



David Herbert Lawrence

(1885-1930)

1 COMPLETE D.H. Lawrence's life and works with the words from the box.

eloped
coal pit

charge
short-lived

banned
environment

emotional
mining

autobiographical
warning

David Herbert Lawrence was born in Eastwood, a (1) village in Nottinghamshire, in 1885. His father was a miner and worked in a (2) throughout his life. He was a handsome man and an excellent dancer. His enormous vitality had attracted a woman of a higher class, Lydia Beardsall, who had been a schoolteacher. The happiness of their marriage, however, was (3) Dissatisfied with her husband, who had turned into a heavy drinker, Lydia spent the rest of her life encouraging her children to advance beyond their restrictive mining (4) David, in fact, escaped the miner's destiny through education and poor physical health. He studied hard to become a teacher and was accepted by Nottingham University College, where he gained his teacher's certificate in 1908. By that time he had begun writing poetry and what would become *The White Peacock*, his first novel (published in 1911). When his brother Ernest died, David became the centre of his mother's (5) life. The story of their mutual love is told in the (6) novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913).

In 1908 he started teaching in a suburb of London and experienced life in the metropolis. A crucial year for Lawrence was 1910 because his mother died. He continued teaching until 1912, when a bad attack of pneumonia served as a (7) that he should give up his job. In the same year he met and fell in love with Frieda von Richthofen Weekley, the German wife of a French professor at Nottingham University. They (8) to Germany and Italy and married in 1914. But World War I put their English-German marriage under some stress. Nevertheless, Lawrence was prolific in this period, writing poems, publishing *The Rainbow* (1915) and working on *Women in Love* (1920). He spent the 1920s travelling throughout the world with his wife: Italy; Australia, where he set *Kangaroo* (1923); Mexico, where he wrote *The Plumed Serpent* (1926); and the south of France, where he died of tuberculosis in 1930. A few novels by D.H. Lawrence were (9) by the censors, such as *The Rainbow*; *Women in Love*, which was in some ways a sequel to *The Rainbow* (written in 1916, published in the USA in 1920 and in Great Britain in 1921); and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, written in 1928 but acquitted on the (10) of obscenity and finally published unabridged both in Great Britain and in the USA only in the 1960s.

Main features of Lawrence's novels

Although his work does not have the evident modernity of James Joyce's (→ 6.17) and Virginia Woolf's (→ 6.18) writings, Lawrence is a revolutionary force in the English novel because of **his view of life, his fight against the mechanical and artificial aspects of industrial civilisation** and his penetrating **analysis of relations between the sexes**. He was **deeply concerned with emotional life**, and particularly with the emotions created by alienation. He considered **man as a mixture of culture and biology, of natural impulses and instincts**. According to Lawrence, 'mind knowledge', that is, the separation of human intellectual powers from 'flesh and blood', from natural impulses, can lead the individual to act wrongly and to fall prey to degeneration. **Of all the natural impulses, the sexual one is the strongest**, so only a new type of relationship between men and women based on sensual passions and sexuality can save humanity from self-destruction. Sex and history are in Lawrence two different

aspects of the same reality.

His concept of women went against the new social role they had acquired thanks to the movement for women's rights (→ 6.1) and their invaluable role during the war. His view was consistent with his political opinions against industrial capitalism: he considered **woman only as an instrument for mankind's happiness**. His female characters are neither heroines nor militant Suffragettes but often sensitive girls who are aware of the essential 'otherness' of their partners, whose intellectual and sexual supremacy they accept. Lawrence employed **the traditional omniscient narrator**, limiting, however, the authorial interventions to the minimum; **the point of view is, in fact, generally that of the characters**. They are portrayed through the techniques of 'showing' and 'telling', and their feelings are revealed by means of a remarkable variety of rhythm (use of occasional rhymes, repetition, alliteration and assonance which convey a musical effect) and of words and images particularly linked to the senses.



CURIOSITIES

In 1960 a jury found Penguin Books not guilty of violating Britain's Obscene Publications Act and allowed the company to publish *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. At the trial, the public prosecutor asked the jurors, 'Is it a book you would wish your wife or servants to read?'

The jury's decision to allow publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is considered a turning point in the history of the freedom of expression and the open discussion of sex in popular culture.

COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION

2 READ about the main features of D.H. Lawrence's works and answer the following questions.

- 1 Why is Lawrence a revolutionary force in the English novel?
- 2 What was he mainly concerned with?
- 3 What is the strongest natural impulse, according to him?
- 4 What sort of female characters did he create?
- 5 What are the main features of his style?

Sons and Lovers

(1913)

PLOT AND SETTING

Sons and Lovers is both an autobiographical novel and a meditation on the Oedipus complex. It deals with **Lawrence's personal experiences in a working-class environment in Nottinghamshire**.

In the opening chapter Mrs Morel, the wife of a Derbyshire coal miner, is expecting her third child, the boy **Paul**, who is to become **the central figure of the story**. Her life with her husband has already turned out to be a complete failure, and quarrels and disputes are the order of the day. The children are estranged from their father and strongly attached to their mother. Paul is her favourite, but the abnormally close relationship he has with his mother proves unsettling. In fact, he is **unable to sustain a fulfilling relationship with any woman**; he rejects **Miriam**, his first girlfriend, who is sacrificed by Paul and abandoned because a physical relationship with her is impossible. Later on he has an affair with **Clara Dawes**, a married woman and a supporter of women's rights, who satisfies the sexual component of his ascent to manhood but leaves him without a complete relationship to challenge his love for his mother.

After Mrs Morel's death, Paul is torn between the wish to rejoin his mother in death or go on living. In the end he succeeds in shaking off his past.

CHARACTERS

Paul's psychological development does not take place in a social void. His father is a miner and his mother belongs to a higher social class. **Mr Morel's estrangement from the**

emotional life of the family is due in part to this social difference, which alienates him from his own children and brings them closer to their mother. Moreover, his lack of education makes it difficult for him to express his feelings, and the hard, disciplined nature of his work leads him to domestic violence which drives the children deeper into their mother's arms.

Mrs Morel is educated and determined; she **symbolises what the young Paul hopes to achieve**: his emotional turning from his father towards her is a revolt against the poor exploited world of the mine towards the life of emancipated consciousness.

THEMES

Lawrence's fascination with primitive and natural human passions led him to **a deep fear of modern civilisation**, which he considered dehumanising, and **admiration of nature**: seasons and natural objects, particularly flowers, symbolise his awareness of the negative power of industrialisation and the chaotic frenzy of city life.

Mrs Morel is socially bound by her status as a woman and by industrialism. She feels 'buried alive', which is a logical lament for someone married to a miner. Though she joins a women's group, she must remain a housewife for life, so she is jealous of Miriam, who has more opportunities to employ her intellect.

Romantic bondage is given far more emphasis in the novel: Paul feels bound to his mother, and he often loves and hates at the same time, especially Miriam.

Lawrence uses **the opposition of the body and mind to**



expose the contradictory nature of desire; characters often pair up with someone who is quite unlike them: Mrs Morel is at first attracted to her vigorous husband because he is different from her refined, intellectual nature. Paul's attraction to Miriam is less intense than his desire for the sensual, physical Clara.

STYLE

Sons and Lovers is narrated in the third person, but almost all the events are seen through Paul's eyes. The novel, in fact, records, often in a penetrating and impressive way, the emotional process as experienced by Paul, but does not quite communicate the process itself.

Key idea

The Oedipus complex

D.H. Lawrence used Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex to explore Paul's relationship with his mother. Paul is extremely devoted to his mother and even if he tries to transfer his incestuous feelings to Miriam and Clara, he cannot love

either woman nearly as much as he loves his mother. The older, independent Clara, especially, is a failed maternal substitute for Paul. After his mother's death, Paul is psychologically adrift, unable to resolve his Oedipal desires.

COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION

1 READ the texts and answer the questions.

- Where is the novel set?
- How are characters and environment related?
- Who is the Oedipus character in this novel?
- What are the most important bondages explored?
- What opposition does Lawrence employ?
- What narrative technique does he use? Is it a traditional one?



T55

The wind-swept ash-tree

This scene takes place at night. Paul, his brothers William and Arthur, and his sister Annie are upstairs in their bedroom and overhear a quarrel between their drunk father and their mother.

When William was growing up, the family moved from the Bottoms to a house on the brow¹ of the hill, commanding a view of the valley, which spread out like a convex cockle-shell², or a clamp-shell³, before it. In front of the house was a huge old ash-tree⁴.

- 5 The west wind, sweeping from Derbyshire, caught the houses with full force, and the tree shrieked⁵ again. Morel liked it.

'It's music,' he said. 'It sends me to sleep.'

- But Paul and Arthur and Annie hated it. To Paul it became almost a demoniacal noise. The winter of their first year in the new house their father was very bad. The children played in the street, on the brim⁶ of the wide, dark valley, until eight o'clock. Then they went to bed. Their mother sat sewing⁷ below. Having such a great space in front of the house gave the children a feeling of night, of vastness⁸, and of terror. This terror came in from the shrieking of the tree and the anguish of the home discord⁹. Often Paul would wake up¹⁰, after he had been asleep a long time, aware of thuds¹¹ downstairs. Instantly he was wide awake. Then he heard the booming¹² shouts of his father, come home nearly drunk, then the sharp replies of his mother, then the bang, bang¹³ of his father's fist¹⁴ on the table, and the nasty snarling¹⁵ shout as the man's voice got higher. And then the whole was drowned¹⁶ in a piercing medley¹⁷ of shrieks and cries from the great, wind-swept ash-tree. The children lay silent in suspense, waiting for a lull¹⁸ in the wind to hear what their father was doing. He might hit their mother again. There was a feeling of horror, a kind of bristling¹⁹ in the darkness, and a sense of blood. They lay with their hearts in the grip of an intense anguish. The wind

David Herbert Lawrence
Sons and Lovers
(1913)

Chapter 4

- brow. Ciglio.
- convex cockle-shell. Conchiglia convessa di cardio.
- clamp-shell. Conchiglia di mollusco.
- ash-tree. Frassino.
- shrieked. Gridava.
- brim. Orlo.
- sewing. A cucire.
- vastness. Vastità.
- discord. Discordia.
- would wake up. Si svegliava.
- thuds. Rumori sordi.
- booming. Che rimbombavano.
- bang, bang. Battere.
- fist. Pugno.
- nasty snarling. Stridulo parlare rabbiosamente.
- was drowned. Veniva annegato.
- piercing medley. Penetrante mescolanza.
- lull. Momento di calma.
- bristling. Ira.



came through the tree fiercer and fiercer. All the cords of the great harp hummed²⁰, whistled²¹, and shrieked. And then came the horror of the sudden silence, silence everywhere, outside and downstairs. What was it? Was it a silence of blood? What had he done?

The children lay and breathed the darkness. And then, at last, they heard their father throw down²² his boots and tramp upstairs in his stocking feet²³. Still they listened. Then at last, if the wind allowed, they heard the water of the tap drumming²⁴ into the kettle²⁵, which their mother was filling for morning, and they could go to sleep in peace.

So they were happy in the morning – happy, very happy playing, dancing at night round the lonely lamp-post²⁶ in the midst of the darkness. But they had one tight place²⁷ of anxiety in their hearts, one darkness in their eyes, which showed all their lives.

Paul hated his father.

- 20 hummed. Emettevano un rumore sordo.
21 whistled. Fischiarono.
22 throw down. Che si toglieva.
23 tramp ... feet. Saliva di sopra scalzo con passo pesante.
24 drumming. Tamburellare.
25 kettle. Bollitore.
26 lamp-post. Lampione.
27 tight place. Nodo.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

1 READ the text and identify its three parts. Then write a heading for each.

- Part 1 (lines):
- Part 2 (lines):
- Part 3 (lines):

2 LOOK at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight and colour represents.

sleep

.....

What feelings does nature convey?

feeling

What does the whole scene highlight?

.....

.....

.....

What sense does the language of the text mainly appeal to?

.....

How do they differ?

3 DISCUSS the following questions in pairs.

- How many characters are involved in the text?
- How do the children use to spend the evening before going to bed?
- Why does Paul wake up after being asleep for a long time?
- What can he hear coming from downstairs?
- What overwhelms the human shouting?
- What is the children's mood?
- What is the sudden silence accompanied by?
- What role do the children play in this scene?
- Where do the noises of the text come from? What are they caused by?
- What role do the woman and the tree have? Why?
- What is the noise of the wind compared to? What is the wind symbol of?

COMPETENCE: PRODUCING A WRITTEN TEXT ON A GIVEN SUBJECT

4 WRITE a 10/12-line paragraph about the following topic: 'How far do Lawrence's linguistic choices affect and highlight the structural elements (setting, characters, plot) of the novel?'