INTRODUCTION

Any new thing must find a new shape, then afterwards one can call it 'art' (Frieda Lawrence).

LAWRENCE said that his books would not be understood for three hundred years. When we read the early critics we can understand his pessimism. J. M. Murry wrote of the characters in *Women in Love*:

> Their creator believes that he can distinguish the writhing of one from the writhing of another; he spends pages and pages in describing the contortions of the first, the second, the third, and the fourth. To him they are all utterly and profoundly different; to us they are all the same (*Athenaeum*, 13 August 1921).

Edwin Muir complained that we should not recognise these characters if we met them in the street, to which Lawrence replied:

> Alas, that I should recognize people in the street, by their noses, bonnets or beauty. I don't care about their noses, bonnets or beauty. Does nothing exist beyond that which is recognizable in the street?—How does my cat recognize me in the dark?—Ugh, thank God there are more and other sorts of vision than the kodak sort which Mr Muir esteems above all others (*Phoenix* 802).

Lawrence's vision strips away appearances, even personalities, and penetrates to being.

Even those who admired (like Murry) could not formulate their approval in coherent critical terms. The old terminology was useless, for they were confronted with something quite new: 'Lawrence was that, and so rare a thing, genius, and Murry, as he says himself, did not have the least idea what Lawrence "was after"' (*Frieda* 273). Murry wrote to Frieda in 1953: 'Why, half *The Rainbow* was completely beyond my ken when it was published' (*ibid.* 330). Murry saw quicker than most the immense superiority of Lawrence to the other writers of the time. Yet, by all the accepted canons, his work was flawed. Murry was forced into a false choice between Lawrence and art. He chose Lawrence:

Much better 'art' has been produced by Lawrence's contemporaries; books better shaped, novels more objectively conceived, poems more concentrated. Beside Lawrence's work they seem frigid and futile. It is simply that they are not commensurate with our deep needs today. Our modern art is all obviously, irremediably minor. And it must necessarily be minor, so long as its aim is to be art (*Son of Woman* 173).

Lawrence's greatness is attributed to the fact that 'at bottom he was not concerned with art':

He gave up, deliberately, the pretence of being an artist. The novel became for him simply a means by which he could make explicit his own 'thought-adventures'...His aim was to discover authority, not to create art...To charge him with a lack of form, or of any other of the qualities which are supposed to be necessary to art, is to be guilty of irrelevance. Art was not Lawrence's aim (*ibid.* 173).

Murry here comes to the very brink of understanding, but turns aside into chaos: 'But he was not a great artist. He was a prophet, a psychologist, a philosopher, what you will—but more than any other single thing, the great life-adventurer of modern times' (*ibid.* 174). If Lawrence is 'what you will', he is vulnerable to all the subjective criticism anyone cares to level at him. 'Destructive hagiography' is Aldous Huxley's phrase for Murry's criticism. He constructs an apparatus of psychology-cum-gossip to 'account for' Lawrence's work and to evaluate it in inverse ratio to its merit as art. The ideas Murry found most accessible and seminal were contained in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Aaron's Rod*, so these were acclaimed as the twin pinnacles of Lawrence's achievement. Neither Murry, nor Eliot, nor even Leavis, could see what Lawrence 'was after' during his lifetime.

F. R. Leavis notes the 'Flaubertian' use of the word 'aesthetic' by Eliot in relation to Pound's art—he was not so much interested in what the Cantos said, as in the way they said it. If there is no separation between the man who lives and the man who creates, if he creates directly out of his living, making art the servant of life, then he has no possible use for the word 'aesthetic'. Eliot's use of it indicates, according to Leavis, a lack of wholeness, a denial of the need of the artist to be a person and to have a deep responsibility towards experience. In a letter of 1915 Lawrence wrote of Van Gogh:

But best of all, if he could have known a great humanity, where to live one's animal would be to create oneself, *in fact*, *be the artist creating a man in living*

fact (not like Christ, as he wrongly said)—and where the art was the final expression of the created animal or man—not the be-all and being of man—but the end, the climax. And some men would end in artistic utterance, and some wouldn't. But each one would create the work of art, the living man, achieve that piece of supreme art, a man's life (*CL* 327).

Lawrence believed that a complete imaginative experience, which goes through the whole soul and body, can renew our strength and our vitality. He saw the novel as the utterance of the consciousness of the whole man, drawing the consciousness of the reader towards health, sanity and wholeness: 'it can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead'. The morality is not injected, but discovered. The artist must keep his thumb out of the balance. The control must be imposed at source. The form corresponds to a pattern in consciousness—a vision—which is itself a product of the interaction between the reality within the writer, the naked self, and the reality outside him, the circumambient universe. As Hart Crane has it:

No work of true genius dares want its appropriate form, neither indeed is there any danger of this. As it must not, so genius cannot, be lawless: for it is even this that constitutes its genius—the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination (quoted by James E. Miller, Jr. in *Start with the Son*).

My aim in this study is to try to discover the 'appropriate form' which Lawrence's genius takes in all his major imaginative works. This will involve a kind of spiritual-artistic biography—an examination of the relationship between Lawrence's vision of life, at every stage of his career, and the form in which that vision finds utterance in art. How can the same man, within six years, produce the superbly constructed *Women in Love* and the rambling, almost formless *Kangaroo*? Why is the form of the late works so different from that of the middle and early ones? Why is the main creative force channelled, at one stage, into full-length novels, and at another, diffused through tales, poems, essays and even paintings? This inquiry will involve, in turn, a study of Lawrence's development, and the accurate dating of the works, according to composition, so as to see them in the right order.

I hope to demonstrate that the works fall into a well-defined pattern:

(1) 1906–11: a period of gradual discovery and growth;
(2) 1912–16: the first phase of mature achievement;
(3) 1917–24: a period of moral and artistic uncertainty or even perversity;
(4) 1925–30: regeneration to a new art and vision.

The fine and distinctive work of the fourth phase is seldom recognised and is not widely read. Almost all coherent critical hostility towards Lawrence is directed against works of the third phase, but in the belief that the conclusions are valid for the whole corpus. By recognising these phases, a more balanced and just estimate of Lawrence's achievement should be possible.

For reasons of space and continuity I have chosen to restrict myself to imaginative work—fiction, poems, paintings—and the other works which relate most closely to them. Some of Lawrence's best work, for example his literary criticism, is therefore given little attention. I have assumed that the novels and long stories carry more of Lawrence's creative effort than the short stories, fine as they are. I have devoted space to a work more or less in proportion to my evaluation of it. The accounts are not intended to be exhaustive, for I have tried to avoid merely reformulating existing commentaries. It is, of course, impossible to avoid covering some familiar ground.

My method is, first, to let each text speak for itself, to examine its structure and texture with close attention to key passages, to try to discover its inner coherence (or incoherence) and to judge its achievement against its own apparent intentions, within the given frame of reference. Second, to draw upon other works of the same period for confirmation or elucidation. Third, to look at each work within the context of the total *œuvre* and to judge it by Lawrence's own best standards. By this approach I hope to avoid the formal preconceptions which have vitiated so much Lawrence criticism ever since Arnold Bennett:

> Tell Arnold Bennett that all rules of 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, he 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 decent respect (*CL* 399).

Any work of art must, by definition, be a new thing. Originality does not, of course, exclude a vital relationship with the tradition. In *The Great Tradition* Dr Leavis examined the way in which the tradition of the English novel through Jane Austen, George Eliot, Dickens, Conrad and Henry James made for continuity, vitality and human centrality, particularly in the handling of moral and social themes. In *D. H. Lawrence Novelist* we see Lawrence using this tradition as a place to start from: he is at the growing tip of a living tradition, extending and transforming it. Dr Leavis's approach yields countless valuable insights, and the most definitive account yet of Lawrence's art. This study will be largely a matter of confirming Dr Leavis's findings, though from a somewhat different approach.

In such contexts as 'the Scott tradition that imposed on the novelist a romantic resolution of his themes', or even 'the tradition coming down from the eighteenth century that demanded a plane-mirror reflection of the surface of "real" life', Dr Leavis seems to me to be using the word 'tradition' in a sense which comes perilously close to the word 'convention'. I want to approach Lawrence as uncompromisingly unconventional, and taking his place in a much larger, two-thousand- rather than two-hundred-year-old tradition. Eliot defines tradition as all the art of the past which has remained alive. The tradition in which Lawrence virtually places himself in the *Study of Thomas Hardy* is much nearer to this than to Leavis's great tradition: he shares with Sophocles, Shakespeare, Tolstoy and Hardy the quality of 'setting behind the small action of the protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature'. *Studies in Classic American Literature* adds more names to this list, including Melville and Whitman. We can add other names from other sources; but the list is not likely to include any of the names in Leavis's more parochial tradition. Lawrence himself spoke of Jane Austen as 'this old maid'; after the very early days, George Eliot is not mentioned, except for her inadequacy in handling sex; Conrad is 'so good', but 'gives in before he starts', and *Lord Jim* is 'snivel in a wet hanky'; while Henry James 'was always on a different line—subtle conventional design was his aim'. Lawrence knew that James would hate *The Rainbow*; 'I have trifled with the exordia', James later confessed.

By concentrating more on Lawrence's reaction *against* the

English realist tradition (it is significant that Dr Leavis should have felt it to be necessary to apologise for the word 'real' in this context), and on his search for access to a deeper and more permanent reality, I hope to contribute some insights complementary to those of Dr Leavis, and to bring us a little nearer to understanding the nature and magnitude of Lawrence's achievement.

CHAPTER 1

CHRONOLOGY

Lawrence was born in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, in 1885. He attended Nottingham High School from 1898 to 1901 and worked as a student-teacher from 1902 to 1906. He entered Nottingham University College in September 1906 for a two-year course. Lawrence met Jessie Chambers in 1901 and became unofficially engaged to her in 1904.

EARLY POEMS (*Complete Poems*, Heinemann, 1964, Vol. 2).

Guelder Roses and *Campions* were written in the spring of 1905; *The Piano*, *The Death of the Baron* and *Married in June* between September 1906 and October 1908; *Baby Songs: Ten Months Old* and *After School* in January 1909.

THE WHITE PEACOCK (Heinemann, 1911).

Begun, as *Laetitia*, Easter 1906, then set aside until the autumn (*CL* 8). First version completed by June 1907 (*CL* 9). Second version completed by April 1908 (*CL* 4). Third version begun January 1909 (*CL* 47), sent to Hueffer at the end of October (*CL* 57), and to Heinemann on 15 December (*CL* 58); now called *Nethermere*. There was some further revision in the spring of 1910.

A COLLIER'S FRIDAY NIGHT (Secker, 1934; *Complete Plays*, Heinemann, 1965).

'Written when I was twenty-one, almost before I'd done anything, it is most horribly green' (Nottingham Exhibition Catalogue—*D. H. Lawrence after Thirty Years*, 14). Lawrence did not show this play to Jessie Chambers until November 1909 (ET 166).

RHYMING POEMS (*Love Poems and Others*, Duckworth, 1913; *Amores*, Duckworth, 1916; *New Poems*, Secker, 1918).

The first nineteen poems with the possible addition of *Lightning* and *A Tarantella* were written between September 1906 and October 1908.

A PRELUDE (*Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 7 December 1907; Merle Press, 1949).
LEGEND (later *A Fragment of Stained Glass*; *English Review*, September 1911; *The Prussian Officer*, Duckworth, 1914).
THE WHITE STOCKING (*The Smart Set*, October 1914; *The Prussian Officer*).

These were entered for a competition in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* at Christmas 1907.

THE SHADOW IN THE ROSE GARDEN (*The Smart Set*, March 1914; *The Prussian Officer*).

Probably written about the same time, as *The Vicar's Garden*.

LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS (Nonesuch Press, 1930).
GOOSE FAIR (*English Review*, February 1910; *The Prussian Officer*).
A SICK COLLIER (*New Statesman*, 13 September 1913; *The Prussian Officer*).
THE CHRISTENING (*The Prussian Officer*).
ODOUR OF CHRYSANTHEMUMS (*English Review*, June 1911; *The Prussian Officer*).

All these may have been written as early as the summer of 1908.

ART AND THE INDIVIDUAL (*The Early Life of D.H.L.*, 1930).

Begun before May 1908 (*CL* 12) and finished by mid-July (*CL* 20).

In October 1908 Lawrence took up a teaching post at Davidson Road School, Croydon.

A FLY IN THE OINTMENT (*New Statesman*, 13 August 1913; *The Early Life of D.H.L.*).

Written in the winter of 1908–9.

A MODERN LOVER (*Life and Letters*, Autumn 1933; Secker, 1934).

Written before June 1909 (*CL* 102).

RHYMING POEMS

Flat Suburbs, *S.W.*, *in the Morning* is the first of the Croydon poems. *Dreams Old and Nascent: Nascent* also belongs to this period.

THE TRESPASSER (Duckworth, 1912).

Begun as *The Saga of Siegmund* in March 1910 and finished within three months (*CL* 66). Heinemann accepted it, but Lawrence, on Hueffer's advice, withdrew it (*CL* 88). Encouraged by Garnett, he rewrote the book in January and February 1912 (*CL* 91–7).

RACHEL ANNAND TAYLOR (*The Early Life of D.H.L.*).

Lecture delivered to the Croydon English Association in mid-November 1910 (*CL* 68).

1

A SORT OF BALANCE

1906–1910

The White Peacock
Odour of Chrysanthemums

§1

The White Peacock is hardly worth attention as a novel in its own right. Ford Maddox Hueffer, Lawrence's first literary adviser, said: 'It's got every fault that the English novel can have.' But he added: 'You've got GENIUS.' For Hueffer recognised the authentic eye, the fine sensibility, the original handling of distinctive themes, most of all the life that runs through even the most cloying prose—qualities not altogether cancelled out by immaturity and formlessness. The very evasions and desperate measures are significant; we can trace the problems Lawrence had to face, and the solutions he came through to, before he could render his own deepest experiences into art with the poise and assurance of *Sons and Lovers*.

Our main concern in looking more closely at the novel here, will be to relate its faults of tone, style and form to the coherence, or lack of it, of Lawrence's vision of life, and to show how the struggle with formal difficulties itself leads to a clarifying of moral insight. This relationship is hinted at by Lawrence himself in his retrospective account many years later:

> I had been tussling away for four years, getting out *The White Peacock* in inchoate bits, from the underground of my consciousness. I must have written most of it five or six times, but only in intervals, never as a task or a divine labour, or in the groans of parturition (*Assorted Articles* 149).

Even while writing it Lawrence called *The White Peacock* 'a florid prose poem':

> All about love—and rhapsodies on Spring scattered here and there—heroines galore—no plot—nine-tenths adjectives—every colour in the spectrum descanted upon—a poem or two—scraps of Latin and French—altogether a sloppy, spicy mess (*CL* 5).

What form there is is second-hand:

> The usual plan is to take two couples and develop their relationships. . . Most of George Eliot's are on that plan. Anyhow, I don't want a plot, I should be bored with it (ET 103).

Lawrence is, as always, concerned to evaluate these relationships; but the Cyril–Emily story, which adumbrates the Paul–Miriam relationship of *Sons and Lovers*, is dropped when it comes too close. Lawrence is not yet sufficiently in control of his own experience to handle it directly in art: the mining background and the home situation are similarly evaded, kept in the margins of the novel.

The Lettie–Leslie–George triangle is at the heart of the book. Yet how many essential questions about it remain unanswered at the end. We can vaguely perceive, from our knowledge of Lawrence's other writings or from the traditional treatment of similar material in George Eliot, Hardy or Emily Brontë, what we are supposed to think about Lettie. Like Catherine Earnshaw, she chooses wealth, security, adoration, a life of elegance and frivolity, thus betraying her 'true' lover and her own heart.

> Having reached that point in a woman's career when most, perhaps all, of the things in life seem worthless and insipid, she had determined to put up with it, to ignore her own self, to empty her own potentialities into the vessel of another or others, and to live her life at second-hand. This peculiar abnegation of self is the resource of a woman for the escaping of the responsibilities of her own development. Like a nun, she puts over her living face a veil, as a sign that the woman no longer exists for herself: she is the servant of God, of some man, of her children, or maybe of some cause. As a servant, she is no longer responsible for her self, which would make her terrified and lonely. . . Like so many women, she seemed to live, for the most part contentedly, a small indoor existence with artificial light and padded upholstery. Only occasionally, hearing the winds of life outside, she clamoured to be out in the black, keen storm (280–7).

The wayward Lettie is perhaps the most convincing characterisation in the novel (with the obvious exception of Annable, whose looming presence reduces all the other characters to shadows).

George is less successful. Something of his physical aura comes across, and a sense of suspended animation, awaiting Lettie's quickening touch. We can see Lawrence painfully struggling to draw on the farm setting, George's work in the fields, to charge him with some more than personal, some 'elemental'