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**D. H. LAWRENCE AND RICHARD ALDINGTON**

JONATHAN LONG

Richard Aldington (1892–1962) was not only a pioneering Lawrence biographer, critic and editor of some of his poetry and of selections of his work but also a significant contributor of introductions to Lawrence's works (see Appendix). One of Penguin Books' main claims to fame was its fight for the publication of the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960. However, it also made sterling efforts to promote Lawrence from 1950 by embarking on the publication of many of his other works in affordable paperback format, to mark the twentieth anniversary of Lawrence's death. It was Richard Aldington who wrote introductions for many of those Penguin titles, and others published by Heinemann. Much has been written about the ambivalent relationship between Lawrence and Aldington, but little has been said about Aldington's appreciation of Lawrence's work, which he found inspirational, as demonstrated in those introductions. This essay will review how the introductions came to be written and comment on those written for Penguin.

Aldington knew Lawrence for most of his writing career.<sup>1</sup> As well as being a prolific man of letters, a poet, critic, novelist, editor, translator and biographer,<sup>2</sup> Aldington was one of the earliest and most prolific writers about Lawrence. Before his much-quoted biography of Lawrence, published by Heinemann in 1950, *A Portrait of a Genius But...*, Aldington had already published four pamphlets about Lawrence.<sup>3</sup> Amongst those who knew Lawrence, with these credentials, Aldington was an obvious choice for Penguin to enlist in its campaign to promote Lawrence's work. However, the project was not without its problems, as he wrote to Alexander Frere of Heinemann on 4 October 1948: "it's a real challenge to a writer – to try to win sympathy for a guy with so many lousy aspects to his character".<sup>4</sup> It was Heinemann that had acquired the rights to publish

Lawrence from Secker in January 1935. Aldington's secretary, Alistair Kershaw, arranged for Heinemann to license Penguin to publish ten books at the same time as Heinemann reprinted twelve of them.<sup>5</sup> All were to have introductions written by Aldington. No one else has been commissioned to write so many introductions to Lawrence books, not even any of the editors of Cambridge Edition volumes some of whom also wrote introductions for the subsequent Penguin paperback editions of those texts, nor Melvyn Bragg who wrote several for Granada, which also published some paperback editions in the 1980s. The novels published by Penguin comprised the three leadership novels plus *The Lost Girl* and *The White Peacock*, also published by Heinemann, so Penguin did not do so well in their arrangement, Heinemann publishing some of the better-known titles as well.

As Vivien Whelpton put it in her biography of Aldington, the introductions are "beautifully crafted to inform the reader of the personal context out of which each text emerged ... to convey an understanding of the writing process behind the work and to provide an insight into the uniqueness of Lawrence's vision, particularly 'his perception of natural beauty'".<sup>6</sup> He was the perfect choice for the job, sharing so many of Lawrence's literary values. The introductions are almost universally extremely complimentary about Lawrence's work, to such an extent that Aldington almost runs out of superlatives to praise it, although he does not shy away from saying what a book lacks. Generally, the introductions follow a pattern, beginning with the genesis of the book, providing publication and textual information, and noting the characters based on real life people known to Lawrence. The extent to which he provides factual information, as opposed to opinion, is reflected in his acknowledgement of the work of Edward D. McDonald, Lawrence Clark Powell and E. W. Tedlock on the bibliography and manuscripts of Lawrence (*Selected Essays* 10).<sup>7</sup>

I will give a few examples of Aldington's effusive praise (all from the Penguin editions). In the introduction to *The White Peacock*, he refers to Lawrence's "originality and disregard for literary fashion"

(*The White Peacock* 7), how he was “an eloquent and beautiful natural writer”, and that at “the first attempt he equalled – some think he surpassed – his master, Thomas Hardy” and he “was to soar far beyond” this (9). In the introduction to *The Lost Girl* he talks of “a very clever interpretation of Italian character” (*The Lost Girl* 9) and of *Aaron’s Rod* that it contains writing “which soars from the comparative commonplace of the opening on to a level more commensurate with Lawrence’s genius” (*Aaron’s Rod* 9). In the introduction to *Kangaroo* he talks of the book being “an extraordinary tour de force of rapid composition” (*Kangaroo* 7) and “its magical freshness and vividness, that immediate feeling of life which Lawrence’s writings had more abundantly than those of any author of his time. Nobody else gives you that sense that you yourself have actually experienced what he has written” (8). In addition, “with all its other achievements, the supreme achievement of *Kangaroo* lies in its unforgettably vivid and accurate pictures of the Australian continent, in which no other English writer has approached Lawrence” (10). Finally, of *St Mawr* he writes of passages that “are unmatched in modern English for poetic power, evocation of natural loveliness, the throb of man’s life in nature” (*St Mawr and The Virgin and the Gypsy* 9). Aldington’s opinions on Lawrence are of course important both because of his literary skills as an accomplished man of letters but also because of his “personal knowledge of his life” (*Selected Essays* 10).

Following the bitterness that ensued from events at Port Cros in 1928,<sup>8</sup> it is difficult to fathom how Aldington was able to be so effusive in his praise in the introductions. It is insufficient to say that these feelings were overcome by the passage of time. Yes, the four pamphlets whilst recording some of the difficulties with Lawrence’s behaviour are generally very complimentary about him. The introductions should be read in conjunction with the 1950 pamphlet, with which there is some overlap, where Aldington talks of Lawrence’s “vivid personality, which I am not alone among those who knew him in thinking as on a different, a higher level from that of other people” (5) and that he was “always a great character, a great

Englishman” (8). In total contrast is the preface that Aldington wrote in 1959 for the third volume of Edward Nehls’s *D. H. Lawrence A Composite Biography*.<sup>9</sup> It runs to only nine pages, the first third of which is a tribute to Nehls and his methodology. In the remaining pages it manages a wholesale character assassination of Lawrence, paragraph after paragraph. Examples of Aldington’s language include:

There was a strange perversity in the man ... which impelled him to insult and to wound those who could harm him as well as those who tried to help him, and at times a species of megalomania under the influence of which he conceited himself the judge and master, not only of those he knew, but even of the world in general (xii);

“how absurdly and irrelevantly jealous he could sometimes be!” (xiii); his “wild fury” (xiii); the “disagreeable traits in his character, such as his ingratitude ... his censorious attitude, his intense class consciousness, his endless abuse and wrangling ... his strange Power delusions” (xv); and his “awkward efforts ... to cultivate the right people ... always ended in mutual explosions of bad temper” (xvii).

As recently as August 1956 Aldington had written to Nehls that “If my life has any value it is that since 1926 – and to some extent since 1914 – I felt his superiority and always acknowledged it”.<sup>10</sup> These differences are difficult to reconcile other than on the basis that either Aldington’s opinion changed from time to time or he was being economical with his true feelings in the Penguin introductions in the interests of getting them published. He wrote for his living and was often “in a financial pinch”.<sup>11</sup> The way Lawrence is portrayed in the introductions is somewhat more nuanced than the qualifying condemning “but” of the title *Portrait of a Genius, But...* suggests.

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<sup>1</sup> They first met in London in July 1914 through Amy Lowell, then at Mecklenburgh Square in October/November 1917 after the Lawrences were

evicted from Cornwall. In addition, following a brief meeting in London in November 1918, there was the Lawrences' long weekend with Aldington in Padworth in August 1926 and Aldington's visit to Villa Mirenda in October 1926, plus the significant time that they spent together on Port Cros in October–November 1928. This was a disastrous episode, leaving Lawrence and Aldington at odds, never to meet or correspond again. There followed a trading of insults, Lawrence apparently pillorying Aldington in some of his *Pansies* (1929) (see *2Poems* 1091 and *3Poems* 1877:1) and Aldington's rendering of Lawrence as Mr Bobbe in *Death of a Hero* (1929), inter alia as "a sandy-haired, narrow-chested little man with spiteful blue eyes and a malevolent class-hatred": see Vivien Whelpton, *Richard Aldington Poet, Soldier and Lover 1911–1929* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2014), 335.

<sup>2</sup> See the bibliographies in *ibid.*, 388–91 and Vivien Whelpton, *Richard Aldington Novelist, Biographer and Exile 1930–1962* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2019), 379–82

<sup>3</sup> The first, published in 1927, one of the earliest books on Lawrence, is complimentary both about his work and his character (see Whelpton *Richard Aldington Poet, Soldier and Lover*, 274–5), and was commented on by Lawrence (6*L* 64–5), the second was published in 1930 following Lawrence's death. Save for a preliminary note in which he refers to Lawrence "as one of the most brave, splendid and vital influences of my own life and of his time" and the omission of the reference to *Ulysses* from the 1927 version (29), it appears to be identical to the earlier version. The third pamphlet was published in 1935. It showcased selected Lawrence books, highlighting particular titles that Heinemann was now publishing, listed at the end. It uses language such as "amazing intuitive insight" and "masterpiece" (16). All this in spite of events at Port Cros. The fourth was published in 1950 to accompany the new Penguin texts, covering similar ground to the 1935 version but using even more laudatory language. Aldington's final Lawrence book appeared in 1961 when Rowohlt published his monograph on Lawrence in German, no doubt timed to capitalise on its publication of a new translation of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* a year earlier.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Charles Doyle, *Richard Aldington A Biography* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, SI: Southern Illinois UP, 1989), 237.

<sup>5</sup> See Whelpton, *Richard Aldington Novelist, Biographer and Exile*, 198–9 for the background and note 39 on 356 – 7 for the full list of titles.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>7</sup> Bibliographic details of Aldington's introductions to the Penguin editions cited in the body of this essay are given in the Appendix.

<sup>8</sup> See Andrew Harrison, *The Life of D. H. Lawrence* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 372; John Worthen, *Experiments: Lectures on Lawrence* (Nottingham: CCCP, 2012), 164–5; and David Ellis, *D. H. Lawrence: Dying Game 1922–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 449.

<sup>9</sup> By this time Harry T. Moore's work on popularising Lawrence was well underway and the contrast between his work and Aldington's is marked: Moore whilst acknowledging Lawrence's faults did not constantly highlight them as Aldington sometimes did. Interestingly he noted another of Aldington's contributions to Lawrence studies, his entry on Lawrence for the Dictionary of National Biography: Harry T. Moore, *The Life and Works of D. H. Lawrence* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1951), 335.

<sup>10</sup> Whelpton, *Richard Aldington Novelist, Biographer and Exile*, 278.

<sup>11</sup> Doyle, *Richard Aldington A Biography*, 242.

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**APPENDIX: RICHARD ALDINGTON'S PAMPHLETS,  
BIOGRAPHIES AND INTRODUCTIONS RELATING TO  
D. H. LAWRENCE'S LIFE AND WORKS**

**1. Pamphlets**

- D. H. Lawrence: An Indiscretion* (Seattle, WA: Washington Book Store, 1927)
- D. H. Lawrence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930)
- D. H. Lawrence: A Complete List of His Works with a Critical Appreciation* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1935)
- D. H. Lawrence: An Appreciation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950)

**2. Biographies**

- Portrait of a Genius, But... (The Life of D. H. Lawrence, 1885–1930)*  
(London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1950)
- David Herbert Lawrence in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*  
(Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1961)

**3. Introductions to books about D.H. Lawrence**

- Edward Nehls, *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography. Volume Three, 1925–1930* (Madison, NJ: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959)
- F.-J. Temple, *D. H. Lawrence: l'oeuvre et la vie* (Paris: Seghers, 1960)

**4. Introductions to books by D.H. Lawrence published by Penguin and/or Heinemann (when first published)**

- D. H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *England, My England and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1950)



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- D. H. Lawrence, *Etruscan Places and Mornings in Mexico* (London: Heinemann, 1956)
- D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The Lost Girl* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The Lost Girl* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The Man Who Died* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *St Mawr and The Virgin and the Gypsy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The Trespasser* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *Twilight in Italy* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The White Peacock* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The White Peacock* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *The Woman Who Rode Away and other Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1950)
- D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Heinemann, 1950)