

# D H LAWRENCE *in the* MODERN WORLD



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## D. H. LAWRENCE IN THE MODERN WORLD

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# Preface

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The essays gathered in this book were first presented as papers to the Lawrence Symposium, held at the University of Nottingham in September 1985. This Symposium, 'D. H. Lawrence in the Modern World', was among the numerous events organised in Nottingham and elsewhere to mark the centenary of Lawrence's birth. From a very early stage in its deliberations, the Lawrence Centenary Festival Committee believed that these events would be incomplete without a major academic contribution from the University at which, in its earlier form as University College, Nottingham, Lawrence had been a student. A summer school for adult students, a Library exhibition and a special issue of *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, the University's humanities review, were already planned; but it was felt that there should also be an event of a more scholarly nature, celebrating Lawrence's connection with the University and at the same time acknowledging his stature as a writer with a reputation extending far beyond the county of his birth and education.

It was with these considerations in mind that, in 1983, the Festival Committee asked its four University representatives<sup>1</sup> to begin plans for a Symposium which, while not part of the official Festival programme, would take place at the same time as the Festival and offer scholars from all over the world an opportunity to celebrate the centenary. But the way forward proved not to be smooth: initial moves met with difficulties, and it was not until September 1984 that we felt confident enough to think of ourselves as a Symposium planning committee. We had barely twelve months in which to organise a major scholarly conference.

Our primary aims in planning the event are implicit in the title of the Symposium and of this book. When E. M. Forster described Lawrence as the greatest imaginative novelist of his generation, his comment was a challenge to a world where Lawrence had notoriety but there was no agreement as to his literary standing. Although the innovative character of his best work was always generally recognised, its disturbing implications – frequently misunderstood – aroused controversy, condemnation and censorship. Now, nearly sixty years after Lawrence's death, the nature

of his achievement is still being debated, and his work has been the subject of a wide variety of critical interpretation, but he is inescapably established as part of the modern literary canon. Furthermore, although Lawrence thought of himself as an English writer, whose 'Englishness is my very vision' (writing to Lady Cynthia Asquith, 21 October 1915), his exploration of the complexities of human relationships, his fresh and open response to the natural world and to new places, his concern with both spiritual and physical experience, and his critiques of modern industrial society have aroused passionate interest in many countries beyond his own. It was in these two senses – as a writer in the twentieth century, and as one with international standing – that we wished to present Lawrence 'in the modern world'.

The extent to which we achieved these aims must, ultimately, be judged by those who attended the Symposium and who read this book. In statistical and geographical terms, though, we seem to have attained some kind of internationalism. Speakers came not only from this country but also from France, Israel, Italy, Korea and the USA. Over half of the seventy or more participants were drawn from an even wider area, including groups or individuals from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the USA and West Germany. Until the very last moment, when a minor diplomatic crisis appears to have prevented his arrival, we expected also to be joined by a scholar from the USSR. In terms of the approaches to Lawrence's work we also achieved some variety. He was seen from the point of view of the textual editor, the psychologist and the social historian; he was placed in the wide context of modern literature as well as in the more narrow contexts of the puritan imagination, British society drama and the regional novel; there were studies of such stylistic issues as his characteristic narrative voices; and philosophical matters were touched on in an exploration of his concept of dualism.

Even so, we were not able to represent *all* the possible approaches to his work, and at least one observer<sup>2</sup> accused us of producing a 'safe' event, which effectively insulated Lawrence from the more uncomfortable conclusions which feminist, structuralist or deconstructionist analyses might have produced. In one sense we were open to the charge of 'safeness' in that, for most of our speakers, we turned to names already well known in the field of Lawrence studies – although we were pleased also to extend

invitations to some younger and less well-established scholars. The only stipulations we made had to do with the length of the papers, not their content, and we did not set out to ensure that we represented this or that school of criticism. None the less, in the papers by Barbara Hardy, Claude Sinzelle and H. M. Daleski readers will find an awareness of how Lawrence appears in the light of recent ideas in literary criticism. They will also find that the papers, although the work of Lawrence enthusiasts, are not uniformly reverential in tone. There was, during the Symposium, a keen appreciation of those areas of Lawrence's work – notably, phases in his attitudes towards women, democracy and the need for a strong leader – which make, and have always made, disturbing, even distasteful reading. And all the speakers were equally alive to the fundamentally exploratory nature of Lawrence's imagination, and his consequent failures as well as triumphs in both conception and achievement. In the end, though, we were gathered to celebrate Lawrence, and the excellence of the papers and the liveliness of the debates which followed them bore witness to the continuing power of a writer whose works, whether they delight or anger, seem now as alive and pertinent, as open to engagement, acceptance or disagreement as at any time in the seventy-five years since they first began to appear.

In his opening speech to the Symposium, reprinted as the Introduction to this volume, Professor Boulton paid fitting tribute to the contributions to Lawrence studies made by Professors V. de Sola Pinto and J. D. Chambers, both of the University of Nottingham. What he did not mention, with proper and characteristic modesty, was his own remarkable and long-standing contribution. Although Professor Boulton has for many years been known as an outstanding scholar of eighteenth-century literature, his interest in Lawrence goes back at least to 1968 when he published an edition of Lawrence's letters to Louie Burrows, which had recently been purchased by the University Library at Nottingham. This was followed by an exemplary study of an early version of 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', and an edition of *Movements in European History*, as well as some briefer scholarly notes.<sup>3</sup> It was no doubt these evidences of outstanding textual scholarship which led the Cambridge University Press to invite

Professor Boulton to become one of the editors of their planned edition of Lawrence's writings. Lawrence is among the first of the major twentieth-century writers to receive the benefit of thoroughgoing editorial scholarship, certainly the first whose letters and other works are being issued as part of a single unified edition. As John Worthen's contribution to this book makes clear, the corrupt nature of virtually all the published texts, and the tangled history of their progress from manuscript to print make such work more necessary for Lawrence than is the case with most writers. Professor Boulton's qualities of penetrating literary insight combined with the most meticulous scholarship, expressed in a language which is direct, vigorous and illuminating, were exactly fitted to the task, and are not only to be found in those volumes of the letters for which he has been wholly or partly responsible: they have left their mark on the volumes which he has overseen as General Editor. If the heart of that edition is now located in Birmingham, it is because Professor Boulton is there, and we can at least console ourselves with the fact that the work was begun in Nottingham. When the Organising Committee came to consider a Chairman for the Symposium, Professor Boulton was the obvious choice, and we were delighted when he accepted our invitation. Throughout the period of planning we benefited from his encouragement and advice, and the Symposium itself was enriched by his presence.

In the course of organising such an event and in preparing this book for publication, we have inevitably incurred many debts of gratitude, and it is a pleasure to have a public and formal opportunity to thank the many people who have helped us. First must come the speakers, now the contributors to this volume, who were generous with their time and energy, not only in producing their papers but also in taking part in prolonged and vigorous afterhours discussions.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the other participants were ready and pertinent with their questions and contributions, and so friendly as to make the actual running of the Symposium a great pleasure. We always enjoyed the full support of our fellow-members on the Lawrence Centenary Festival Committee, whose belief in what we were doing was a great encouragement, particularly in difficult times. Within the University, we are grateful for the support of the Vice-Chancellor, Dr B. C. L. Weedon; the co-