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Lawrence, Eastwood and Working-Class Experience

The story of D. H. Lawrence's first meeting with Ford Madox Hueffer¹ in September 1909, and of how Hueffer accepted Lawrence's work for publication in the journal he was then editing, the *English Review*, and became Lawrence's mentor, has often been told. This was one of two truly transformational events in Lawrence's early life, the other being his meeting with Frieda Weekley in early March 1912. They were pivotal moments in Lawrence's development as a person and an author, and as such they feature centrally in the biographies.

For their accounts of the context to Lawrence's meeting with Hueffer, biographers have had to rely on Jessie Chambers's memoir, *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record* (1935), while the only source which deals with the meeting itself is Hueffer's essay on Lawrence in his *Portraits from Life* (1937). Jessie recalls how Lawrence introduced the *English Review* to her family when he returned to Eastwood, the mining town on the Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire border where he was born, to spend Christmas with his family at the end of his first term as an elementary school teacher at Davidson Road School in Croydon, south-east London. This would have been sometime between 23 December 1908 and 10 January 1909. He must have shown them the first number of the journal, of December 1908, which contained contributions from (among others) Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy and H. G. Wells. Jessie notes that they were 'delighted' with the *English Review*, and with her father's backing they decided to subscribe to it. She 'soon noticed that the Editor was prepared to welcome new talent' (Chambers 1935: 156) and she 'begged' Lawrence to submit some of his work, 'but he refused absolutely', stating that he was not anxious to 'get into print', and in any case the journal would 'never take it'. He agreed, however, to let her submit on his behalf any of his work she chose, so long as she gave him a *nom de plume*, since he said he did not want 'folk in Croydon to know I write poetry'.

Jessie picked out what she thought were the best poems Lawrence had sent to her since he left Eastwood to take up his teaching post in early October 1908. She copied them out 'one beautiful June morning' in 1909. She chose 'Discipline', 'Dreams Old and Nascent' and 'Baby-Movements', plus 'several other poems whose titles I don't remember'; she placed 'Discipline' first because she thought 'the unusual title might attract the Editor's attention' (Chambers 1935: 157). 'Discipline' and 'Dreams Old and Nascent' were poems dealing with Lawrence's early experiences as a teacher; 'Baby-Movements' was inspired by his affection for Hilda Mary Jones, the second daughter of John and Marie Jones (the couple in whose home he lodged in Croydon). In her cover letter, Jessie described Lawrence as 'a young man who had been writing for a number of years, and who would be very grateful for any recognition'; she gave his name 'but said that if any of the poems were printed they should appear under the *nom de plume* of Richard Greasley (Richards was an unacknowledged name of Lawrence's, and Greasley was his home parish)' (Chambers 1935: 158).²

Hueffer's reply arrived at some point between 1 and 14 August, while Lawrence was on holiday with his family on the Isle of Wight. Hueffer found the poems 'very interesting' and felt that the author had 'undoubted talent', but he injected a note of caution into his praise, commenting that 'nowadays luck played such a large part in a literary career'. He said that if Jessie would get Lawrence 'to come and see me some time when he is in London perhaps something might be done'. Jessie replied that when Lawrence was back from his holiday she was 'sure he would be glad to call on Mr Hueffer'. Soon after 14 August, she gave him Hueffer's letter. He murmured to her 'You are my luck' and took it to show his mother. Jessie 'never saw it again' (Chambers 1935: 158–159).

Lawrence travelled back to Croydon on Sunday 29 August and began teaching the following day. Jessie states that Lawrence went to see Hueffer in September. If so, the meeting happened at some point between Wednesday 1 September and Saturday 11 September. Unfortunately, Hueffer's account of the meeting, which took place at 84 Holland Park Avenue, his flat above a fishmonger and poulterer's shop which doubled as the offices of the *English Review*, is very brief and unreliable, for reasons which will soon become clear. He recalled that after Lawrence's arrival was announced by his secretary, Olive Thomas, his visitor stood in the doorway, like a fox 'going to make a raid on the hen-roost before him' (Ford 1937: 76). Hueffer records Lawrence saying 'This isn't my idea, Sir, of an editor's office'. When Hueffer defended his room, describing the 'feeling of thankfulness and satisfaction' he got from coming to it from outdoors, Lawrence is said to have replied: 'That's all very well. But it doesn't look like a place in which one would make money ... The room may be all right for your private tastes ... which aren't mine, though that does not matter. But it isn't one to inspire confidence in creditors. Or contributors' (Ford 1937: 77–78).

What else passed between them, he does not say. Surviving letters suggest, however, that Hueffer was encouraging and supportive. On his twenty-fourth birthday, 11 September, Lawrence reported to Louie Burrows, a friend whose family lived in the village of Cossall, around six miles south-east of Eastwood: 'It is supposed to be a secret, but I guess I shall have to tell you. The editor of the *English Review* has accepted some of my Verses, and wants to put them into the *English Review*, the November issue ... The editor, Ford Madox Hueffer, says he will be glad to read any of the work I like to send him – which is a great relief, is it not?' (IL 137–138). He told Jessie that Hueffer was 'fairish, fat, about forty, and the kindest man on earth', and he boasted about the invitations to dinner with 'celebrities' and 'two R.A.s' (Chambers 1935: 163) that accrued from Hueffer's support.

Hueffer stresses Lawrence's 'shynesses' (Ford 1937: 76) in their first meeting. It is quite plausible that Lawrence hid his nervousness about meeting Hueffer by adopting the kind of confident, assertive, even brash demeanour that Hueffer ascribes to him. However, the phrases he puts into Lawrence's mouth are transposed in a revised form from Jessie's account in her memoir of her visit to Croydon almost three months later, on the weekend of 27–28 November, when Lawrence took her to meet Hueffer at his flat before they all went together to have lunch with Hueffer's partner, Violet Hunt, at her home, 'South Lodge', 80 Campden Hill Road.³ Most of the rest of Hueffer's essay is unreliable too. He states that he read 'The Fox' shortly before writing his essay, which accounts for the image he used for Lawrence's attitude as he stood in the doorway.⁴ Hueffer weaves together details from his recent reading of Jessie's memoir and some of Lawrence's writing with vaguely recalled information about Lawrence's early life (perhaps drawing in part on *Sons and Lovers*); he even erroneously suggests that he once met Lawrence's father.⁵

Setting aside the inaccuracies and inventions, however, the main problem with the essay is Hueffer's determination to present the Lawrence he first met as a working-class writer. He takes issue with Jessie by stating that she first wrote to him to ask if he 'would care to see anything – and then should it be poetry or prose' (Ford 1937: 72); he says he requested both, so she sent him the poems together with 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', a story of mining life set in Eastwood which Lawrence actually began writing later in the year. Ford therefore describes his own trepidation on meeting Lawrence as being all to do with class: 'If he really was the son of a working coal-miner, how exactly was I to approach him in conversation?' (Ford 1937: 75). Jessie notes that at Violet Hunt's gathering, Ezra Pound asked Hueffer 'How would *you* speak to a working man?', and Hueffer replied 'I should speak to a working man in exactly the same way that I should speak to any other man, because I don't think there is any difference' (Chambers 1935: 174). Ford repeats the anecdote as a sign that he 'automatically regarded every human being as my equal' (Ford 1937: 75), but his essay is full of class consciousness and class condescension.

In fact, the only person who directly claims that Jessie divulged details of the occupation of Lawrence's father in her initial letter to Hueffer is Violet Hunt. In her memoir, *The Flurried Years* (1926), Hunt suggests that Jessie described Lawrence as 'the son of a miner, and not very strong', but the latter phrase is not one Jessie seems likely to have used, and the fact that Hunt also recalled Jessie saying that 'her sweetheart was schoolmaster in the same school' (Hunt 1926: 47) casts doubt on the accuracy of her memory. Two of the three poems we know Jessie sent to Hueffer allude to Lawrence's career as a teacher; they contain no mention at all of coal mining. Lawrence was taken up by Hueffer as a poet, on the basis of several distinctive, observant but whimsical verses, shot through with the kind of highly literary Pre-Raphaelite qualities which Lawrence would shortly discover in the work of another young *English Review* poet, Rachel Annand Taylor. Lawrence told Louie Burrows in the letter of 11 September that his poems were 'all in the rough, and want revising'; he said that he was 'very hard at work, slogging verse into form'. He added: 'I never thought of myself blossoming out as a poet – I had planted my beliefs in my prose' (IL 137–138).

It is important to pause the biographical narrative at this point in early September 1909 in order to reflect on how Lawrence and the writing he had produced up to that point had been shaped by his upbringing in Eastwood. In future years, Lawrence would express impatience with producing the short biographical notes required by publishers, in part because he knew they wished to emphasise his working-class roots in a Nottinghamshire mining town. While it was true that his father, Arthur, was a miner (albeit a 'butty', or mining contractor, in charge of a small team of men at Brinsley Colliery), and he was born in a small two-up two-down terraced house, his early life had been largely determined by the outlook and ambition of his mother. Lydia Lawrence (née Beardsall) had been born in Manchester and grew up in Sheerness in Kent as the daughter of an engineer. An injury which her father suffered at work reduced the family to poverty and forced them to move to Nottingham to be close to his relations. Her four sisters all married into the middle or lower-middle classes. Lydia's maternal uncle, John Newton, was married to Arthur's maternal aunt, Alvina Parsons. Lydia and Arthur met in 1874 at a Christmas party thrown by John and Alvina, and married a year later, on 27 December 1875. They lived together in Brinsley, New Cross, South Normanton and Old Radford before settling in Eastwood in 1883. Lawrence was the fourth of their five children (three boys and two girls), and their youngest son.

Lydia was determined that none of her sons should follow their father into the pit. Fundamental differences in the outlooks and values of Lydia and Arthur led to conflict and estrangement in their marriage. Through strict domestic economy, Lydia ensured that the family lived with a degree of dignity and distinction. She used the shop window in their first Eastwood home to sell lace in order to supplement the family's income. During Lawrence's time in Eastwood, up to October

1908, when he left for Croydon, his family had moved three times, each house improving on the last, from a terraced house with a shop window in Victoria Street, to an end terrace with an extra strip of garden in the Breach, to a house on Walker Street with a wide view down onto Brinsley Colliery and the surrounding countryside, and finally to a house on Lynn Croft situated at the top of a steep street with a bay window and a back garden looking out onto Lydia's beloved Congregational Chapel. In February 1896, Lydia bought ten shares at £1 each in the Ideal Brick Press Syndicate Ltd.⁶ In August 1899, she purchased a second-hand pianette for £6, which she was able to pay for in full by 1 November.⁷ Lawrence was the only one among his circle of friends to have paints bought for him, and the first to get a new bicycle.⁸

Lydia's drive to improve the family's circumstances strongly influenced the lives of her three sons. The eldest, George Arthur, who had the closest emotional ties with his father, seems to have rebelled against the pressure to 'get on'. He worked for a time at High Park Colliery before being apprenticed to a picture framer. At the age of 19, he impulsively took the King's Shilling while out with a friend in Ilkeston, signing on to serve for seven years with the King's Own Scottish Borderers; he soon regretted the act and was bought out by his mother 15 months later (perhaps with money she borrowed from one of her sisters). Shortly after his release he took up with a girl against his mother's wishes and was forced to marry her when she fell pregnant. He subsequently got a job as a turner and went to live in Nottingham. By September 1909, he and his wife Ada had three children (two sons and a daughter). The next eldest son, William Ernest (known as Ernest or 'Ern'), was his mother's favourite. He excelled at school, both academically and in sports. Like George, he had to leave school at age 14. He worked at first for the Co-op at Langley Mill before moving at the age of 18 to the Offices of the Shipley Colliery Company and then acting as a clerk for a bicycle company in Coventry. He taught shorthand and typing on a private basis, and at the British School in Eastwood. Finally, he landed a job as a clerk for a firm of solicitors, John Holman and Sons, in central London.⁹ His death from erysipelas on 11 October 1901, at the age of 23, devastated the family.

Lawrence (known to friends as 'Bert') grew up in Ernest's shadow, but he achieved his own mark of distinction when he won a County Council Scholarship to Nottingham High School, which he attended between September 1898 (when he was 13) and July 1901. Afterwards, he was employed for a few months as a clerk for J. H. Haywood, a surgical appliances manufacturer in Nottingham, before a bout of pneumonia forced him to leave. Following his recovery, he worked as a pupil-teacher at the British School and received training at the Ilkeston Pupil-Teacher Centre. He then took the King's Scholarship examination in order to study at University College Nottingham. He was placed in the First Division of the First Class. He spent one year earning some money as a full-time

pupil-teacher at the British School before beginning his studies at the College in September 1906. He left with a teacher's certificate in summer 1908. He secured the job in Croydon in late September of the same year.

Lawrence began writing in spring 1905, at the age of 19, and his first works were poems. 'Champions', 'Guelder Roses' and perhaps 'The Wild Common' date to this period. As their titles suggest, his impetus to write came not from the streets of Eastwood, but from the surrounding countryside. In the early summer of 1901, during his last term at the High School, he had gone with his mother to visit the Chambers family at their home, Hags Farm, in nearby Underwood. Lydia had got to know Ann Chambers through their shared attendance at the Chapel, which – with its Sunday School and Literary Society – occupied a central place in the social life of the Lawrence family. Ann's husband, Edmund, used to have a milk round in Eastwood, but in 1898 he and his wife moved with their seven children (three daughters and four sons) two miles away and became tenant farmers. Hags Farm was situated in beautiful open countryside, at the back of the large Moorgreen Reservoir and on the edge of Sherwood Forest, close to the Annesley hills. Lawrence immediately established a close bond with Edmund Chambers, then with May (the eldest daughter), and finally with the other children. It was with Jessie, however, that he found the closest ties. She was the most literary of the children, and the most brooding and reflective. She resented her brothers for their patronising treatment of her as a young woman and longed to improve her lot in life. Once her initial sense of reserve in front of the privileged scholarship boy fell away, she found an ally in Lawrence as a precocious young man with a similarly immersive appreciation of literature.

In the summer of 1902, while Lawrence was still convalescing from the bout of pneumonia which put an end to his job as a clerk, he visited Hags Farm more and more frequently, helping out with farming jobs. Hags Farm became a second home for him, away from the tensions in his own family. His imagination and love of literature flourished in this setting, and a more fun-loving and exuberant side to his nature found free expression. May Chambers noted how he could light up the room 'with a dancing light like a sunbeam' (Nehls 1959: 570). He and the members of the Chambers family 'would join together and sing songs, or sometimes we would dance, and sometimes read aloud in turn from a book we all wanted to read at once. It was a splendid time for all of us, and Bert was always the centre to whom we all looked as leader, a position he thoroughly enjoyed' (Nehls 1959: 589).

Lydia Lawrence naturally came to resent all the time her son was spending there. Lawrence would be forced to give her minute accounts of what took place, and in the small world of Eastwood news got around about their antics, coloured by the family's feeling that Bert was being stolen away from them. In time Lydia

and her sisters would make Lawrence aware of the perceived impropriety of his spending so much time with Jessie. When May Chambers challenged Lawrence about these things, he said: 'To know all is to forgive all' (Nehls 1959: 602).

Lydia Lawrence valued books and literature as ways to escape the meanness of her surroundings in Eastwood. She was a keen reader, and her tastes straddled the popular and highbrow. Lawrence remembered her being impatient with George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) and 'terribly thrilled' (LEA 177) by Mrs Henry Wood's bestseller *East Lynne* (1861). His father, in contrast, was 'scarcely able to read or write' (LEA 112); the open (sometimes violent) animosity between Arthur and Lydia, caused by Arthur's sense of being marginalised, undervalued, and even despised, by his wife and children, was one of the mitigating factors to which Lawrence alluded in his remark to May. Lydia Lawrence nurtured and shared cultural aspirations first with Ernest, and then with Lawrence. Lawrence's youngest sister Ada noted how she loved to discuss religion and philosophy with the Scottish minister of the Congregational Chapel, the Reverend Robert Reid.¹⁰ She joined the Co-Operative Women's Guild, whose members met to address social issues and the history of the co-operative movement.

Lydia's outlook can be perfectly gauged by the fact that on 19 July 1892, for her forty-first birthday, her 15-year-old son George presented her with a copy of George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), containing a careful inscription in his best handwriting wishing her 'many happy returns of the day, and a long, happy and prosperous life'.¹¹ Lawrence noted that his mother wrote with 'a fine Italian hand' (LEA 177) and she would have encouraged such refinement in her children. The summer before his death, Ernest had bought *The International Library of Famous Literature*, edited by Dr Richard Garnett, a twenty-volume set which Jessie noted was treated with 'reverence amounting to awe' (Chambers 1935: 92) in the Lawrence household. For Lydia, reading was linked to 'getting on'. In contrast, Lawrence discovered a rich imaginative freedom through his shared reading with Jessie at the Hags. They would meet to borrow books from the Mechanics Institute Library in Eastwood, which was open for two hours on a Thursday evening. They recited poems together, discussing the lives of the authors. Lawrence oversaw re-enactments of scenes from the texts they loved best in the fields surrounding the farm. Jessie became 'the threshing floor on which he threshed out all his beliefs' (SL 265).

F. T. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics* became a 'kind of Bible' to Jessie and Lawrence around the time of her eighteenth birthday, in January 1905. Jessie says that they read poems by Shelley, Wordsworth and Keats, and she particularly records his fondness for poems by William Cowper, Robert Burns and Thomas De Quincey: 'He liked 'Fair Helen' [the traditional Scottish ballad] very much, and later he taught it to his boys in the Croydon school' (Chambers 1935: 100). She notes that Lawrence gave her 'a selection of Shelley and at other times

The Blessed Damsel and the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, and I gave him Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*' (Chambers 1935: 101).

It is little wonder that his own early poems are so intensely literary; 'Guelder Roses' even contains a reference to 'the thought-drenched eyes / Of some Pre-Raphaelite mystic queen / Who haunts me' (*Poems* 1397), revealing the influence on him of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In summer 1908, he would read Walt Whitman, whose importance for him is clear in the free-verse form of his early poems about school and teaching (two of which Jessie sent to Hueffer). In the Easter of 1906 he began work on a novel, which he initially entitled 'Laetitia', a forerunner of *The White Peacock*. He based its plot on George Eliot, contrasting two relationships. The eponymous Lettie falls pregnant outside marriage by Leslie Tempest, the son of a colliery owner; to avoid social stigma she marries a farmer's son, George Worthington, and they emigrate together to Canada. The surviving fragment of the novel reveals Lawrence's indebtedness to literary romances like *Lorna Doone* (1869), whose key scenes Lawrence and Jessie had acted out together on the Annesley hills. As Lawrence worked on the novel by fits and starts over the following three and a half years it blended the original romance elements with tragic and French naturalist qualities, revealing the shifts in his reading and influences. He dispensed with the pregnancy plot and had Lettie marry Leslie Tempest, focusing on her rejection of the farmer's son (renamed George Saxton) and his fall into alcoholism. Lawrence said that his family considered his writing an 'affectation'. At some point, his mother read a chapter of the novel and said 'But my boy, how do you know it was like that? You don't know —' (*LEA* 112). In August 1907, when Lawrence was at College and the novel was still in an early state, Jessie asked Lydia what she thought of it, and perhaps in reference to Lettie's pregnancy, she replied 'To think that *my* son should have written such a story' (Chambers 1935: 117).

This response to her youngest son's writing reflected her dislike of the changes she would have detected in him by this date. Lawrence's questioning of religion and his loss of religious faith in 1906–1907, around the age of 21, was precipitated by his reading of T. H. Huxley, Darwin and Ernst Haeckel, and of books by Herbert Spencer, J. M. Robertson, Robert Blatchford and Philip Vivian. Ann Chambers was dismayed when Lawrence introduced such texts and ideas to her children, and she looked to protect her youngest from their influence. Lawrence could tone down his views in the company of his mother, and of Edmund and Ann Chambers, and he continued to attend Chapel for his mother's sake, but it became necessary for him to seek out the company of those with whom he could express his scepticism, and his increasingly scathing views on religion. He was particularly sustained by his friendship with William ('Willie') Hopkin, a shopkeeper in Eastwood who was a renowned atheist and socialist. Willie and his wife Sallie, a suffragette, involved Lawrence in the Eastwood Debating Society, which they set up to offset what they saw as the conservatism of the Chapel Literary Society. Lawrence made new friends through it, including Alice Dax, the wife of an Eastwood optician and

another very outspoken suffragette, and her friend Blanche Jennings, who lived in Liverpool. He began to seriously question the values of his upbringing and his education. At College, Lawrence joined the 'Society for the Study of Social Questions'. When he delivered a paper to the Debating Society, on 19 March 1908 at the Hopkins' home on Devonshire Drive, he used the occasion to challenge the theories of education which he was being forced to assimilate, attacking Johann Friedrich Herbart's suggestion that aesthetic interest is aroused by a sense of harmony by invoking the pleasure derived from the honesty of the challenging, disreputable authors he was reading (Edgar Allan Poe, Émile Zola, Guy de Maupassant and Maxim Gorky) who 'express their deep, real feelings' (*STH* 226).¹²

Lawrence's critical questioning of social and aesthetic matters was inseparable from his questioning of religion and education. In the earliest stages, by Easter 1906, his views evolved in dialogue with his reading of works by Charles Lamb, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle was an especially important sounding post for him. As John Worthen has noted, 'At times, reading Carlyle, one can hear the swingeing certainties of Lawrence's prose': 'Lawrence took from Carlyle what he needed – and then transformed it into his own way of understanding and feeling' (Worthen 1991: 122). We can see this happening in Lawrence's annotations in his copy of *Past and Present* (1843). In Book III, Chapter XIII, Carlyle asserts his belief that 'in no time, since the beginnings of Society, was the lot of those same dumb millions of toilers so entirely unbearable as it is even in the days now passing over us'; 'Do we wonder', he writes, 'at French Revolutions, Chartisms, Revolts of Three Days?' Lawrence wrote in the margin 'Unemployed Processions'. In Book III, Chapter XV, when Carlyle declares 'But we will leave this of "Religion"; of which, to say truth, it is chiefly profitable in these unspeakable days to keep silence', Lawrence wrote 'Oh verily'. In Book IV, Chapter IV, when Carlyle emphasises the necessity for workers to form a 'veritable brotherhood' and notes that 'Chelsea Hospitals, pensions, promotions, rigorous lasting covenant on the one side and on the other, are indispensable even for a hired fighter', Lawrence wrote: 'It is true – why no such covenant of miners and teachers!'¹³

Lawrence's observations show him applying Carlyle's early Victorian insights to his own world, seeking out a kindred spirit in his questioning of religious authority and his development of an incipient political awareness. He once referred to himself during his College years as suffering from 'spiritual dyspepsia' (Nehls 1959: 609), tacitly acknowledging the influence of Carlyle, who was afflicted by the physical ailment throughout most of his adult life. Lawrence's marginal comment about the absence of any covenant between miners and teachers reveals his rather gauche desire to link his father's manual occupation with his own labours as a poorly-paid pupil-teacher. Although Lawrence grew up in a mining community with a collier as a father, his own world was one of desk jobs, scholarships, teaching, and the reading and writing he had begun with his mother's encouragement and developed through his contact with the Chambers family. In a conversation with Lawrence about the

merits of realist writing, May Chambers once pointed out that he was different to most people, and he is said to have commented ‘Oh, yes, the great unwashed ... But there are others, you know’ (Nehls 1959: 610). Willie Hopkin’s daughter, Enid Hilton, noted that in Eastwood ‘you either belonged or you didn’t’: since as a scholarship boy Lawrence was ‘no longer accepted by, or really belonging to’ the town he became merely ‘an observer and recorder of the mining world’ (Hilton 1993: 15). There is just one account of the young Lawrence going down a mine. During his time working as a pupil-teacher, a newly-appointed teacher was keen to experience the world of the miners in Eastwood, and Lawrence joined a small party that gained permission to be taken down. May Chambers was in the group and she notes how Lawrence was the first to speak when they came to the surface: ‘Didn’t it blow hard coming up the shaft! Didn’t it blow up your trousers!’ (Nehls 1959: 587).

When, in December 1907, Lawrence wrote to the Reverend Robert Reid to discuss the cause of his loss of faith, he described being profoundly affected by witnessing the poverty in ‘the lowest parts of Sneinton’ and asked how it was possible ‘that a God who speaks to all hearts can let Belgravia go laughing to a vicious luxury, and Whitechapel cursing to a filthy debauchery’ (*IL* 40). The suffering of the working classes was something that he alluded to as happening in Nottingham and London, not in Eastwood. Indeed, when Lawrence started teaching in Croydon he was shocked by the signs of poverty he witnessed in the dress and appearance of some of his pupils; families in Eastwood would do anything to avoid sending their children out with dirty clothes or holes in their shoes. He was apparently very sceptical of Willie Hopkin’s socialist views; Enid Hilton recalled him laughing at her father and telling him, ‘You are wasting your time, Willie All this will come later, social change, why are you spending energy on it now?’ (Hilton 1993: 8). After Alice Dax introduced Lawrence and Jessie Chambers to the journal *The New Age*, evidently trying to interest them in its socialist outlook, Lawrence subscribed to it, but Jessie reports that he ‘liked it far more for its literature than its politics. He was never really interested in politics, and was quickly irritated and bored by the subject’ (Chambers 1935: 120). Jessie remembered Hueffer saying to her in November 1909, ‘You’re a sort of Socialist, I suppose?’ She noted: ‘Not a single political idea had crossed my mind in those days’ (Chambers 1935: 170). When Lawrence revised the paper he delivered to the Debating Society, he gave it the title ‘Art and the Individual: A Paper for Socialists’, addressing it to ‘readers of the “New Age”’, but (as Annalise Grice suggests) his intended readers were ideal rather than practical socialists.¹⁴ In the opening paragraph, he wrote: ‘we, who are not hungry and thirsty for material things, and who have not the tough spirit or the single purpose of a political fighter, we will stay at home, and in wicked sloth forget the din that rages round the platform, such time as in our own fields the lark is nigh’ (*STH* 135). Lawrence refers to Carlyle in both the paper and its revised version,¹⁵ and Carlyle’s influence is obvious in the mannered style of his address to his implied readers.



D. H. Lawrence, c.12 December 1908. University of Nottingham, Manuscripts and Special Collections, La Phot 1/3/1.

If Lawrence's earliest poetry was inspired by the countryside surrounding Eastwood, so was his earliest prose fiction. His first novel was set around Moorgreen Reservoir; he even re-titled it 'Nethermere' (his fictional name for the Reservoir) in recognition of the importance of its country setting. 'A Page from the Annals of Gresleia' (later revised as 'Ruby-Glass' and then 'A Fragment of Stained Glass') was a tale which created an imaginary event in the history of the nearby ruins of Beauvale Priory and the lives of the Carthusian monks who once lived there. 'Goose Fair' was an historical tale of the lace trade in Nottingham, co-written with Louie Burrows. 'The Vicar's Garden' (an early version of 'The Shadow in the Rose Garden') is set in Robin Hood's Bay, where Lawrence holidayed with his family in the summer of 1907. 'A Prelude' (which won a Christmas story competition for the best story of an enjoyable Christmas and was published in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* in December 1907) is a rural tale set around an imaginary Hagg's Farm. In its earliest form, 'The White Stocking' was a slight tale based on an amusing anecdote from his mother's early life.

The only thing Lawrence had written by September 1909 which drew directly on his experience of working-class Eastwood was a dialect poem of January 1909 entitled 'Violets for the Dead'. Lawrence was fascinated by Eastwood speech

patterns and the Eastwood dialect. May Chambers records his 'keen interest in words and phrases' (Nehls 1959: 600). 'Violets for the Dead' is presented in the form of a dialogue between a brother and sister, who reflect on the recent burial of their wayward sibling Ted. The brother tells of a mysterious and grief-stricken young female mourner who went up to his rain-sodden grave after the family had moved off and threw a handful of violets on his coffin. Lawrence used the Eastwood dialect word 'slive' (meaning 'creep') to describe the woman's surreptitious movements. The poem ends with the brother's question about the woman and her relationship with their brother: 'Dost think there was öwt between 'em? / Tha knows 'e'd a winsome way wi 'im, an' she / Was th' liddle, cuddlin sort, as 'as nöwt ter screen em' (*Poems* 1407). 'Violets for the Dead' faithfully reproduces the speech patterns Lawrence heard in his home town, but it is self-consciously literary too, reflecting his early love of Robert Burns; in 1913, he would start, but then abandon, a novel which transferred Burns's early life to his own Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire border country.¹⁶

Ford Madox Hueffer probably knew nothing about Lawrence's particular background when they first met, except that he was a teacher in Croydon and came from a small town in Nottinghamshire. Lawrence would almost certainly have mentioned Jessie Chambers to him, since she was the intermediary who had contacted Hueffer in the first place and facilitated the meeting, but whether he mentioned Eastwood we simply do not know. Hueffer learned more in the following weeks, however, as he introduced Lawrence to 'all the Swells' (*IL* 145). Hueffer evidently thought that he had discovered a genuinely working-class writer, but when he read the manuscript of 'Nethermere' he had a rude awakening. In the letter of support which he wrote about it, and which Lawrence copied out before Violet Hunt delivered the manuscript to Heinemann, he perceptively noted that it was of 'the school of Lorna Doone': he stated that 'the book, with its enormous prolixity of detail, sins against almost every canon of art as I conceive it', but he added that 'Properly handled ... it might have considerable success, and I don't think that in these matters I am at all a bad judge' (*8L* 2-3). The recommendation helped to secure Lawrence a contract with Heinemann.

In later years, Lawrence would comment that Hueffer was 'most kind and most friendly—Got Heinemann to accept the MS., a ragged and bulky mass, of *The White Peacock*—invited the schoolteacher to lunch—introduced him to Edward Garnett [the son of Dr Richard Garnett]—and Garnett became a generous and genuine friend. Hueffer and Garnett launched D. H. into the literary world' (*LEA* 113). Lydia Lawrence, to whom Lawrence proudly showed the contract for his novel, would also acknowledge Hueffer's kindness to her son, remarking on 8 February 1910, in a letter to her sister Ada Krenkow, that he had been 'such a friend to Bert, so kind & helpful'.¹⁷

Hueffer, however, sought to address Lawrence's prolixity by espousing the value of the Flaubertian impersonality and economy of expression which he so admired. One of the things he would have tried to rein in was the literariness of Lawrence's writing. Hueffer had 'never known any young man of his age so well read in all the dulnesses that spread between Milton and George Eliot' (Ford 1937: 82). He was 'inclined to prescribe to him a course of workingman novels', the idea of which Lawrence found 'oppressive' (Ford 1937: 83). In a section of the editorial to the first number of the *English Review*, Hueffer had described 'the poor' as 'breaking in on us everywhere': 'But of knowledge of the lives and aspirations of the poor man how little we have. We are barred off from him by the invisible barriers: we have no records of his views in literature. It is astonishing how little literature has to show of the life of the poor'.¹⁸ He encouraged, or maybe instructed, Lawrence to write about Eastwood, recognising that his ability to describe a mining town and the life of miners as one who had grown up in such a place as the son of a miner would be his unique selling point as an author. As Worthen observes, 'it can hardly be a coincidence that, in the autumn of 1909, Lawrence wrote first his play *A Collier's Friday Night*, then his short story 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' and then, in December 1909, two sketches of school life in Croydon ['A Lesson on a Tortoise' and 'Lessford's Rabbits'] which can also be linked with Hueffer' (Worthen 1991: 217).

A Collier's Friday Night is closely autobiographical. The stage directions reproduce in minute detail things specific to the Lawrence household such as the books they have in the kitchen (including *The International Library of Famous Literature*), their crockery and kitchen utensils, and the piano music they play. In focusing on Friday night (which was market night in Eastwood, and the day for baking bread and courting), the play presents the fraught relationship between Lawrence's father (George Lambert in the play) and his mother (Mrs Lambert), and the hostility that both Lawrence (Ernest Lambert) and his sister Ada (Nellie Lambert) felt towards him. In its depiction of the close intellectual relationship between Ernest Lambert and Maggie Pearson, it also explores the complex bonds between Lawrence and Jessie Chambers, probing Lydia Lawrence's resentment of Jessie's intimacy with Lawrence and the cruelty of Ada's friends in tormenting Jessie and drawing attention to the awkwardness of her situation in the Lawrence household. The play also gestures in a frank and unflinching manner towards the examination of the intense mother-son bond that would occupy such a central position in *Sons and Lovers*. Stage directions refer to the 'abnormal emotions and proximity' of Ernest Lambert and his mother, to the 'dangerous gentleness' between them, and to the 'safe reserve of their souls' being 'broken' (Plays 57, 59).

However, if *A Collier's Friday Night* represents the first instance of Lawrence using his writing to work through his feelings about his mother, repeating and presenting his emotions 'to be master of them' (2L 90), it is also a carefully and

very deliberately structured piece of writing. The artfulness of the play is emphasised by the way that Lawrence changes both the central character and the setting from their real-life originals. Lawrence gives Ernest Lambert his dead brother's name and makes him a student at a college in Derby rather than Nottingham; Ernest is in some ways the least developed and complex character in the play, and Lawrence seems at pains to prevent us from empathising too closely with him, underscoring his aloofness and priggishness. The layout of the miner's house described in the play combines aspects of the Lawrences' third and fourth houses in Eastwood (the houses in Walker Street and Lynn Croft). The play also brings together the basic situation in the Lawrence household in November 1906 with details relevant to the time of writing in November 1909.¹⁹

A Collier's Friday Night is constructed around certain basic contrasts and unresolved conflicts between the characters. The most obvious contrast is that between the father and Ernest. George Lambert's major complaint against his wife is that she has set their children against him, and while she spoils Ernest she holds things back from himself. This is confirmed during the play by Mrs Lambert's purchase of grapes and pine-nuts from the market, the former being bought because Ernest likes them and the latter to make a cake for Ernest. While Lambert comes home from the pit to a meal of meat, gravy and cabbage followed by rice pudding, Ernest returns from college and tells his mother that he has eaten an asparagus omelette in a vegetarian restaurant. Lambert has brought home the weekly wages to be divided among his team of daymen at the pit, while Ernest asks for money from his mother for a copy of 'Piers the Ploughman' and 'two books of Horace' (*Plays* 15). Ernest's effete language, with references to 'piffle', an 'Infernal shindy!', and 'foolery and flummery' (*Plays* 15, 23, 27), his boasting to his mother of Professor Staynes's view that he has an 'instinct for Latin' (*Plays* 15), his reading of French verse with Maggie, and his recourse to French and German words in his interactions with friends and family, form a stark contrast to the blunt, bad-tempered assertiveness of his father's regionally-inflected speech.

The other major contrast is between Maggie Pearson and Beatrice Wyld (a depiction of Alice Hall, a friend of the Cooper family who lived next door to the Lawrences in Lynn Croft. One of the Cooper girls, Gertrude or 'Gertie', appears in the play as Gertie Coomber). Beatrice's vivaciousness and cruelty serve to accentuate Maggie's brooding and spiritual nature. In a scene which Lawrence would draw upon again in the 'Strife in Love' chapter of *Sons and Lovers*, Mrs Lambert asks Ernest to keep an eye on the bread in the oven while she goes to market. Ernest's repartee with Beatrice distracts him, but when the bread burns Maggie is the scapegoat; she knows that Mrs Lambert will blame her, not Beatrice, for turning her son's head.

In April 1912, Lawrence added a note to the manuscript of *A Collier's Friday Night* describing it as 'most horribly green' (*Plays* xxviii). The play draws clear

lines between the characters and shows Ernest, Nellie and their friends inhabiting a world of high culture quite oblivious to the life and ways of their father and his fellow miners, whom they scoff at behind their backs. At one point in Act III, the father hovers his fist so near Ernest's nose that '*he draws his head back, quivering with intense passion and loathing, and lifts his hands*', but, on hearing his wife's supplications to their son, Lambert '*withdraws*' in a '*movement of defeat*' (Plays 52). When Lambert threatens his wife with stopping supporting the family, telling her 'I'll stop it, I'll stop it—or they can go' (Plays 50), she retorts '*you don't keep us*' and tells him that the family is kept by herself and Nellie. In *Sons and Lovers*, which Lawrence was working on when he wrote the note, he would offer a more thorough analysis of the psychological impact of the father's alienation within the house on all of its members, and he would attend more fully to the mother's crippling financial dependence on her husband.

Lawrence's ability to adapt to his new social environment in Croydon, and to Hueffer's literary circles, proved disconcerting to both his family and Jessie. His mother and his closest sibling, Ada, were displeased with him, feeling that he was changing and breaking away from home, but Lawrence insisted that he '*had to change, and leave the old things*' (Chambers 1935: 159). Jessie witnessed the full force of Lawrence's detachment first-hand when she visited him in Croydon for that memorable weekend in late November 1909. On the morning of Saturday 27 November, he met her at King's Cross Station and took her to see the 'big shops'. After having lunch at Selfridge's, they visited the National Gallery. Lawrence then took her to Waterloo Bridge, showing her '*the bridges at night, with the lights of the trams reflected*' (Chambers 1935: 165). They went to see Alfred Sutro's play *Making a Gentleman* at the Garrick Theatre. Back at Lawrence's lodgings at 12 Colworth Road, Lawrence made a supper of macaroni and showed her his latest writings: '*There were poems, quite a number that I had not seen, and a play that was about his home on a Friday night. Sitting there in the tiny suburban room, it troubled me deeply to see his home put before me in his vivid phrases*' (Chambers 1935: 166). Lawrence kept Jessie up until two o'clock talking about his writing and their different prospects in life. Jessie reported that she bent her head, '*and the tears ran down into my lap, because in my heart was no hope at all, but only fortitude*' (Chambers 1935: 167).

The immediate context for Jessie's upset was her uncertain future, since (as Worthen has noted) '*four days later, Jessie gave a month's notice to her school authorities; she was moving from Underwood to the Musters Road School in Nottingham, and at least one of the reasons was the continued strain of living at home with her family at the Hags*' (Worthen 1991: 219). Yet her feelings would have been intensified by the experience of renewed intimacy with Lawrence in a situation which emphasised his movement outside the former life he had shared with her. In Selfridge's, he had written a postcard to his new

love interest, Agnes Holt, arranging to take Jessie to meet her on Sunday morning before the visit to Hueffer. Reading Lawrence's play in the midst of such tumult would have underscored for Jessie his emotional detachment from Eastwood and from his family and friends. The degree of cool analysis he brought to his family life, and his relationship with his mother and with Jessie herself, must have shocked her. She remembered telling Lawrence on the Saturday night that the play was 'very true' (Chambers 1935: 166). Lawrence gave her the manuscript to read on the train journey home. The new poems he showed her may have been those he had recently entered into his second University College Nottingham notebook.²⁰ It opens with the poems which Jessie had sent to Hueffer and which had just been published in the *English Review* ('Discipline', 'A Still Afternoon/Dreams Old and Nascent' and 'Baby-Movements'); if Jessie was shown the notebook she would have seen that the poems, which she had copied out to send to Hueffer, had been neatly entered into the new book by Agnes Holt.

We can only imagine what Jessie made of *A Collier's Friday Night*. In Act III, Mrs Lambert openly expresses her resentment of Maggie Pearson, telling Ernest 'No, I *don't* like her—and I *can't* say I do'. Although Ernest initially defends Maggie and stands his ground, his mother's strong emotional appeals finally cause him to tell her: 'You know, Mater—I don't care for her—really—not half as I care for you' (*Plays* 55, 56). The hurt this must have caused Jessie was a portent of the greater pain she would subsequently feel at the depiction of the entire development of their relationship in *Sons and Lovers*. Writing for the first time about his upbringing, and thinking about how he might present it to a middle-class metropolitan audience or readership, necessitated a degree of objectivity, but it brought out in Lawrence an almost brutal capacity to depict in an analytical mode his most intimate experiences and feelings. He would later state: 'You have to have something vicious in you, to be a creative writer' (*IR* 324).

Hueffer's injunction to write about Eastwood caused Lawrence to turn for the first time to stories connected with his father's family. 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' fictionalises the death of his paternal uncle James in an accident at Brinsley Colliery in February 1880, five years before Lawrence was born, and it incorporates things which Lawrence heard his paternal grandmother (Louisa Lawrence) say about it when he was a child. He would use the same event slightly differently in his play *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*. When Edward Garnett (Lawrence's second mentor, and an experienced reader for the publisher Duckworth) read 'Violets for the Dead' and encouraged him to write further dialect poems, one of the three he produced was 'A Collier's Wife', in which the eponymous wife and her rather timid son are surprised by a knock at the door from a miner informing them that their husband and father has been injured down the pit and is in hospital in

Nottingham. Lawrence could have been drawing here on several injuries which his father sustained at various points during his childhood (the most serious one being a compound fracture of his right leg in November 1903, which left him with a permanent limp).²¹

Lawrence's prolix style, and his commitment to romance, however, did not simply go away. Alongside these Eastwood writings, he produced fictions which drew on a new twist in his troubling relationship with Jessie, and on his interactions with, and attraction to, a fellow teacher he got to know in Croydon named Helen Corke. On Christmas Eve 1909, Lawrence visited Hagg's Farm and proposed that he and Jessie should begin a sexual relationship. The experiment was not a success. In the short story 'A Modern Lover' (begun around December 1909), a young man returns to his Midlands home from 'all the South-Country which he had fled' (*LAH* 29) and seeks out his former love at the farm where she lives with her parents, only to find that she has taken another lover in his absence; in the course of their interactions, an old intimacy is reignited, but when he leaves they can only stand 'together, apart', since he is 'too spent to think of anything to say', while she is 'too overcome with grief and fear and a little resentment' (*LAH* 48). 'The Saga of Siegmund' (the first version of his second novel, *The Trespasser*, written between February and August 1910) fictionalises Helen Corke's affair with her married violin teacher, Herbert Macartney, who committed suicide on 7 August 1909 after spending a week with her on the Isle of Wight. When Lawrence showed Hueffer the manuscript of the novel his mentor said that it was 'a rotten work of genius, one fourth of which is the stuff of masterpiece'. Hueffer's sharp criticism of the novel rested on his earlier insistence to Lawrence that 'prose *must* be impersonal, like Turguenev or Flaubert' (*IL* 178). He would convince Lawrence that the combination of its eroticism and florid style meant that it was 'finally, pornographic' (*IL* 229); Hueffer advised Lawrence not to publish it for fear that it might damage his fledgling career. Lawrence only returned to it in January 1912, with Edward Garnett's encouragement and advice; following revision, it was published by Duckworth in May 1912.

Writing the great autobiographical novel of his life in Eastwood, the book which both Hueffer and Garnett hoped he might produce, proved a much more difficult, painful and protracted process. Sometime during the first half of 1910, he started but soon abandoned a novel based on his mother's pre-marital life, now known as 'Matilda'.²² Then, in October 1910, he began a novel entitled 'Paul Morel'. Only a plan of it survives,²³ but this shows that Lawrence was now focusing – perhaps in response to his mother's recently-diagnosed abdominal cancer – on the unhappy marriage of his parents and its consequences for them, and for their children. He wrote one hundred manuscript pages, but his mother's death on 9 December put a halt to work on it. Shortly before her death, he became

engaged to Louie Burrows. Work on his novel needed to resume if he was to make sufficient money from it to supplement his teacher's pay and enable them to marry. He wrote a wholly different 355-page draft between mid-March and mid-July 1911. This version has survived and been published as *Paul Morel*. It draws closely on Lawrence's experiences as a young boy in Eastwood, but it also incorporates events in the life of his wider family, including his paternal uncle Walter's accidental killing of his 15-year-old son, also called Walter, at their home in Ilkeston on 18 March 1900. Lawrence told Louie: 'I'm afraid it's heterogeneous' (*IL* 263).

His renewed contact with Jessie at this time led him to send the manuscript to her for comment. Jessie encouraged Lawrence to stay closer to the experiences of his nuclear family (including the death of his brother Ernest), and to 'keep it true to life' (Chambers 1935: 192). Lawrence worked on the third version between November 1911 and June 1912. This time his progress was interrupted by another serious bout of pneumonia shortly after a visit to Garnett at his home, the Cearne, near Edenbridge, Kent, on the weekend of 18–19 November. It ended his teaching career and precipitated the breaking of his engagement to Louie. He saw out the worst of his illness in Croydon before convalescing for a month in Bournemouth from 6 January to 3 February 1912, then (following a brief stay with Garnett) he moved back to Eastwood, living with his family in his elder sister Emily's house in Queens Square between 9 February and 3 May.

Before his illness, he had asked Jessie to send him her own memories of their 'early days' (Chambers 1935: 193), since he wished to incorporate these into his revision of the novel and his account of the relationship between Paul Morel and Miriam Leivers. He collected her notes on his return to Eastwood. Lawrence began working again on the novel, delivering pages to Jessie as he wrote. As Helen and Carl Baron note, in the new version 'Lawrence ... placed Miriam in the context of the Leivers family at the farm', so Jessie 'read it as history rather than fiction and took exception to a great deal of it, writing her objections freely over the pages of Lawrence's manuscript' (*SL* xxxiv).²⁴ She gave him four pages of criticisms. Lawrence took some account of her responses, but he ultimately insisted on analysing the failure of their relationship in fictional form on his own terms. Jessie came to see the novel as a betrayal of their friendship and intimacy.

If his time in Croydon and the period of illness and convalescence had caused him to view his relationship with Jessie in more detached and critical terms, it also deepened his detachment from working-class Eastwood. Lawrence's arrival back in his home town coincided with the first national miners' strike. On 2 February, the Miners' Federation proposed a new schedule of wages and when negotiations failed the miners came out on strike on 26 February; their action

would last until 6 April. Lawrence wrote several short stories and sketches about the strike, thinking they might be topical and saleable: Garnett immediately placed 'The Miner at Home' with *The Nation*, but 'Her Turn', 'Strike-Pay' and 'A Sick Collier' would not be published until September 1913, the first two in the *Westminster Gazette* and the third in the *New Statesman*. These short pieces are more concerned with what Macdonald Daly terms the 'domestic repercussions' (Daly 1994a: 135) of the strike than the specific details of the industrial dispute; they offer insights into the contrasting attitudes to the strike of the miners and their wives, suggesting how interpersonal dynamics replicate 'in the household the structures of the public dispute being waged outside' (Daly 1994a: 138). Lawrence helped to deliver relief tickets in Eastwood and expressed sympathy for the plight of the working families,²⁵ but (as Daly observes) it would be 'an exaggeration' to describe his depiction of the striking workers in his letters and writing as revealing 'solidarity, far less commitment': his is 'the ambiguous voice of the suburban schoolmaster who regularly encountered manual workers and reacted variously with wondering admiration and cynical repugnance' (Daly 1994a: 145).

In a letter to Garnett, Lawrence now referred to 'Paul Morel' as his 'colliery novel' (*IL* 372). In March 1912, he met and fell in love with Frieda Weekley, and in May they travelled together to Germany. In late April, Lawrence showed Garnett the manuscript, and he began revising it with Garnett's advice. He wrote to Jessie, telling her that he was 'going through *Paul Morel*. I'm sorry it turned out as it has. You'll have to go on forgiving me' (Chambers 1935: 216). He sent the finished manuscript to Heinemann on 9 June 1912, but they swiftly rejected it because of its 'want of reticence' (*IL* 421 n. 4). As he had done with *The Trespasser*, he turned for support to Garnett, who gave him notes for revision. Lawrence revised the novel between early August and 18 November 1912. Garnett got the novel accepted by Duckworth, but he told Lawrence that significant cuts must be made to the manuscript. Garnett made these cuts himself, removing outspoken words, phrases and passages, and editing it down, removing ten per cent of the text to make it a suitable length for the circulating libraries.

The most striking aspects of *Sons and Lovers* are (in the first part) its wealth of social detail and its evocation of a whole social milieu and way of life, and (in the second) its remarkable psychological analysis of Paul Morel's failed relationships with Miriam (based on Jessie) and Clara Dawes (a composite figure, drawing on aspects of Louie Burrows, Alice Dax and Frieda Weekley), and the impasse in his emotional and erotic lives. The novel provides almost documentary insight into the daily lives of Paul's parents, Gertrude and Walter Morel, and their children. It shows us in great detail the layout of the miners' houses, with their exclusive front

parlour rooms (where Gertrude invites the clergyman, Mr Heaton, to take tea), their warm and claustrophobic back kitchens (where people bake, eat, sit, and argue), their sculleries (where the crockery and kitchen utensils are kept, and where Morel bathes), the pantries for food storage, and the dreadful ash-pits (or open privies) and alleys running between the terraces, 'where the children played and the women gossiped and the men smoked' (SL 10). We are told that miners' hearths are 'sacred to the family' (SL 238). When Gertrude goes into labour with Paul, she strikes the back of the fire grate with a poker to alert Mrs Kirk, her neighbour, who climbs onto her washing 'copper' to scale the fence separating their houses: 'It was an understood thing that if one woman wanted her neighbour, she should put the poker in the fire and bang at the back of the fire-place, which, as the fires were back to back, would make a great noise in the adjoining house' (SL 40).

Here, as elsewhere in the novel, the narrator seems to be acting as a mediator between the working-class life he describes and his implied middle-class readership. There are a number of occasions early in the novel where some term, or some aspect of working-class behaviour, is glossed for the benefit of those unaccustomed to such things. In Chapter II, there is even a footnote to explain Barker's question to Walter Morel as they prepare to end their work shift down the pit: 'Shall ter finish, Sorry?' We are told that 'Sorry' is 'a common form of address. It is perhaps a corruption of "Sirrah"' (SL 41). An early instance of explanatory backtracking occurs in the description of daily rituals around the all-important kitchen fireplace: 'The fire was never let to go out. It was raked just at bed-time. That is, a great piece of coal, a raker, was placed so that it would be nearly burned through by morning' (SL 23). After a section of the first chapter describing Walter's unstable income as a 'butty' too ready to criticise the pit managers, an explanation is provided of what his job entails:

A butty is a contractor. Two or three butties are given a certain length along a seam of coal, which they are to mine forward to a certain distance. They were paid something like 3/4 for every ton of coal they turned out. Out of this, they had to pay the men, holers and loaders, whom they hired by the day, and also for tools, powder, and so on. If their stall was a good one, and the pit was turning full time, then they got a hundred or two tons of coal out, and made good money. If their stall was a poor one, they might work just as hard, and earn very little. (SL 26)

Notice how Lawrence explains 'butty', but expects us to know what 'holers' and 'loaders' are. He is rather vague in his description of the amounts of coal mined from productive stalls. He seems a little uncertain of what his middle-class readership would know, and also unsure of some specific mining details.

The need to describe and explain this unfamiliar world to his middle-class readership is underscored when William's metropolitan girlfriend (based on Ernest's fiancée, Louisa Lily Western Dennis, who like her fictional counterpart was known as 'Gipsy') enters the Morel house at Christmastime and is unable to orientate herself when confronted by its host of strange customs and unwritten codes of conduct:

She glanced round the kitchen. It was small and curious to her, with its glittering kissing-bunch, its evergreens behind the pictures, its wooden chairs and little deal table ... In such a household, in Streatham, Miss Western would have been a lady condescending to her inferiors. These people were, to her, certainly clownish—in short, the working classes. How was she to adjust herself? (*SL* 143–144)

The fictional 'Gyp' (whom Lawrence calls Louisa Lily Denys Western) is an unsympathetic character in the text: she is superficial and insensitive to her new surroundings, and she treats Annie (the character based on Ada) as a servant and misjudges Mrs Morel's need for the observance of certain standards, choosing the wrong photograph to send her and addressing William as 'Chubby' (*SL* 143) in front of his family. Compare her failure to understand the Morel household with the greater social ease and familiarity of Clara, who, in spite of her dubious status as a married woman estranged from her husband (Baxter Dawes), has the experience of working-class life necessary to put Gertrude at her ease.

However, the nature of the explanations of working-class language, occupations and behaviour in *Sons and Lovers* might cause us to question the narrator's own sympathies where certain features of working-class life are concerned. Walter Morel's manners are a point in question. His drinking and eating habits, and his slovenliness, are subjected to constant rebuke in the novel; the narrator tells us that 'He loathed a fork. It is a modern introduction which has scarcely reached the common people. What Morel preferred was a clasp knife' (*SL* 37–38). The tone here is difficult to grasp, since it seems at once to snigger slightly at the 'common people', but only in the context of narrating Walter's daily customs in a way actually likely to endear us to him. His outbursts of drunken violence and his menacing and provocative behaviour must be set against the wonderful description of him making the gunpowder fuses with William and Annie, and telling them stories about Taffy the pit-horse.²⁶

As the central consciousness in the novel, Paul Morel exhibits a problematic and divided attitude to the working-class environment he inhabits. As a young man, he idolises 'Gyp', much to his mother's disgust, and he remains rather blind to his father's working and socialising life outside the home. When he goes to the

pit bank to tell his father that William is dead we are shown Walter's silent despair and told that Paul overlooks it:

Morel walked on a few strides, then leaned up against a truck side, his hand over his eyes. He was not crying. Paul stood looking round, waiting. On the weighing machine a truck trundled slowly. Paul saw everything, except his father leaning against the truck as if he were tired. (*SL* 167)

This is one of very few moments in the novel when we see Morel giving way to despair, and not transforming it into brutal outbursts and acts of violence or avoiding it by pretending it is not there or by leaving the house. Although elsewhere he is shown to be a bad sufferer, here he does *not* cry, or whimper, like Paul; he is 'manly' – a quality Gertrude admires in men.²⁷

The blindness to Walter Morel's feelings in this instance is a failing in Paul, *not* in the novel itself, but some critics have suggested that Lawrence spends too little time exploring the pressures exerted on Walter by his physically demanding and dangerous work. Early in the novel we are given access to Gertrude's thoughts as she reflects on her despair at being trapped in Bestwood (the name given to Eastwood),²⁸ but only once (in Chapter II) is Walter's evening mood traced back to his dissatisfaction with his work.²⁹ We have no comparable access to *his* thoughts; he seems to lack any tragic potential because of his inability to contextualise the conditions of his life. Daly observes that 'Morel's sub-literacy and inarticulacy conveniently prevent his own voice from being heard', so 'there is no point in the novel where we are invited to see things in a larger perspective than the rather confined view of Mrs Morel and the children' (Worthen and Harrison 2005: 83–84). We are led to believe that his working life is easy and natural to him: 'It scarcely seemed hard to him, to leave the fresh, cool air of morning, and go down. He was so used to it, it came simply and naturally' (*SL* 38). This omniscient statement strikes a discordant note. In Chapter V, Walter has an accident; like Lawrence's father, he suffers a compound fracture of his leg as a result of a fall of rock in the mine shaft, which entails a great loss of blood.³⁰ Can his life underground really be so simple and natural to him, or does this reveal a failure of understanding in the narrator (and in the author) comparable to Paul's partial blindness?

The novel contains a self-reflexive awareness of the difficulty involved in offering a sympathetic insight into working-class life which is not simultaneously glib or patronising. In Chapter X, Paul discusses the issue of class with his mother:

"You know," he said to his mother, "I don't want to belong to the well-to-do middle class. I like my common people best. I belong to the common people."

“But if anyone else said so, my son, wouldn’t you be in a tear. *You* know you consider yourself equal to any gentleman.”

“In myself,” he answered, “not in my class or my education or my manners. But in myself, I am.”

“Very well then—then why talk about the common people.”

“Because—the difference between people isn’t in their class, but in themselves.—Only from the middle classes, one gets ideas, and from the common people—life itself, warmth. You feel their hates and loves—”

“It’s all very well, my boy—but then why don’t you go and talk to your father’s pals?” (*SL* 298)

Mrs Morel clearly sees the problem inherent in Paul’s idealisation of the working classes. As Daly notes, ‘the common people’ is ‘hardly a phrase favoured by those who genuinely identify with the working class’ (Worthen and Harrison 2005: 88). Elsewhere in the novel, Paul uses the word ‘common’ pejoratively: he describes Clara to his mother as ‘nice ... And not a bit common!’ (*SL* 359), and when he tells his mother about his experience of collecting his father’s wages on a Friday afternoon, he refers to the colliers as ‘hateful, and common, and hateful’ (*SL* 97).

Although Paul treats class as a superficial aspect of identity separable from one’s true self, the novel shows that the material circumstances of one’s life are defining and inescapable. Paul acts on the belief that he can fashion his own identity, drawing strength from both the middle and working classes without suffering the displacement experienced by his brother William. However, in the manner of the great realist tradition which Lawrence’s mentors had encouraged him to assimilate, and novels like *Middlemarch* (1871), *Madame Bovary* (1857) and *Anna Karenina* (1878), *Sons and Lovers* insists on setting the lives of its characters in a concrete social setting which exerts a powerful and tragic influence over them. The novel opens with a description not of the Morel family but of Bestwood and the development of the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire coalfields from the time of Charles II in the seventeenth century. Even before Paul’s birth, the lives of the Morels are shown to be shaped by industrial history and the financial motives of the colliery owners. The sons’ individual movements outwards and upwards into a wider social world are troublingly mirrored in the family’s rather circumscribed progression from one house to the next in Bestwood. They have the room to achieve some localised distinction (even acquiring the services of a maid, Minnie, in their last home),³¹ but their efforts are contained within Bestwood, and they remain tethered to the incomes of the father and Paul.

It is Gertrude who believes in the power of men (not women) to escape such determinism, and to move up the social ladder through aspiration and industry:

'She frankly *wanted* [Paul] to climb into the middle classes, a thing not very difficult, she knew. And she wanted him in the end to marry a lady' (*SL* 299). One reading of the novel would see it as a critique of Mrs Morel's mistaken ideology of male self-improvement.³² While she is content to see Annie married off in a modest way to a steady man, she encourages her first-born son, William, to take the initiative and drag himself into the middle classes. For a time it seems to work, as he moves among the families of the wealthier tradesmen in Bestwood and finally gets a job in London, where he uses all of his income to support his claim to a middle-class lifestyle, spending money extravagantly on food and Christmas presents, or wasting it on replacement gloves for his careless and snobbish fiancée. Yet, his social aspiration brings him no real happiness: he seems about to trap himself in a loveless marriage, but he dies before he gets the chance, suffering alone in his grim lodgings at Elmers End (the fictional equivalent of Ernest's lodgings in Catford).

It is education and reading that serve in the novel as the catalysts for progression up the social ladder, as they had done in the Lawrence home. Yet, her sons' propensities for reading and study are mixed blessings for Mrs Morel. William studies so hard that he becomes fretful and his mother has to urge him to lighten up for the sake of his health;³³ likewise, Paul's delight in reading is shared with Miriam Leivers, with whom he develops an intellectual kinship that threatens to alienate him from his family. His mother must 'sadly' (*SL* 251) admit that she has no interest in the things he reads and discusses with Miriam, and in one of the most quietly profound moments in the novel, Walter Morel tells Paul 'tha writes i' such a fashion, I canna ma'e it out' (*SL* 419). The novel explores the undesired consequences of Mrs Morel's drive to educate her sons to move up the social ladder: their mental alienation from the social world that nurtured them.

Repetitive patterns show that Paul is unconsciously tied to his family background and doomed to repeat the damaged lives of his parents and siblings. His brother Arthur wins a scholarship to the Grammar School but inherits the reckless impulsiveness of his father, getting into numerous scrapes before almost ruining himself by signing up to serve in the army. Paul seems to be assuming the role of the deceased William, not only by inheriting his brother's suit (which is too big for him)³⁴ and his mother's affections, but in other, less obvious ways. He replicates his brother's brutal impatience when teaching Miriam maths and French; his irritable gloominess 'reminded [Mrs Morel] of William. But Paul was worse' (*SL* 324). The novel contains numerous echoes which connect characters and events to one another: Miriam burns some potatoes, while Paul burns a loaf of bread; Paul prays for his father to be killed at the pit, while Miriam prays not to love Paul Morel;³⁵ more disturbingly, Walter tells Gertrude that he will make

her 'tremble at the sound of my footstep' (SL 49), while Paul proudly tells his mother that the girls at Jordan's 'quake at my footstep' (SL 346). Paul may despise his father's behaviour, but in spite of this he finds himself involuntarily repeating some features of it. We might compare his cruel behaviour towards Miriam with his father's physical cruelty to his mother. The novel is full of images of repetition and return. Like 'the donkeys that plodded wearily in a circle, round a gin' (SL 9) on the first page of the novel, characters find themselves repeating the words and actions of their family members, caught up in destructive patterns of behaviour which seem to be outside their control. Clara ultimately returns to Baxter, and Paul walks back towards Nottingham, 'His fists ... shut, his mouth set fast' (SL 464).

The manner of narration of *Sons and Lovers* and its perspectival complexities reveal almost as much about Lawrence's early life as the rich social detail it contains and its painstakingly transformed and shaped analysis of his family life and the relationships of his youth. The narrator acts as a cultural guide to the working-class habits, rituals and language of Bestwood, but in places his grasp of mining detail falters and when describing working-class ways he adopts by turns a slightly sardonic and condescending tone and an idealising discourse which sees the working man as simple and wholesome. Yet the shifting perspective and ambiguity which might have been weaknesses in another novel are the main strengths of *Sons and Lovers*. By foregrounding Paul's conflicted relationship to the working and middle classes, Lawrence was bringing to the reader's attention matters which were implicit in his own relationship to his materials. The uncertainties and ambivalences of the text articulate Lawrence's own subject positioning as a scholarship boy living in a working-class community but acculturated to a middle-class outlook. The elaborately structured repetitions reveal the influence on him of European realist writers, and of his mentors. Taken together, these aspects of the novel show that Lawrence was not the straightforward working-class author whom Hueffer thought he had discovered but rather a prodigiously well-read and decidedly literary author *from* the working class.

Notes

- 1 Ford Madox Hueffer changed his name to Ford Madox Ford in 1919.
- 2 Lawrence's name appears on his birth certificate as David Herbert Richards Lawrence.
- 3 Cf. Chambers (1935: 169) and Ford (1937: 77–78). Jessie recalled how, on this occasion, 'Lawrence told me that Hueffer was very fond of this flat and said he felt

a sense of satisfaction every time he entered it. / 'I can't say I should', said Lawrence critically'. Ford, taking the suggestion from Jessie, recalled Lawrence being critical of his flat, and himself defending it.

- 4 See Ford (1937: 76).
- 5 See Ford (1937: 80).
- 6 La Ac 2/7/5 (University of Nottingham).
- 7 La Ac 2/7/9 (University of Nottingham).
- 8 See Nehls (1957: 29); Worthen (1991: 39).
- 9 The firm's offices were located at 50 Lime Street.
- 10 See Ada Lawrence and Gelder (1931: 22).
- 11 George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, stereotyped edition (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, n.d.).
- 12 See *STH* 223–226.
- 13 Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896), pp. 181, 199, 235.
- 14 See Grice (2022: 68).
- 15 See *STH* 226–227 and 140.
- 16 The so-called Burns Novel fragments are printed in *LAH* 201–211.
- 17 La Ac 2/8/6/1 (University of Nottingham).
- 18 *English Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (December 1908), pp. 162–163.
- 19 Lawrence incorporates references to the death of the poet Swinburne in April 1909, to his unfinished poem 'A Life History in Harmonies and Discords', and to the first Christmas of his niece Margaret King – daughter of his older sister Emily – who was born in February 1909.
- 20 The notebook is Roberts E320.1 (University of Nottingham). It includes 'A Beloved', 'The Punisher', an epistolary sequence of three poems entitled 'An Epistle from Thelma', 'An Epistle from Arthur' and 'Epilogue from Thelma', 'Sickness', 'A Day in November' and Lawrence's unfinished experimental autobiographical poem 'A Life History in Harmonies and Discords'.
- 21 See Worthen (1991: 43).
- 22 See *PM* 145–160.
- 23 See *SL* xxv.
- 24 Some of Jessie's annotations challenged his fictional depiction of their interactions. For example, she wrote her own alternative account of Miriam Leivers's response to a letter she receives from the 21-year-old Paul in which he calls her a nun. See *SL* 557, explanatory note 293:15.
- 25 See *IL* 380 (3 April 1912).
- 26 See *SL* 88–89.
- 27 See *SL* 112.

- 28** Bestwood is a mining village in its own right; it is located approximately eight kilometres to the east of Eastwood.
- 29** See *SL* 51.
- 30** See *SL* 108–111.
- 31** See *SL* 345.
- 32** See Holderness (1982: 146–147).
- 33** See *SL* 78.
- 34** See *SL* 297.
- 35** Cf. *SL* 176 and 245; 85 and 208.