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SONS AND LOVERS: NOVEL OR AUTOBIOGRAPHY?

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Most readers of *Sons and Lovers* know that the events in the novel are drawn largely from Lawrence's own life. More than that, it appears to be an account of the development of his consciousness and emotional being, powerfully influenced by the conflicted relationship of his parents, his own early passionate attachment to his mother, and the difficulties he experienced in relationships with other women. For this reason it seems to have a significance beyond its own pages: as some kind of key to the author's psyche. Furthermore, Lawrence's fictional account was fiercely contested by one of the most important people in his early life, his first girlfriend Jessie Chambers on whom the character of Miriam was based. As readers we may feel torn between reading the novel as a self-sufficient work of fiction and making judgements about Lawrence's understanding of his own experience.

In my book *Sons and Lovers: A Biography of the Novel* I drew on biographical and surviving draft material to portray the novel as a life-event, which shaped and was shaped by Lawrence's experiences during its composition, as well as the past experiences that supply the plot material.[1] In this essay I argue that this approach helps to resolve the fiction/autobiography dilemma. Self-evidently the novel is not straightforwardly an autobiography – it departs from biographical fact in a number of obvious ways (Paul has only one sister, he doesn't attend university or become a teacher, and so on), but neither is it an autonomous work of fiction. What we read in *Sons and Lovers* is not a finished, more or less true or false version of Lawrence's life, but an ongoing and provisional dialogic process.

In March 1912 Jessie read the third draft of the novel, which was the first complete draft. Though she was delighted with Lawrence's evocation of working-class family life, she was appalled and deeply

hurt by his treatment of the central conflict in the novel – Paul's bond with his mother and its effect on his relationship with Miriam.

The previous October Lawrence had sent her the second draft, which had come to an impasse. She had responded by advising him to keep closer to the real events of his life. For this advice she had two motives. The first was that she believed that the real events had in them "the stuff of a magnificent story".[2] In this respect she was undoubtedly right, and Lawrence's readers owe her an enormous debt for directing him on this path. Her other motive was more problematic:

> My deeper thought was that in the doing of it Lawrence might free himself from his strange obsession with his mother. I thought he might be able to work out the theme in the realm of spiritual reality, where alone it could be worked out, and so resolve the conflict in himself.[3]

This was the aim in which she believed Lawrence failed:

> I began to perceive that I had set Lawrence a task far beyond his strength. In my confidence I had not doubted that he would work out the problem with integrity. But he burked the real issue. It was his old inability to face his problem squarely. His mother had to be supreme, and for the sake of that supremacy every disloyalty was permissible.[4]

For Jessie *Sons and Lovers* was a "betrayal" of the spiritual bond which she believed they had, despite the failure of their sexual relationship two years earlier. She was not a naïve or unsophisticated reader. She knew the difference between fiction and autobiography, and she believed, as many readers have done since, that *Sons and Lovers* was an artistic failure to the degree that Lawrence falsified his emotional history.

As it happens the version of *Sons and Lovers* that Jessie read was not the published text. She read a draft that he showed her in Spring

1912, and he subsequently wrote a completely new version. However, the justice or otherwise of Jessie's critique as it applies to the final text of *Sons and Lovers* is not my main concern. What I want to discuss, while focussing on this particular novel, is a more general question about autobiographical fiction, and the criteria by which we judge it. Modern critics are divided about Jessie's critique, but a significant number are sympathetic. One of the best recent writers on the subject, Michael Bell, writes that Jessie's "objections with respect to the treatment of Miriam were not just to personal 'betrayal', which would indeed be irrelevant artistically, but to Lawrence's artistic betrayal of himself. The problems are not just between the book and the life; they are actually in the book".[5] The significant phrase here is "which would indeed be irrelevant artistically". The implication is that an author *might* commit such a betrayal as Jessie accuses Lawrence of, and still write an artistically successful book. There is lurking behind this phrase a formalist anxiety about judging works of art by extraneous criteria, which can be traced back at least as far as Sir Philip Sidney's 'Defence of Poesie' (1595). Sidney asserts that in contrast to history which is "captived to the truth of a foolish world", poetry "nothing affirmeth and therefore never lieth".[6] Some such principle is of course necessary for art to exist as a separate category at all. My argument is confined to the particular problems that arise in consideration of autobiographical fiction – which is, of course, in itself an oxymoronic phrase.

My worries about the separation of "personal" and "artistic" betrayal derive partly from a passage in John Worthen's outstanding biography of Lawrence's early years:

> For the first time, Lawrence is making Miriam a deeply disturbed and frustrated character ... The analysis shows precisely what Frieda remembered Lawrence trying to do in Villa [where he wrote the final draft]: "understand his relationship with Jessie and why he did not want to marry Jessie": "I had to listen to him by the hour as he tried to understand her and their relationship". His

> continued thinking about the real person helped create this desperately yet helplessly egotistical fictional character, whose frustrated anger and contempt are all she has left after Paul abandons her. The analysis shows Lawrence now developing a character according to his own fictional logic – not according to the patterns of real life. He was creating a pattern of manipulative and frustrated desire: and he was concluding that what Miriam wanted was possession and power, to make up for her deep unhappiness. It was part of Lawrence's new emotional range as a writer that he could create such a character; and a sign of his ruthlessness that he should do so upon the basis of his feelings about Jessie Chambers.[7]

One might debate this interpretation of Miriam's character: it is based on the account of her feelings when Paul ends their relationship after persuading her to sleep with him. A character's feelings at such a moment are an unreliable basis for the kind of moral judgement made here. However, what concerns me is less the justice of the analysis than the idea that Lawrence succeeds in understanding his relationship with Jessie by developing a character "according to his own fictional logic" rather than "the patterns of real life". Note that Worthen is careful not to allege that *Jessie* wanted "possession and power", but the creation of a disturbed, egotistical and manipulative character "upon the basis of" his feelings about her enables Lawrence to understand her.

Literature is of course awash with characters that are unflattering portraits of real-life individuals. Just within Lawrence's *oeuvre* there are Hermione Roddice in *Women in Love,* based on Lady Ottoline Morrell, Jimmy in 'Jimmy and the Desperate Woman', based on John Middleton Murry, Owen in *The Plumed Serpent,* based on Witter Bynner, and the Melvilles in 'Things', based on Earl and Achsah Brewster. In all of these cases Lawrence could be said to be sacrificing the feelings of the person concerned for his art. In all of these cases, too, it would be correct to say that the justice of the portrayal has no bearing on the quality of the novel or story in

question. But that is because in none of these cases is Lawrence trying to understand the real people and his relationship with them. Their role is more akin to that of an artist's model. It is the doubleness of response that *Sons and Lovers* seems to demand of its readers – as both an autonomous work of art and an important biographical document – that is problematic.

Another factor that causes problems about the relationship of autobiography and fiction is the narrative style of the novel. It is quite common for readers to find Paul's character unattractive, or at least to feel ambivalent about him, yet to feel that the narrator sides with him and that they are intended to sympathise with him. This is largely because Lawrence makes extensive use of free indirect discourse, in which the narrator conveys the thoughts and feelings of a character, but without explicitly stating that this is so. He uses this technique in respect of a number of characters in *Sons and Lovers* but overwhelmingly so in the case of Paul. This results in a blurring of the boundary between narrator and character. Consider for example this episode in which Miriam has been watching Paul mending a puncture on his bike:

> He straightened himself. His back was towards her. She put her two hands on his sides, and ran them quickly down.
>
> "You are so *fine*!" she said.
>
> He laughed, hating her voice, but his blood roused to a wave of flame by her hands. She did not seem to realise *him* in all this. He might have been an object. She never realised the male he was. (*SL* 227)

In the final paragraph the first two sentences are explicitly Paul's point of view. But the last two sentences are ambiguous. They might be free indirect discourse, continuing Paul's point of view, or they might be direct commentary from the narrator. Grammatically the two are indistinguishable. I suggest that most readers are inclined at this moment to sympathise with Miriam, who is displaying a natural

physical affection for Paul, yet feel invited to sympathise with Paul's reaction, and his projection of his discomfort on to her.[8]

It is difficult at such moments not to feel that Lawrence is, as he wrote in his essay 'Morality and the Novel', "put[ting] his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection": behaviour by a novelist which was, for Lawrence, "immorality" (*STH* 172), and that the reason is that at such moments he is justifying his own behaviour to Jessie. My approach to this problem about the relation between autobiography and fiction is to look at the book as itself a life-event, which was influenced not only by Lawrence's past experience; Jessie's reading of the novel, and his response to her reading, shapes it as much as his memories of the past. There are even several passages that were written by her because she disagreed with Lawrence's account, and which he incorporated with little alteration. When he was writing the final draft he was living with Frieda Weekley and, although there is little textual evidence of her contribution, she was also closely involved with the writing. *Sons and Lovers* is, of course, a work of art and also a work of profound autobiographical importance. But it is not an autonomous whole which has ideally cut itself free from its autobiographical origins, but itself a life-event, which is both biographically and artistically enmeshed in its material.

Lawrence first mentions 'Paul Morel', as he originally called the novel. in October 1910. In a letter to his publisher, he says it is about one-eighth written, is "plotted out very interestingly" and describes it as "not a florid prose poem, or a decorated idyll running to seed in realism: but a restrained, somewhat impersonal novel" (*1L* 184). This draft has not survived, so we don't know to what extent it matched this description, but it is notable that he describes it in aesthetic terms, and in doing so he is speaking to negative judgements of his first two novels by members of the literary establishment, especially his first mentor Ford Madox Hueffer. The word "impersonal" in particular appeals to a literary climate in which impersonality, as practised above all by Gustave Flaubert, was a dominant criterion. This was a climate which Lawrence felt to be hostile to his own

literary temperament. So far as we can judge from this letter, Lawrence's primary motive was to write a novel which would be acceptable to the literary establishment.

Although none of the draft survives, there is a chapter plan. This is clearly written for Lawrence's own use and is highly allusive and difficult to decipher. The main plot lines concern a violent relationship between a father and his elder son, followed by the deaths of both, and the relationships of a younger son with two girls. Twice he starts to write "Jessie" but replaces it with the name "Flossie". What is most striking about this plan is that there is no mention whatever of a mother-son relationship. A reader of *Sons and Lovers* will recognise the first episode – "he pushes her out of the house before the birth of their son" (*PM* 163), which occurs in the first chapter of the novel – but the mother is never explicitly mentioned. The name that occurs most often is "Miss Wright", and the plan concludes with the death of this character, who does not feature at all in the final version of *Sons and Lovers.*

Since this is a plan that Lawrence wrote for himself it may be that the mother-son theme was so prominent in his mind that he didn't need to mention it. Nevertheless it is clear that, while he is making use of material from his life, the autobiographical motive is not dominant – in this respect it resembles his first novel, *The White Peacock,* more than *Sons and Lovers.*

After writing that letter in October 1910 Lawrence did no more work on this draft. The reason for this is almost certainly his mother's diagnosis of cancer, the rapid deterioration of her health and her death in December. In February of the following year he began 'Paul Morel' again. His mother's death profoundly affected his attitude to his subject matter. Now the relationship of mother and son was very prominent and, in contrast to the distanced aesthetic description that he gave of the first version, now he describes it twice in letters as a "terrible" and "great" novel (*1L* 237, 238). However, Lawrence still exercises much greater freedom with regard to the autobiographical material than in the final text. The most startling difference is that the father kills one of his sons in a drunken rage and subsequently dies

himself. It is possible that this same plot material underlies the references to the deaths of father and son in the plan of the first version. This has nothing to do with Lawrence's immediate family but is drawn from an incident in the life of his father's brother. The relationship between Paul and his mother is sentimentalised and there is no suggestion, as there certainly is in the final text, that his emotional development is damaged by it. Whereas in the final version Miriam lives, as Jessie did, on a small farm with her family, and is of the same social class as Paul, in this version he places her in a middle-class family in town.

Lawrence's approach to writing this second draft was probably influenced by an important change in his personal circumstances. He had ended his relationship with Jessie Chambers in the summer of 1910, and in December of that year, while waiting for his mother to die, he impulsively proposed to his old college friend, Louie Burrows. He was hoping for a more uncomplicated relationship with Louie who, he said, "will never plunge her hands through my blood and feel for my soul, and make me set my teeth and shiver and fight away", as he thought Jessie did (*1L* 191).

But engagement to Louie brought other problems. They were both working as teachers, he in London and she in Leicestershire, so their relationship was conducted mainly by letters. In those days if a female teacher married she had to give up her job, and Lawrence's salary wasn't enough to marry on. Unlike Jessie, who had reluctantly agreed to sleep with Lawrence with painful consequences, Louie firmly resisted sex before marriage. So Lawrence had to increase his earnings and the most obvious way was to write a saleable novel. This was possibly a reason for his including the melodramatic story of the father killing his son. He was also under pressure from his publisher, to whom he was contracted to write another novel. Most of Lawrence's references to this second draft are in letters to Louie. After the early enthusiastic letters in which he calls it a "great" and "terrible" novel, his mentions of it are mostly in response to her asking him how much he has written. He was writing in the evenings, after a day's teaching and correcting his pupils' work. He was

evidently exasperated by the pressure he felt Louie was putting on him to progress with the novel. At one point he burst out with, "Am I a newspaper printing machine to turn out a hundred sheets in half an hour?" (*1L* 266). He also disliked the attitude of his publisher's editor, Frederick Atkinson, whom he called "a sneering, affected little fellow" (310). He thought he had offended the publishers and confessed, "I haven't done a stroke of Paul for months – don't want to touch it. They [his publishers] are mad, and they are sneery. I don't like them" (310).

There are a number of possible reasons why Lawrence came to a standstill this second time. He seems to be saying that the main reason is his dislike of the publishers. This seems unlikely but, as we shall see, he returned to the task enthusiastically shortly afterwards when he found them much friendlier. If the plot was to take a direction at all similar to that of the final version, he was approaching the point at which Paul persuades Miriam to sleep with him and subsequently breaks with her. Since he was trying to persuade Louie to sleep with him before marriage he wouldn't have wanted to reveal this to her. The draft ends just when Paul is beginning a relationship with the character who became Clara in the final version. Clara is partly based on Alice Dax, a married woman with whom Lawrence had an affair that probably began at this time. So the autobiographical resonances of the story would have been very difficult to manage in Lawrence's personal situation at that time. However, the main reason is likely to have been why Lawrence called the novel "terrible". I assume that by this he meant painful to write. Despite the father killing his son, which had no direct autobiographical significance, there is nothing in the surviving draft that accounts for this description. He must mainly have been thinking about his mother's death, which had become the inevitable conclusion of this story.

But shortly after writing that derogatory letter about his publishers he had another meeting with them which he found much more congenial. His response to this was immediately to send the manuscript to Jessie Chambers for her opinion. Her response was perhaps the single most important event in determining the destiny

of the novel. She thought the writing was "extremely tired", lacking in spontaneity and "second hand". She found the treatment "sentimental" and "story-bookish".[9] She was surprised that the novel excluded the career and death of Lawrence's charismatic elder brother Ernest, who becomes William in the final version.

> As I read through the manuscript I had before me all the time the vivid picture of the reality. I felt again the tenseness of the conflict, and the impending spiritual clash. So in my reply I told him I was very surprised that he had kept so far from reality in his story; that I thought what had really happened was much more poignant and interesting than the situations he had invented. In particular I was surprised that he had omitted the story of Ernest, which seemed to me vital enough to be worth telling as it actually happened, Finally I suggested that he should write the whole story again, and keep it true to life.[10]

As we have seen, one of her reasons for giving this advice was the hope that "Lawrence might free himself from his strange obsession with his mother". It is with Jessie's intervention that the autobiographical character of the novel takes a decisive turn. Her testimony is not entirely reliable: she wrote her memoir twenty years after the events and mis-remembered some details of the novel; moreover, she may have been predisposed to a harsh judgement of the second draft because it had been written while he was engaged to Louie and had very little contact with herself. But in broad outline there is no reason to doubt her account. This is the moment when the novel begins to take its final form: Lawrence re-wrote the first three chapters and the beginning of the fourth within the next two or three weeks. It is also the moment at which writing and life become entwined: *Sons and Lovers* is no longer straightforwardly a re-casting of biographical events into fictional form, but also a response to immediate events, to which its own composition was central. For the next year, two of the novel's three most important readers will be Jessie and Frieda; their responses, and the revisions that they

prompted, have as much to do with current events as with the past. (The third reader was Edward Garnett, whose excisions determined the form in which the novel would be published from 1913 till 1992.)

In response to Jessie's advice Lawrence asked her to write what she could remember of their early days. Jessie responded enthusiastically to this request. How much she wrote, and what exactly, we cannot know because her writing has not survived. However, from other evidence we can confidently identify one episode that originates with her: the outings to the Hemlock Stone and Wingfield Manor in Chapter 7, and in particular one of the most poignant episodes in the novel, when Miriam comes upon Paul in the road, struggling to mend a broken umbrella:

> He remained concentrated in the middle of the road. Beyond, one rift of rich gold in that colourless grey evening seemed to make him stand out in dark relief. She saw him slender and firm, as if the setting sun had given him to her. A deep pain took hold of her, and she knew she must love him. And she had discovered him, discovered in him a rare potentiality, discovered his loneliness. Quivering as at some 'Annunciation', she went slowly forward.
>
> At last he looked up.
>
> "Why," he exclaimed gratefully, "have you waited for me!"
>
> She saw a deep shadow in his eyes.
>
> "What is it?" she asked.
>
> "The spring broken here."
>
> And he showed her where his umbrella was injured. Instantly, with some shame, she knew that he had not done the damage himself, but that Geoffrey [her brother] was responsible.
>
> "It's only an old umbrella, isn't it?" she asked.
>
> She wondered why he, who did not usually trouble over trifles, made such a mountain of this molehill.
>
> "But it was William's—an' my mother can't help but know," he said quietly, still patiently working at the umbrella. The words went through Miriam like a blade. This then was the confirmation

> of her vision of him! She looked at him. But there was about him a certain reserve, and she dared not comfort him, not even to speak softly to him. (*SL* 201–2)

Miriam's "vision" is of the depth of Paul's attachment to his mother. This episode is absent from the earlier version, and later Jessie referred to "my writing" about it (*PM* 244). It is an episode whose importance derives from its significance for Miriam. If Lawrence hadn't forgotten it completely, he didn't think it important enough to include in the earlier draft. It is impossible to tell how closely Jessie's original writing resembled this, but Lawrence has invited Jessie into the novel, asked for her version of an incident and based his narrative on her perspective. Moreover, this is not the end of her contribution. The final text is not what Lawrence wrote as an immediate response to Jessie's version. When she read his version in the third draft, written in the spring of 1912, she wrote, "The revelation over the broken umbrella was a spiritual awakening <I> [Miriam] had a glimpse of the inner Paul, and it set her wondering and eternally seeking" (*PM* 243). (Jessie deletes "I" and replaces it with "Miriam".) Lawrence subsequently rewrote the episode, introducing these sentences: "And she had discovered him, discovered in him a rare potentiality, discovered his loneliness. Quivering as at some 'Annunciation', she went slowly forward.". Compared to his first version, these sentences intensify Miriam's response, drawing on Jessie's perspective to do so. We see that the final text of the novel was produced through a process of dialogue.

This episode is one of the most sensitive pieces of writing in the novel. Another, also deriving from Jessie's recollection of their outings, is when Paul and Miriam climb the ruined tower of Wingfield Manor:

> They continued to mount the winding stair-case. A high wind blowing through the loopholes went rushing up the shaft and filled the girl's skirts like a balloon, so that she was ashamed, until he took the hem of her dress, and held it down for her. He did it

> perfectly simply, as he would have picked up her glove. She remembered this always. (*SL* 205)

Again, this is not exactly what Lawrence originally wrote. His first version did not contain the sentence, "He did it perfectly simply, as he would have picked up her glove". What he wrote was, "Paul laid hold of the hem of her dress, and held it down for her, chatting naturally all the time" (*PM* 238). Jessie objected to the last phrase: "There was no need to chat. It was an act of the purest intimacy. Do not degrade it" (298). A later reader might struggle to understand why Jessie thought the reference to chatting degraded the action. But this touches on a point of extreme sensitivity and importance for Jessie. In her recollection their earlier years together were untroubled by the slightest self-consciousness about sex. To her, the reference to chatting, to "cover" Paul's action in holding down her dress, introduces an element of self-consciousness. Lawrence's revision indicates another intervention by Jessie in the production of the final text.

I have been trying to show that the relationship of *Sons and Lovers* to Lawrence's life is neither straightforward autobiography nor the transformation of a biographical past into an autonomous fiction. It is rather an ongoing dialogic process, an interaction in which the novel itself is a part of the lived experience on which it is based and in which other voices than Lawrence's own can be heard. Its final draft was written after the most decisive event in Lawrence's adult life, his meeting with Frieda Weekley. Frieda was his constant companion for most of the time that he was working on it. And though Frieda was as different from Jessie as possible, she had as much reason as Jessie for wanting him to "free himself from his strange obsession with his mother". During this period she wrote to his mentor Edward Garnett: "I think L. quite missed the point in 'Paul Morel'. He really loved his mother more than any body [sic], even with his other women, real love, sort of Oedipus" (*1L* 449). Frieda had only a sketchy knowledge of Freudian theory, but it was more than Lawrence had, and may have helped him to see his theme as

more than merely personal, so that he was able to write when he had finished the final version, "It's the tragedy of thousands of young men in England" (*1L* 477). Frieda's comment refers to the third draft, the one that Jessie read. If this draft really 'missed the point' about Paul loving his mother, it must have been very different from the final draft, on which Frieda was the main influence, and in which that point is unmistakable. Lawrence and Frieda's early months together were far from harmonious, and one cause of friction was precisely his obsession with his mother. At the time of her death he wrote a poem, 'My Love, My Mother' (later published as 'The Virgin Mother'), which included this stanza:

> My little love, my dearest
> Twice you have borne me,
> Once from the womb, sweet mother.
> Once from myself to be
> Free of the hearts of people
> Of each heart's home-life free. (*3Poems 1488*)

Frieda wrote on the manuscript,

> Yes, worse luck—what a poem to write! yes, you are free, poor devil, from the heart's homelife free … I have tried I have fought, I have nearly killed myself in the battle to get you into connection with myself and other people, sadly I proved to myself that I can love, but never you.[11]

Frieda wrote about the final version of *Sons and Lovers*, "I wrote little female bits and lived it over in my own heart" (*1L* 479). It's impossible to identify any of Frieda's writing in the novel, but there is one point at which we can hear her voice. The following year Lawrence wrote a story, 'New Eve and Old Adam', which is clearly inspired by his relationship with Frieda. In this story the heroine says to her husband that "he could not come out of himself, that he was no good to her, because he could not get outside himself" (*LAH* 179).

The character of Clara in *Sons and Lovers* was conceived before Lawrence met Frieda, and partly based on his earlier married lover Alice Dax, but he rewrote most of the chapters in which she figures while he was with Frieda. Clara tells Paul, "You can't come out of yourself" (*SL* 407). This is unlikely to be the only occasion on which the life Lawrence was living with Frieda in late 1912 impinged directly on a novel that is ostensibly about his younger self.

Frieda almost certainly influenced the novel at least as much as Jessie, and the final draft is infused with their conflict, not only about his feelings for his mother, but her own mourning for the loss of her children, imposed by her vindictive husband – mourning to which Lawrence was antagonistic, as his understanding of the damage done to him by his mother's influence grew. But since the textual evidence for this is so slight, I'm going to conclude by returning to Lawrence's dialogue with Jessie, and the most notable mark that she made on the novel.

Their friendship had begun when Lawrence first began visiting the farm in 1901, when he was fifteen and she fourteen. For the next five years, at least in Jessie's recollection, they enjoyed a harmonious relationship based on a love of nature, of reading, and shared spiritual values. During this period it was in no sense, at least overtly, a sexual relationship. Five years later, on Easter Monday 1906, Jessie was devastated when Lawrence told her his mother and sister had advised him that now they were twenty and nineteen they "either ought to be engaged or else not go about together". He said, "'I've looked into my heart and I cannot find that I love you as a husband should love his wife'". Jessie's immediate response was that his mother said this because she didn't like her. She had not, she said, thought about love in that sense, but she "saw the golden apple of life that had been lying at my finger tips recede irretrievably".[12] Despite her saying that they should stop seeing one another, Lawrence insisted that they should go on meeting to talk about reading and writing. Outwardly, Jessie writes, things went on as before but "inwardly everything was changed. We had become self-conscious and aware of a barrier" and Lawrence "developed a highly critical tone".[13] One of her complaints

about *Sons and Lovers* was that Lawrence's narrative didn't acknowledge the significance of this change and pre-dated the tension and self-consciousness. This is why she objected to "chatting naturally all the time" in his account of Paul holding down Miriam's dress – an incident that had occurred in the earlier period.

I have quoted from Jessie's account of this incident in her memoir, written in the 1930s, after Lawrence's death. But she had written at least two earlier accounts, much nearer the time. In 1911, during their semi-estrangement after he had broken with her following their unhappy attempt at a sexual relationship, she sent him a short story based on this incident, not knowing that he was writing an autobiographical novel. According to her he replied, "They tore me from you, the love of my life … It was the slaughter of the foetus in the womb" (*1L* 268). Assuming that Jessie's recollection is correct his is a remarkable outburst, given that Lawrence was engaged to another woman at the time.

What is even more remarkable is that the second version of *Sons and Lovers*, which he was working on at exactly this time, narrates this episode but doesn't mention this pressure to get engaged or stop seeing Jessie. As John Worthen remarks in his note on 'Use of Sources' in *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years*, in the 1930s Jessie was reconstructing letters that she had destroyed twenty years earlier. And these "texts" should be considered "a rough paraphrase".[14] Worthen has also privately suggested to me that Jessie's dating of the letter can't be relied on. Taking this into account, however, it seems evident that Lawrence concurred with Jessie in a version of the Easter Monday meeting that he didn't initially use in the novel. He narrates this episode without any mention of Paul being under pressure from his family. The same is probably true of the third version, the one that Jessie read in the spring of 1912. Although none of the writing Jessie did in response to Lawrence's original request has survived, we do have three episodes written by her at this later date. Lawrence incorporated all three of them into the novel, with comparatively little emendation.

The most important of these episodes is her response to Lawrence's account of the Easter Monday meeting. Jessie wrote that the pages in which he narrates this episode "really do Paul an injustice. The brutality was not true for that period. If it had been so, subsequent events must have been different. These pages merely suggest something nearer to the actual spirit of the time" (*PM* 261). To understand what she meant by "brutality" we can look at the dialogue in *Sons and Lovers*, where Paul is leading up to the assertion that they should "break off". He says to Miriam, "'Can you never like things without clutching them as if you wanted to pull the heart out of them?'", "'You wheedle the soul out of things'", and "'You don't want to love—your eternal and abnormal craving is to be loved'" (*SL* 257–8). In this episode, as in the second draft, Paul does *not* say that he is acting under pressure from his family. The third draft, the one Jessie considered brutal, hasn't survived, but my guess is that it was very similar to this.

However, Lawrence does incorporate Jessie's perspective in startling fashion. Paul returns a week later and is much gentler with Miriam. This episode is closely based, often word for word, on Jessie's text. The following dialogue, in particular, is lifted almost without alteration:

> "Do you think—if I didn't come up so much—you might get to like somebody else—another man—?"
>
> So this was what he was still harping on.
>
> "But I don't know any other men—why do you ask?" she replied, in a low tone that should have been a reproach on him.
>
> "Why," he blurted, "because they say I've no right to come up like this—without we mean to marry—"
>
> …
>
> "Who says?" she asked…
>
> "Mother—and the others. They say, at this rate, everybody will consider me engaged, and I ought to consider myself so, because it's not fair to you.—And I've tried to find out—and I

> don't think I love you as a man ought to love his wife.—What do *you* think about it?" (*SL* 264)

There is no reason to believe that, in reality, Lawrence made two visits corresponding to these episodes. The autobiographical context is much closer – Jessie's response to the previous draft. He responds to their dispute about the incident by including both versions – the second one largely in Jessie's own words. Artistically this is much to the novel's advantage. Paul's spiteful words to Miriam in his original version are a powerful expression of his anguish about his feelings for her; his return a week later in a more generous mood is both natural and prepares for the continuation of their relationship. As Russell McDonald has written, Lawrence allowed Jessie's contributions to "stand in unresolved dialogue with his own".[15]

Sons and Lovers was written over a period of two and a half years, in four drafts. As he rewrote it he was not merely improving his expression. The material of the novel, and his relationship to the material, changed dramatically. His revisions were responses to events in his life that were happening as he was writing, and other people, most notably Jessie and Frieda, contributed to it. Their responses to the novel were important events in their relationship with Lawrence, so that the novel itself is a hidden part of the biographical context. Lawrence went on changing his mind about key incidents, even the feelings of the autobiographical hero, right up to the end, even when he was correcting the proofs. If he hadn't published it when he did he would probably have gone on revising it.

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1 Neil Roberts, *Sons and Lovers: A Biography of the Novel* (Clemson, SC: Clemson UP, 2016).

2 Jessie Chambers (E.T.), *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), 192.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 201.

[5] Michael Bell, '"A Restrained, *Somewhat* Impersonal Novel"', in *D. H. Lawrence's* Sons and Lovers: *A Casebook*, eds John Worthen and Andrew Harrison (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 37.

[6] Sir Philip Sidney, 'A Defence of Poesie', <http://socrates.acadiau.ca/courses/engl/rcunningham/2273/Defence_of_Poesie.pdf>.

[7] John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years 1885–1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 449.

[8] For an extensive account of free indirect discourse in *Sons and Lovers* see Violeta Sotirova, *D. H. Lawrence and Narrative Viewpoint* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 1911).

[9] Chambers, *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record*, 190–1.

[10] Ibid., 192.

[11] Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years*, 411–12. (This draft is slightly different from the published text.)

[12] Chambers, *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record*, 66–7.

[13] Ibid., 125.

[14] Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years*, 507–8.

[15] Russell McDonald, 'Revision and Competing Voices in D. H. Lawrence's Collaborations with Women', *Textual Cultures* 4.1 (2009), 1–25, 1.