

'Rotten and Rotting Others' : D.H. Lawrence and English Studies (In Honour of Professor Fumio Miyahara On the Occasion of His Retirement)

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‘Rotten and Rotting Others’– D.H. Lawrence and English Studies

Seán Matthews

Prologue : Old Bailey Law Courts, London.

“Members of the Jury, I leave Lawrence’s reputation, and the reputation of Penguin Books, with confidence in your hands.”¹

In Court No.1 of the Old Bailey, on the morning of 1 November, 1960, Mr Gerald Gardiner, QC., so concluded his summing up for the defence in the case of Regina v. Penguin Books – the “Lady Chatterley Trial”. Why was the reputation of a writer debated on such a stage? What was at stake in that close association with Penguin Books? In accordance with what criteria were the jury to make their judgement? Why, above all, was D.H. Lawrence’s work the “test case” for the Obscene Publications Act of 1959?² C.H. Rolph was forced to concede in his succinct introduction to the problems of pornography and the British law, which figured so dramatically in the trial; “This supplies no dynamic reason why *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, thirty-two years after its first publication, should have been brought to trial under a new statute expressly designed to inhibit prosecutions of this very kind.”³ Such a “dynamic reason”, moreover, is nowhere to be found in the entire transcript of the proceedings. And yet, the Chatterley Trial was one of the great moments of postwar culture, seeming to announce the beginning of the ‘swinging’ sixties (and, therefore, for Philip Larkin

1 C.H. Rolph, ed., *The Trial of Lady Chatterley* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1961) p205.

2 Mr Griffith-Jones, QC., as Gardiner noted in his appeal for costs (wryly refused by Mr Justice Byrne), the publication had been “brought before the jury as a test case.” *Trial* p249.

3 *Trial* p2.

at least, Sexual Intercourse), the final rout of restrictive class assumptions and moral hypocrisy and all that had gone to make up that “anguished, parched decade”, the 1950s.⁴

The trial brought to very public prominence a multitude of issues bound up with class, sex, provincialism, literacy and education which had become the staple of cultural debate during the previous decades. The transcript overflowed with evidence of tensions around that network of concerns: for instance, in Griffith-Jones’s question, “Is it a book you would even wish your wife or servants to read?” or in Mr Justice Byrne’s comment, “It would never do to let members of the working class read this.”⁵ Such issues inevitably arose when a writer with Lawrence’s background and reputation was under consideration – to the extent that the perplexities and uncertainties form the substance of that reputation. None of this evidence, however, makes it any clearer as to why it should specifically have been Lawrence’s book that was prosecuted. For sure, there were the elements of circumstance, among them Penguin’s eagerness for publicity (after all, they delivered the text by hand to the local Police Station), but the date of publication, and the easy availability of other texts, indicate that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions selected *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* with some care⁶. Lawrence’s work had gained such increasing prominence in critical discussion, inside and outside the universities, during the 1950s, that the attention to his novel on so public an occasion was an appropriate culmination of this stage in the evolution of his reputation.

4 Philip Larkin, ‘Annus Mirabilis’ in *High Windows* (London: Faber, 1964) p25; “Sexual intercourse began/In nineteen sixty-three/ (Which was a little late for me)/Between the ending of the Chatterley ban/And The Beatles’ first LP.” Perry Anderson, ‘The Left in the Fifties’, *New Left Review* 29 (Jan-Feb., 1965) p4; “anguished, parched decade.”

5 *Trial* p195;

6 See for instance, Rolph, *Trial* pp1-4, p22; Noel Annan, *Our Age* (London: Fontana, 1991 c1990) p179; R. Hoggart, *An Imagined Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1993 c1992) pp52-9.

Alan Sinfield, in his polemical assessment of postwar British culture, noted in passing, "D.H. Lawrence suddenly became very important."⁷ The glancing acknowledgement is typical of accounts of the period. Peter Widdowson, introducing a recent volume of Lawrence studies, suggested that a small "Lawrence revival" began in the late 1940s, but only really "took off, of course, after the famous trial in 1960."⁸ Lawrence's controversial position is thus remarked by critics, usually viewing this as a result of the Chatterley trial, but the force and structural significance of his example before that moment is therefore underestimated or ignored. Nevertheless, Sinfield's "suddenly" is suggestive; the Lawrence of the 1950s was altogether a new, stronger, and more pervasive presence than before. The Chatterley Trial was thus not the origin but the result of a Lawrence revival. It is necessary to trace the development of his reputation in order to understand what determined such alterations in his status.

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2. Lawrence before 1950 : a review of his reputation.

The dominant traits of Lawrence's reputation, and of the terms for its analysis and assessment, were well established within a few years of his death. Many of the more familiar tendencies were evident even in the reception of his first novel, *The White Peacock* (1911). An early reviewer, for instance, found the writing "needlessly frank to a fastidious mind."⁹ The general currency of opinion upon which Mr Griffith-Jones was able to draw for his case in 1961 was the ready coinage of the 1920 and 1930s. In *D.H. Lawrence : A First Study* (1930), Stephen Potter made the point

7 Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Culture and Politics in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p259.

8 Peter Widdowson, ed., 'Introduction', *D.H. Lawrence* (Essex: Longman, 1992) p3.

9 *Athenaeum* (25 February, 1911) cited in R.P. Draper, ed., *D.H. Lawrence : The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970) p3. See also pp33

that, although “there has been, so far, no book published in England with D.H.Lawrence as its main subject”, the reputation of the writer was secure –

Lawrence's Reputation. Lawrence is famous... with a growing newspaper fame, and the acquiring of a definite newspaper character: i.e., he is showing signs of stepping into Bernard Shaw's shoes as a fearless, stop-at-nothing, trenchant and above all bannable young writer. Now, his public character decided, it is established and filled out exclusively by news of Lawrence which fits this conception.¹⁰

Lawrence's reputation was barely derived from his published work. It was his scandalous life which largely set the tone for assessment of his writing. E.M. Forster wrote in an obituary notice that Lawrence's greatness was being “ignored”. He asserted that Lawrence “was the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation”.¹¹ Over the following weeks that assertion was fiercely criticized in the correspondence columns by, among others, T.S. Eliot.

Much of the staple for this disapproval of Lawrence derived from the public analyses of his personality made by those who had known him; their accounts fed into the general awareness of his scandalous, even treasonous, trajectory.¹² All the books concerned with Lawrence in the 1930s, except for a short pamphlet on his novels by F.R. Leavis, had biographical aims. Richard Aldington stressed the appeal of Lawrence as a very English heretic, in the mode of Swift, Blake and Byron, or as an

10 Stephen Potter, *D.H. Lawrence : A First Study* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930) p9 & p15.

11 E.M. Forster, *Nation and Athenaeum* 29 March, 1930.

12 Quite apart from bans on his books, during the 1914-18 War, Lawrence was subjected to police surveillance due to his liaison with a German, Frieda Weekley, and because of his uncertain attitude to the war effort. See his own account in the ‘Nightmare’ chapter of *Kangaroo* (1923), or Mark Kincaid-Weekes, *D.H.Lawrence* (1996).

anarchist, "living outside human society, rejecting all its values, fiercely concentrated on his own values..."¹³ The central issue was his lived example; "One goes to him, I repeat, not for a doctrine but a personality."¹⁴ Middleton Murry's *Son of Woman*, a "destructive hagiography", used the novels and their characters as biographical evidence to substantiate Murry's views of Lawrence's feelings and personality.¹⁵ There was no shortage of writers willing to speculate on Lawrence from the vantage of their private acquaintance - among them Catherine Carswell; Jessie Chambers, or 'E.T' (the original of the 'Miriam' of *Sons and Lovers*); and David Garnett.¹⁶ Frieda Lawrence also wrote a long, impassioned memoir. Interesting and sincere as these texts were, they served to keep attention firmly on Lawrence himself, and his writing was poorly represented.

The problem with the attention to Lawrence's life was that the reputation of his books was far from established - as the rejoinders to E. M. Forster's tribute to their value indicated. Even Potter's "first study" was primarily concerned with the way the books explained the life. This technique of blending life and art to substantiate critical analysis was a consistent method in writing about Lawrence - in writing about Joyce, or T.S. Eliot, in contrast, such biographical speculation was less common at this time. Critical opponents of Lawrence were particularly adept at such associative criticism. In the writing of T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf,

13 Richard Aldington, *D.H. Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930) p14. This short work was followed with the later, more extensive but also more qualified, *Portrait of a Genius, but..., The Life of D.H. Lawrence* (London: Heinemann, 1950).

14 Aldington, *Lawrence* p18.

15 "Destructive hagiography" in John Middleton Murry, *Son of Woman : The Story of D.H. Lawrence* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931).

16 Catherine Carswell, *The Savage Pilgrimage : A Narrative of D.H. Lawrence* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931); E.T., *D.H. Lawrence : A Personal Record* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935); Frieda Lawrence, *Not I, But the Wind* (London: Heinemann, 1935).

aspects of Lawrence's reputation otherwise dispersed across other commentators and biographers found concentrated articulation. In this sense, their writing on Lawrence was representative of the case "against": Leavis, for instance, was to address Eliot as "the essential opposition in person" in a later discussion of the slow development of respect for Lawrence's artistry; Raymond Williams referred to the impossibility of "trying to drive the Eliot and Lawrence horses together".¹⁷ Since they were at once such intense expressions of prevailing currents, and also played a significant part in subsequent debate, the idiom and structure of these appraisals merits close attention.

Virginia Woolf, who ostentatiously managed not to read a Lawrence novel before 1931, remarked that his reputation "was that of a prophet, the exponent of some mystical theory of sex, the devotee of cryptic terms...". Discussing *Sons and Lovers*, she noted;¹⁸

Paul Morel, like Lawrence himself, is the son of a miner. One of his first actions on selling a picture is to buy an evening suit. He is not a member, like Proust, of a settled and satisfied society. He is anxious to leave his own class and enter another. He believes that the middle class possess what he does not possess. His natural honesty is too great to be satisfied with his mother's argument that the common people are better than the middle class because they possess more life. The middle class, Lawrence feels, possesses ideas; or something else that he wishes himself to have. This is one cause of his unrest. And it is of profound importance. For the fact that he, like Paul, was a miner's son, and that he disliked his conditions, gave him a different approach to writing from those who have a settled station and enjoy circumstances which allow them to forget what those circumstances are.

17 F.R. Leavis, 'Mr Eliot and Lawrence' in *Scrutiny* XVIII i 66 (June, 1951); Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters : Interviews with the 'New Left Review'* (London: New Left Books and Verso, 1979) p68.

18 Virginia Woolf, 'Notes on D.H.Lawrence' (1931), in ed., L.Woolf *Collected Essays* I, (London: Hogarth Press, 1947). Reprinted in W.T.Andrews, ed., *Critics on D.H.Lawrence* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971) p37.

Lawrence received a violent impetus from his birth. It set his gaze at an angle from which it took some of its most marked characteristics. He never looked back at the past, or at things as if they were curiosities of human psychology, nor was he interested in literature as literature. Everything has a use, a meaning, is not an end in itself. Comparing him again with Proust, one feels that he echoes nobody, continues no tradition, is unaware of the past, of the present save as it affects the future. As a writer, this lack of tradition affects him immensely. The thought plumps directly into his mind; up spurt the sentences as round, as hard, as direct as water thrown out in all directions by the impact of a stone. One feels that not a single word has been chosen for its beauty, or for its effect upon the architect of the sentence.¹⁹

Woolf's writing works here to place Lawrence through a series of elisions and confusions. In the first paragraph, she insists on Paul's working-class background, diagnosing his discomfort in that milieu as due to a consciousness of cultural lack, a desire for "something he does not possess", which she figures as an aspiration to middle class manners, materially represented by the evening suit. She endorses that aspiration as a function of "natural" intellectual honesty; any decent, half-educated young man would want the same. Thus, any categorical distinction between intellectual aspiration and class aspiration is dissolved. She goes further, though, eliding the distinction between author and character, so that it becomes Lawrence, also the son of a miner, also disliking his conditions, who aspires to the evening suit, to the obscure "something else that he wishes himself to have", which has already been equated with the middle class. Finally, then, Woolf attributes to Lawrence an aspiration produced by her own critical confusion, "The middle class, Lawrence feels, possesses ideas".

The second paragraph of Woolf's piece continues in this way, concentrating now solely on Lawrence's life and education. Having already defined Lawrence's "anxiety" through the association with Paul Morel, Woolf diagnoses "lack of tradition" as the main problem, deriving from

19 *Critics* p39-40.

the peculiar “angle” at which the “violent impulse” of his birth had set him. The “angle”, presumably, was a craning of the neck to gaze up the social ladder: whether all working-class births were by nature “violent” is unclear. Certainly, the suggestion is that Lawrence, and by association all who came from such places, was deficient in a due sense of “history”, an understanding of his relation to the “past”. The account of Lawrence’s “style” is ambiguous – the randomness and lack of control, of care, in his compositions are contrary to Woolf’s artistic principles, though her description is finely metaphoric. Thus, Woolf’s piece draws together Lawrence’s upbringing and education, class position, and artistry. The novels stand here as evidence in two ways: first, as examples of an inadequate grasp of style and form; second, as grounds for explanation of that failure in terms of biography.

T.S. Eliot’s long critical engagement with Lawrence was more subtle, the spread of attention across publications in French and English throughout the period suggested a continuing, changing concern.²⁰ It was a mark of his influence that Eliot was invited to appear for the defence at the Chatterley trial, and even attended at the Old Bailey, but was never called to give evidence. However, as the defence counsel noted privately, that influence had been largely negative – and his presence would have been required to repudiate or explain much of his earlier criticism of Lawrence.²¹ It was these earlier texts – written just before and after Lawrence’s death – which became established as classic statements of critical antagonism. In *La Nouvelle Revue Française* Eliot criticized the rapidity and humour-

20 T.S. Eliot, ‘Le roman anglais contemporain’ in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, (vol.28, p671) May, 1927 ; letter, *Nation and Athenaeum* 5 April, 1930; ‘The Victim and the Sacrificial Knife’ in *The Criterion* (vol. X, p768-774) July 1931; passages in *After Strange Gods : A Primer of Modern Heresy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and co., 1934) partic. p58; ‘Introduction’ in John Baillie and Hugh Martin, eds., *Revelation* (London: 1937); passages in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber, 1933) partic. p97; ‘Introduction’ in Fr. W. Tiverton, *D.H. Lawrence and human existence* (London: Rockliff, 1951).

21 R. Hoggart, *An Imagined Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1992 c1991) p54.

lessness of Lawrence's writing (and the presses "vomiting" out his texts), the obsession with sex, and lack of "refinement and grace" in his notion of love, his ignorance of intellectual and literary tradition, the degeneration of mankind in the novels; and, above all, the "extremely bad writing" - which showed up the worse in a comparison with Virginia Woolf, who was "civilized" and took "great care" in her composition.²²

In 1930, when E.M. Forster's obituary notice of Lawrence appeared, he characterized Lawrence as, "the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation."²³ As the obituary context made clear, Forster was calling for a recognition of the quality and importance of Lawrence's writing - as opposed to harping on his erratic and infamous life. Eliot went on the attack, retorting the following week, "I submit that this judgement is meaningless." In 1931, he published a review article of Middleton Murry's *Son of Woman*, which articulated at length and in English his objections. His argument distilled the prevailing representations of Lawrence, eliding the distinction between life and art, using the novels as sources of biographical speculation and judgement of character. First, Eliot asserts that Lawrence suffered in a variety of ways from his background. Murry's description of him as "a man who makes a heroic effort to liberate himself from the matrix of his own past" is coolly approved - "This is true." Eliot goes on to underline the "emotional dislocation of a 'mother

22 "Les presses vomissant chacun de [ses textes] avant que nous ayons eu le temps de terminer le précédent... quand ses personnages font l'amour.. (ils ne font pas d'autre chose)... ils perdent toutes les amenites, raffinements et grâces que plusieurs siecles ont elabore... ils semblent remonter le cours d'evolution... retrogradant au-dela du singe et du poisson jusqu'a quelque hideux accouplement de protoplasme." ["The presses vomit forth each one [of his texts] before we have had the time to finish the previous one... when his characters make love... (they don't do anything else)... they lose all the agreeableness, refinement and grace which have evolved over several centuries... they retreat up the evolutionary scale beyond the monkey and the fish to the point of some hideous protoplasmic bonding..." - my translation]

23 E.M. Forster, 'D.H. Lawrence' in *Nation and Athenaeum* 26 March, 1930.

complex", a condition diagnosed, in Murry's book, on the strength of *Sons and Lovers*. Eliot notes with regret the "shadowy Protestant underworld" which so signally failed to instil in Lawrence an appropriate sense of religion: Eliot's criteria of judgement in the article contain strongly anglo-catholic religious aspects. Lawrence's life as a whole is regarded with distaste and regret; "It is an appalling narrative of spiritual pride, nourished by ignorance, and possibly by the consciousness of great powers and humble birth." These early difficulties became, for Eliot, sources of a pathological case - he writes of "Lawrence's emotional disease", finding that "such complacent egotism can only come from a very sick soul". Ultimately, "we may feel poisoned by the atmosphere of his world, and quit it with relief."

In addition, Eliot stressed the failure of Lawrence's art: "he never succeeded in making a work of art" and "[Murry's] book is the history of his failure." There could be sympathy, but no evaluative concessions, "He is to be grieved over and his faults are to be extenuated; but we can hardly praise a man for his failure." The artistic failure was most evidently the function of a diseased mind in the obsessive treatments of human relations:

A better illustration of Lawrence's 'ignorance', and a fault which corrupts his whole philosophy of human relations - which is hardly anything but a philosophy of human relations and unrelations - is his hopeless attempt to find some mode in which two persons - of the opposite sex, and then as a venture of despair, of the same sex - may be spiritually united... The whole history of Lawrence's life and of Lawrence's writings... is the history of his craving for greater intimacy than is possible between human beings, a craving irritated to the point of frenzy by his unusual incapacity for being intimate at all.

The evidence for the contention of this human failure, the "unusual incapacity" for intimacy was in Murry's biography, but again "Lawrence's life" and "Lawrence's writings" are conflated (this from the critic who so

severely separated “the mind that suffers from the artist that creates”). The diagnosis is all in condemnatory terms (“fault... corrupts... hopeless... despair... frenzy”), but the key term here is “ignorance”, which Eliot took pains to explain and reinforce over a number of years;

When I use the term ‘ignorance’ I am not contrasting it with something which is popularly called ‘education’. Had Lawrence been sent to a public school and taken honours at a university he would not have been a jot less ignorant; had he become a don at Cambridge his ignorance might have had frightful consequences for himself and for the world, ‘rotten and rotting others’. What true education should do – and true education would include the suitable education for every class of society – is to develop a wise and large capacity for orthodoxy, to preserve the individual from the solely centrifugal impulse of heresy, and to make him capable of judging for himself and at the same time capable of judging and understanding the judgements of the experience of the race.

Although Eliot explicitly refuses to contrast “ignorance” with what was popularly called “education”, he nonetheless makes clear that Lawrence had not had the benefit of “public school and university”, and so was doubly handicapped, since he also lacked the “true education” which might have been “suitable” for one of his “class of society”. The careful definition of “ignorance” is thus blurred: the given sense goes on to equate ignorance, effectively, with an individuality which questions the tenets of Christian orthodoxy and “wise” faith, and with a lack of knowledge of the “judgements and experience of the race”. Beyond those meanings, still, lies the familiarly pejorative sense, underscored by the speculation on the “frightful consequences” of the influence Lawrence might have had as a Cambridge University lecturer – “‘Rotten and rotting others’”.²⁴

Ignorance was Eliot’s predominant term of description of Lawrence, and one which he repeatedly refined. In *After Strange Gods*, he suggested

24 The fallout from this final comment was to be the enmity of Q.D. Leavis and irritation of F.R. Leavis. As Lawrence’s “champions” in Cambridge, they took Eliot’s comments as personal jibes—see Ian Mackillop, *F.R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1995) p192.

Lawrence's ignorance was "a lack not so much of information, as from the critical faculties which education should give, an incapacity for what is ordinarily called thinking."²⁵ In his introduction to Tiverton's book he stressed that, "... we can now begin to see how much was ignorance, rather than hostility; for Lawrence was an ignorant man in that he was unaware of how much he did not know."²⁶ Ignorance served as a word by which Eliot located Lawrence outside the central currents of art, culture, and religion; it expressed Eliot's spiritual and aesthetic distaste. As with Woolf, however, Eliot's position was vulnerable because of an avowed non-acquaintance with much of Lawrence's writing. In the Murry review he numbers *Lady Chatterley's Lover* among "the novels I have not read" and also discusses *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, "which I have not read...". He also equates Lawrence with his characters. Discussing a speech in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in which Mellors talks of his wife, Eliot praises Murry's analysis and suggests, "Such complacent egotism can only come from a very sick soul, and, I should say, from a man who was totally incapable of intimacy. The girl was obviously in love with him, in the way appropriate to her youth and inexperience; and it was not good enough for Lawrence." Quite apart from whether Eliot could make such a judgement of Mellors without having read the novel, the final extension of that judgement to embrace Lawrence is revealing. Lawrence's attitude to character or context is simply not present in the passage, yet Eliot condemns him as he condemns Mellors. Eliot's opposition to Lawrence was grounded in religious and aesthetic principles, his orthodoxy and sense of tradition, but he did not allow Lawrence the coherence of a contrasted principle or position: he characterized Lawrence's antagonism to his beliefs as "ignorance" or, worse, "disease", and then defined Lawrence's art as failing as a result of that personal inadequacy. The inadequacy of life and art confirmed deficiencies of background and

25 T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods : A Primer of Modern Heresy* (New York: Harcourt Brace and co., 1934) p58.

26 T.S. Eliot, Introduction to Fr. W. Tiverton, *D.H. Lawrence and Human Existence* (London: Rockliff, 1951) p. vii.

upbringing - which, further, permitted Eliot to generalise on the wider degeneration of British culture. Opposition to Lawrence consistently retraced this self-confirming sequence.

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3. Reconsidering Lawrence : after the War.

From the perspective of the late 1940s and early 1950s the prevalent attitude toward Lawrence seemed compounded of neglect, antipathy and incomprehension. Fr. William Tiverton (pseud. William Robert Jarrett-Kerr) asserted that, in 1948, he had been moved to write his monograph, *D.H. Lawrence and Human Existence*, "when neglect of Lawrence was perhaps at its deepest."²⁷ T.S. Eliot later commented, in his introduction to that book, "After being misunderstood, he [Lawrence] is in danger of being ignored."²⁸ H. Coombes wrote to *Scrutiny*, in 1949, to present a "public challenge", noting that although "from time to time there have been highly appreciative references to D.H. Lawrence in the pages of *Scrutiny*..., there has never been a full article on Lawrence in your Review."²⁹ F.R. Leavis wrote approvingly of Coombes's intervention - "some critical treatment will be attempted in an early number of *Scrutiny*". The *Cambridge Journal* of February, 1951, stated, "With one or two exceptions... critics since Lawrence's death have tended to follow the lead of Mr Eliot in *After Strange Gods*."³⁰ Leavis's subsequent series of articles formed the basis of *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* (1955), which opened with reference to Lawrence, after his death, "being dismissed to a long relegation from among living subjects".³¹ Graham Hough, author of *The Dark*

27 Tiverton, *D.H. Lawrence* p7. For Jarrett-Kerr's authorship, see W.T. Andrews, ed., *Critics* p126.

28 T.S. Eliot, 'Introduction', in Tiverton, op. cit., pii.

29 H. Coombes, 'D.H. Lawrence Placed' (letter) in *Scrutiny* XVI i (March 1949) p44.

30 Cited in F.R. Leavis, 'Mr Eliot and Lawrence', *Scrutiny* XVIII i p66 (June, 1951).

31 F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955) p17.

Sun (1956), similarly asserted that when he began his work there was “no comprehensive study”, and that such analysis as was available constituted a “critico-biographical stew”.³²

Gathering references from a dozen books of the previous decade, two of which took Lawrence as their primary subject, Coombes demonstrated the “impression of Lawrence that is current in ‘educated’ circles.” Much was familiar—attention to his personality rather than his writing; distaste at the obsession with sex; avowal of his ignorance of tradition and education; pity for the impossible upbringing; irritation at the dogmatism. In addition, however, Lawrence now stood convicted of responsibility for the fascistic politics of the 1930s, and of World War II—he was “a mouthpiece of reaction in contemporary letters... the ‘mindless, eyeless, hysterical mass-consciousness’ with which his work is identified has become the bane of modern Europe”; “Fascism finally succeeded, at least temporarily, in making the synthesis that eluded Lawrence.”³³ In short, as the 1950s began, Lawrence’s notoriety, such as it was, rested upon his wild and rebellious personality, his intense interest in sex, and his difficult origins: when he was considered, it was as a sensational topic rather than an object of any consistent critical appraisal. His reputation was as a colourful figure in an earlier milieu, not a major writer. There is, of course, nothing unusual in the belated celebration of a writer’s work: interest and significance lie in the reasons for that recognition when it comes, and in how the terms and criteria of approval indicate changes in the critical idiom, and the culture. It was in the “Lawrence Decade”, the 1950s, that his example was to move to the centre of the critical agenda, figuring important alterations in the priorities of English Studies.

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32 G. Hough, *The Dark Sun : A Study of D.H. Lawrence* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961 c1956) p9.

33 “A mouthpiece...” in R. Dattler, *The Plain Man and the Novel*; “Fascism...” in Rex Warner, *The Cult of Power*; both cited by Coombes in ‘D.H. Lawrence’.

4. The Lawrence Decade.

The aftermath of the 1939-45 War was a period of widespread, major changes to the British state.³⁴ The war effort acted as a catalyst for long meditated reforms which brought into being the "Welfare State". Education was an area substantially affected.³⁵ Already, in the 1920s and 1930s, there had been an increase in the access of working-class pupils on scholarships to the Grammar Schools: the maturation of this generation, combined with the numbers of returning servicemen who had continued their studies under the auspices of Army Education programmes, generated a new class of educated people not previously involved in Higher Education, or addressed in intellectual discourse.³⁶ New universities were established, and Adult Education programmes were massively expanded. The resulting changes in the nature of the "Reading Public", in its size and configuration, were dramatic: the critical consensus within which Eliot and Woolf had worked, the habits of literature and of cultural debate from before the war, were radically questioned. Poets of 'The Movement' refused the rhetoric of high modernism; characters created by the 'Angry' writers derided the assumptions of the Edwardian era; and a new generation of cultural critics - historians, sociologists, literary critics - seeking to articulate their experience and values within 'English Studies' found the idiom and priorities of that field of study alien and inappropriate. It was in their struggle to find voices that Lawrence

34 The nature and history of these changes are the subjects of a substantial critical literature: see, for instance, P. Addison, *The Road to 1945* (London: Quartet, 1977, c1975); Arthur Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1977); Harold L. Smith, ed., *War and Social Change* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

35 See for instance Deborah Thom, 'The 1944 Education Act : the "art of the possible"?' in Smith, *War*.

36 The importance of such scholarships was that they alleviated some of the financial burden in households where potential wage-earners continued in education beyond the then statutory minimum (between 12 and 14 years of age).

became crucial; as a representative writer of similar background offering possible solutions, and as a distinctive example in the conflict with antipathetic, dominant critical mores. By the time of the Chatterley Trial, the tremendous increase in attention to Lawrence had made him a ubiquitous presence.

Between 1951 and 1961, over a dozen monographs concerned with Lawrence's writings were published, and numerous articles.³⁷ These publications were indicative of a major shift in focus. No previous work had taken the writings as their primary material, preferring as we have seen predominantly to address issues involved in Lawrence's personality. Partly, this change in critical attitude was due to the fact that this postwar generation of critics had not met Lawrence, or lived through the newspaper scandals, but had felt his influence in the texts – Graham Hough (b.1910) commented that, “with most readers of my age, he had loomed more or less largely in the imagination since the early thirties”; G.D. Klingopoulos (b.1926) stressed, “Perhaps even those a generation or so younger than Mr. Leavis can say that Lawrence has been, for them, as for Mr. Leavis, ‘a major contemporary fact.’” Raymond Williams (b.1921) noted, “It is not after all an end with Lawrence. It is where in our time we have had to begin.”³⁸ It was also clear that this new current of writing was a protest, an intervention in debate against those positions prevailing in 1950. *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* was so titled in order to emphasize the importance of the fiction; Leavis argued that, “Lawrence is, I have to

37 For a comprehensive bibliography of the period see Warren Roberts, *A Bibliography of D.H. Lawrence* (Soho Bibliographies, London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1963). At the Chatterley Trial, reference was made to “over eight hundred books about Lawrence.”

38 G. Hough, *The Dark Sun* p.7; G.D. Klingopoulos, Review of *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* in *Universities Quarterly* X 2, (February, 1956) p190; R. Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970) p184 – from a lecture in the early 1960s. Williams wrote the first of his many pieces on Lawrence in *Culture and Society* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956) p199ff.

contend, a case for literary criticism.”³⁹ To treat Lawrence as such a case, however, was ultimately to contribute to major changes in the paradigm for such study.

Leavis's work on Lawrence was widely considered as the most important and significant of the period – subsequent analysis inevitably took it into account. This was for two reasons. Firstly, Leavis had always been a defender of Lawrence, amongst his first publications was a small pamphlet which made strong claims for Lawrence's preeminence amongst modern writers, though he had not written specifically on the novelist since that time.⁴⁰ Secondly, in Leavis's writings on the novel in general, and Lawrence in particular, he was amongst the first to offer an approach to fiction coherent with study of other literary forms (drama, poetry), and thus had helped to establish parameters and terms for subsequent critical work on any author.⁴¹

Recognition of the significance of Leavis's work on Lawrence was widespread. For example, Klingopoulos wrote, “Mr Leavis's book will make Lawrence not only more significant but more important.” J.C.F. Littlewood, actually reviewing Hough's book, suggested Leavis's was “an earlier and more skilful hand”, to the extent that Hough's work was “Leavis re-written with denaturing journalistic looseness.”⁴³ Reference to Leavis in work on Lawrence was obligatory: Hoffman and Moore, in their assessment of Lawrence criticism, found Leavis was arguably

39 F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955) p153

40 F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930).

41 The innovative significance of *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948) was in its stern removal of novel criticism both from the domain of plot summaries, and also from belle-lettrist appreciation (Lord David Cecil was a specific target).

42 G.D. Klingopoulos, Review of *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist*, p193.

43 J.C.F. Littlewood, Review of *The Dark Sun*, in *Universities Quarterly* X 4 (Oct. 1956) p306.

the only important source.⁴⁴ Henry Gifford, in an early review of *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist*, suggested the implications of this association of Leavis with Lawrence – “to judge Lawrence is to judge his interpreter.”⁴⁵ By the time of the “Two Cultures” controversy between Leavis and C.P. Snow, in 1962, Leavis was so closely identified with Lawrence that several of his detractors joked about his “infatuation with the shaggy God”.⁴⁶

In order to stress what he saw as the success of Lawrence’s writing and the positive force of his example, Leavis addressed the composite conservative critical position as articulated by Eliot. Leavis’s position was, put simply, the converse of Eliot’s – he approved of Lawrence’s moral concerns and artistic decisions, he emphasized “intelligence” where Eliot had stressed “ignorance”. Leavis agreed with Lawrence:

The way things have developed since his death has had no tendency to make his diagnostic insight the less important to us, or the positive enlivening and enlightenment – the education – he brings the less necessary.⁴⁷

However, the technique of his analysis was wholly different from that of Eliot. Leavis’s achievement was to draw together the familiar issues of Lawrence’s background – his class, education, and family circumstances – but to elucidate them in terms of social history and through close analysis of the writing. It was this critical method which was to point the way for subsequent writers – Hoggart and Williams amongst them – to press out of the discipline of English into the field which became known

44 F.J. Hoffman and H.T. Moore, eds., *The Achievement of D.H. Lawrence* (Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1953) p20.

45 H. Gifford, ‘The Incorruptible Guardian’ in *Essays in Criticism* VI ii p224.

46 W. Gerhardie, (letter) in *The Spectator* 16 March, 1962; “Dr Leavis’s infatuation with the shaggy God... [is] like the ‘pash’ of an hysterical schoolgirl viciously jabbing her pencil into the back of any girl daring to utter a word of criticism of her adored mistress.”

47 F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* p9.

as Cultural Studies.

Leavis's approach marked a decisive shift from the impressionistic diagnosticism which otherwise typified work on Lawrence, or on the novel form generally. Leavis assessed directly those areas Eliot found most inadequate, ignorant or repulsive in Lawrence, and presented a triumphant account of Lawrence as the representative of a vital, coherent cultural tradition. Far from being a diseased, self-obsessive heretic, Lawrence was the intelligent product of an old, finely-civilized world: emphasizing Eliot's expatriate, cosmopolitan position and the misunderstandings of British culture to which he was prey, Leavis declared, "I am a fellow-countryman of D.H. Lawrence."⁴⁸ Lawrence was crucial to Leavis's articulation of a critical idiom because his case involved so precisely those issues - language, community, tradition - which were so compelling in Leavis's concern with literature.

Ironically, the idiom and technique of Leavis's work on the novel developed from the critical attention he had given to English poetry in the 1920s and 1930s, in large part under Eliot's influence.⁴⁹ His first readings openly treated novels as "dramatic poems", arguing that the finest achievements in the form shared the concision and heightened attention to language which was to be found in the best poetry and in Shakespearean drama.⁵⁰ Against allegations of artistic failure, Leavis protested that Lawrence was, on the contrary, a fine writer. The method of evaluation Leavis used to justify this claim was continuous with that developed in his poetry criticism. For Leavis, the pressure of felt, or lived, experience was transformed in a work of art by an impersonalising intelligence which made of the particular, individual sentiment a text, available as general

48 F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* p320.

49 F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1963, c1932).

50 F.R. Leavis, 'The Novel as Dramatic Poem' in seven parts, in *Scrutiny* xiv - xix (1946-1953).

or objective reality. The quality of that intelligence, evident in the moral and formal decisions made in articulation, was then representative of the quality of the wider community to which it owed its development - even if explicitly reacting against that milieu. The relation to intellectual and artistic traditions, the extent of continuity with a broader culture and with the past, was thus revealed in the use of language and of form. Eliot had found Lawrence eccentric and heretical, and had not recognized continuity or intelligence in his work. Leavis argued that this was due to Eliot's ignorance of important areas of Englishness, specifically the strong positive forces in provincial culture. Approving Lawrence's work, therefore, necessarily involved the demonstration not only of Lawrence's intelligence, shown in Leavis's close readings which revealed artistry and skill, but also the location of Lawrence's work in the network of the culture from which he came:

[His attitude to life] expresses the rare personal adequacy of an individual of genius, but it is also the product of a fine and mature civilisation, the sanctions, the valuations, and the pieties of which speak through the individual... [Lawrence had] intimate experience of the confrontation, the interpenetration, of the old agricultural England with the industrial; the contrast of organic forms and rhythms and the old beauty of humane adaptation with what had supervened.

Upbringing and environment worked on him through the means by which (to quote Mr Eliot's account of tradition) "the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present"; and it is not anything merely residual he brings from them, but his very formation, something that lives and grows, and that expresses itself in mature insight and wisdom, his creative impulse, and his criticism of the contemporary civilised world.

It is the intelligence of a great creative artist, whose imaginative achievements are, at the same time, achievements of intelligence.⁵¹

51 F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* p 78, p114.

The continued use of Eliot's formulations pointed to a sympathy with that model of a relation between society and literature which he had articulated, but also served to underscore the radical disagreement. The diagnostic priorities of *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* were not, as Eliot's, concerned with the individual. The Lawrence "case" was an attention to the whole society and period through the representative figure – "the great writer of our own phase of civilization".⁵²

Leavis changed Lawrence studies by presenting a positive view of the cultural milieu in which Lawrence developed. His views were well received by those younger critics who, having grown up in working-class areas and then pursued Higher Education, were angered at the range of critical antagonism towards, and misrepresentation of, Lawrence's experience – an anger premised on their own knowledge of similar conditions. Lawrence was the inevitable point of reference for such writers, as someone who had addressed directly the issues of their own experience. The struggle of such critics to articulate a "new voice" in their writing, distinct from those accents and idioms of critics from other backgrounds, involved a close examination of Lawrence's example.⁵³ Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), for instance, referred repeatedly to Lawrence's example. Hoggart argued that "it is some novels, after all, that may bring us really close to the quality of working-class life – such a novel as Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*..."⁵⁴ Lawrence was used as a recurrent correlative for Hoggart's own experiences and observations: "...notice that many old working-class women have an habitual gesture which illuminates the years of their life behind. D.H. Lawrence remarked it in his mother: my grandmother's was..."⁵⁵ Similarly, in Raymond Williams's

52 F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* p9.

53 The struggle for articulation of a new voice is the central concern of my article. 'A Grammar of Uncertainty' in *Studies in Languages and Cultures* 8 (Kyushu 1997).

54 R.Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958, c1957) p25.

55 Hoggart, *Uses* p49.

Culture and Society (1958), the emphasis was on Lawrence's inside knowledge of working-class community and values:

The outstanding value of Lawrence's development is that he was in a position to know the living process as a matter of common rather than of special experience. He had, further, the personal power of understanding and expressing this. While the thing was being lived, however, and while the pressures were not theoretic but actual, the inherited criticism of the industrial system was obviously of the greatest importance to him. It served to clarify and to generalize what had otherwise been a confused and personal issue. It is not too much to say that he built his whole intellectual life on the foundation of this tradition.⁵⁶

Williams moved in his argument from the "living process" to the intellectual tradition of criticism which enabled him to "clarify and generalize" that experience: "The intellectual critiques of industrialism as a system were therefore reinforced and prepared for by all he knew of primary relationships."⁵⁷ The evaluative shift from Leavis was subtle but important. Whereas Leavis made high claims for Lawrence's status as an artist, and grounded them by presenting, against Eliot, an account of the quality of his original culture, Williams and Hoggart made the point that Lawrence was important because of his knowledge and articulation of that original culture. Leavis's praise for Lawrence's enunciation of "classless truth" was ultimately at odds with the newer priorities.⁵⁸

Writers such as Williams and Hoggart used Lawrence's example to underpin their own representations of a distinctive and valuable contemporary working class culture. Inevitably, this led them away from Leavis, whose pessimistic view argued that the vitality of Lawrence's background had been dissipated in the modern world of industrialization, mass

56 R.Williams, *Culture and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, c1958) p203.

57 R.Williams, *Culture and Society* p206.

58 F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence : Novelist* p76.

consumption and declining standards of education. Intense debates took place, in the later 1950s, as to the continuing value of working class life and the nature of contemporary writing about it. Discussion frequently considered Lawrence in terms of provincial culture, rather than in such explicitly class terms, but these arguments reproduced the oppositions previously based on prejudices of class. S.W. Dawson, in an article for *Essays in Criticism*, 'Provincial-A Modern Critical Term', gave an extensive account of the historical variations in the use of "provincialism" and concluded;

It is hardly likely that any English novelist after D.H. Lawrence will turn his provincialism so triumphantly to account... A process akin to detribalization has all but swept away provincial culture and whatever hopes exist for the novel do not lie in that direction... It is safe to say that if a provincial tradition did exist, it exists no longer.⁵⁹

Dawson's definition of provincialism here involved a "relatively stable" but "intellectually cramping" society, which he considered no longer viable in a society of mass media. Nevertheless, it was to Lawrence that the critic turned to substantiate any such historical presentation of such a "provincial culture". In the first decade of *Essays in Criticism* (1950-60), there were more articles concerned with Lawrence than any other author, and he was a recurrent reference in other pieces.⁶⁰

Dawson's article provoked spirited response. The status of working class and provincial culture was a major issue for debate in the later 1950s. In the volume *Conviction* (1958), Richard Hoggart located the importance of understanding and representing the "cultural aspects of our

59 S.W. Dawson, 'Provincial - A Modern Critical term' in *Essays in Criticism*, V iii 260 (July, 1955).

60 I discuss the formation of *Essays In Criticism*-and the topics which predominated in it - in my 'Notes towards the definition of a journal : the case of *Essays in Criticism*'.

complex social revolution” which were generating a new Britain;

... the emerging Britain of a modest and fairly widely diffused prosperity, of a new kind of “working class” and of the mass media; a Britain that has superimposed on its many other changes a significant stream of interclass movements through educational opportunity; a Britain that has not yet learned to speak to its new self.⁶¹

Hoggart’s intellectual trajectory, his contribution to the articulation of that new voice, led him to the Chair of English at Birmingham University, where he proposed, even in the title of his inaugural address, a new emphasis in critical work, within ‘Schools of English and Contemporary Society’.⁶² In the *Penguin Guide to English Literature* (1961), W.W. Robson asserted simply in an essay on Women in Love, “Lawrence is a person that future students of English Literature and English civilisation will have to meet...”⁶³ Lawrence’s reputation and position had developed in close relation with critical priorities: from being a notorious character and representative of degeneracy, via Leavis’s specification of him as a “subject for literary criticism”, into a central, dynamic influence in a broadened field of English Studies. The network of issues around Lawrence’s text which were so publicly explored in the ‘Lady Chatterley Trial’ can thus be seen to have been a pressing, expanding presence in critical cultural debate prior to that point.

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61 R. Hoggart ‘Speaking to Each Other’ in N. Mackenzie, ed., *Conviction* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958) p121.

62 R. Hoggart, *Schools of English and Contemporary Society* (Birmingham: University Press, 1963)

63 W.W. Robson ‘D.H. Lawrence and Women in Love’ in B. Ford, ed., *The Modern Age* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, c1961) p281.

5. Epilogue : Birmingham.

Lawrence was crucial to the discursive bifurcation of English Studies. The effort to establish his reputation as an artist – the work in large part of F.R. Leavis – ultimately prepared the way for a new generation of critics to move beyond the received boundaries of critical discourse. It is less often recognized, moreover, that his contribution to this process was of major material significance. It was a couple of years after the Chatterley Trial, when sales of the book were flourishing (they were to reach 3.5 million by the late 1960s), that Richard Hoggart, who had played so celebrated a role in those proceedings, was appointed to the Chair of English at Birmingham University.⁶⁴ As a condition of his appointment, he asked for permission to establish what became the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. The University authorities were content that such a centre be founded, but unable to offer any funding: Hoggart would have to find outside sponsors. He spoke with Allen Lane, the proprietor of Penguin Books, who agreed a generous seven-year financial covenant, and the institutional project of Cultural Studies began – as a branch of the Department of English.⁶⁵

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64 Stuart Laing, 'The Production of Literature', in Alan Sinfield, ed., *Society and Literature 1945–70* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983) p127.

65 R. Hoggart *An Imagined Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1993 c1992) p89.