

A Biographer Looks At *Mr Noon*

Mark Kinkead-Weekes

Mr Noon is an unfinished novel which ends in mid-sentence, indeed mid-word, and two thirds of what we have is uncorrected first draft. Lawrence started the manuscript in November 1920 in Sicily, to distract himself from *Aaron's Rod*, which had got stuck. He wrote very rapidly till the New Year, shortly after which he and Frieda went on their trip to Sardinia. He wrote the rest in another burst in February 1921. Part One, whose plot draws on what had happened to his boyhood friend and fellow teacher George Neville,¹ was later revised with the idea of publishing it as a novella or a serial, but this never happened, though it did appear in a collection after his death. Part Two disappeared for more than forty years, until it came up for auction, and could be re-united with Part One as a *coup* for the Cambridge Edition.² Lawrence himself had made no attempt to find out what had happened to it, though one of his letters at the time had spoken of his 'wicked joy'³ in the writing.

There was a good deal of excitement among Lawrentians when the CUP edition appeared, since the lost Part Two seemed to be 'about' Lawrence and Frieda in Germany in 1912 and on the way to Italy, after they left England together. The 'lost' manuscript seemed to offer biographers a new and vivid inside story of the months from May to September 1912; a basis for insights more detailed and illuminating than had ever been possible before. The Cambridge editor proceeded confidently to identify almost all the characters as living people 'thinly disguised', a recurrent phrase, and to document events and places. (Some years later, the Penguin edition in turn would assemble an appendix of equivalences.⁴) In volume one of the Cambridge Biography, however, John

Worthen sounded a note of caution, since *Mr Noon* is after all a fiction. Yet he draws on it frequently, as how should he not. It even seemed possible to use it as evidence, in the minutest of details – such as the question of who posted Lawrence's fateful letter to Frieda's husband dated 8th May. Seemingly trivial, the point is actually of considerable significance for the future, since that letter put an end to concealment and led gradually but surely to the divorce proceedings at which it was read out. So let us look at this as a test case of the relation of the fiction to fact, and therefore of the biographer's responsibility in using the novel as a source.

In *Mr Noon* Gilbert himself posts his letter to Everard – and the first volume of the Cambridge Biography follows suit, saying roundly that Lawrence posted the letter to Weekley. Worthen does record the fact that, enclosing such a letter in one to Frieda on 7th May, Lawrence said: 'You needn't, of course, send it. But you must say to him all I have said.' Yet he seems confident that Frieda did not 'either send it or say what Lawrence wanted'. The date on the letter read in court, for Worthen, had to mean that Lawrence both wrote and posted that letter himself the next day, the day he left for Trier. (Presumably Frieda simply destroyed the one he had sent her?) 'This', the biographer goes on, 'was the irrevocable step which Lawrence had been pressing her to take, but which she had deliberately not taken'. By insisting on being honest – which Weekley respected – he had 'managed to precipitate things', and though Frieda would later think it had been a mistake, he insisted that 'I did not do wrong in writing to Ernst', thus bringing to an end all the lies and subterfuges he so hated.⁵

When Brenda Maddox treats the matter in her biography, which is lively but often remarkably unscrupulous about evidence, she has converted Worthen's account into a crisp moral condemnation of Lawrence. To her, 'sending this let-

ter, without Frieda's consent, was selfish and destructive. It cost Frieda her children.⁶

Yet there is in fact no evidence apart from *Mr Noon* that Lawrence did post his letter to Weekley on the 8th, in the teeth of what he had written the night before. And the comically impulsive and naive Gilbert Noon cannot (as I shall argue) be so confidently identified with the real life D.H. Lawrence. It is wholly consistent with Gilbert's role as a character in a comic novel that he should both write and post a more naive letter than Lawrence's, about which the author of the fiction has some sardonic things to say, and do so without any thought of consequences, or of Johanna. But can we take comic fiction as fact? In fact, our only knowledge of the letter and its date is through newspaper reporting of the divorce proceedings. No letter now exists, no envelope, and no postmark to say where it was posted and when.⁷ Moreover if Lawrence did post it, either in Metz or Trier, without Frieda's consent, he was being remarkably hypocritical, having emphasised only the evening before that it had to be her decision. Is that likely, from what we know of him? He had insisted in Nottingham that she must tell Weekley about him, though in the end she had fudged it, frightened enough by her husband's reaction to being told about previous lovers. In Trier, two days after Lawrence had been packed off there, she agreed to telegraph a true reply to her husband's challenge about whether she was with another man, but though this was under pressure by Lawrence it was in her name and with her consent. When Weekley offered to have her back on condition she gave Lawrence up, Frieda became 'fearfully angry' because Lawrence wouldn't beg her to stay for his sake, and insisted she had to choose for herself.⁸ Again and again in all sorts of circumstances he asserted that people must take responsibility for their own lives.

So when Mark Kinkead-Weekes came to review the question for his second volume of the Cambridge Biography,

which partly overlapped with the first, he tried for a different balance. He was much more sceptical about the use of *Mr Noon* for evidence, and put in brackets any use of the fiction where there was no other evidence. He agreed that the writing of the letter amounted to an attempt to force the issue, rebelling against her family's attempt to direct his affairs no less than hers, as well as against the dishonour and deceit. But he could not conceive that Lawrence would have gone, so deviously and hypocritically, against what he had written with such passion against subterfuge and deceit the night before. With apparently as much confidence as Worthen, but in the opposite direction, Kinkead-Weekes held that Frieda did post the letter that had been sent to her – which Lawrence, writing at night for her to send the next day, may have post-dated, though that point did not come up.⁹

What trivia biographers have to settle! But a great deal may hang on such trifles, which is a reason why detailed and scholarly biographies get much closer to the truth than popular ones. If Lawrence did deceive Frieda, and engage in a manoeuvre behind her back that would fatally limit her freedom of choice, all those quarrels about 'the children' in later years would gain a new perspective, and his anger seem even less sympathetic. It might even be said that what is at stake is our whole conception of whether he was, in fact, what Weekley called him, 'ehrlich', honourable.

So when John Worthen came to the same place in his new one-volume biography (in which our tripartite friendship and collaboration is still involved) the matter had to be thrashed out again. In the meantime Kinkead-Weekes had become even more sceptical about treating *Mr Noon* as a reliable source for biographers, for reasons that will become apparent. Yet there seemed to be no other evidence either way. The discussion went round and round, as we tried to re-imagine the sequence of events: the walk in Metz on the

Tuesday, when for the first time the lovers were allowed to be alone together, but which ended so disastrously in the 'arrest' for being in a military area – and then the referral to Frieda's father, resulting in a horribly embarrassing interview. Lawrence must have returned to his hotel deeply humiliated, and furiously angry. For two hours – his letter to Frieda that night begins by telling her – he sat without moving a muscle. Then he wrote the letter to Weekley that he enclosed to Frieda, asking her either to send it, or to write herself but saying all that he had said, in order to free them both from dirt and deceit. 'Don't show this letter to either of your sisters', he ends. He clearly thinks of them as in the enemy camp. Then suddenly, by contrast, the last line of his letter to Frieda from Trier the next day jumped out at us, as it had never done before. 'I love you – and Else – I do more than thank her.' Something must have happened on the 8th that entirely changed his mind about Frieda's elder sister. The letter to Garnett from Trier the same day, also speaks of her goodness, and of his 'reverence' for her.¹⁰

Would he have 'loved' and 'reverenced' her for being a moving spirit in the scheme to pack him off to Trier? Surely not. Would he have so changed his mind because she had given him money to tide him over? *Mr Noon* suggests a gift from the older, richer sister, and if so he would have been grateful – though he might also have felt (if she still seemed an enemy) that she was buying him off. Yet his response is quite different from either of these. What could explain such a *volte face*?

How if Else had been responsible for smuggling Frieda away from the family to see him at the hotel, and later to the station to bid goodbye, as indeed happens in the novel? And what if, even more important, *she had also given them time for serious and private talk about the letter* – as she does not do in the novel since there the impulsive Gilbert had already posted it? That would be something else altogether. It

would show Else as behaving honourably towards him, independent of her family, sympathetic to the lovers, and willing to give them freedom to choose. For, given a chance, they would unquestionably have discussed the letter and what to do with it. It is not even mentioned when Lawrence writes cheerfully from Trier, which seems to confirm that they had indeed come to an agreement. If that were the case, it would no longer matter whose hand actually put it into the postbox. It was probably Frieda since she had it and he had a train to catch, but it may have been done together. There is not, and never can be, conclusive evidence. But there is an explanation that fits all the known facts better than any other. It certainly does not support any biographer (on the evidence purely of the novel) in charging Lawrence with hypocrisy or destructive selfishness. This explanation fits some details in *Mr Noon*. Yet it also shows how the fiction may falsify by both commission and omission if one tries to use it as fact. Gilbert's posting of the letter as soon as written – without telling Johanna – fits his fictive character; and the novel's omission of any discussion of it the next morning follows as of course; but both are likely to be false to fact if Lawrence and Frieda had enough time for serious talk on the Wednesday morning.

It is a tiny detail. Yet how one understands it will also affect one's view of the chain of steps by which the divorce became inevitable. Frieda had made no decision about leaving husband and children when she boarded the Ostend ferry. Her family put great pressure on her to be discreet, thinking it perfectly possible to manage extra-marital affairs without breaking up one's marriage, since her father and both her sisters had done so. But if she consented to the posting of Lawrence's letter to Weekley, it was a crucial concession to his very different point of view. The telegram from Trier, to which she clearly did consent, was a logical next step; and the turning down of Weekley's offer of separate maintenance

on condition she gave up Lawrence, a privately determining one. The decision then to abandon all 'public' pretence of being on holiday with her family, by going to live openly with Lawrence in Italy, made divorce inevitable. My biography goes on to show how her own later actions, against Lawrence's advice, were responsible for her husband's gaining judicial custody of the children even before the divorce. On the other hand, for the rest of her life with Lawrence, she had a habit of pouring out at the earliest opportunity to each new acquaintance the unhappy story of how her relationship with Lawrence had cost her her children. This is understandable and pitiable, as is the likelihood that in depths of self-pity she should have felt that her hand had been forced. (She was not a responsible and objective biographer – to put it mildly!) Yet it is no less understandable that Lawrence should react furiously to what he saw as fixing all the blame on him; and indeed 'the children' became a language for more than one kind of marital conflict which biographers must not simplify.

Of course Part Two of *Mr Noon* does draw on life and is invaluable to biographers. The vivid recall of and response to new places is one of the great strengths of the book and helps to bring biography imaginatively alive. The evocations of Metz and Bavaria and of the journey over the Alps are factually checkable in detail, both by retracing them oneself and by comparing the non-fictional essays which were written at the time or immediately afterwards. John Worthen and I found almost all the crucifixes and were able to examine the most powerful of them at remarkably close quarters. (The tortured Christ at Wieden had been temporarily removed from the chapel into the priest's house.) We clambered over Alpine slopes, imagining what the climbs, particularly the very steep one to the Sterzinger Jaufenhaus, must have been like for Frieda in a long dress and with a knapsack. We found not only the hay hut and the new chapel but also the old one, now hidden away among trees; and we realised just how

and why it was easy for Lawrence and Frieda to make the mistake which led them all the way back to Sterzing instead of onwards to Meran. The Chapel and Hayhut sketches got mislaid in 1913, but Lawrence had great powers of recall and it is not impossible, since he planned to write travel sketches for money, that he may have made and kept notes as he did later about the boat journey on Lake Chapala, though it is not at all necessary to suppose this. The narrative conceals the proportion of bus and train to shanks's pony. It probably improves on life; and at some points the vision is clearly that of 1920/21 not 1912, as we shall see. But the wonderfully vivid and evocative account of place in the novel seems generally reliable, and a joy to biographers as it is to readers of every kind.

With chronology, and therefore with some of the most enjoyable scenes however, it is a different matter. Most of the start of Part Two in Munich is invented or displaced. It was *after* Metz, Trier, and his time in the Rhineland that Lawrence came to Munich to rejoin Frieda, but spent only a night and part of the next day there. They came for one day in June to go shopping together – and Lawrence came by himself a week later for the weekend, having probably been sent off while Frieda consulted with Else about how to respond to Weekly's latest letter. He might, just conceivably, have visited Irschenhausen with Edgar (though he more probably drew on later memories of 1913 when he and Frieda occupied Edgar's new cottage); but it is most unlikely that they would have hiked to the Starnbergersee, where Else did not have a house. There is also a confusion, which revision (had there been one) would have had to clear up, between the Baroness mother of 'Louise' whom Gilbert meets in Louise's house in Bavaria, and the Baroness mother of 'Johanna' whom Gilbert meets in Alsace Lorraine. (Johanna and Louise are cousins in the novel, not sisters). The arrival in Munich of Johanna is pure invention. Only the trip to the

Kochelsee (though not from Munich) is confirmed by Frieda's memoir many years later. The account of Gilbert's stay in 'Oetsch' has more support in fact, but should also be treated with considerable caution by biographers. For, unlike in the novel, Lawrence in fact spent only four days there and saw frustratingly little of Frieda, as he complained to her. They arrived late on Friday night 4th May, but Frieda moved out of the hotel on the Saturday morning to her parents' home, to be immediately appropriated by her family and caught up in the family gathering to celebrate the fifty years of her father's army service. In the afternoon she brought her sister Else to meet Lawrence (actually of course for the first time) and probably her mother too, as in *Mr Noon*; but it was already clear that his existence was to be kept a secret from her father, while the von Richthofen women discussed what she should do. So she went back to the family home in Montigny, leaving Lawrence to wander about the town on Sunday, watching the parading of German officers and their ladies on the pavements and from his hotel window, like his counterpart in the novel. At 9.15 on the Monday morning, the day of the anniversary, he writes to tell Frieda that since she has not turned up, he is going out in spite of the rain for a long walk in the country – the one he describes in 'French Sons of Germany' – and he complains as strongly as he dares about Else's management of their affairs and how little he has seen of Frieda. This is the last day he will 'let you off'.¹¹ In the afternoon he went to the Fair we know of both from the novel and Frieda's much later memoir. There he saw her other sister Nusch for the first time, but had to remove himself quickly lest he be noticed by the Baron. But on Tuesday morning the sun came out and they went for their walk – only to suffer the 'arrest' and the humiliating interview with her father that afternoon, described in *Mr Noon* and by Frieda later, after which he returned to the hotel in fury, sat for two hours without moving, and wrote his letter to Weekley and

the one to Frieda enclosing it. He probably walked the three miles to Montigny to put the envelope through the door. The next morning he was packed off to Trier.

All this is verifiable from other sources, but *Mr Noon* does tell us an inside story as well as the outside one. We get a full sense of the boredom of hanging about by oneself in a strange town and country, with only minimal knowledge of the language; and of the hatefulness of German militarism (though this has almost certainly been heightened because of the subsequent war); and above all of Gilbert's growing resentment at being kept from Johanna and endlessly discussed above his head and behind his back – let alone being humiliated by her father. All these suggest that Lawrence may have been putting up a brave front in his letters and postcards to England.

But (and it is a big but) the novel has expanded into six days the four that Lawrence actually spent there, and the reasons are not far to seek. The sex scenes in Munich and 'Oetsch' and the sentimental ones with 'Rudolf', are not only superbly comic but structurally essential, so significantly in parallel with scenes in Part One that there must be the strongest suspicion that they are invented – much as one might wish it otherwise. We know that the episodes in Munich are pure invention, whose purpose is to establish from the very beginning the comic inflammability of Johanna, who is only there at all because she was so nearly bedded by an inscrutable oriental on the train. The coitus interruptus in the strictly 'family' hotel in 'Oetsch' – the knock at the door, the naked Johanna struggling into her underwear, the tongue-tied blocking of the proprietress at the door – these are materials of classic farce; and they invite comparison, sardonic in both directions, with the greenhouse episode in Part One and the satire on respectability, whether German or provincial English. *Mr Noon* puts the scene on Monday – the one day we know that it could not have happened, since that was

the morning that Frieda failed to turn up and Lawrence complained of having seen her so little. There *might* have been time for such an event the previous day, though since the family were well known it would have been extremely risky. But it would then seem very strange that Lawrence should have so complained on real-time Monday, if he had seen her on both Saturday and Sunday, and bedded her too, however interruptedly. It is, again, not impossible that Frieda might have slept with Von Henning on a previous visit, but when she threatened to do so while Lawrence was away in Waldbröl, his letters show he thought this simply an attempt to make him jealous and didn't take it at all seriously. And the scene with 'Rudolf' in the cathedral in *Mr Noon* is so perfectly thematic (travestying Will's spiritual 'whoosh' in *The Rainbow*), so much a part of the novel's onslaught on the sentimental and the idealistic, as to raise the very darkest suspicion as to fact. Once again there is a structural parallel, with Emmy and her sentimental swain Walter George in Part One. These scenes seem to me the reason why Lawrence had to expand his time scheme. Both the farce and the carefully structured parallels, moreover, pose the question whether in being so keen to see *Mr Noon* as 'autobiographical', we aren't looking seriously askew.

Perhaps one should stop being merely a biographer and try to be more of a critic as well? If one stopped thinking that Gilbert and Johanna 'are' Lawrence and Frieda 'thinly disguised', would one not detect and enjoy better the wicked exaggeration and caricaturing? For all the underlying seriousness of the novel's themes, both the main characters are comic figures – quarrelsome and lusty finches not love birds, since the novel is an attack on 'love' as commonly understood. Lawrence may start from memory, but the heightening of impulsiveness, naivety, sentimental idealism, and sex in the head, especially in Johanna, is a matter of richly comic art, while Gilbert's withdrawal into catatonia when he

comes under pressure produces several of the book's funniest scenes. There was far more to the real-life Edgar Jaffe than the comically fussy little professor of *Mr Noon* – but who would want the character otherwise, especially since he and his wife are part of a demonstration that intellectuals in Germany, for all their apparent sophistication, are no more truly alive, fulfilled or capable of true commitment than the intellectuals in the Midlands with whom the novel begins. Louise is a wonderfully complex character, but her combination of condescending humour and sympathy, with a clear touch of malice, and her bossy power to draw Gilbert's soul out (so reminiscent of Ottoline Morrell in life and Hermione in fiction), are very probably heightened from life and highly selective. It is difficult to imagine Lawrence dedicating *The Rainbow*, his novel of marriage, to the Louise who finds the very idea of commitment and fidelity such a music-hall joke!

Moreover it is misdirected emphasis on sources that leads to the assertion that the novel is broken-backed. While it is true that Part One draws its plot from the circumstances of George Neville, but Part Two from those of Lawrence and Frieda, I don't believe that anyone coming to the fiction quite ignorant of biography would find a mismatch. There are one or two minor physical details which revision would have sorted out, but Gilbert is essentially the same character in both Parts – full lipped (like Lawrence incidentally, not Neville), sexy, given to act on impulse with no thought of consequences, irritable, and naively idealistic, as well as comically vacuous and catatonic under attack. The paralysis in front of the School Board and in the lovers' obtuse triangle at the end of Part One, clearly anticipate the scene with the Baron and the episode with the Baroness in Part Two. The bonds between the two parts multiply: two farcical scenes of coitus interruptus; two sexy maidens whose sex is largely in the head; two absurdly romantic sentimental swains; two fathers both hypocritical and aggressive; two sets of intellec-

tuals whose apparent sophistication conceals a life lacking in vitality and real passion, and so on.

Which is not to deny, of course, that Part Two is a very different experience from Part One. But this is deeply thematic; not a change of character so much as the growth of new kinds of consciousness. It begins with a crucial change of perspective: the un-Englishing of the protagonist which had been central to *The Lost Girl* and would be no less so to the novels that would follow *Mr Noon*. Part One is parochial; but in Part Two Gilbert's world opens out in wonder, not just to the beauty and strangeness of new places and cultures, but to the realisation that values he had thought universal are not so at all, but English-provincial and relative. This is most obvious in ideas of 'love'. In English 'spooning', Lawrence ironically contrasts the sensuous 'love-making' of a 'sporty' maiden and her technically accomplished swain, with the strict limits of how far they can go without compromising respectable middle-class marriage, to which all classes in England seem to aspire. The story moves sardonically from 'Co-Operative' doorway, to disaster in the 'greenhouse', to arraignment by the School Board, to the final paralysed silence of the love- triangle, none of whom dares to admit what has happened. It is a story not only of sexual anticlimax but of bathos and arrested life at every level. In Bavaria, by contrast, Johanna is an apostle of Otto Gross-like ideas of free-love, instantaneously put into practice, bing-bang-bump; and her whole family shows a sophistication about taking lovers and mistresses which opens Gilbert's eyes wide. Yet the satire coils uneasily. For these 'liberated' German intellectuals are actually no more vitally alive or fulfilled than the Midlands pair at the beginning. The Biedermayer marriages they preserve are only another kind of bourgeois respectability. Moreover Johanna's ideas of free-love are shown up as idealistic sex-in-the-head, grossly sentimental when set against the physical passion, conflict, and commitment that

she and Gilbert gradually learn together. Part One had already shown Gilbert a glimpse of a deeper womanhood, an Aphrodite unfulfilled in Patty, whose fear of the animal and whose 'heart-failure' are both satiric and pitiful. There can only be sardonic parody of *The Rainbow* in the satire of Part One. But in Part Two Gilbert and Johanna begin to learn together, in bodily passion, the marriage of opposites that was the central concern of the great 1915 novel – and begin to show promise of becoming much more than comic, though there is comedy and bathos to the end. (Gilbert's idealistic forgiveness of Johanna's 'lapse' with Stanley is an absurd 'whoosh', and, it would seem, very different from Lawrence's feelings in real life;¹² while Johanna's cross 'I believe he was impotent' is richly ironic – what is it that she is confessing, then? – as well as bathetic. Lawrence's hatred of what is usually meant by 'love' has grown. The way forward is not lovey-dovey, but through passionate battle.

The other important factor that sets Part Two off against Part One is of course the different attitude to the 'gentle reader'. We are reminded from the beginning, as Peter Preston observes, of eighteenth century novels like Fielding's. I would make the point even stronger. Mock-heroic is endemic in a fiction which has also learned from Pope and Swift. It contains the classical eighteenth-century features of the genre. There is pervasive irony. There are learned disquisitions (on spooning); bursts of apostrophe (such as the one on Jupiter Tonans); and elevated metaphor to be punctured with comic effect. There are battles against monsters, and heroic games. Above all there is constant anticlimax, most literally in the scenes of *coitus interruptus* but also throughout the texture. The novel would have served Pope as a fine example of the Art of Sinking, into bathos. The influence of Swift is present too, in the satire on windy Aeolian idealists, who need to have their bottoms kicked to deflate them lest their trousers be puffed with wind to bursting, whooshing

point. Most of all there is the shifting relationship with the 'gentle reader', first Fielding-esque, then Swiftian. In Part One the reader is invited to join the author in amused contemplation of the absurdity of the protagonists; but in Part Two he and she are more and more implicated in the satire, and challenged, first insidiously and then openly, while the tone harshens. Some personal factors lay behind this last. While Lawrence was writing, the reviews of *The Lost Girl* arrived, and confirmed his contempt for the representatives of the great British reading public. He had firmly believed before the war that there was an audience for what he had to say, but during the war that confidence took heavy blows. The destruction of *The Rainbow* and then the inability to find a publisher in England for *Women in Love* had disastrous effects financially, but also psychologically. *The Lost Girl* had started as a deliberate attempt to write a book that the circulating libraries would accept, and *Mr Noon* began the same way. But the ineptness of the reviewers and (on the other hand) more accusations of obscenity, spurred Lawrence to aggression. So addresses to the 'gentle reader' become more and more ironic, like saying 'good doggie' when one fears a bite. The female reader is subjected to insinuations: that she expects Lawrence to show what happens in the bedroom but has a detective in readiness as soon as he opens the door; and (slyly) that she will secretly admit the importance of priapic sex, while her husband is the one with inflated trousers who wishes to deny the very existence of the body. But this also shows that the manipulation of tone towards the reader is not (once more) to be explained in merely biographical terms but is thematic, and structural. Sentimental idealism and hypocrisy must be challenged in the reader also. If new consciousness can only be won through conflict, then old ideas must be attacked and battle be joined between author and reader too. It would take an essay in itself to trace that battle in detail; but it is up to us in the end to prove

by our response that we are not as sentimental, cowardly, hypocritical, and imbecile as we have been accused of being.

Moreover Lawrence is also making fun of his own earlier self; hence the frequency of that other crucial element in mock-heroic, parody, but of himself rather than the classics. Part of the fun for those who know his work is to see how the rapt rhetoric of consciousness in *The Rainbow* is wickedly parodied in Emmy's response to spooning; though (tut tut) there must be nothing so bestial as intercourse, and certainly no loss of consciousness or self (such as the dying into new life which had been absolutely central to the 1915 novel). As we have seen, there is a parodic glance askew at its great scenes, in the cathedral, and with the horses. What we watch is *not* the Lawrence and Frieda of 1912 'thinly disguised', but those younger selves seen through the sardonic and parodic eye of the Lawrence of 1921. I might indeed have pointed out, as part of the argument against reading fiction as autobiography, how many scenes of inner experience in Beuerberg and Icking are not drawn from memory, but from memory already filtered through the poems of *Look! We Have Come Through!* In many cases, as an essay of mine shows in detail,¹³ these have been rewritten or even newly composed by the Lawrence of 1917, already a very different person because of all that had happened to him since 1912. What we then watch in Lawrence's fiction and non-fiction from 1917 to 1921, is a sea-change in many of the positions and ideas of the Lawrence of *The Rainbow*. This has already begun in *Women in Love*, especially in its late revision. There is steadily increasing resistance to talk of 'love' as the basis of relationship, and increasing emphasis on singleness of being, especially in the male. The stories of 1917-18 often assert maleness against the dominating female. An important letter of 1918¹⁴ worries lest one's wife become a substitute mother, and puts even more strongly Birkin's longing for male friendship in addition to marriage. Lawrence's whole attitude to

marriage is changing, though his commitment to it survived the strains of 1917–20, of which there were many. Expanding his Education essays in Taormina, he sees marriage as the wagon train beyond which adventurous males must ride out, riskily, to scout new territory.¹⁵ And the contrast between Alvina's relationship with Ciccio in *The Lost Girl* and those of the powerful females of *The Rainbow* marks how far we have come.

Indeed, perhaps the most striking thing a biographer can learn from *Mr Noon* is not only how much the Lawrence of 1920 can smile at his younger self, but also the extent of his rueful self-knowledge now. Several powerful moments not only have no counterpart at all in the experience of 1912, but could not possibly have had. As Gilbert looks at the soldiers and the young rider with bloody spurs, and at the mowers, his longing to be part of the world of active men, living a womanless life, is a world away from the feelings expressed in the poems of *Look!* But the ruefulness with which he then has to admit to himself that he has 'no comrade, no actual friend' and that he is in fact a loner, is a new note even beyond the education essay. The episode that Gilbert himself regards as the most perfect moment in his life is a vision of a solitary Alpine peak, in its and his 'perfected aloneness'.¹⁶ This looks back to the meditation in his father's timber-yard in Part One, when he perceived individuality, singularity, as the very centre of organic life and growth.¹⁷ And now, 'The eternal and everlasting loneliness. And the beauty of it ... The heart in its magnificent isolation, like a peak in heaven ...' We begin to see why *Mr Noon* not only is not but could not be finished and published. It would have made for difficulties with Frieda's family and others. Publishers would shy from its openness about sex; and it was most unlikely to be popular with readers who were excoriated, in its experimental form. But the main reason was the huge imaginative distance the fiction would have to travel before it could connect up with

the Lawrence and Frieda of 1921. It was taking its lovers into the marriage of opposites, ground already well trodden and left behind. In the final sermon to the reader, about fighting 'the mother of our days'¹⁸ the 1918 (and 1921) worry about over-dependence on a wife-mother is intervening just at the point when Johanna seems to be Gilbert's way into new life. So it was perhaps inevitable that – having put to good use in *Sea and Sardinia* the practice he had now had in making comic figures of himself Frieda, seen now as Queen Bee and irascible burdened worker – he should turn to take much further in *Aaron's Rod* and *Kangaroo* the debate between being married or solitary, or following some charismatic leader. In these, unlike their predecessors, the author would keep a much greater distance than before from the struggles of the protagonists, not so much Lawrence Agonistes now as Lawrence Quaestor, in novels deliberately formed as Quests, without conclusion.

The more we are tempted to look at *Mr Noon* as a backward-looking autobiographical recreation of the Lawrence and Frieda of 1912, 'thinly disguised', the more certainly we shall distort the comic experience, the experimental form, and the real significance of the forward-looking novel of 1921.

Endnotes

1. There was also, however, a real-life Gilbert Noon, whom Lawrence had known at the Pupil-Teacher Centre at Ilkeston, and who also went on to teacher training at the University and a teaching career thereafter. He was talented in music and mathematics; but the final report on him by the Professor of Education hints at doubts about his morals.
2. D.H. Lawrence, *Mr Noon*, ed. Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge, 1984). Henceforward referred to as 'Cambridge'.
3. James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson (ed.), *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence* vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1984), p. 646 (henceforward *Letters* 3).
4. D.H. Lawrence, *Mr Noon*, ed. Peter Preston (London 1996), pp. 293–7 (henceforward, 'Penguin').

5. John Worthen, D.H. Lawrence, *The Early Years 1885-1912* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 398-9 (henceforward, *E.Y.*); see also James T. Boulton (ed.), *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence* vol 1 (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 392; 401 (henceforward *Letters* 1).
6. Brenda Maddox, *The Married Man: A Life of D.H. Lawrence* (London, 1994), p. 124.
7. *Letters* 1, recognising that the evidence of date comes only from the trial report in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, boldly 'corrects' it to the 7th, but this seems high-handed.
8. *Letters* 1, p. 421.
9. Mark Kinkead-Weekes *D.H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile 1912-1922* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 10.
10. *Letters* 1, pp. 393; 394; 395.
11. *Letters* 1, pp. 390-1.
12. 'Misery' in *Look! We Have Come Through!* seems likely, along with the definite case of 'Meeting Among the Mountains', to date essentially from 1912 – unlike many of the others, written or rewritten in 1917, see note 13 below.
13. 'The Shaping of D.H. Lawrence's *Look! We Have Come Through!*' in Howard Erskine-Hill and Richard A. McCabe (ed.), *Presenting Poetry* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 214-234.
14. To Katherine Mansfield, *Letters* 2, pp. 301-2.
15. 'Education of the People' in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*, ed. Michael Herbert (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 165-6.
16. Cambridge and Penguin pp. 266-7; see previously Cambridge and Penguin p. 264.
17. Cambridge and Penguin pp. 34-5.
18. Cambridge and Penguin p. 290.

Helen Corke's *Neutral Ground* and D.H. Lawrence's *The Trespasser*: the fascination of the Siegmund story

Jonathan Long

Ellis, roused sufficiently to desire that Derrick Hamilton should be convinced of error, gave him her record of the five days spent with Angus Rane in the Island. And Derrick, gazing, fascinated, into the other man's soul, followed Domine throughout his measure of passionate experience - and beyond, the one day's journey to death.¹

Whilst much has been written about Lawrence's use of real events for *The Trespasser*² there is little commentary on Helen Corke's *Neutral Ground* which, although reflecting the earlier part of her life as well, covers the same tragic events of August 1909 in some detail.

Lawrence and Helen Corke came to write their books from very different beginnings. According to Jessie Chambers (who is wrong about the *date* of composition):

Almost immediately on returning to Croydon he wrote, apparently very much disturbed, saying that he found that he had to write the story of Siegmund ... It was in front of him and he had got to do it. He begged me to go to Croydon and make the acquaintance of 'Helen'.

His second novel, *The Trespasser*, was written in feverish haste between the Whitsuntide and Midsummer of 1910. Lawrence implored me not to attempt to hold him. He told me most impressively of the Shirt of Nessus. Something of that kind, he said, something fatal, perhaps, might happen if I insisted on holding him: 'For this I need Helen, but I must *always* return