

D. H. LAWRENCE

Sons and Lovers

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Chapter 1

Genesis

Sons and Lovers, published in 1913, was Lawrence's third novel. Although he and his publishers were disappointed with its sales, it confirmed his growing reputation, and by the time of his death in 1930 it had been reprinted both in England and in the United States, and was the most popular of his works; indeed reviewers of his later novels fell into the habit of deploring that they were not like *Sons and Lovers*. It is now one of the most widely read of all English novels. It is usually the first book by Lawrence that anyone reads; often the only one; and is usually remembered with pleasure.

His first novel, *The White Peacock*, published in 1911, but started as early as Spring 1906 and redrafted several times in the interval, has important affinities with *Sons and Lovers*. It is set in the same region, the Nottinghamshire–Derbyshire borderland of Lawrence's childhood ('the country of my heart' he called it in later life), though the emphasis is on the natural beauty of the country rather than the man-made landscape of the coal-mining areas. It deals with a group of young people, very like Lawrence's youthful circle, about to leave home and enter life, and looking for a mate. It is tragic in that it suggests that their effort is thwarted and their life-endavour will go to waste. They are blocked by things in their own nature which they do not control or even understand: in particular the sexual impulse fails or is misdirected. The men seem baffled; the women are powerful or dangerous. The reader who already knows *Sons and Lovers* identifies another Lawrence-figure, an analogue of Paul Morel, in the narrator Cyril Beardsall, who has Lawrence's mother's family name; one is not surprised to learn that Cyril's father is a drunken failure who left the family to be brought up by the mother. This diminished father-figure appears only briefly

and is quickly killed off. Cyril is emotionally involved with, but unable to love effectively, a girl called Emily who lives on a farm; and we recognise the prototype of Miriam in the later novel, also based on Lawrence's boyhood friend and first love Jessie Chambers. Her brother George is admired, indeed loved, by Cyril; and his story is one of the leading threads of the plot: it is as if Miriam's brother Edgar (based on Jessie's brother Alan) has his imagined potential fictionally realised in this earlier treatment of the family – except that George too is tragically frustrated in his love for one woman and his marriage to another. An idealising glamour is cast over the whole novel, and one effect of this is to lift everything in the social scale, or at any rate to soften class characteristics. It is not possible to disguise the fact that George's family are small farmers, but Cyril's are positively genteel. Minor characters are allowed to speak broad dialect; it is as if the reader is taking a tourist's interest in local colour. The main characters speak literary English.

There still hung over Lawrence the anxiety he had expressed to Jessie Chambers in their discussions of his writing: '... what will the others say? That I'm a fool. A collier's son a poet!' (ET 57). He could not at first trust an overwhelmingly middle-class contemporary readership to be uncondescendingly interested in the lives of people from another class; so we seem to be among E. M. Forster's people rather than Lawrence's. And yet his mother and the Chambers family were great readers: Jessie gives us a glimpse of her father reading aloud to her mother the newspaper serialisation of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, with the hearer painfully involved, and shocked by the boldness of the author. In the event, a few perceptive contemporary readers of *The White Peacock* saw through the veil; for them it was an attraction that the modern novel, with Lawrence as with H. G. Wells, seemed at last to be widening its view of society; there were reviewers and journalists who were waiting for something they could hail as a 'working-class novel'.

Some of them were friends and colleagues of Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford Madox Ford), the brilliant editor for a

crucial couple of years of the *English Review*, where Lawrence's poems and stories were first published. Hueffer himself read much of Lawrence's early writing in manuscript, and was conscious of helping a new kind of writer with his advice as well as his patronage. He and his companion Violet Hunt were looking for accounts of 'how the other half lived' as Hueffer put it. For all that, Lawrence's self-protective instinct was not misplaced. There was an element of condescension even in Hueffer and Hunt, based on the inevitable class-conditioning shown by the unsigned review of *Sons and Lovers* in the *Standard* of 30 May 1913, which noted 'such terms as "protoplasm", "despicable", and "the human form" in the conversation of those who had not the habit of their use. Simple people have complex emotions often enough, but they are plain spoken or they take to silence.'

Among the early works which Hueffer read, the most notable was the first version of the story 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', published in somewhat revised form in the *Review* in June 1911. Here readers found the first treatment of a situation which recurs several times in *Sons and Lovers*, as it does in the play *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*, written in 1910, but not published until 1914, after *Sons and Lovers*. In the story as in the play, a miner's wife, with small children, waits in her kitchen with the evening meal ready. It is noticeable that she is not contentedly a member of the mining community; she corrects her son's dialect speech and in general seems too refined for the setting. As the time passes and her husband does not return at the end of the day-shift, she wonders if he has stopped off at the pub, in which case he will return drunk to a spoilt meal and there will be a sordid quarrel. Or has something worse happened – an accident at the pit? That is obviously tragic, and the reader from another class might, from a distance, sympathise; but in the first case, would 'refined' readers find an equivalent interest and sympathy? The final version of the story, published in 1914 in the collection *The Prussian Officer*, was the result of further and drastic revision after Lawrence had written and published *Sons and Lovers*. In its reassessment of the meaning of the bitter struggle

between man and wife, it became one of his own indirect comments on the same struggle in the novel. But that had made him not just the recorder of a particular region of provincial English working-class life, but, as later readers began to perceive, the painfully involved author of a major classic of world literature, a landmark in a territory where other landmarks are Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Ibsen's *Ghosts* and, by way of commentary, certain works of Freud. For that reason we now tend to take the regional setting and the social realism as mere background, but they have importance, providing a particular and real setting which is also a social-moral world.

One glimpses this in another early story written in 1911, and first called 'Two Marriages'; it too was collected in *The Prussian Officer*, also much revised, as 'Daughters of the Vicar'. In the crucial episode, Miss Louisa, who might well be taken as representative by a female middle-class readership, finds herself facing a daily reality of the miner's family life: the young collier back from the pit in his alienating mask of coal-dust and sweat finds that his mother, on whom he is dependent for this service and much more, is ill and cannot wash his back. So Louisa, wanting to help, finds herself doing this task, which might be expected to revolt a fastidious young lady. But as she removes the veil of dirt she comes to the reality of another human being, wonders at it, and in due course unhesitatingly recognises her mate across the barrier of class (well represented by her parents' shock and resistance).

Another preoccupation in the early fiction, and another link with *Sons and Lovers*, is found in the early short story, published since Lawrence's death, 'A Modern Lover'. The surviving manuscript was written in January 1910. Readers of yet another short story 'The Shades of Spring', first written in December 1911, and included in *The Prussian Officer* collection, will recognise that in both stories Lawrence has returned to the beloved farm, the Hags, where the Chamberses lived, and is as it were circling round the Paul Morel-Miriam Leivers relationship, or the Lawrence-Jessie Chambers relationship,

and trying to imagine different outcomes. One has the sense of an account still painfully unsettled.

There is also a little group of stories – sketches really – which were revised for magazine publication in 1913, almost certainly planned as companions to each other, and probably thought of as exploiting the public interest aroused by *Sons and Lovers*. They had been drafted while he was writing the novel: ‘A Sick Collier’ in March and ‘The Christening’ in June 1912. They too treat of the daily reality of the life of the mining community. ‘A Sick Collier’ and ‘The Christening’ were included in *The Prussian Officer*; ‘The Miner at Home’, ‘Her Turn’ and ‘Strike-Pay’, also written in 1912 and revised in 1913, were published in periodicals at the time, and collected posthumously.

So too was the play *A Collier’s Friday Night*, written in 1909 and shown to Jessie. In many ways it is the closest of all these early works to *Sons and Lovers*. It is obviously set in the Lawrence home: the father is there, washing, getting ready to go out on pay-night; the mother is there, the young student must be Lawrence, the girl visitor must be Jessie. The dialect speech is broad and vivid; so is the contrast with those who speak ‘properly’, and the setting is completely authentic. The play corresponds closely with pages 234–54 of the novel.

This family of fictions, or those which were published at the time, might have been received by readers in 1911–13 as establishing Lawrence as a working-class, regional, realist writer. There could have been some condescension in this public perception; there had to be a deeper interest; to find that, one had only to read a second time, and to start to make other connections between the works. There was in any case the second novel, *The Trespasser*, which breaks the pattern at once. Published in 1912, it was a work which imposed itself on Lawrence. It told the story of his friend Helen Corke, and her disastrous relationship with a married man, ending with his suicide on 7 August 1909. The body of the book recounts their six days’ idyll on the Isle of Wight, out of the world, but for that reason thrown up against the limitations and

failures of their relationship, which cause the man to kill himself. It is not at all a vindication of passion but another emotional impasse, another tragedy, more explicit than *The White Peacock*. The man, Siegmund, is utterly blocked, caught between a conventional jealous wife and his lover, Helena, who cannot really give herself to him. If the first two novels are taken together, there emerges from them a distinct aura of misogyny. Lawrence's feeling is invested in the male protagonists; the women they love have power; by denying the men they destroy them. Jessie Chambers shrewdly commented on *The White Peacock* that 'it seems to me not without significance that in this first novel Lawrence should portray no fewer than three men whose lives come to complete frustration, while Cyril [the narrator and Lawrence-persona] is a purely negative figure' (ET 119).

The Trespasser confirms the pattern. It was first drafted in February–July 1910, was shown to Hueffer, and submitted to Heinemann, who had accepted *The White Peacock*. But the advice Lawrence was given was that the book was unpublishable in its then state, for various reasons including its 'eroticism'; so he laid it aside, and thought he might not bother with it further. In any case, he was now seriously engaged in the writing of the third novel, which was to become *Sons and Lovers*; it was almost fortuitous that in early 1912 he returned to *The Trespasser*, rapidly revised it and let it go forward to publication. He needed the money it would bring him. The circumstances leading to that decision are best dealt with in the account of the writing of *Sons and Lovers* which follows.

At this point, the reader who has felt some confusion at this complicated sequence of titles and dates and draft states has had a practical introduction to an important aspect of Lawrence's writing: what one must call his method, even his aesthetic. Throughout his writing life he was working simultaneously on several things, each of which would be carried through a drastic process of revision after revision. So he would find himself working on one draft of one piece, while there was another which he might be revising in proof, and several short

stories he was having retyped, perhaps, only to revise them again when he saw the typescript; and there might be something like *The Trespasser* written some time ago which he would suddenly take up again and completely recast. There was also a store of drafts of pieces written earlier, which might be taken up again if, for instance, a literary agent told him that a magazine was looking for stories, or a publisher offered to give him a contract for a collected volume, in which case he would revise the stories, often drastically. Between the works being written or revised concurrently, there would be an affinity or a continuity of preoccupation, because they were written while his mind was full of some particular concern or just because it was that time of his life. The underlying strata and the overlying layers of revision reveal a developing intention being gradually realised.

It was not a matter of his having a stated theme, still less a programme. Each draft was the product of a spontaneity; one could put this paradoxically by saying that it was his spontaneity that was programmatic. On the other hand, the redrafting – very often a sequence of radical rewritings – evolved a work where the successive spontaneities produce an effect which can be compared to that of a careful planning, except in the most important respect: Lawrence did not at the outset foresee all aspects of the end-product.

He was a publisher's nightmare in his way of working: every time he was shown the latest form of a work of his, he would not check that it had been accurately transcribed: that is, he did not check the new state against the previous one, so he missed many errors of transcription in the typing or type-setting. On the other hand he would obsessively revise, since he now saw aspects which needed to be changed, or was more in possession of what he wanted to say. Hence Lawrence's difficulties, recounted below, with those critics and advisers like Garnett and Hueffer, who made a fetish of 'form', and from that point of view judged his work on the assumption that the draft presently before them was a planned and final intention. He reached his own form his own way.

This becomes an important textual issue: the later editor of

his work has carefully to plot his perpetually revising progress through a succession of documents of transmission and publication. There may be more than one manuscript, or a manuscript which represents several phases of writing and revision; then more than one typescript, usually made by a typist willing to correct in the process; then carbon copies differently corrected for publishers in England and the USA, then the proofs. It is fortunate that so many of these documents survive. One has to recover at each stage the new aspects of developing intention, at the same time eliminating the errors of transmission which Lawrence failed to notice, including his own, and the interferences by other hands. This becomes a critical issue: the interferences which Lawrence had to submit to in the process of publication included sexual censorship, which no modern reader is willing to accept; they also included changes made in the interest of formal standards – whether standard punctuation and grammar or the sense of literary ‘form’ which older advisers adhered to. This issue becomes important as we trace the history of the composition and publication of *Sons and Lovers*, and affects our own reception of the text which was restored in the Cambridge edition published in 1992.

One can sum up the early writings by saying that the regional setting and the working-class social background gave Lawrence a peculiar authenticity: this was where he came from. But that phrase in its modern use implies something internal. The collier’s son who was surprisingly a poet and novelist was not primarily concerned to convey local colour, nor even, more seriously, engaging with ‘the means of production’, unless that is taken to mean the whole world which he re-created. The two first novels are unmistakably tragic, and the tragedy is located in the sexual relationship. The question arises: is this a personal, a social or a universal plight? There is an implication that it is universal. That might be a subjective overstatement, a youthful despair. If we press the question further, we see that the personal may be representative, and that is a better word than ‘social’. If one feels, as Lawrence undoubtedly did

feel, that one is emotionally blocked, it is sensible to ask, how did he come to be in this impasse, who else is involved, could they be called responsible, and does the story have a wider significance? Is it representative?

Lawrence's first reference to his third novel occurs in a letter to the publisher's editor Sydney Pawling, of Heinemann's, on 18 October 1910. Saying that he is not for the time being willing to have *The Trespasser* published, because he is not satisfied with it, he offers Pawling instead:

... my third novel, Paul Morel, which is plotted out very interestingly (to me), and about one-eighth of which is written. Paul Morel will be a novel – not a florid prose poem [i.e. like *The White Peacock*], or a decorated idyll running to seed in realism [i.e. like *The Trespasser*]: but a restrained, somewhat impersonal novel. It interests me very much. I wish I were not so agitated just now, and could do more. (I, 184)

Heinemann was at that moment producing *The White Peacock*; Lawrence goes on to say that he hopes it will be published soon, because he wants his mother 'to see it while still she keeps the live consciousness. She is really horribly ill. I am going up to the Midlands again this weekend' (I, 184–5). The reference to his mother's terminal cancer explains both why Lawrence wanted to be writing the new book, and why he was too agitated to do more.

His mother's illness declared itself in August, about ten days after his next-to-final break with Jessie Chambers – the coincidence perhaps struck him. She died on 9 December 1910: the painful account in *Sons and Lovers* can be taken as accurate in essentials. During those weeks Lawrence was almost completely preoccupied with her; one may guess that thinking about her and talking with her confirmed an intention to tell her story:

Sometimes as she lay he knew she was thinking of the past. Her mouth gradually shut hard in a line. She was holding herself rigid, so that she might die without ever uttering the great cry that was tearing from her. He never forgot that hard, utterly lonely and stubborn clenching of her mouth, which persisted for weeks. Sometimes, when

it was lighter, she talked about her husband. Now she hated him. She did not forgive him. She could not bear him to be in the room. And a few things, the things that had been most bitter to her, came up again so strongly, that they broke from her, and she told her son. (*SL*, 429)

As if prophetically, he had earlier that year, some time before July, written forty-eight pages of a work called 'Matilda Wootton'; the unpublished manuscript survives as a completed first chapter and the beginning of a second one; it tells the story of a girl who was ten in 1860, describing her family and first years. The account is not unlike the pages on the early life of Gertrude Coppard in *Sons and Lovers*, including a time as a teacher and a first attachment like Gertrude's affection for John Field.

It is also the case that some time before March of the same year 1910 Lawrence had crossed out of *The White Peacock* a conversation between the mother, Mrs Beardsall, and her daughter, in which the older woman looks back on her youth, recollects a similar romantic attachment, and makes a complex judgement on her life: 'You have to determine whether you'll marry a husband, or the father of your children. I married the father of my children; a husband might eternally reproach me for it' (ed. Andrew Robertson, Cambridge, 1983, p. 370).

One wonders what made Lawrence delete that conversation, and what made him abandon 'Matilda Wootton'. Writing on 24 July to his friend Louie Burrows, who was now taking Jessie Chambers's place in his affections, he said offhandedly: 'As to "Matilda" – when I looked at her I found her rather foolish: I'll write her again when I've a bit of time' (I, 172).

The narrative instinct ('I will tell you') was sparked off suddenly again in a letter of 3 December to the poet Rachel Annand Taylor, a mere acquaintance. He explains why he is at home, and what is happening ('My sister and I do all the nursing'), and overflows: there is already more than a touch of art in the telling, and much understanding, born perhaps in the hours of watching:

I will tell you. My mother was a clever, ironical delicately moulded woman, of good, old burgher descent. She married below her. My father was dark, ruddy, with a fine laugh. He is a coal miner. He was one of the sanguine temperament, warm and hearty, but unstable: he lacked principle, as my mother would have said. He deceived her and lied to her. She despised him – he drank.

Their marriage life has been one carnal, bloody fight. I was born hating my father: as early as ever I can remember, I shivered with horror when he touched me. He was very bad before I was born.

This has been a kind of bond between me and my mother. We have loved each other, almost with a husband and wife love, as well as filial and maternal. We knew each other by instinct. She said to my aunt – about me:

‘But it has been different with him. He has seemed to be part of me.’ – and that is the real case. We have been like one, so sensitive to each other that we never needed words. It has been rather terrible, and has made me, in some respects, abnormal.

I think this particular fusion of soul (don’t think me high-falutin) never comes twice in a life-time – it doesn’t seem natural. When it comes it seems to distribute one’s consciousness far abroad from oneself, and one ‘understands’. I think no one has got ‘Understanding’ except through love. Now my mother is nearly dead, and I don’t quite know how I am.

I have been to Leicester today, I have met a girl [Louie Burrows] who has always been warm for me – like a sunny happy day – and I’ve gone and asked her to marry me: in the train, quite unpremeditated ... When I think of her I feel happy with a sort of warm radiation ...

Muriel [another name Lawrence gave to the Jessie-figure in some of the fictions and poems of his that Mrs Annand Taylor had been reading] is the girl I have broken with. She loves me to madness, and demands the soul of me. I have been cruel to her, and wronged her, but I did not know.

Nobody can have the soul of me. My mother has had it, and nobody can have it again. Nobody can come into my very self again, and breathe me like an atmosphere. (I, 189–91)

This is brave and honest, open in the way Lawrence was often able to be with people he hardly knew. With those close to him it was more difficult. There is a similar but less profound letter to Louie, written after a night of sitting with his dying mother (‘Ada and I share the night’). It is 6 December, just before the end:

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It is morning again, and she is still here . . .

I look at my mother and think 'Oh Heaven – is this what life brings us to?' You see mother has had a devilish married life, for nearly forty years – and this is the conclusion – no relief. What ever I wrote, it could not be so awful as to write a biography of my mother. But after this – which is enough – I am going to write romance – when I have finished Paul Morel, which belongs to this. (I, 195)

That thought, that what he was engaged on (he had written about 100 pages) was going to be 'awful', may explain the earlier false starts. He was now going to enter a painful territory, not just because it was a sad story about a blighted life, but because in really entering into it he would have to face what it had done for him and to him. He would also have to face the question: could he ever be free of that conditioning?

On an impulse, he had become engaged to Louie three days earlier. One may speculate now that he felt that a new phase of his life was about to begin; that he needed to be married; that he felt an uncomplicated desire for Louie, who did not belong to his past in the way that Jessie did (i.e. was not, paradoxically, linked to his mother in their fight for him); and so the new phase should start with her. There is a dark underthought in the letter to Rachel Annand Taylor: he could never really love deeply again, and something like the desire for Louie would have to be enough. It is the first thought that emerges from the letter to Louie:

This anxiety divides me from you. My heart winces to the echo of my mothers pulse. There is only one drop of life to be squeezed from her . . . And while she dies, we seem not to be able to live.

So if I do not seem happy with the thought of you – you will understand. I must feel my mother's hand slip out of mine before I can really take yours.

He veers toward the underthought in a crucial statement:

She is my first, great love. She was a wonderful, rare woman – you do not know; as strong, and steadfast, and generous as the sun. She could be as swift as a white whip-lash, and as kind and gentle as warm rain, and as steadfast as the irreducible earth beneath us.

but continues hopefully:

But I think of you a great deal – of how happy we shall be ... You will be the first woman to make the earth glad for me: mother, J. – all the rest, have been gates to a very sad world ... We do not all of us, not many, perhaps, set out from a sunny paradise of childhood. We are born with our parents in the desert, and yearn for a Canaan. You are like Canaan ... (I, 195)

In the last sentence the despair and the hope lie side by side. It is possible that Louie responded to the remark about his mother by saying to herself, yes, of course he loved her, and so suppressed the true message. The day before his mother's funeral, Lawrence met Jessie, and they went for a walk. She records his insistence that he be understood by her:

... Lawrence looked at me with intensity. 'You know – I've always loved mother,' he said in a strangled voice.

'I know you have,' I replied.

'I don't mean that,' he returned quickly. 'I've *loved* her, like a lover. That's why I could never love you.' (ET 184)

1911 was a disastrous year for Lawrence. He started it grieving for his mother. He had to return to his teaching job in Croydon, work which exhausted him, and left him little time or energy for writing. But he was now engaged to Louie, and she, being the conventional child of watchful parents, would not become his lover. They had to be married; and he had to save enough to be married on; so there was a need to make money by writing. The task before him was 'Paul Morel'; but the 'awful' psychological cost of writing it was daunting. During the year he revised a number of stories, and got one or two new ones into first draft, but it was a painfully unproductive time.

The letter to Pawling in October had said that the novel was 'plotted out very interestingly' and about one-eighth written. There is an outline in one of Lawrence's college notebooks, and it is assumed that this is the original plan of the novel. Here it is, slightly regularised:

I

- I. Introduction – he pushes her out of the house before the birth of their son.
- II. Tears without cause – watching the engines on Engine Lane – young sister Aunt Ada playing in Breach house
- III. Sent to school – long lane young brother – Sunday school – super. Cullen Miss Wright – visit to Cullens – Newcombe lives there Floss
- IV. Move from Breach – Mrs Limb – Father hospital – Miss Wright making toffee in evening.
- V. Return of Father – walks with Mabel – filling straws – visit to Aunt Ada
- VI. Band of Hope – Fred strikes father – father blacks eye – Miss Wright – Fred in office – horse manuring – Mabel – painting
- VII. Fred dancing – quarrels with father – Gertie teacher – Wm. learns from her – Flossie friends – Mabel jealous – Wm. at Mr Bates's school – painting – visit Aunt Ada
- VIII. Death of Fred – Wm ill – Mabel – death of Walter Morel – Aunt Ada superintends

II

- I. Wm. begins at Haywoods.
- II. Goes to Miss Wright for painting – meets Flossie much & Newcome – reads & learns – neglects Mabel – she becomes engaged.
- III. Advance at Haywoods – Miss Haywood & painting (red-haired Pauline) – Newcome very jealous
- IV. Flossie passes high – renewed attention of Wm. – great friendship after painting in Castle – death of Miss Wright.
- V. Flossie in College – death of Miss Wright

This is interesting from more than one point of view. Given what was said above about Lawrence's successive spontaneities, one would not expect him to work to a plan at all. In fact only one other similar document survives, a fragmentary note for part of 'Laetitia', an early version of *The White Peacock*. It is reasonable to infer that as he went on writing Lawrence discovered his method, and that he dropped, if he ever really formed, the habit of making a plan. The obvious critical or

aesthetic disadvantage is that a too-much considered plan, followed too closely, prevents writers from discovering as they go along what it is they really want to say; with a plan rigidly adhered to, you only produce at the end what you projected at the beginning, and the work itself is not allowed to tell you where it needs to go. From the start, Lawrence had an instinctive sense of this issue; Jessie remembers him saying, when he was thinking about *The White Peacock*:

The usual plan is to take two couples and develop their relationships ... Most of George Eliot's are on that plan. Anyhow, I don't want a plot, I should be bored with it. (ET 103)

Many readers are familiar with his later statement that 'the novels and poems come unwatched out of one's pen', so that he felt he had to write his discursive or philosophical works in order to develop more consciously what the imaginative works were doing in the other way. Similarly, one may remember the passage in a letter of 23 April 1913, when he had embarked on his most prolonged and complicated piece of writing, the novel which finally split into *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*: 'I am doing a novel which I have never grasped. Damn its eyes, there I am at page 145, and I've no notion what it's about. I hate it. F[rieda] says it is good. But it's like a novel in a foreign language I don't know very well - I can only just make out what it is about' (I, 544). There is a clear affinity here with things said about *Sons and Lovers* itself - compare for instance, Frieda's penetrating remarks about 'form' in the letter to Garnett quoted below.

In fact, there is a cardinal aspect of much twentieth-century art involved here. What Lawrence finally entered on as a way of working suited what he called his 'demon' - the creative element of his nature which knew better than his conscious mind or social intelligence what he had to say. There is an important statement written when he was forty-two, but looking back to his early life:

... I remember the slightly self-conscious Sunday afternoon, when I was nineteen [twenty, actually], and I 'composed' my first two

'poems' ... most young ladies would have done better: at least I hope so. But I thought the effusions very nice, and so did Miriam.

Then much more vaguely I remember subsequent half-furtive moments when I would absordedly scribble at verse for an hour or so, and then run away from that act and the production as if it were secret sin ... I used to feel myself at times haunted by something, and a little guilty about it, as if it were an abnormality. Then the haunting would get the better of me, and the ghost would suddenly appear, in the shape of a usually rather incoherent poem. Nearly always I shunned the apparition once it had appeared. From the first, I was a little afraid of my real poems – not my 'compositions,' but the poems that had the ghost in them. They seemed to me to come from somewhere, I didn't quite know where, out of a me whom I didn't know and didn't want to know, and to say things I would much rather not have said: for choice. But there they were ...

To this day, I still have the uneasy haunted feeling, and would rather not write most of the things I do write ... Only now I know my demon better, and, after bitter years, respect him more than my other, milder and nicer self.

Then, a few lines later, a crucial remark about the process of revision:

It is not for technique these poems are altered: it is to say the real say ... The demon, when he's really there, makes his own form willy-nilly, and is unchangeable. ('Foreword' to *Collected Poems*, printed as Appendix I in *The Complete Poems*, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts, 1964, pp. 849–51)

Lawrence's insight – his working method – was theorised later in the century, first by the Surrealists, and then by the Abstract Expressionists, as the liberation of the subconscious. That formal psychoanalytical appropriation of the process disguises an older Romantic approach: 'inspiration' is now thought to be a discredited idea, 'romantic' in a weak sense. But the old idea of a 'muse' who stood apart from the poet and dictated to him what he was to say catches the same idea of something coming from a source which because it was deeper, seemed other.

Blake had said of his pictures, 'Though I call them mine, yet I know that they are not mine'. F.R. Leavis in his last book on Lawrence, pondering the relationship with Blake,

also wanting to theorise the creative process, but seeking to escape the narrowly Freudian terms of Surrealism and after, felicitously expressed the whole composition process as 'the emergence, as he [Lawrence] experienced it, of original thought out of the ungrasped apprehended – the intuitively, the vaguely but insistently apprehended: first the stir of apprehension, and then the prolonged repetitious wrestle to persuade it into words' (*Thought, Words and Creativity*, 1976, p.124). Leavis also saw that this process was not merely internal to, and completed in, each separate work; it was the basic impulsion of the whole life-work, in which each new start was a further attempt to catch an aspect of the whole. The extraordinary sequence of successive drafts of successive works may be reductively described as simply crystallising into the works of D. H. Lawrence, seen from outside as the row of volumes on the shelf. Received internally and related in the same way as they were conceived, they are 'a unity, a coherent organic and comprehensive totality' (p.67).

In fact, to return to the interestingly 'plotted out' first sketch of 'Paul Morel', there is no conflict with the theory, or with the concept of Lawrence as an instinctive writer. Parts of the scheme were abandoned or overtaken by Lawrence's own reconceiving as he went along, so that the plan represents – could only represent – one stage in the evolution of the novel. It is as unlike the final version as the plan for 'Laetitia' was unlike *The White Peacock* in its final form. What we have in both cases is a set of very brief notes, not much more than a memorandum of incidents and characters. In particular there is very little that a nineteenth-century novelist would recognise as 'plot', i.e. those complex devices of incident, coincidence, change of fortune, hidden relationships, sudden discovery and so on which enabled a popular writer to introduce a large cast of characters, set them working on each other, and bring them to a happy or tragic ending, with everything satisfactorily 'worked out'. Nor is there any statement of 'theme'. What we have is consonant with Lawrence's very simple narrative procedure, which seems, like his prose, paratactic. His natural