tireless campaigning by a number of academics and critics who have persisted in their belief that there were qualities in the work deserving of recognition.

This book attempts to offer its readers an account of some central moments in that slow and uneven process of change to which Lawrence's reputation has been subject during the past eighty years. The extracts and essays reprinted here have been selected (given the usual, but frustrating, constraints of space in a single volume) for their value in

marking the progress of the critical debate surrounding Lawrence's work. Some are pieces which speak firmly of the years in which they were written, and act as marking posts on the critical trail, to be taken as representations of the value-systems and attitudes which prevailed in the year of their publication. Others have a more enduring quality and still serve to lead the reader and the critic to new understandings of their subject. Taken together, these writings should be seen as a set of tools to be applied to the novels themselves – for the novels remain always at the heart of the volume.

And, although this book is concerned with only two of his novels – and though they may be said to represent his finest work in fiction – it is not the intention of this book to limit the reader's attention to *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* alone. To recognise Lawrence's greatness solely as the writer of these two novels is to tell but a small part of a much greater story. It is hoped that the reader will explore the links that are offered to other works and other forms in Lawrence's enormous repertoire – for it was a central part of his vision of art that it had an organic quality, that it afforded a means to define, test, reject and redefine his beliefs across the many forms he attempted. In that respect, there is a satisfying harmony between the many shifts, peaks and troughs in his status and reputation as an artist and the processes at work in his art. In the sentence quoted above from Lawrence's essay 'The Novel', he asserts its ascendancy over all other art forms. He goes on to explain why:

Because it is so incapable of the absolute.

In a novel, everything is relative to everything else, if that novel is art at all. There may be didactic bits, but they aren't the novel.

... There you have the greatness of the novel itself. It won't let you tell didactic lies, and put them over.²

There was never stillness and certainty in Lawrence's work. Instead, a constant state of warfare existed between the novelist and the novel itself. Which meant, for Lawrence, that his work was never truly finished, never fully defined – and properly so. The novels under scrutiny here should not be seen, then, as existing in any capacity of separateness from the rest of Lawrence's work, for they all form part of his lifelong attempt to test his own beliefs.

By the time his life was ended at forty-four, by the tuberculosis which had plagued him since boyhood, Lawrence had turned his hand to novels, short stories, poetry, full-length works of philosophy, critical essays on a vast range of subjects, translation, plays, painting, travel-books, literary criticism, reviews, thousands of letters – and even a history textbook. According to Anthony Burgess, another prolific and proudly 'professional' writer, 'Lawrence was essentially a man *who wrote*, and the only form which he did not practise was the film scenario'.³

It is, in part, because of the sheer range of Lawrence's output that his works are so widely known, so satisfying, and so widely contested upon the critical stage. And by 'range' we should understand not simply the variety of artistic forms he attempted in his life, but the variety of arguments, styles and truths he held up for question. Because he refused to let his own work alone, because he was always ready to come back at his art in another guise, he kept his readers in a more or less constant state of uncertainty – 'everything is relative to itself', he kept reminding them.

We shall be exploring the many critical expressions of puzzlement and, more recently, satisfaction, which Lawrence's artistic method elicited from his critics in this volume, and we shall also begin to see how there is an appropriateness in the diversity of responses to the two novels. The richness and variety of the critical press should stand as something of a tribute to the writer and his work, because he never wanted his art to stand still, to become 'ossiferous', as he felt that much of English fiction had. He rose to new challenges throughout his life, and was never deterred by adverse comments or a hostile critical press.

To refuse categorisation, to insist on the right to contradict and reinvent oneself has always been a risky business for an artist. Today, we hear so much of rock stars', poets', painters' and novelists' attempts to elude categorisation, to refuse to be placed in a movement, trend or 'school'. The artist pulls one way; our demand for order pulls the other. Such individuality is seen as a strength, as the source of original creative energy and as evidence of an innovative drive quite proper to artistry. But we live, now, in a world which embraces postmodern dissonance, in a world of sound-bites, media-snapshots and hype, where more than fifteen minutes of fame is something akin to immortality: it is easier now to be different, for now we lay great store by difference. But such was not the world in which Lawrence lived and wrote. Late Edwardian English society was rooted in tradition and treated difference with scorn. By daring to be different, and by having the temerity to suggest that his readers should be different too, Lawrence risked all. And as we have noted above, his reputation suffered for forty years as a result of the risks he took.

An Overview

The published writings on Lawrence may be considered as belonging to three broad areas. First, there are those writings, produced during Lawrence's lifetime, which allow for some recognition of early genius, but which point to a gradual falling-off of talent, loss of form and increasing moral waywardness. Second, there is that body of writings which first appeared around the time of Lawrence's death and continued to dominate the critical field throughout the Thirties. These treatments

centre chiefly on the personality and psychology of the writer, and may be further divided into two groups: those which offer psychological and psychoanalytical readings of the works, and those which are basically reminiscences and extended personal memoirs about Lawrence. Third, comes that vast body of writings spanning the period from the so-called 'Lawrence Revival' of the early 1950s, to the present. Of this last group, the sub-divisions are practically endless: there are New Critical approaches, moral-formalist approaches, biographical studies, bibliographical studies, feminist studies, comparative studies, historical studies, Marxist analyses, post-structuralist readings, and a host of others. What brings these works together, however, is that they are all expressions of serious scholarly activity founded, principally, on the acceptance of Lawrence's status as a great creative talent.

Lawrence first gained recognition for his early poems when, in 1909, he had work published in the *English Review*, edited by the influential critic and novelist Ford Madox Hueffer, later known as Ford Madox Ford (who also discovered Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis in the same year). There followed a degree of critical success, and an introduction to literary circles, with the publication of his first two novels, *The White Peacock* (1911) and *The Trespasser* (1912). Lawrence was taken up as a 'talented newcomer', and was highly thought of by a number of prominent literary and intellectual figures, including Pound, who told the American poet Harriet Monroe in 1913: 'As a prose writer I grant him first place among the younger men.'⁴

With his third novel, *Sons and Lovers* (1913), Lawrence's popularity and reputation grew. Most reviewers recognised the development that had taken place between the early work and this, his first 'mature' novel. But already there were those who began to express unease at the growing psychological intensity and lyrical richness of Lawrence's writing. A review in *The Standard* complained that his 'weakness is that he is too often the lyrical poet making his creatures speak his thoughts and this is a bad fault for a novelist.'⁵

In *The Westminster Gazette* of the same year we find another early instance of the sort of criticism that would cast a shadow over all of Lawrence's later novels. The anonymous reviewer recognised that '*Sons and Lovers* is a book to haunt and waylay the mind long after it has been laid aside', but seemed uncomfortable with the very aspect of the writing which was to become Lawrence's major artistic preoccupation in his next two novels:

Nowadays we have done with the hero, and in his place we have the subject. Sensitiveness is the only quality the really modern novelist seeks in the central figure of his tale, and the consequence is that we are in danger of replacing our novels of character by those of character-

isation. This change, which has come to us from France, is likely enough to work its own revenge on the English novelist, and a warning sign of this danger may be found in . . . *Sons and Lovers*.⁶

For Lawrence, it was precisely the desire to approach character in a new way, to turn away from the 'novel of character' which so dominated English fiction, that seemed the way forward to a new form, to a new novel. In the early years of his artistic career he had seemed to work within the boundaries of established and accepted fictional technique. He paid attention to the demands of realism, adhered loosely to the prevailing model of the late-Victorian English novel, and was rewarded with success. When he came to write the two novels with which we are concerned, however, he felt that there was a need for something new, for something beyond that to which the novel was currently attending. In his decision to pursue his instincts, to abandon the safety of the known and acceptable, he moved into a world where his critics could not and would not follow.

After *Sons and Lovers*, and despite the sort of review quoted above, he devoted enormous energy to the search for an expression of a new consciousness which itself would drive and shape the novel. Through the many drafts of the manuscript that Lawrence first called *The Sisters*, later renamed *The Wedding Ring* and eventually divided to form *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, he worked at the task of redefining and re-presenting character. In what is now probably one of the most famous and most-quoted of his letters, Lawrence outlined to his friend and early mentor, Edward Garnett, his still hazy, but deeply-felt desire for a new sort of novel. In the first part of the letter, which responds to Garnett's obviously negative comments on a manuscript draft, we see an awareness in Lawrence that his work had changed, and that such a change in the work required a change, too, in the reader:

I don't agree with you about the *Wedding Ring*. You will find that in a while you will like the book as a whole. I don't think the psychology is wrong: it is only that I have a different attitude to my characters, and that necessitates a different attitude in you, which you are not prepared to give.⁷

Further into the letter, Lawrence tries to explain the nature of his 'different attitude' to character:

You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable *ego* of the character. There is another *ego*, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element . . . You must not say my novel is shaky – it is not perfect, because I am not

expert in what I want to do. But it is the real thing, say what you like. And I shall get my reception, if not now, then before long. Again I say, don't look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle-bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, the sand takes lines unknown.⁸

The review in *The Westminster Gazette*, almost exactly a year before this letter, had recognised then, in *Sons and Lovers*, the earliest signs of the technique which was to be developed fully in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, and which was to distinguish Lawrence from his British contemporaries. That the reviewer had neither understood nor appreciated the value of Lawrence's distinct approach to character is no surprise. The vast majority of Lawrence's reviewers – and even his friends, like Garnett – felt much the same.

In the letter to Garnett, we find a sense of certainty and optimism that readers would, though, 'before long', come to read differently, to accept the truth of the new technique. It was an optimism that Lawrence maintained for only a short time, for as the almost entirely negative reception and swift banning of *The Rainbow* proved, there were few people who could see past the difference in the technique and value the 'real thing'. From the suppression of *The Rainbow* under the Obscene Publications Act in 1915 until he died in 1930, Lawrence wrote not because he thought that public recognition was imminent, but chiefly for the reason that he had to express what he saw as the truth, in a way which itself was truthful. He wrote in spite of his readers, and in spite of the many critics who maligned and misunderstood his aims, ideas and techniques – simply because he believed he was right.

Once *The Rainbow* had been savaged in the public press and banned from sale in his own country, Lawrence ceased to hope for acceptance, for his 'reception', in Britain. Here we find the moment of crisis in his life: from this time, Lawrence's years of isolation really begin. Barely a month after the police action against *The Rainbow*, his changed attitude was evident in a letter written to his literary agent, J. B. Pinker, on 16 December 1915. Responding to criticisms of the structural weaknesses of his novel made by Arnold Bennett, Lawrence delivered the following broadside:

Tell Arnold Bennett that all rules of good construction hold good only for novels which are copies of other novels. A book which is not a copy of other books has its own construction, and what he calls faults, being an old imitator, I call characteristics. I shall repeat till I am grey – when they have as good a work to show, they may make their pronouncements *ex cathedra*. Till then, let them learn respect.⁹

It took 'them' nearly forty years to learn respect. But, as is now a matter of history, Lawrence's assault on the form and style of the English novel did eventually succeed in changing the way we read and receive our sense of the world through fiction, and has had a vital influence on the genre and its place in twentieth-century culture – as much of the remainder of this book will show.

Lawrence was deeply wounded by the response to *The Rainbow*, and in some ways never forgave or forgot the insult perpetrated on his art in 1915. Throughout the remainder of the First World War, he and Frieda simply waited to escape from England. During these years, Lawrence became increasingly obsessed with his long-cherished dream of establishing a utopian community of writers, artists and like-minded folk, to be called 'Rananim' – behaviour symptomatic of his distaste for all he saw around him in Britain. He could no longer conceive of achieving recognition or fulfilment in his own country – so he spent most of the rest of his life engaged in his 'savage pilgrimage', searching for a place where he felt at home, where he felt he could work and live in peace. The search took him, across a period of twenty years, to Italy, Capri, Sicily, Sri Lanka, Australia, the islands of the South Pacific, New Mexico, Mexico, Italy, Switzerland and finally to Vence in the south of France, where he died.

During his life, and despite the difficulties most critics had in understanding his work, Lawrence was generally seen as a gifted writer – even a genius – but one who had somehow failed to live up to the promise of his early work. The fact that he had shown talent early in his career seemed to count increasingly against, rather than for, his reputation.

For a reader of Lawrence's work today, there is little sense of the danger to public morality that was felt to be so acute in his novels during the years of the First World War and the early Twenties. Certain of the essays and reviews which form the earlier sections of this book present views which can hardly be matched with our contemporary sense of Lawrence's worth, but which nevertheless held sway over the critical reception, publication and reprinting of his works for decades. Indeed, to gain any real understanding of the battles which have been fought over Lawrence's reputation we need to consider briefly the staggering rehabilitation that has taken place, which has elevated Lawrence from public menace to cultural institution.

Very few undergraduate students of English literature will now pass through their degree programmes without focusing on some aspect of Lawrence's prose, poetry, philosophy and critical or dramatic writings. Virtually all Women's Studies courses which explore the growth of twentieth-century feminist criticism will have focused on Simone de Beauvoir or Kate Millett's ground-breaking re-evaluations of Lawrence's work.¹⁰ Students of American Literature will, at some time, have turned to Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* for a refreshing and

insightful account of Hawthorne, Melville, Poe or Whitman. For many years, schools and colleges have been teaching A Level syllabuses and Access modules that include *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* or short stories by Lawrence, as well as the hugely popular *Sons and Lovers* as part of the GCSE syllabus. In short, it is hard to approach the study of modern literature in English today without encountering Lawrence's work directly, or through its influence on others.

But the extraordinary contemporary interest in Lawrence is not confined to the academic world, for he is one of the few 'serious' artists whose sales have remained at a level more common to a popular novelist. There is scarcely a member of the reading population who has not at some time encountered a novel, story or poem by Lawrence – and huge numbers of cinema-goers and television viewers will have seen one of the many dramatisations of his works on screen. There have been times when even our social values and sense of cultural norms seem to have been bound up with Lawrence's image, ideas or arguments. Since November 1960 and the end of the (in)famous obscenity trial which surrounded the Penguin publication of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, his name has given our language a new adjective – 'Lawrentian' – which has become firmly established in the general consciousness, with all its (often ill-placed) connotations of full-blooded sexuality, individuality, and earthiness.

In 1967, when Philip Larkin wrote the poem 'Annus Mirabilis', he attempted to sum up something of the magic (and expose something of the myth) of the Sixties by focusing on the sexual liberation the decade was claimed to have ushered in. He selected for the poem two defining moments, two events that seemed to act as markers for the shift in public mood and awareness:

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(Which was rather late for me) –
Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles' first LP.¹¹

The album did rather well: the novel did even better. Following the enormous publicity of the unsuccessful obscenity actions in America in 1959, and Britain in October–November 1960, the twenty-eight year ban on the novel was finally lifted and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* released in its unexpurgated form in the Autumn of 1960. In the eight months that followed, the novel sold over three million copies in Britain alone.¹²

Lawrence and his work had become a part of the Sixties. The massive sales of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* continued throughout the decade, and led to a huge increase of interest in his other works, so that during the decade as a whole, world-wide sales of Lawrence's books totalled around ten million copies.¹³ For many of his readers it seemed that Lawrence

had anticipated the mood of the Sixties. From a distance of forty years, he had given voice to much that the well-educated, consumer-rich, but painfully divided society of the Sixties seemed to hanker after. The ideas that were found in the novels, stories, poems and philosophical essays seemed to serve a present need, despite the fact that they were conceived of before universal suffrage, free mass education, civil rights awareness, the Pill, television, the atom bomb and the mini-skirt.

In addition to the explosion in film and television versions of the stories and novels since the Sixties, the visual image of the writer himself has become something of an icon of the modern age. Images of Lawrence have appeared so often on the covers of biographies, critical works and collections of essays (such as this), that he has become one of English literature's most easily recognisable figures. Lawrence's portrait or photograph will be found somewhere on the covers of most editions of his works, and has come to signify an attitude and a style as much as a man.

In the face of the over-used images and neatly coined by-words, and the welter of casual, populist treatments of his writings, academics and students are left with the task of assimilating the ever-developing arguments, approaches and theories surrounding Lawrence's name and literary reputation. Unpicking the innumerable layers of myth to reach something of the original work is a task that has become hugely demanding.

Keeping track of the ever-increasing body of critical writings about Lawrence's work has become a strenuous full-time occupation for academics and research students the world over – though there has never been a shortage of volunteers for the job. For over thirty-five years, reference has been made to a 'Lawrence Industry'¹⁴ suggestive of a hugely prolific grouping of academics, writers, publishers and dramatists who have produced millions of words which serve to advance, adjust and review the currently held images of Lawrence and his work. Though the term is somewhat derisory, it is hard to come upon another workable description which captures the global scale and intense activity of Lawrence scholarship without resorting to some industrial or commercial metaphor. As far back as 1961, when the great critical revival of Lawrence's reputation was still in its youth, Eliseo Vivas offered a wry commentary on the progress made by his fellow scholars:

His life has been thoroughly examined by a large number of biographers, friendly and unfriendly; he has been psychoanalysed, criticised, evaluated, loved in public posthumously; he has been worshipped from a distance as the loveable angel that at times he was, and he has been despised as the demon that he also was. His every move has been charted, his reading scrutinised, his formidable battles with his wife

recorded, and his novels have been corrected by checking them against the facts he used as matter for them. We know he cooked, trimmed hats for Frieda, built chicken coops, baked bread in old-fashioned ovens and fell into sadistic tantrums; and we also know that he could be tender after his explosions . . .

Recently his most indefatigable biographer, Harry T. Moore, has added to two very useful books on Lawrence a third; and more recently still, another biographer, Edward H. Nehls, has given us a very valuable composite biography in three volumes. If there is information on his life that has been overlooked, letters that have not yet been printed, surviving relatives and friends not yet interviewed, vital statistics not yet published, it is not likely that they shall alter the picture we have of Lawrence's work and of his character. But if there is such data, it is not the writer of this book who would be interested in finding it.¹⁵

As Lawrence's reputation has risen, so has the output of material about him or his writing. Also, during the time since Vivas's comments were written, the huge rise of interest in literary theory has provided fresh ground for re-evaluation and re-interpretation of the predominantly New Critical approaches to Lawrence's work. In what is the most thorough of the several bibliographies that have been compiled since the 'Lawrence Revival', James C. Cowan lists more than 4,600 full-length books and articles written across the period 1910-70.¹⁶ For the total of the critical writings produced since 1970, estimates currently run at around 2,300 additional works.¹⁷

In the face of such an enormous mass of material, students are somehow required to develop a view of Lawrence's writings which is fresh, yet takes account of the critical work which has been undertaken in the past. It is hoped that this volume will be of use in that process.

The freedoms enjoyed by the English novel in the closing years of the twentieth century owe much to Lawrence's artistic honesty and perseverance, to the duty which he felt was owed to the novel, and to the fact that he did not surrender his belief in his art. In 1920, after the seizure and destruction of the first edition of *The Rainbow*, and facing the refusal of British publishers to handle its sequel and sister-work, Lawrence wrote a Foreword to the American edition of *Women in Love*. His vision of the novel's function, and of the novelist's responsibility to that function, remained unshaken, and echoed something of the certainty, if not the optimism, of his 1914 letter to Edward Garnett:

Man struggles with his unborn needs and fulfilment. New unfoldings struggle up in torment in him, as buds struggle forth from the midst of a plant. Any man of real individuality tries to know and to understand what is happening, even in himself, as he goes along. This

struggle for verbal consciousness should not be left out in art. It is a very great part of life. It is not super-imposition of a theory. It is the passionate struggle into conscious being.¹⁸

CHAPTER ONE

Contemporary Reviews

IN THE reviews which follow, we find some of the extravagant expressions of moral outrage that greeted *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* upon their publication – as well as some of the usual, more muted, statements of disappointment at Lawrence's apparently wasting talent in the two novels. To a modern audience, more or less accustomed to Lawrence's techniques, such reviews speak very clearly of the literary conservatism with which he had to deal throughout his life. However, these pieces are not reprinted simply to offer light relief; they are included in this volume for a number of serious reasons.

First, they serve a straightforward and important purpose in reminding readers of the distance between Lawrence and the society in which he lived. Both in terms of moral sensibilities and in their conception of the artist and his place in society, we can see that Lawrence and his reviewers were poles apart. All that the reviewers in popular publications seemed to hold dear, Lawrence found tainted or moribund. All of the conventions upon which Lawrence's society based its expectations for literature, he found false, constricting and dangerous to our future. The sexual frankness of the novels that we now see as derived from Lawrence's attempt to expose and explore the roots of human relationships, the reviewers of the period could only see as filth or sensationalism. In almost every aspect of the writer's purpose, there was a challenge to the outlook and values of his society.

Such contemporary reviews also highlight the ways in which Lawrence was exploring new areas in his fiction, and offer a view of the developments which had taken place in Lawrence's art between the completion of *Sons and Lovers* and the publication of his two great(est) novels. Even a brief study of Lawrence's letters across the period 1914–16 demonstrates that his interest had permanently shifted away from the semi-realist method of *Sons and Lovers*, to a new and (as he admitted) experimental investigation of character psychology and human relations. To draw any comparisons between the earlier novels and *The Rainbow* or *Women in Love* was, for Lawrence, an irrelevance.