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REVIEWS

**Neil Roberts, *'Sons and Lovers': The Biography of a Novel.*
Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2016.
Pp. xii + 191. \$120 / £75.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978 1 9429 5418 7**

Reviewed by Keith Cushman

In August 1910 when D. H. Lawrence began the autobiographical novel that would become *Sons and Lovers*, he was a schoolteacher in South London, struggling to write in the evening after an exhausting day and after correcting his students' work and preparing the next day's classes. When he finished the fourth and final version of the novel in November 1912, he had published two promising novels and had given up teaching to become a full-time professional writer. Astonishingly, he was living with the wife of one of his college professors in a town on the Lago di Garda in northern Italy. During those two years his mother had died, he had broken for the final time with the woman who was the original of Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*, he had had an affair with a married woman, he had been engaged for a year to an inappropriate young woman, and he had nearly died from pneumonia. Neil Roberts's scrupulous "biography" of *Sons and Lovers* combines textual scholarship and biography to lay out and analyse the complicated process of Lawrence's creation of the novel during these tumultuous two years. He traces "the process of composition" in detail as he demonstrates "the effects of the life-experiences that transformed Lawrence from the frustrated, depressed and ailing schoolteacher of 1911 to the creatively and sexually triumphant artist of the end of the following year" (4).

The great achievement of *'Sons and Lovers': The Biography of a Novel* is its careful and revelatory tracking of the intertwining of Lawrence's life and his autobiographical novel. The narrative

begins in 1901 when Lawrence first met Jessie Chambers and concludes in 1913 with Edward Garnett's cutting of 10% of the manuscript and the publication of the novel on 29 May 1913. A major payoff of Roberts's study is its demonstration of the way that different episodes in his relationship with Chambers – and later with Frieda – play into particular scenes in *Sons and Lovers*. As Roberts puts it, "The 'biography' of *Sons and Lovers* shows us that the novel was shaped by literal dialogues, first with Jessie Chambers and later with Frieda Lawrence" (3).

But an implication of Roberts's working method is that the focus of his book is rather narrow. Its readership consists of D. H. Lawrence specialists rather than that larger, increasingly mythical audience of general readers interested in great modern literature. The book lacks the expansiveness of Michael Gorda's *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece* (2012), which combines biography, criticism and travelogue in its account of the creation of *The Portrait of a Lady*. '*Sons and Lovers*': *The Biography of a Novel* is an excellent short book that I wish were longer.

The textual journey that led to the publication of *Sons and Lovers* features twists, turns and false starts. The first version of the novel (*Paul Morel I*), which dates from late 1910 and which Lawrence set aside after writing about 100 pages, is lost. Roberts brings *Matilda*, a fragment of an abandoned novel from this period, to bear in his understanding of the lost earliest attempt at *Sons and Lovers*. Lawrence wrote about 355 pages of *Paul Morel II* between March and July 1911. Cambridge University Press published this unfinished version of the novel, edited by Helen Baron, as *Paul Morel* in 2003.

Paul Morel III dates from mid-February to June 1912. Lawrence shared the incomplete draft of *Paul Morel III* with Jessie Chambers in the spring of 1912. Some of her distressed annotations and commentary on this version of the novel survive, and she also rewrote a few episodes. Lawrence's relationships with Helen Corke and Alice Dax had an impact on *Sons and Lovers*. Roberts also

offers interesting insights into the significance of *The Trespasser*, *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* and *The Daughter-in-Law* in the development of *Sons and Lovers*. In 1935 Chambers published *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record*, which figures importantly (though of course cautiously) in Roberts's biographical account of Lawrence's life. Roberts also draws on Chambers's letters and on George Neville's posthumously published *Memoir of D. H. Lawrence* (1981).

The textual evolution of the novel is more complicated than my two-paragraph account suggests. For example, Roberts's use of the careful paper analysis Helen and Carl Baron did for the Cambridge University Press edition of *Sons and Lovers* allows him to connect manuscript passages with particular moments in Lawrence's life. The Barons'

research makes it possible to identify pages that date from the abandoned second draft (March–July 1911), his new start immediately before his near-fatal illness (November 1911), the period in Eastwood when he was showing his work to Jessie, and when he met Frieda (February–April 1912), his revision of this draft in Germany (May 1912) and the final draft, mostly written in Gargnano (July–November 1912). (4)

Roberts handles all these materials superbly; no previous scholar has subjected them to such careful scrutiny and interpretation. In the bargain Roberts writes with clarity. Nevertheless, I sometimes found it a little difficult to follow the textual progression. I wished that the book began with the sort of time-line found in all the volumes of the Cambridge University Press edition of Lawrence. And why not provide a simple chart, explaining exactly what *Paul Morel* I, II, and III and the Jessie Chambers bits and pieces are and providing the pertinent dates? The reader could refer back to this chart as needed. Was Roberts labouring under a page limit imposed by his publisher?

An excellent example of the sort of illumination Roberts brings to our understanding of *Sons and Lovers* is his discussion of the early scene in which the drunken Walter Morel locks his wife, pregnant with Paul, out of the house and she has an intense, mysterious, transcendent experience in the moonlight. No version of this scene survives from the first two drafts, but the scene is the first entry in Lawrence's 1910 outline of the novel. Some rendering of the scene must have been present in the earlier drafts. Roberts speculates that "this episode, in which the unborn child shares the mother's plight of being shut out of the house by the father, might have symbolised or even, in Lawrence's mind, explained" (86) Lawrence's antipathy toward his father. The version in *Paul Morel*, dating from November 1911, "is very close indeed to the final text". Roberts shrewdly observes that the scene is "Lawrence's most developed piece of writing yet" and adds that it "anticipates some of the most memorable episodes in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*". Roberts persuasively suggests that the scene "looks beyond the dominant realist mode of *Sons and Lovers*, before Lawrence has fully accomplished that mode".

Jessie Chambers felt deeply betrayed by her portrait as Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*. She believed that Lawrence had written every scene in a way that set off Miriam to a disadvantage and gave her dialogue that reinforced Mrs Morel's hatred of her. Both John Worthen and Helen Baron have argued that Lawrence's changes in the final manuscript cast Miriam in an increasingly unfavourable light. Roberts gracefully disagrees. Perhaps the most striking argument in Roberts's "biography" of the novel is that in those last changes "Lawrence was constantly rethinking and reinterpreting the relationship of Paul and Miriam, that there is no final interpretation, and it is this that makes the novel both dialogic and true to life" (140).

I need to mention a pet peeve before closing. In his two-volume edition of the *Collected Letters* Harry T. Moore represents Lawrence's quick, nervous open en-dashes just the way Lawrence wrote them. The open en-dash is a distinctive, expressive detail of

Lawrence's punctuation. Moore published the *Collected Letters* in 1962. In *'Sons and Lovers': The Biography of a Novel* – 54 years later – Roberts incorrectly represents Lawrence's open en-dashes as closed em-dashes. This is not the practice of the Cambridge edition of the letters or of *JDHLS* – or of D. H. Lawrence. I can only ask why Roberts – or his publisher? – made this choice.

'Sons and Lovers': The Biography of a Novel is an impressive work of scholarship and an important, very readable contribution to our understanding of Lawrence's great autobiographical novel.

**Vincent Sherry, ed. *The Cambridge History of Modernism*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
Pp. 960. £120.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978 1 1070 3469 3**

Reviewed by Gemma Moss

The *Cambridge History of Modernism* is ambitious, thorough, and will be invaluable for researchers and educators. At over 900 pages, it is around the same length as *Ulysses*, and accordingly this review will also be longer than usual. The volume covers a huge amount of ground, probing modernist sensibilities with attention to time, space, aesthetics, genre, gender, race, technology, and politics in 43 wide-ranging essays. The list of contributors is the modernist studies equivalent of an all-star cast: edited by Vincent Sherry, the collection includes work by Tim Armstrong, Marjorie Perloff, David Trotter, Maud Ellmann, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Lawrence Rainey, Ronald Bush, Laura Marcus, Michael Levenson, Rachel Blau Duplessis, and an epilogue by Steven Connor. D. H. Lawrence gains mentions in several chapters, but mainly appears in 'Non-Metropolitan Modernism: E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence and William Faulkner' by Howard J. Booth. The volume covers core topics and modernist figures while still providing fresh insights, and ranges spatially and historically while acknowledging that even a book as big as this must limit itself geographically and temporally.