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Introduction

This volume opens and ends with puzzlement: at the start of chapter 1, Rick Rylance reflects on the puzzlement of Lawrence's earliest reviewers as they struggled to ascertain the literary and social provenance of his work: was 'D. H. Lawrence' a man or a woman, what was his or her social background, and to what literary tradition did these strange fictions belong? Chris Baldick closes the last chapter with puzzlement as to what the readers of the new century will make of a writer whose reputation, both literary and personal, has undergone extraordinary vicissitudes, fluctuating more wildly than that of any other twentieth-century British author. There seems to be hardly anyone else who has generated such extreme reactions in his readers, from people at one end of the spectrum who have tried to 'become' Lawrence to people who have felt contaminated by reading him. That reading and writing about Lawrence can be a bewildering and often problematic enterprise is a fact that all the contributors to this book touch on in different ways. For Rick Rylance, Lawrence's early work disturbs and unsettles its readers because it is itself wrestling with the 'chronically disturbed' relations between mind and body in an age where materialist scientific theories have denied any divine agency in the natural world. For Marianna Torgovnick in chapter 2, Lawrence pushes his critics into starkly polarised positions: either they ritualistically rehearse his views or they reject him out of hand. The problem, she argues, is how to negotiate between these extremes. For Hugh Stevens in chapter 3, attempts to interpret a work like *Women in Love* in political terms can all too easily 'lead to a banality which is absolutely at odds with the novel's power'. And so the problems posed by Lawrence's work proliferate from chapter to chapter.

Lawrence's prose is intellectually and emotionally demanding. Its unevenness, its tendency to repetition and excess, its sometimes outrageous flouting of aesthetic norms, its sudden moments of bathos, are notorious. For Marianna Torgovnick, Lawrence's predicament is that of someone who is radically out of sync with his culture, 'wanting what he cannot yet name,

working with ideas and vocabulary drawn from systems of thought fundamentally at odds with his desires', and this may partly account for the interpretative and aesthetic difficulties he poses.[1] Another factor may be Lawrence's socially and culturally deracinated existence. A miner's son whose mother harboured middle-class aspirations, he later married a German aristocrat with whom he went on to live an itinerant, at times poverty-stricken, life across four continents. He never really *belonged* to any specific social class, nor indeed to any literary or artistic group. In Virginia Woolf's words, he was 'not a member . . . of a settled and satisfied society', and this, for Woolf, explained the sense of restlessness in *Sons and Lovers*, a novel 'full of stir and unrest and desire for something withheld'.[2]

But perhaps the most immediate explanation for the instability of Lawrence's fictions lies in the voracious and eclectic reading which was a staple of Lawrence's life, no matter where he happened to be. Ford Madox Hueffer, the influential editor of the *English Review* who encouraged Lawrence early in his career, was deeply impressed by the breadth of Lawrence's reading, observing that he 'moved among the high things of culture with a tranquil assurance'.[3] But Lawrence did not restrict himself to the classics, or indeed to literary material. His reading took in, amongst other subjects, evolutionary theory, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychoanalytical theory, religion and ethics. John Worthen, describing the self-educative programme that Lawrence embarked upon with his girlfriend Jessie Chambers in the period between school and college, explains how Lawrence was no passive reader, but took '*possession* of the thoughts of others . . . turn[ing] them into what he wanted' (*EY*, 122). Perhaps this rapid absorption of such a range of conflicting discourses explains the charges of 'formlessness' or unevenness as a writer that dogged Lawrence throughout his career. He was piqued by Hueffer's complaint that 'The Saga of Siegmund' (an early version of *The Trespasser*) had 'no construction or form' (i. 339), and Hueffer's criticism of the 'Saga' as a 'hybrid' work seemed to point to the blurring of generic boundaries which is so characteristic of Lawrence's writing.[4] In chapter 6 of this volume, Con Coroneos and Trudi Tate emphasise this feature of the short stories, and for Michael Bell in chapter 10, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* reads in parts like 'a mixture of fable and lay sermon' (191).

One of the most striking ways in which Lawrence criticism has changed over the past few years is that there is apparently no longer any need to try to smooth these difficulties away as there once might have been. On the contrary, as the chapters here demonstrate, critics today seem to thrive on the sense of disjunction and disorientation produced by Lawrence's writing. An early reviewer of some of the tales noted their preoccupation with what he

called 'the queer dark corners' of life, and today, when 'queer' has become a literary critical term in its own right, that early reviewer's observation takes on a new resonance.[5] Eve Sedgwick's tracing of the etymology of the term is illuminating: 'The word "queer" itself means *across* – it comes from the Indo-European root – *twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*.'[6] Whilst Sedgwick's own work is primarily concerned with gender, she is also, like Lawrence, interested in those components of human identity which, in her words, 'can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses'.[7] Several of the chapters in this volume spring to mind here. Hugh Stevens's chapter, for example, focuses on the densely tangled tropes of race, eros and death in *Women in Love*, while Mark Kinkead-Weekes shows how issues of gender in the 1924 novellas (especially 'The Woman Who Rode Away' and 'The Princess') are inextricable from questions of colonial identity. Interestingly, Con Coroneos and Trudi Tate use the same metaphor as Sedgwick, that of crossing a line, to describe the unsettling quality of Lawrence's short story 'Smile', where 'a line [is] crossed from laughter to death' (106). On a multiplicity of levels, Lawrence's writing does exactly that: it crosses lines, between linguistic and social registers, between literary genres and traditions, between whole discourses and disciplines. It is this refusal to respect lines or boundaries which, more than anything else, accounts for both the bafflement and the fascination of many of Lawrence's readers, and for the difficulty of doing critical justice to his works.

It is perhaps small wonder, then, that Lawrence's position on the literary map has, at times, seemed far less secure than that of, say, Joyce or Woolf. But it is worth noting that this has only really been true within academic circles. In the broader cultural sphere, Lawrence has retained his popularity. The numerous lists of 'best books of the century' or 'greatest works of art of the century' have frequently included one or more of Lawrence's best-known novels, and, at the time of writing this introduction, BBC Radio 4 is embarking on a celebration of his work.[8] He has, moreover, enjoyed a genuinely international reputation, his influence stretching far beyond the Anglophone world. He has been seen as the champion of freedom and individualism in countries with oppressive government regimes, such as China. Different countries have privileged different parts of the Lawrence canon, some countries, such as Poland and India, favouring the poetry over the prose.[9] In his own lifetime, though, Lawrence's literary success was all too brief, promise mutating into notoriety almost overnight with the banning of *The Rainbow* in 1915, when Lawrence was just thirty years old. What he would have made of his posthumous canonisation one can only imagine. He was canonised in

both senses of the term: the 1950s witnessed his installation, at the hands of F. R. Leavis and others, into the 'canon' of English literature as he began to appear with increasing frequency in school and university curricula. Then, in the wake of the famous *Lady Chatterley* trial of 1960, he was canonised in a different sense, becoming, as Chris Baldick terms it in chapter 14, 'one of the patron saints of the 1960s', not just the most prized of modern British writers, but also a cultural icon for a whole generation. For Lawrence's life was championed as much as his writing. As Baldick shows, he became a working-class hero, seen to be injecting new life into a desiccated social system, a stance with which many identified in the freer social climate of the 1960s.

This was all set to change, at least in Britain and America, with the appearance of Kate Millett's ground-breaking and hard-hitting work *Sexual Politics* (1970), which knocked Lawrence off the pedestal he had been occupying as a sexual and moral example in the 1960s. Millett's reading of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* made Lawrence into the subtle conveyor of a masculine message through a feminine consciousness.[10] Elsewhere in the world, though, Lawrence's popularity showed no signs of waning. The critical response in a country such as Korea, for example, which started in 1926, has continued to escalate unabated. As recently as 1998, there were thirty academics teaching in South Korean universities with Ph.D.s on Lawrence – probably a greater number than in any other country with the possible exception of the USA.[11]

When one considers the successive waves of critical and theoretical practice that have shaped academia since Lawrence's death, some sense can be made of his tumultuous afterlife. His popularity was at its height when various forms of Anglo-American New Criticism were dominating literary study, with their post-Romantic emphasis on organic form, on the importance of an intuitive response to literature, and on the inadequacies of paraphrase or logical explication. Cleanth Brooks, for example, had warned against 'the heresy of paraphrase', a phrase suggesting that literary texts were sacred life forms that should not be tampered with.[12] This chimed in with Lawrence's own frequently voiced hatred of rational analysis, and with his use of organicist imagery in his own literary and cultural criticism. Today it might be argued that the generic hybridity and the unevenness of much of Lawrence's writing make it radically incompatible with this notion of organic form. Yet it seems as true now as it did back then that Lawrence's writing *is* particularly difficult to paraphrase, even if this is no longer to do with some quasi-religious notion of the ineffability of art. Paradoxically, although the New Critical movement evolved as a pedagogic tool to meet the needs of teachers of literature as an academic subject, its post-Romantic

overtones were, in essence, anti-academic. The same could be said of F. R. Leavis's work. Leavis's own marginal, and embattled, position within the academy, together with his championing of Lawrence, reinforced the notion that Lawrence and academia, like oil and water, do not mix. In this way, the academic study of Lawrence became a curiously self-defeating enterprise, reduced to the tautological replication of Lawrence's own terminology and the ritualistic rehearsing of his prophecies. As Linda Williams explains, Lawrence criticism became 'a question of showing that criticism was a "real", personally felt, and above all "vital" response activated through one's very life . . . The heady amalgam of life and work turned Lawrence into an Example to us all.'[13] Just as the boundaries between Lawrence's life and his work had seemed so permeable, so the boundaries between the *reader's* life and Lawrence's work also seemed to dissolve. The arrival of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* on the critical scene was shocking not just because it demonised what had previously been sanctified (Lawrence's view of sexual relations), but because its own plain-speaking, no-nonsense idiom was not afraid to demystify Lawrence's post-Romantic rhetoric, and to commit the 'heresy' of paraphrasing it. For many, this has remained the stumbling block of Millett's approach.

What Millett had in common with earlier critics was that there was still very little attention being paid to the linguistic complexities of Lawrence's work. The metaphors governing Lawrence criticism, medical metaphors (of sickness and health), legal metaphors (of trial, accusation, defence) and Biblical metaphors (of the prophet in the wilderness), had always been, and continued to be, very author-centric. Lawrence himself had set this trend, differing from contemporaries such as Joyce, Woolf, Eliot and Pound in that (as Michael Bell points out in chapter 10) he did not self-consciously privilege the linguistic medium in which he worked. His savage mockery of 'critical twiddle-twaddle about style, and form, all this pseudo-scientific classifying and analysing of books' seemed to foreclose on the possibility of formal analysis of his works.[14] Nor, as Paul Eggert stresses, did he go along with the impersonality theories present in the modernist period, so that there was a strong sense of authorial presence in much of his writing. Perhaps this was why the most precarious period for Lawrence, in Britain at least, came with the impact of French post-structuralist theory on literary criticism in the late 1970s and 1980s. Lawrence could appear to be naively logocentric, relying on the 'metaphysics of presence' which Derridean critics were at pains to deconstruct. Paradoxically, though, as John Worthen so clearly demonstrates in his analysis of a passage from *Sons and Lovers*, authorial presence is by no means easy to pin down in Lawrence's fictions.

The 1990s saw a largescale drift towards a more interdisciplinary notion

of cultural studies and away from a narrowly literary approach. Hence Lawrence's very hybridity, which had always made him difficult to pigeonhole, gave him a newfound legitimacy as an object of study. Lawrence was nothing if not a cultural critic himself. In a single, five-page essay ostensibly on the novel, Lawrence can quite typically be found discussing, in and amongst a range of classical and popular novels, such diverse topics as Van Gogh's painting, ancient Assyrian and Egyptian art, philosophy, science, religion and sexual relations.[15] Today's cultural critics share this eclectic approach to reading and writing. Further, the opening up of feminism into a broader-based and more flexible concept of gender studies has transformed Lawrence criticism, together with the increasing interest from the 1990s onwards in issues of race, ethnicity and nationality. In all these areas, critics are finding, perhaps against their expectation, that Lawrence's work is a rich vein to be tapped.

The impact of new kinds of historicism on literary research has made us realise more clearly than before how many of Lawrence's excesses were the excesses of his own rapidly metamorphosing and politically unstable culture. With all his idiosyncrasies, he *was* very much a product of his time, tirelessly alert to the cultural trends of his day and voracious in his absorption of new ideas. Morag Shiach shows in her chapter, for example, how Lawrence's interest in a psycho-biological model of subjectivity was by no means eccentric. He was, she stresses, drawing on the social and medical models of psychic life and psychic health available in his time: theories of traumatic neurasthenia, hysteria, depression. Despite his itinerant life, then, and despite his resistance to official cultural 'movements', Lawrence was not working in a cultural vacuum. What *was* distinctive about Lawrence was perhaps less the particular views he expressed in his letters and essays than the unashamed, even naive, openness with which he articulated them, not to mention his inconsistency. For if Lawrence's reputation has see-sawed dramatically, it has been no more erratic than his own views on the many issues, cultural, social and political, that he addressed in the vast number of letters, essays and reviews he wrote in his short lifetime. Between 1979 and 1993, the Cambridge edition of the complete letters was published. Stretching to seven volumes in all, this vast body of material enables us to see even more clearly than before just how restless and unsettled Lawrence's opinions were. To take gender relations as just one example, Lawrence wrote to a fellow writer, Edward Garnett, in 1912, 'It seems to me queer you prefer to present men chiefly – as if you cared for women not so much for what they were in themselves as for what the men saw in them. So that after all in your work women seem not to have an existence, save they are the projections of the men . . . No, I *don't* think you have a high opinion of women' (i. 470). Yet

it was the same Lawrence who wrote to Katherine Mansfield in 1918, 'I do think a woman must yield some sort of precedence to a man, and he must take this precedence. I do think men must go ahead absolutely in front of their women, without turning round for permission or approval from their women' (iii. 302). Perhaps this breathtaking inconsistency was part of what T. S. Eliot had in mind when he complained that Lawrence had 'an incapacity for what we ordinarily call thinking', but such a comment arguably betrays a failure to come to terms with Lawrence's particular intellectual mode.[16] It is 'rhetorical' in the true sense of the word: it seeks to persuade at the moment of writing, or, as Paul Eggert puts it in chapter 9, Lawrence 'must have known in some part of himself that there were brackets around his truth-claims; but he could not write as if there were' (171). His disclaimer in a letter of 1913, 'Don't ever mind what I say. I am a great bosher and full of fancies that interest me' (i. 503), is telling in this respect. The availability, too, through the Cambridge edition, of the different versions of particular texts, supports Eggert's argument about the 'provisionality' of Lawrence's writing. These texts suggest contingency, 'change and variation, response to accident', rather than organic growth to some predestined goal of literary perfection. The development of computer-generated hypertext, enabling students to view successive states of a text simultaneously, will doubtless reinforce this point. But if each of these constantly shifting stages is taken in isolation, one could be forgiven for taking it as a final statement.

Those who have never read very much Lawrence are quick to condemn him as an extremist, isolating one phase of his work, one single text, or even one single letter, as representative of the whole oeuvre. So they present him as the priest of a cult of the phallus, or as the puritanical proselytiser of monogamous marriage, or perhaps as the proto-fascistic promoter of leadership. To read a substantial amount of Lawrence's work soon puts paid to these parodic versions of him, even if at times Lawrence is his own best parodist. Whilst is true that much of his writing, especially in the discursive as opposed to fictional mode, is as insistent as it is inconsistent, it is also true that reading Lawrence is a more complex process than his reputation as an extremist would suggest. Three aspects of his writing which contribute to this complexity are emphasised by the contributors to this volume: his use of multiple consciousnesses (Rylance and Worthen); his refusal to comply with the dualistic codes he sets up (Stevens and Baldick); and the 'provisionality' of his assertions (Eggert).

Given his brief lifetime (he died at the age of forty-four), Lawrence's literary output was quite astounding, both in terms of quantity and in terms of generic diversity. A volume of this kind could never be comprehensive; it could never represent every important text within Lawrence's oeuvre, nor every important issue within Lawrence criticism. So, for example, some of

the 1920s novels and some of the travel writings are not represented. An attempt has been made to address as wide a range of works as possible without sacrificing detailed attention to particular texts, and to focus on those topics most likely to be of interest and relevance to today's students. In Part I, the focus is primarily on particular texts or groups of texts within the Lawrence canon; in Part II, the emphasis is on contexts and critical issues. But in practice, of course, the division is by no means clearcut, nor is it desirable that it should be.

In chapter 1, Rick Rylance contextualises the early works in terms of the conflicting evolutionary theories circulating in Lawrence's time. He shows how Lawrence was someone working at the limits of the available literary, social and scientific paradigms. He analyses Lawrence's use of free indirect discourse, a narrative method which produces a sense of a multi-aspected, disjunctive reality: there is no overarching narrator's voice to provide a synthesised, comprehensive view. This technique also enables Lawrence to create the complex social fabric of a work like *Sons and Lovers*, in which 'identity is formed interpersonally'. In chapter 2, Marianna Torgovnick reads *The Rainbow* against the available models for writing about sex in Lawrence's own time, both literary models and those supplied by the relatively new 'science' of sexology. She argues that, whilst Lawrence's treatment of sex in *The Rainbow* is more direct and less aestheticised than that of his modernist contemporaries, it is nonetheless the antithesis of pornography, which is premissed on the replicability or interchangeability of its sexual episodes. Equally, it is the antithesis of the typologising of sexual behaviour to be found in the works of sexologists such as Havelock Ellis. Ultimately, for Torgovnick, Lawrence is distinguished by his attempt to *narrate* sex, to embed it in a narrative continuum and to integrate it into the texture of a wider experience. In chapter 3 on 'The Prussian Officer' and *Women in Love*, Hugh Stevens links the subjection and power struggle central to the relationships in these works to the global power struggles of the First World War and 'the fundamental act of subjection which Lawrence sees as central to the modern crisis of Europe – our subjection to the nation state'. Stevens connects Lawrence's own wartime experiences, including the banning of *The Rainbow* and his medical examinations at the hands of the military authorities, to a crisis in his sense of Englishness, and to his mapping of an idealised, transgressive sexuality onto other races and nations.

Mark Kinkead-Weekes opens chapter 4 with Doris Lessing's definition of racism as an 'atrophy of the imagination' and takes this as the starting-point for a post-colonial analysis of some of Lawrence's 1920s writing. Through detailed biographical contextualisation, he charts Lawrence's oscillating responses to racial and colonial issues, his imaginative successes and failures.

'Quetzalcoatl', for example, the early version of *The Plumed Serpent*, emerges as a more exploratory and less assertive novel than the more stridently ideological but better-known later version. Morag Shiach in chapter 5 reads *Lady Chatterley's Lover* not for what it has to say about sex, but, more unusually, for what it has to say about work. She delineates the unstable relations between industrial labour and selfhood in this novel, and shows how creative forms of self-realisation are set off against empty and degenerate forms of subjectivity. She concludes that, in a novel in which, as in so many of Lawrence's works, history and myth are so subtly imbricated, more integrated forms of labour can only be imagined, not realised.

In chapters 6 and 7, on the tales and poems respectively, the emphasis is less on contexts and more on the formal properties of the works themselves. In both these chapters, there is an emphasis on genres *within* genres. Just as, for Con Coroneos and Trudi Tate, the short stories encompass 'sketches and novellas, naturalistic tales, fables, apologues, satires and ghost stories', so Helen Sword shows how the poetry is by turns imagist, confessionalist, nature poetry, satire, mysticism. The contributors stress how, in both the short story and poetic genres, Lawrence eludes easy classification. In both these chapters, too, there is an emphasis on 'darkness' (what Woolf famously called 'the dark places of psychology'[17]), whether of sexual panic, loss of control, unnerving laughter in the tales, or the erotic violence lurking in some of the poems. In chapter 8 on Lawrence as dramatist, John Worthen explains how a particular cultural and economic climate, together with the lack of personal support Lawrence received at crucial stages, prevented him from developing his full potential in this genre. Lawrence's versions of the dramatic and the comic 'were left to find alternative routes through his writing'. Worthen then analyses a passage from *Sons and Lovers*, tracing the subtle shifts of narrative point of view in order to show how Lawrence's talent, even within the novel genre, and even when no one is actually speaking, is 'essentially dramatic'.

Paul Eggert opens Part II with the critical issue of biography, a particularly resonant one where Lawrence is concerned. As noted above, Lawrence never went along with the theories of aesthetic autonomy promoted in his lifetime by T. S. Eliot and others, so that critics have found it oddly difficult or inappropriate to try to separate 'the man who suffers and the mind which creates'. Eggert's overview of the recent three-volume Cambridge biography of Lawrence shows afresh how the life and the writing fed each other, and how the life can be brought to bear on the writing in critically meaningful ways. Lawrence's love of role-play from an early age, for example, can be linked to the *provisionality* of his writing mentioned above, and to the 'risk-taking polarizations and extremes' which typify much of his work. For

Michael Bell in chapter 10, the cultural context is that of literary modernism, Lawrence's relation to which has always been a matter of debate. Bell argues that Lawrence was neither straightforwardly modernist nor anti-modernist, but engaged in a parallel project. Whilst he shared many of the concerns of his modernist contemporaries, concerns such as time and myth for example, his approach was less programmatic and self-conscious than theirs. Rather than rejecting his Romantic heritage as Eliot and Pound did, Lawrence sought to transform it from within, and in his emphasis on the centrality of feeling, he can be seen as the 'repressed conscience' of modernism.

In chapter 11, Drew Milne addresses the difficult task of reading Lawrence *politically*, arguing that Lawrence's politics have too often been conflated with sexual politics. He shows how Kate Millett, for example, turns sexual politics into the master narrative in Lawrence's works. Focusing on *St. Mawr*, Milne argues that Lawrence's novels dramatise a rejection of politics. But equally importantly, they reject the attempted sexual solutions to the political problems posed. Such solutions, or moments of sexual transcendence, are shown within the terms of Lawrence's novels to be merely illusory; they do not provide the ground for genuine political resistance to existing social structures. In this sense, Milne suggests, there is a more self-critical dimension to Lawrence's fictions than has perhaps been recognised. In chapter 12, Fiona Becket explores the intersections between Lawrence's writing and psychoanalysis, tracing Lawrence's struggle to retrieve the 'unconscious' from Freud and to develop his own, alternative genealogy of consciousness. She examines Lawrence's idiosyncratic language of the body in his essays on the unconscious. For Becket, this language of solar plexuses and lumbar ganglions is a deliberate attempt on Lawrence's part to close the gap between the literal and the metaphorical in discussions of the unconscious. The determined misogyny of *Fantasia* is contextualised in terms of Lawrence's own illnesses and his troubled marriage at the time of writing. Becket also highlights crucial differences between Lawrence and Freud: where Freud, for example, seeks to normalise his 'sick' patients and reintegrate them into society, Lawrence sees society itself as 'sick'.

Aptly enough at the start of a new millennium, Sandra Gilbert's focus is on Lawrence and apocalypse. She analyses the visions of sociocultural apocalypse, of the transfiguration of an exhausted culture, to be found in some of the late poetry, and is fascinated by the ways in which such apocalyptic moments are gendered and sexualised. She describes Lawrence as 'the ultimate pre-postmodernist' in his repudiation of the 'hopeless, horizonless aesthetic' which we would now associate with postmodernism and suggests that 'we are bemused, even bewitched, by the ways *he doesn't* fit into our current systems of thought'. In the final chapter, Chris Baldick addresses the turbu-