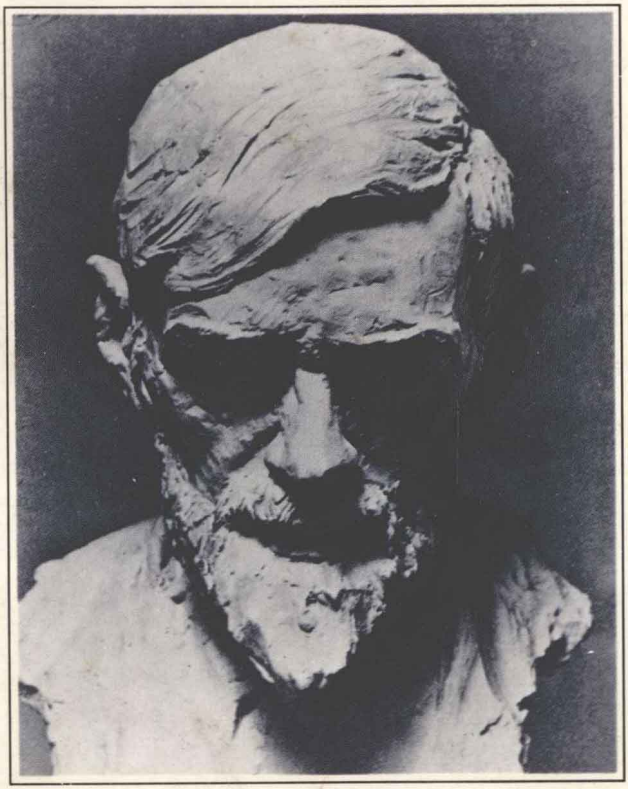
D·H LAWRENCE

Apocalypse



D. H. LAWRENCE

Apocalypse

With an Introduction by
Richard Aldington

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INTRODUCTION

To Frieda Lawrence

Dear Frieda,

I've undertaken to say something about *Apocalypse* and about Lawrence, and I've decided that the best way to do it is by a letter to you. There are two clear advantages. If I say anything which you know to be false or malicious, you are thus invited to come out and say so publicly. And by making this Introduction an informal letter, I can at least try to avoid that quasi-professorial solemnity of the intellectuals which annoyed Lawrence and which is so unsuitable when writing about a free spirit who loved life.

Such a lot of nonsense has been written about Lawrence, as well as stuff which is either stupidly uncomprehending or downright malevolent. I don't want to add to any of it. Yesterday I was reading a new life of Edgar Poe, where the man shows that most of the discreditable stories about Poe are either unproved or demonstrably untrue; and that the worst fabricator was his own literary executor! This made me think of the ridiculously false and cruel things which have been written or said about Lawrence. People have been terribly eager to point out his faults before ever they allowed themselves to recognize his qualities and achievements; and they've tried to explain him away long before they understood him. Like every creative man, Lawrence suffered from the hundreds of people who would like to create, and can't. The unconscious envy of this type disguises itself as 'critical standards', and its attack is always against the essentially creative and original artist.

I don't mean that Lawrence wasn't appreciated as a

writer. From the Garnetts and Hueffer at the beginning, on to Aldous Huxley at the end, there were always distinguished men who admired him, as well as a growing number of silent people who bought his books. But how much there was against him! The Home office with its policemen and beastly war-time spies; many of the reviewers; the huge stupid puritanical middle class; and all the nasty busybodies who are always so busy watching and warding other people's morals. It was a lot for a poor miner's son to fight, even though he was a great writer. I do think it is up to us to see that his courage and energy are not misrepresented and betrayed.

I often think that the biggest blow Lawrence ever received was the prosecution of *The Rainbow*. They can say all they like about 'obscenity', but you and I know in our bones that the real reason for the attack was that he denounced war. And you were German, so of course Lawrence was plotting to bring the Prussian Guards into Cornwall in submarines. Probably only you know how much he suffered in those war years, though other people can guess if they will read the 'Nightmare' chapters in *Kangaroo*. I think it was the utter stupid misjudging of him, and the complete betrayal by nearly everyone who ought to have stood by him, which hurt him, far more than the bitter poverty which the prosecution brought. As if he did not care far more for England than the 'patriotic' fools and knaves who ruined it for us! For the War was a triumph of that evil hatred of life which he always struggled against.

His acceptance of the poverty was one of the sweet things in him. You remember the time after you were both turned out of Cornwall as dangerous conspirators, and afterwards went to live at that little cottage of Margaret Radford's at Hermitage. He described it all in *Kangaroo* – how poor you were, and how you often hadn't enough to eat, and

how he went out in the evening to gather the woodcutters' chips so that you could have a fire. The trees were being cut down to further the ends of the destructionists, so it was only right that the man who believed in life and creativeness should have only the chips. He writes about all that with a simple-hearted acceptance which is deeply touching, because it is so unconscious. The resentment in him was not about his own suffering or even yours, but at the triumph of the world's yahoos over the human beings.

The way people misunderstand all this is rather exasperating. In the summer of 1930 I received a letter (one of those hoity-toity superior letters which people think they have a right to send because they've spent a few shillings on a book) from a man, a schoolmaster I think he was, about my little book on Lawrence. This man said I was quite wrong to protest – he knew Lawrence was popular, because two of his friends were Lawrence enthusiasts, and he knew he had plenty of money because Lawrence first editions fetched as much as three pounds! Doesn't it make you cross? That little book was published in America in 1927 (nobody would issue it in England until after Lawrence was dead, and therefore famous) and, as you know, he was never without money anxiety until 1928, and then it was too late. I remember at the Mirenda in 1926, you were both so pleased because he had got £80 for a short story from the *Saturday Evening Post* – very pleasant, except that I knew they then paid anything from £100 to £500 to other far less gifted writers.

You know how simply he lived, how completely without any sort of extravagance, how unmercenary his writing was, how he even gave away manuscripts, and how cross he was with me at Port-Cros for trying to make him more 'business-like'. So you will hardly believe it when I tell you that somebody recently informed me that 'Lawrence loved

money'. We shall hear next that he loved power and had political ambitions. Naturally, a hungry man is pleased when he gets some food; and it does not surprise me that a man should be pleased to have a little money after being poor for forty years. I don't call that 'loving money'. To hear people talk you might suppose he had yachts and had Hispano-Suizas and large villas at Cannes. I remember once at Port-Cros we were all making out the list of provisions. Lawrence wanted a whole ham, and you said it would be too expensive; and he said, very proudly and extravagantly, 'Never mind, we've got £700 – let's have what we want.' So we got the 'money-lover' his ham!

The absurd popular Lawrence-legend reaches me in forms which do not come to you. All sorts of little episodes, which showed the utterly false ideas circulating about him, come into my memory. There was the well-meaning but sadly stupid literary gentleman, who gravely informed me that Lawrence was 'one of the most sinister figures of our time'. Only last year I heard a wealthy middle-class woman say at a party, 'Lawrence? He's the man who hates women, isn't he?' Perhaps one should pay no attention to such idiocies, but they annoy me. I hope the books that you and his sister are bringing out will destroy some of these ill-natured calumnies; but, though truth is great, it seems to take a long while to prevail. I think Ada Lawrence is quite right when she says that nowadays our rulers underhandedly try to discredit and ruin a man whose ideas do not please them, instead of adopting the more direct methods of their ancestors, such as burning and imprisonment.

In the last twenty years other writers have been banned or persecuted, but Lawrence was peculiarly unlucky, or shall we say, selected. There is something very irritating in the back-stairs methods now so much favoured in England.

A writer may be secretly denounced by his rivals, and is judged and condemned by his inferiors. I know that in France during the War I received a communication from some English Vice Society, asking for a subscription to carry on their good work and boasting that their latest achievement was – what do you think? – the suppression of *Rainbow*. I lost the document, but I remember that it was signed (among others) by a Bishop and a 'literary critic' now dead. Another and more startling example of animosity towards Lawrence came my way once when I was on leave, and staying in the same house with you both. When everybody else was out I discovered a man poking about the house, and he informed me that he was a detective sent to investigate Lawrence's activities in London. (It sounds a bit mad, but it's true.) I tried to point out that Lawrence had neither the will nor the means to do any material harm to the Allied and Associated Powers, and that his attitude towards the War was determined by moral and human considerations. This, however, went rather over his head. Reassured by my uniform, he became quite confidential, and finally informed me that he had read some of Lawrence's books and 'didn't fink much of 'em'.

From this distance, it seems comic, particularly when you know that our treasonable activities the night before had been limited to playing charades under Lawrence's direction. (How he bossed us about, as if we were children, and insisted on having the most important part himself!) But at that time it was more serious and tragic than we realized. All this opposition and persecution and calumny (which in his case was certainly greater than the normal hostility every original writer must expect) made him feel very lonely. The 'intellectuals' let him down as badly as anybody. From 1916 to about 1921 Lawrence felt, and indeed almost was, a pariah. And the result was not only the des-

perate feeling so startlingly expressed in *Kangaroo*, but a sharpness and intolerance very unlike his own genuine sweetness and charm. In this very *Apocalypse*, to which I am leading up, you will find him snapping at sun-bathers for lying on the beach 'like pigs'.

His ordinary rages and crossnesses had nothing to do with this later sharpness which I was surprised to find in him after you came back from Mexico. (I did not see him between 1919 and 1926, and so noticed such things.) In working-class homes people let off steam much more freely than in bourgeois homes, where a sort of rancour often lurks under the superficial good manners. Very likely Lawrence was only doing what he had seen his father do a thousand times – work off his annoyance by shouting and apparently unnecessary violence. But with these people, once the scene is over, there is no ill-will at all. Everybody has worked off his or her annoyance, and is quite prepared to be affectionate again. People like ourselves are brought up to conceal our feelings; he always expressed his. Once I had worked that out for myself, I didn't at all mind his occasional crossnesses; but I did mind that sharp girding at so many people and things. Yet I believe it was not inherent in his nature. It was created in him by the spirit of persecution and hostility which met nearly everything he wrote. A little genuine effort to understand what he was trying to say, a slight gleam of intelligence in wooden-headed officials, would have spared him much humiliation and suffering. It was the humiliation he could not forgive. But I am indeed glad that he never wasted time in replying to literary 'attacks', that he made the only reply an artist need make – writing another fine book.

What annoyed, and still annoys me, is that Lawrence was attacked on 'moral' grounds by people who ought to have shut up when the 'morality' was mentioned. For instance,

there was one 'critic' – now deceased – whose hobby was the collection of filthy verses and writing indecent letters. And there is another whom I will not specify in any way. The beastly hypocrisy of it! These people hated Lawrence because he was a clean man, because he had such reverence and delight in the beauty and glory of sex and sex-love, that he would not endure anything which degraded or sneered at them. Do you remember how our Italian friend, G., used to say laughingly, 'How moral they are, those Lawrences, how moral!' But it was true. I think Lawrence had the sweetest imagination and feeling about sex of any man I have known; just as, in its essential meaning, he was a truly 'religious' man.

It isn't necessary for me to insist any further on this, since you and his sister are writing about him. I hope you'll give the quietus to all the highbrow and lowbrow calumnies – particularly the highbrow ones. But I must add one little story to show how sensitive Lawrence was to anything which he thought at all vulgar or indelicate in these matters. One day we were spelling out Etruscan inscriptions – you know, they go from right to left. I transcribed a, r, s, e. Lawrence scratched his head and said, 'I wonder what that means, Richard?' I said, 'Well, I don't know what it means in Etruscan, but I know what it means in English.' How cross he was with me! Afterwards he said to someone else, 'You know, I used to think Richard was sound, but now I'm afraid he's just like other Englishmen!'

I mustn't prolong these reminiscences, because this, after all, is meant to be an introduction to *Apocalypse*, yet I can't help giving one more glimpse of this *wicked* man. It was at the Mirenda. You had gone into Florence to do some shopping, and Lawrence and I sat in deck-chairs under the chestnut trees at the back of the villa. The October afternoon was very warm and golden, and we talked about this

and that, and occasionally a ripe chestnut slipped out of its bulging spiky burr and plopped in the grass. Our real interest was not in talking, but in the children of the contadini. Every now and then, a shy little barefoot child would come stealing through the bushes with a bunch of grapes. Lawrence would say, 'Look! There's another. Pretend not to see.' The child would come very stealthily forward over the grass, like a little animal, and then stop and gaze at him. Finally, Lawrence would look up, and say with a pretence of surprise, 'Che vuoi?' 'Niente, Signor Lorenzo.' 'Viene qui.' Then the child would come up very shyly, and present the grapes. 'Ma, cosa hai li?' 'Uva, Signor Lorenzo.' 'Per me?' 'Sissignore.' 'Come ti chiami?' And then was a grand scene, trying to make out the child's name. We were terribly puzzled by ''stasio', until we decided it must be 'Anastasio'. But every time, Lawrence, ill as he was, went into the house to get the child a piece of chocolate, or some sugar when all the chocolate was gone. And each time he apologized to me for his generosity (for at Vendemmia, as you know, grapes are worth nothing, and chocolate and sugar are always expensive luxuries) by telling me how poor the peasants were, and how the children ought to have sugar for the sake of their health.

And in England they called him 'a sewer'. Per Bacco!

It is sometimes suggested that Lawrence made himself unpopular by 'putting people in his books', and there is Norman Douglas's pamphlet about Lawrence and Maurice Magnus in support of this view. Now, I'm not one of those clever people who know what went on in Shakespeare's mind when he wrote *Hamlet* and in Keats's when he wrote the *Nightingale*. So I shan't pretend that I can tell you what went on in Lawrence's mind when he wrote his novels and poems and essays. If you think about his books you will see that they form a whole; and that it is a vast

imaginative spiritual autobiography. Lawrence believed that you cannot write about anything but yourself, by which I suppose he meant that a writer must keep within the limits of his experience. He also said that the writing of a book is an adventure of the mind. Lawrence made use of traits of character, situations, relationships among the people he knew. But he used these imaginatively, and very often merely to project his own inner experience.

This Norman Douglas denounces as 'the novelist's touch', asserting that such writing at its best is a travesty of life, at its worst dishonest. And he proceeds to show that the Magnus he knew was not at all the person described by Lawrence. But a poet is not bound to the literal accuracy of a biologist. Oddly enough, this Magnus book contains some of Lawrence's most beautiful descriptive prose. It seems plain to me that what Lawrence wrote was a short imaginative novel about a possible (not necessarily the real) Magnus, and that his grave error was to publish this as a biography. As I knew nothing of Magnus, I can easily read the thing as a short novel, and as such I find it extremely interesting. Thus, while I believe Douglas was right to condemn what he thought was a travesty of his friend, I think he was wrong to extend his condemnation to Lawrence's avowed fiction. Otherwise the contemporary novel becomes impossible, and every doctor's wife in Normandy will be taking action against the author of a future *Madame Bovary*. In any case, I do not think that the resentment of persons who imagined that he had written about them unflatteringly in his novels was responsible for the fantastic legendary Lawrence and the hostility to his books; though, doubtless, such people would not always strive too officiously to defend him.

I have tried to give with frankness my own impression of the man whom you knew far more intimately than any-

body else. Before I go on to talk about *Apocalypse* I must try to tell you what is my explanation of the anger and hostility at his books, a hostility which spread from them to himself, and made of him in common imaginations such a monster that there is scarcely any relation between the Lawrence we knew and the Lawrence of the Press and common talk. I shall take only a few simple and fairly obvious points, for I am not such a fool as to imagine that I can explain all Lawrence in a preface.

There was nothing particularly surprising or remarkable in his shocking the circulating library public. It is the most omnivorous public in existence, interested in everything except literature and life, from which it is conscientiously defended on all fronts. The prussic-aciders are always with us. The official prosecution arose out of war panic (supported by a little virtue) and was prolonged by mere departmental stupidity – which did not make it any more endurable or any less reprehensible on the part of those responsible. You will see at once what I mean when I say that offence was given all round, not by any sort of scandalous behaviour or horridness of character in him but by his whole attitude towards human life and human beings. I believe Lawrence had a great deal of love in him, and the sharpness I have regretted only came after his love had been grotesquely misunderstood and flung back at him as hatred. I intend to write this without dragging in Jesus, so I will put it in this way: suppose a Nietzsche who effected a transvaluation not of intellectual values but of fundamental human values. Such was Lawrence. And he paid the price.

Before Lawrence, the primacy of the intellect had been doubted by Bergson, the psychology of the unconscious had been formulated by Freud, and the whole system of values of European civilization had been rejected in their different ways by Tolstoy and Nietzsche, and even Dostoievsky.

Lawrence differs from them, partly because he was English, but chiefly because he was essentially a poet – a poet who for various reasons found his more effective medium was prose. But, being an Englishman of his class and time, he could scarcely avoid being a preacher as well as a poet. It was the preacher who brought the house down on his own head. From the point of view of the intellectuals (and this is the reason why they treated him either with coldness or hostility) Lawrence's fundamental heresy was simply that he placed quality of feelings, intensity of sensations and passion before intellect. In this he is the very antithesis of Bernard Shaw, a fanatic of the intellect, who was at the height of his powers and influence when Lawrence began writing. See the complete contrast between the optimistic belief of the Fabians that anything and everything could be achieved by the human intellect, and Lawrence's conviction that intellect is a dangerous, even pernicious thing which leads only to death.

Perhaps I put this a little too strongly, and in any case I must insist that he felt and wrote about these things as a poet, and not as a philosopher with a system to expound. I think you will agree that what Lawrence had to give and wanted to give was a new or different way of feeling, living, and loving, and not a new way of thinking. You cannot put him into formulas. Of course, he had to think too – how else could he be a writer? But his problem as a writer was to put into words these feelings and perceptions which he believed to be independent of the conscious intellect. This was difficult enough for Lawrence, who was dealing with his own experience; it is almost impossible for anyone else, who may entirely misinterpret what he wrote. For example, what exactly were the experiences expressed (or rather, symbolized) in those beautiful but curious poems in *The Plumed Serpent*? What did he mean when he spoke

of the Indian singing as 'mindless'? What exactly are the 'physical life' and the 'tenderness' he used to talk to us about? I can feel, you can feel what he meant, but they are not things which can be pinned down with neat defining sentences. These things cannot be expressed except through images and symbols and the evocative descriptions at which Lawrence excelled.

This rejection of the sovereignty of the intellect is the cause of much of the misunderstanding and hostility Lawrence endured. It made him look like a crank, and thereby estranged the intellectuals. At the same time, his rejection of organized religion naturally offended the enormous number of people who are still enthralled by it. The so-called 'spiritual' values had no interest for him at all; and numerous idiots went about saying that Lawrence wished us to become 'animal' or even 'amoebic'. Finally, he was serious about sexual love. There are all sorts of accepted attitudes towards sex, which you can get away with because *au fond* they all imply contempt and disgust, the Pauline conviction that sexual desire is base, impure, and sinful. You may be sentimental-pure or sentimental-prurient, mocking or solemn, materialist or idealist, sociological or medical; but you may not say (and believe and experience) that sexual desire is a glorious and beautiful thing. Any other god may be worshipped, but not *Aeneidum genetrix, hominum divumque voluptas.* (That 'voluptas' is the crime – why, a skilful journalist very nearly shook the English superstition about Shakespeare by suggesting that the Bard was 'a voluptuary'.) Thus while Lawrence informed mankind that they were scarcely living at all, they retorted by calling him a cretin, a sewer, and a pornographist. A sad imbroglio.

Towards the end of his life Lawrence wrote three books which are very important towards an understanding of him. They are *The Man Who Died*, the essays on Etruscan

Towns, and – most important of all – *Apocalypse*. The Etruscan book had been in his mind for a long time, and he died without finishing it. I thought the manuscript (it has not yet been published) extremely interesting, less perhaps for what it told me about the Etruscans (though that is stimulating enough) than for what it told me about Lawrence. To put it roughly in a sentence, Lawrence believed that the Etruscans of about 700–300 B.C. had lived largely in the way he wished to live and thought that we should all live. The Etruscans were a great convenience, for, since nobody knows much about them, nobody could contradict what he said. Lawrence ranged pretty far both in space and time in search of other modes of living which could be used either as symbols for expressing his faith or as sticks to beat the moderns. He found bits of what he wanted in German and Italian peasants, in Mexicans and Indians. (You remember how he liked the fishermen at Lavandou, going out in boats with their sons, playing boules, and eating bouillabaisse with their wives? Alas, they are lost already among cocktail-drinking tourists and ladies in trousers.)

These traces of elemental life were not enough for him. In Europe they are being obliterated every day, and probably even more rapidly in America. Moreover, I think he grew dissatisfied with his savages, if only because (as he says somewhere) their consciousness is so different from ours that there is scarcely any possibility of communication. The white man can do nothing with the savage except to destroy or enslave, since it is too much to expect the elementary justice of leaving him alone. Lawrence's return to Tuscany was fortunate. I think he always liked it, and was as happy at the Mirenda as anywhere, except perhaps the Ranch and Sicily. Boccaccio, who is the very essence of country Tuscany, was one of the few authors he always loved, a man filled with that warm instinctive life Lawrence wanted so

much to see around him. And for a long time he had had a hankering to investigate the Etruscans for himself, and to write a book about them.

The Etruscans were quite a godsend. Here was a lost European civilization which had never been guilty of a Homer or a Plato, had indeed no extant literature at all. There is no history of the Etruscans, for the book about them by the Emperor Claudius has disappeared, and the dislike of the Romans for a conquered and perhaps more civilized people, added to Christian horror of 'pagans', has left us little but archaeology and conjecture. To increase their attractiveness, you will find that the Etruscans are not favourites with the learned, who accuse them of immorality and of borrowing what culture they had from other races. They were a very religious people, greatly interested in the divine significance of the flight of birds and of the entrails of sacrifices. They must have believed in some sort of life after death, since they constructed cities of elaborate tombs (planned in imitation of their towns), burying their dead in full armour or festival robes in painted chambers filled with precious objects and offerings to the dead. Sometimes the dead were burned, and placed in carved marble or alabaster coffers.

Lawrence believed that Etruscan art had a quality of its own, quite different from Greek or Roman art; and what he found there and liked so much was that intense 'physical' life he thought the world has very nearly lost. The Etruscans did not possess much 'aesthetic' feeling, the Greek love of perfection, harmony, grace. They were wonderful craftsmen in gold, for the best modern goldsmiths cannot quite equal the delicacy of their filigree work. The best of their bronzes have great spirit and energy – for example, the chariot and shields in the Vatican, and the elongated statuettes in Florence. The Apollo of Veii at the Villa di Papa Giulio and the tomb in the British Museum show