

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND LIFE WRITING

Andrew Harrison

Surprisingly little attention has been paid to D. H. Lawrence's engagement with historiography; that is, with the writing of history and the study of history as an academic discipline. Available discussions of Lawrence and history have tended to focus in a rather narrow manner either on *Movements in European History* (1921), the school history textbook which Lawrence wrote for Oxford University Press, or on his treatment of historical events or historical processes in his fiction. There has been no attempt to take a broader view of these distinct aspects of his historiographical practice or to relate them to his interest in (and production of) other historiographical forms such as autobiography, biography, fictional biography, and the various hybrid historical fictions now discussed under the term 'auto/biografiction'. In this Chapter I will situate Lawrence's historiographical writing in its early twentieth-century context, focusing on key debates in the period, firstly about the nature of history as an academic discipline and mode of writing, and secondly – and relatedly – about life writing.

Historiography: 'The old bad history is abolished'

One of the most prominent theoretical debates in historiography at the turn of the twentieth century addressed the question of whether history is an art or a science. On 26 January 1903, J. B. Bury delivered his inaugural address as Regius Professor of History at Cambridge. His title was 'The Science of History'. Bury described the 'transformation and expansion of history' by late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German historians such as Friedrich

August Wolf, Barthold Georg Niebuhr and Leopold von Ranke; he stated that these historians had given succeeding generations ‘the idea of a systematic and minute method of analysing their sources, which soon developed into the microscopic criticism, now recognised as indispensable’, and he noted that for his own generation the ‘idea of a scrupulously exact conformity to facts’ had been ‘fixed, refined, and canonised’ (1930: 4, 6). He told his audience that ‘history is not a branch of literature’ and ‘literary dress is no more the part of a historian as a historian, than it is the part of an astronomer to present in an artistic shape the story of the stars’ (9). In fact, the association of history with literature had (in his view) tended to obscure its status as a science. He asserted that

History has really been enthroned and ensphered among the sciences; but the particular nature of her influence, her time-honoured association with literature ... [has] acted as a sort of vague cloud, half concealing from men’s eyes her new position in the heavens. (5)

For Bury, the danger of viewing history as an art was that, in that case, ‘the sanctions of truth and accuracy could not be severe’ (6). Bury made it quite clear that the responsibility of the science of history was to document, in an objective and selfless way, with minimal reference to ‘one’s own time and place’, the ‘material and spiritual development, of the culture and the works, of man in society, from the stone age upwards’ (16, 19).

‘The Science of History’ received a rebellious reply from the twenty-four-year-old G. M. Trevelyan, who would succeed Bury in his Cambridge post in 1927. In an essay entitled ‘The Latest View of History’, published in the *Independent Review* for 1903-4, and later re-printed under the title ‘Clio, a Muse’ (1913), Trevelyan made a plea that history should be recognised as an art as well as a science. As Todd Avery comments, Trevelyan seems to have

been bothered by ‘the ascendancy of “scientific” historiography’ primarily because, ‘as a symptom of the growing scientization of British culture, it was ... contributing to the burgeoning scientism of education and a rising distrust of literature as a valid way of knowing’ (2010: 851). Trevelyan was a committed educationalist and he was troubled by history being considered a soft science rather than a discipline which required ‘the accumulation and interpretation of facts’ alongside ‘the whole art of book composition and prose style’ (1913: 34). He argued pragmatically for the importance of art and science to history on the grounds first that as an academic discipline it required both detached analysis of fact and a sympathetic understanding of contextual factors, and second that without art history could have only a niche readership.

Trevelyan’s argument for viewing history as both a science *and* an art seems tame by modern standards. The powerful post-structuralist turn in the 1960s toward a view of history as a constructed narrative form indistinguishable from fiction makes these early twentieth-century debates appear decidedly dated, but in the first three decades of the twentieth century they were very much alive. Lawrence met G. M. Trevelyan in summer 1914, through Trevelyan’s older brother, the poet R. C. (‘Bob’) Trevelyan, and he did not respond well to the former’s committed academic outlook: ‘I met Bob Trevelyan’s elder brother ... and rather hated him. He’s so God almighty serious. I reckon it’s conceit to be quite so serious: as if he was the schoolmaster and all the world his scholars, poor dear’ (2*L* 211). However, in the matter of history as a science or an art, Lawrence took a similar line to Trevelyan, arguing for a balanced view that foregrounds the educative value and appeal of history. In July 1918 Lawrence was invited by Oxford University Press to write ‘a school-book, of European History’ (3*L* 261). Lawrence’s contact at the Press, Vere Collins, had been ‘struck by the knowledge he showed of history’ and suggested that he might write ‘an elementary text-book for junior forms in grammar, or upper forms in primary, schools’ (i.e. for children between

approximately ten and thirteen years of age), focusing on Europe because the Ministry of Education was at that time ‘urging schools to do more in teaching European history’ (Nehls 1957: 471). Lawrence was ideally suited to write for a young adolescent readership because of his experience of teaching at Davidson Road Elementary School in Croydon between October 1908 and November 1911. Elementary schools were divided into Standards I to VII, with pupils ranging in ages from five to fourteen; Lawrence was given Standard IV (with an average age on the national scale of around ten to eleven) when he arrived at the school (*IL* 80). His own training for teaching history while studying for the King’s Scholarship Examination had required him to read textbooks on English history by Cyril Ransome (father of Arthur Ransome) and Samuel Rawson Gardiner (Lawrence 1905: 283), so he had a fairly recent appreciation of how history was taught in schools, and an understanding of the textbooks which teachers had at their disposal.

The challenge of producing a history textbook for a young readership which must be at once wide-ranging and informative but also accessible and stimulating forced Lawrence to confront the different contemporary approaches to history as an academic discipline. In the foreword to *Movements in European History* – the ‘Introduction for the Teacher’ – Lawrence notes how:

At the present moment, history in school must either be graphic or scientific. The old bad history is abolished. The old bad history consisted of a register of facts. It drew up a chart of human events, as one might draw up a chart of the currants in a plum-pudding, merely because they happen promiscuously to be there. No more of this.
(*MEH* 7)

Lawrence describes ‘graphic’ history as consisting of ‘stories about men and women who

appear in the old records, stories as vivid and as personal as may be'. 'Scientific' history, on the other hand, is 'all head':

Having picked out all the currants and raisins of events for our little children, we go to the university and proceed to masticate the dough. We must analyse the mixture and determine the ingredients. Each fact must be established, and put into relation with every other fact. This is the basis of scientific history: the forging of a great chain of logically sequential events, cause and effect demonstrated down the whole range of time. (8)

The 'Introduction' critiques both the graphic and scientific approaches to history, noting how the former is liable to make the study of historical figures over into our own understanding, leaving out 'the impersonal, terrific element, the sense of the unknown', 'the strange, vast, terrifying reality of the past' (7), while the latter is

all very well, if we will remember that we are not *discovering* any sequence of events, we are only abstracting. The logical sequence does not exist until we have made it, and then it exists as a new piece of furniture of the human mind. (8)

Lawrence was aware that the intended readers of his textbook demanded a compromise, since they would 'have had almost enough of stories and anecdotes and personalities', but 'not yet reached the stage of intellectual pride in abstraction' (8). The graphic approach to history requires fact in order to inject into an historical narrative the necessary degree of strangeness and impersonality, while the scientific approach needs imagination to discover logical sequences – or, in Lawrence's terms, 'threads' or 'movements' – in recorded data and events.

Lawrence's interest in the history textbook project clearly resided more in the telling of vivid stories and the process of abstracting sequences than it did in the setting down of factual information. At a late stage of his work on the textbook, he declared his dislike of 'the broken pots of historical facts' and said that he felt happier when he could discern 'the thread of the developing significance' (3L 322). Yet he worked intensively, if not always accurately, to establish the factual basis of his account. Philip Crumpton has shown how closely Lawrence relied upon certain historical sources, including 'Gibbon, Suetonius, Plutarch's *Lives*, the translation of *The Annals of Tacitus* by A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb (1906) and A. J. Grant's *A History of Europe* (1913)', plus Tacitus's *Germania*, G. W. Kitchin's *A History of France* (1881), Kenneth Bell's *Medieval Europe* (1911), R. B. Mowat's *The Later Middle Ages* (1917) and Emmeline M. Tanner's *The Renaissance and the Reformation* (1908) (*MEH* xix, xx, xxii, xxiii). He also referred to more imaginative sources such as Thomas Bulfinch's *Legends of Charlemagne* (1862) and Joseph Victor von Scheffel's *Ekkehard: A Tale of the Tenth Century* (1867) (3L 304, 315). In places the narrative consists of a simple listing of facts and details, as when Lawrence sketches in the early history of Rome:

Gradually Rome extended her dominion. In 252 B.C. she took Sicily, her first overseas possession. Then she defeated Carthage in North Africa; then Macedonia, in the Balkan peninsula; then Greece, then Spain, and so on, till the lands of the Mediterranean were under her power. In the year 62 B.C. Pompey the Great returned from the east. He had been as far as the Euphrates, had defeated the Persian Mithridates, who fled to the Crimea, and Syria was added to Rome. In the year 58 B.C. Julius Caesar marched north to Gaul, and across from Gaul he came to Britain. By Gaul we mean the land now occupied by France, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Rhine. (*MEH* 11-12)

Crumpton notes that in a marked-up copy of the first edition somebody at Oxford University Press questioned the date of the taking of Sicily: 'I suppose this might stand? But 241 B.C. wd. be more accurate' (287 n.12:1). The historian C. R. L. Fletcher, Fellow of All Souls and a Delegate of Oxford University Press, read the original manuscript of *Movements in European History* and approved it subject to the correction of 'some small details of dates and names' (xxv), and the author and editor V. F. Boyson made further, unauthorised changes to names and dates when the Press was preparing the 1925 illustrated edition.

The initial commission was to write not 'a formal, connected, text book, but a series of vivid sketches of movements and people' (Nehls 1957: 471). The strength of the book lies precisely in the vividness of its descriptive passages. Very little evidence has survived of Lawrence's teaching practice, but in a letter of 4 November 1908 he told Blanche Jennings that when he gave Standard IV 'a history lesson' they were 'pretending to shoot arrows at me, drawing back the bow with vigour, and looking at me with brown bright eyes' (*IL* 89). We know that in one lesson he got his class to act out the Battle of Agincourt by the division of the classroom into two halves (Healey and Cushman 1985: 132). Lawrence clearly saw the educative value for young minds of connecting with historical events through empathy and imaginative re-enactment.

It is in the graphic descriptions of historical experience that Lawrence's skills as a fictionalist are felt, as when he invokes the trepidation of Roman soldiers as they advanced through deep forests in southern Germany:

This Hercynian forest created the greatest impression on the Roman imagination. No one knew how far it stretched. German natives who had travelled through it had gone on for sixty days, without coming to the end of it. In the illimitable shadow the pine-

trunks rose up bare, the ground was brown with pine-needles, there was no undergrowth. A great silence pervaded everywhere, not broken by the dense whisper of the wind above. Between these shadowy trunks flitted deer, reindeer with branching horns ran in groups, or the great elk, with his massive antlers, stood darkly alone and pawed the ground, before he trotted away into the deepening shadow of trunks. (*MEH* 45)

This kind of immersive historical writing comes close to the style and content of the popular historical romances which Lawrence had greatly cherished in his youth. The extent of Lawrence's early reading of historical romance is made clear in Chapter IV of Jessie Chambers's *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record*, 'Literary Formation', in which she lists the texts which fired the young writer's imagination, from Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth: A Tale of the Middle Ages* (1861) and Frederic ('Dean') Farrar's *Darkness and Dawn. Or, Scenes in the Days of Nero. An Historic Tale* (1891) to R. D. Blackmore's *Lorna Doone: A Romance of Exmoor* (1869). These were read alongside adventure tales by R. L. Stevenson, James Fenimore Cooper and Anthony Hope, and stirring poems with historical settings like 'Hiawatha' and 'Evangeline' by Longfellow, and 'Morte d'Arthur' and 'The Lady of Shalott' by Tennyson, which we know he read and enjoyed (Chambers 1935: 92-6). Jessie records how Lawrence would not only discuss these texts with her, but sometimes actually involve her in enactments of scenes from them. Lawrence's ability to inhabit and reproduce the form of these historical romance writings and popular adventure narratives underscores his appeal to his young readership in *Movements in European History*.

Lawrence's most engaging imaginative passages in the book concern peoples who had typically been traduced or marginalised in earlier historical accounts. The same desire is felt in the posthumously published *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, which Lawrence wrote in a

spirit of opposition to the scholarly accounts of Etruscan civilisation provided by historians such as Theodor Mommsen, George Dennis, Fritz Weege, Pericle Ducati and R. A. L. Fell. Gaps in the historical record were particularly appealing to Lawrence; in February 1916 he asked Lady Ottoline Morrell to send him a history book which was ‘not too big, because I like to fill it in myself, and the contentions of learned men are so irritating’ (2L 529). His descriptions of the ‘Germanic races’ (MEH 44) and the Huns in *Movements in European History* give details of the family structures and cultures of these groups which seem intended to balance sympathy with a critical awareness of their difference from the reputedly more civilised Romans; he avoids sentimentalising the barbarian warriors, calling them ‘lazy and violent’ (48) and ‘avaricious as demons’ (67), but he stops short of dismissing them or explaining them away in relation to Roman accounts or contemporary norms.

In ‘The Science of History’, Bury had argued that the best preparation for truly understanding the past and ‘for investigating its movements, for deducing its practical lessons, is to be brought up in a school where its place is estimated in scales in which the weight of contemporary interest is not thrown’ (1930: 16). Lawrence was aware that ‘each age proceeds to interpret every other age in terms of the current personality’, so that ‘Shakespeare’s Caesar is an Elizabethan, and Bernard Shaw’s is a Victorian, and neither of them is Caesar’; his response was to focus not on ‘our sentiments and our personal feelings’, on ‘cosiness and familiar circumstance’, but on the impersonal ‘surging movements which rose in the hearts of men in Europe, sweeping human beings together into one great concerted action, or sweeping them apart for ever on the tides of opposition’ (MEH 7, 8). This epochal understanding of history rests on belief in an underlying mass psychology to elucidate significant historical phenomena. For example, Lawrence explained the catastrophe of the First World War as a mass reaction against the stymied state of safety and self-preservation created in the West by ‘Laws, and all State machinery’:

No wonder there is a war. No wonder there is a great waste and squandering of life.

Anything, anything to prove that we are not altogether sealed in our own self-preservation as dying chrysalides. Better the light be blown out, wilfully, recklessly, in the wildest wind, than remain secure under the bushel, saved from every draught. (*STH* 15-16)

Such an account reads history in terms of psychological needs rather than politics and personalities.

Great men and exceptional individuals interested Lawrence in his writing of history and fiction only in so far as they enabled him to ‘discover whither the general run of mankind, the great unconscious mass, was tending’ (Carswell 1932: 38). The emphasis is not on a Whig version of history which stresses progress and linear historical development, or on a straightforward narrative of evolution and/or degeneration, but on a cyclical view of changing human impulses and ‘Worlds successively created and destroyed’ (*MM* 14). Unlike H. G. Wells, who argued in *The Outline of History* (1920) that an inclusive ‘sense of history as the common adventure of all mankind is as necessary for peace within as it is for peace between the nations’ (1920: vi), Lawrence saw conflict and war as necessary and unavoidable features of human life, and the role of history to help us grasp their meaning and significance rather than to ameliorate conflicts and prevent further wars.

Lawrence’s focus on epochs in history helps to explain the significance of the word ‘Movements’ in his title, *Movements in European History*. ‘Surging movements’ or tides are recurring and allow one to identify with the human needs and desires which have shaped historical events without losing the recognition of the fundamental strangeness of the past. Lawrence certainly valued historical accounts for the light they shed on contemporary events,

but he believed that their educative value in this respect lay solely in our responsiveness to collective experience: Rupert Birkin's reading of a 'thick volume of Thucydides' in *Women in Love* (WL 105), in the scene in which Hermione Roddice hits him on the head with a lapis lazuli paperweight, indicates the implicit connection Lawrence sensed between the violent collapse of Western civilisation in the First World War and the fall of ancient Greece. In this tragi-comic scene the domestic offers a window onto impersonal historical processes.

Lawrence's views of history do not make themselves felt in his fiction only through such isolated allusions, however, since his interest in the impersonal tides of history can be said to shape the very structure of his works. In his frequently-quoted letter of 5 June 1914 to Edward Garnett, Lawrence expressed his interest in exploring character in his fiction at this same impersonal level: he wanted to move beyond the 'old stable ego of the character' in order to discover the 'inhuman will', and to address what the characters *are* instead of what they feel (2L 183). He was aware that this committed him to adopting a new approach to literary form:

don't look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, like when one draws a fiddle-bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, the sand takes lines unknown. (184)

Mark Kinkead-Weekes has described *The Rainbow* as 'an historical novel' with a 'double focus' on how the individual is shaped both by 'historical development and social change' and 'a timeless nature, outside history' (1989: 121-2). While the novel traces developments in the opportunities and range of experiences available to women between 1840 and the early twentieth century, the religious and mythical aspects of the narrative reveal continuities between the emotional and intellectual natures of Lydia Lensky, Anna Brangwen and Ursula

Brangwen down the generations. Specific historical contexts are absent from *Women in Love*, so the emphasis is placed entirely on the states of violence, self-destruction and emotional collapse to which the characters are subject; Lawrence deliberately wished for the historical setting of the novel 'to remain unfixed, so that the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters' (WL 485). The realist drive to account for the development of characters' lives in terms of their personal psychologies and social experiences – which Lawrence externalised in his letter to Edward Garnett of 19 November 1912 (IL 476-9) concerning the form of *Sons and Lovers* – gives way in the post-war novels to an incorporation of form-breaking and unresolved impulses to escape such structures and to realise deeply-felt but unarticulated needs. Alvina Houghton, Gilbert Noon, Aaron Sisson, Richard Lovatt Somers and Kate Leslie each act on their irreducible and unresolved desires in ways which challenge the formal and thematic features of the *Bildungsroman*.

Life Writing: Lawrence and 'The New Biography'

The historiographical issues confronted and negotiated in Lawrence's writing of history are implicitly worked through in his prose fiction, then, but they also inform his multi-layered engagement with life writing. The key figure in contemporary debates around biography was Lytton Strachey. Strachey was studying history at Trinity College, Cambridge over the period of the debate between Bury and Trevelyan. In an unpublished essay entitled 'The Historian of the Future', written for a Cambridge reading group in 1903 (and now in the Strachey papers in the British Library), he made his own contribution to the issues at stake. The essay is a rejoinder to Bury: in it, Strachey argues that the greatest historians were invariably artists. Avery notes that Strachey – like Trevelyan, a Cambridge Apostle – uses the methods of analytical philosophy of G. E. Moore to unpick Bury's arguments, suggesting that he (Bury)

was ‘conflating the definitional and pragmatic questions, What is history? And, What good does history do?’ (2010: 853). Strachey contends that by spending most of his energies arguing about the good that history does, Bury ignores (in Avery’s words) ‘the intrinsic goodness of History as a type of art’ (854) and its capacity to have a positive effect on the future. For Strachey, ‘history, made interesting by judicious selection, and made beautiful by art, is one of the most valuable things we know’ (855).

‘The Historian of the Future’ articulates views that would be more succinctly expressed in the preface to *Eminent Victorians* (1918), one of the key texts of what has come to be known – after Virginia Woolf’s 1927 essay – as ‘The New Biography’. By setting out a vigorously aestheticist notion of history as an intrinsic force for good Strachey paved the way for his own irreverent experiments in biography (undoing Victorian mythography) and the kinds of experimental biographical narratives written by modernist authors who shared his desire to critique the accepted wisdom of imperialism while linking this to a broader assault on the unitary and coherent subject. Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) and *Flush: A Biography* (1933) – focusing on Vita Sackville-West and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s spaniel respectively – are often viewed as landmark texts for ‘The New Biography’. In her essay of that title, Woolf argued that biographers should leave behind naïve notions of reality and focus more closely on language and design, combining truth and imagination, ‘granite-like solidity’ and ‘rainbow-like intangibility’ (1967: 229). Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen, was a celebrated biographer and editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and Woolf’s parodic and mocking interrogation of the conventions of life writing can be viewed (in Max Saunders’s formulation) as ‘a complex reaction against the kind of Victorian “official” biographic tradition that the *DNB* represented: conventional, patriarchal, impersonal, censorious, and censored’ (2010: 438-9).

Lawrence’s approaches to life writing across his career respond to what Saunders

calls

the turn-of-the-century awareness that the conventions of biography (like history) are beginning to seem absurd: that as soon as they begin to become visible *as* conventions, they can no longer do their work of transparently creating the impression of authority and objectivity. (2010: 450)

Saunders groups Lawrence with Joyce, Eliot and Pound as authors who ‘did not write their memoirs’ and did not ‘write biographies of others (with the possible exception of Pound’s *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (1916), which is more manifesto for Vorticism than conventional life-narrative)’ (2010: 293). This statement simplifies the extent of Lawrence’s involvement with experimental autobiographical writing and biography. Saunders focuses almost exclusively on Lawrence’s autobiographical fiction, only registering in a footnote the autobiographical nature of some of his poetry (256 n. 117). He does not pay any attention to Lawrence’s most experimental autobiographical poem, the unfinished ‘A Life History in Harmonies and Discords’. He also overlooks two examples of Lawrence’s biographical writing: the ‘Memoir of Maurice Magnus’ and the short satirical ‘squib’ entitled ‘The Life of J. Middleton Murry By J. C.’ Lastly, he does not consider two unfinished works by Lawrence – the fragments now known as the ‘Burns Novel’ and ‘The Wilful Woman’ – which variously combine fiction with biography and autobiography. In the remainder of this Chapter I will discuss the historiographical implications of Lawrence’s approach to life writing by focusing on autobiography, biography and auto/biografiction.

Lawrence had a lifelong aversion to producing the kinds of short autobiography required by publishers, partly due to his impatience with the business aspects of publishing and his resistance to being marketed as a working-class writer, but also because he realised

how little they tell one about an author's actual identity. His instinct was always to send people to his more autobiographical fiction if they wanted to learn about his early life. In July 1928, for example, he grudgingly provided some autobiographical notes in response to a request from the French publisher Kra, but told Jean Watson, the manager of his literary agent Curtis Brown's Foreign Department: 'Let the Kra – Kra – Kraaa! read *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* and he's got all he wants – and be damned to him' (6L 465). In his fictional autobiographies Lawrence explores selected aspects of his life in a fully self-critical way, seeking to discover general insights through the personal experience he is drawing on. The self-aggrandisement implicit in the autobiographical note is here replaced by detached self-analysis and an acknowledgement that a life cannot be viewed in isolation from the biological, social and historical forces that went to create it (and of which it is a part): autobiographical writing must give due emphasis to the impersonal shaping forces of heredity and social history, and of human nature. The most obvious example here is *Sons and Lovers*; in this most autobiographical novel Lawrence offers a comprehensive account of the historical and family forces which shape the lives of the Morels, and at a late stage of his work on it he claimed to 'loathe Paul Morel' (1L 427) and later still called the excessive mother-love and consequent psychic split in Paul 'the tragedy of thousands of young men in England' (477). Lawrence's late autobiographical essays – including '[Return to Bestwood]', 'Getting On', 'Which Class I Belong To' and 'Myself Revealed (Autobiographical Sketch)' – are very carefully crafted constructions of his life which address (and, to some degree, re-imagine) his past by discussing wider issues of social change and class structure.

The nine poems which comprise 'A Life History in Harmonies and Discords' were written around November 1909. Lawrence clearly thought of the sequence as an experimental autobiography, since the character Ernest Lambert, in his contemporaneous play *A Collier's Friday Night*, refers to it as 'full of significance' and notes that 'The profs. would make a

great long essay out of the idea' (*Plays* 29). Lawrence draws on a scientific language he had gleaned from Ernst Haeckel's *The Riddle of the Universe* (1900) to describe reproductive growth and the origins and development of the individual through antinomies of 'joy with death, and black anger with Love for mate' (*3Poems* 1425). The poems are complex, and they are made more difficult to decipher because of the fact that the only available state of the text (transcribed in the Cambridge edition of *The Poems*) is that written in pencil in the second University College Nottingham notebook (Roberts E320.1), and parts of the poems are heavily deleted and almost illegible. The sequence is formally innovative, since it is structured musically, in terms of alternating 'harmonies' and 'discords': its central theme seems to be the necessity of contraries for human life and the violence that ensues from them, but it also confronts the difficulty one faces in clearly tracing the shape of one's own life, as this entails disentangling it from the intertwined lives of one's parents: 'With pain did I carefully overline / What part of my graph was plainly plotted / Where the curves were knotted I must define / Pains that were clotted over mine' (*3Poems* 1429). As John Worthen has suggested, the sequence is best considered in the context of Lawrence's early reflections on his mother's life and his preparation for writing *Sons and Lovers*, because the third poem presents the reflections of a mother 'who is so clearly using her child to help her escape her own unhappiness', and the final, unfinished poem 'is an author's instruction to himself about what his job should be when he deals with material such as the story of his mother' (1991: 275, 276). Its heavily revised and unfinished state strongly suggests that its author was aware of his inability to resolve the issues involved in creating clear autobiographical understanding from a consideration of biological factors and psychological determinants that stress the inevitable overlapping of subjectivities and the reverberation of experiences through the generations.

'Memoir of Maurice Magnus' is Lawrence's only extended piece of biographical

writing. It was written between November 1921 and January 1922 as an introduction to Magnus's autobiography *Dregs*, which details his experiences in the French Foreign Legion. Catherine Carswell records that Lawrence thought it 'the best single piece of writing, *as writing*, that he had ever done' (1932: 117). The contexts of its composition and publication – recounted at length in the Cambridge edition of *Introductions and Reviews* (IR xl-l) – highlight the complexities involved in producing a truthful account of another person's life when one's own is so closely interwoven with it. Lawrence first met Magnus in the company of Norman Douglas in Florence in November 1919. He was at once interested and impressed by Magnus's past experiences and courage, and appalled by his spendthrift tendencies and reliance on others to get by. Magnus solicited money from Lawrence on several occasions. In Taormina, Sicily, at the end of April 1920, Lawrence grudgingly offered Magnus some financial support but refused to accommodate him or to fetch his possessions from the monastery at Montecassino (where he had been living, and to where he had been followed by police who were pursuing him for paying for a hotel stay in Anzio with a cheque which bounced). Magnus subsequently travelled from Sicily to Malta in May 1920 on the same boat as Lawrence, Frieda and their friend Mary Cannan. Magnus stayed on Malta, and at the start of November 1920 he committed suicide by drinking hydrocyanic acid, having been intercepted on the street by policeman intent on extraditing him to Italy on the charge of fraud.

Lawrence heard about Magnus's suicide in late November, via a letter he received from one of Magnus's friends on Malta, Walter Salomone. He wrote his 'Memoir' with a view to publishing it together with *Dregs* in order to make enough money to pay off the debts that Magnus owed to himself and another friend, Michael Borg. Lawrence sought and received the permission of Norman Douglas (Magnus's literary executor) to publish Magnus's book. However, when the volume – re-titled *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion* – was

published by Martin Secker on 1 October 1924 Douglas took exception to Lawrence's 'Memoir'. He issued a pamphlet entitled *D. H. Lawrence and Maurice Magnus: A Plea for Better Manners*, in which he contested the presentation of himself in Lawrence's account and ascribed what he saw as Lawrence's unfair attack on Magnus to his (Lawrence's) mean-spirited resentment of the money Magnus owed him.

The experimental form of Lawrence's 'Memoir' reveals (*pace* Douglas) his attempt to confront and foreground the problems involved in making sense of Magnus, and in understanding his own feeling of being implicated in the suicide. As Howard Mills notes, the 'Memoir' is a 'generically hybrid work', combining aspects of 'memoir, autobiography and fiction' (1988: 121). Lawrence may have begun writing it with the words 'Yesterday arrived the manuscript of the Legion, from Malta' (*IR* 63), which occur close to the end of the published text (xlii). This would be consistent with Lawrence's original intention to produce a short introduction to Magnus's book. In the event, the introduction became an extended account of Lawrence's encounters with, impressions of and reflections on, Magnus.

Lawrence accentuates the subjective nature of his understanding of Magnus by providing a vivid account of his sensitivity to Magnus's response *to him* alongside his own response to Magnus. If Lawrence thought Magnus a 'little scamp', 'shrewd and rather impertinent', full of 'niceties and little pomposities' (71, 12, 15), then he was also aware of how he might appear to Magnus with his 'beard bushy and raggy' because of his 'horror of entering a strange barber's shop' and his strict exercise of economy: 'Magnus rather despised me because I did not spend money' (11-12, 15).

As in his historical writing, in the 'Memoir' Lawrence balances sympathy with critical awareness in a manner which impedes reductive reasoning and stresses the strangeness of experience and the provisional nature of our attempts to comprehend it. Mills shows how Lawrence dramatises 'the struggle to summarise'; in his analysis of Magnus's

behaviour Lawrence makes regular use of ‘generous qualification’, employing ‘frequent “turns” of *but* and *yet*’ (1988: 125, 123). Instances of such qualifications abound:

He had a queer delicacy of his own, varying with a bounce and a commonness. He was a common little bounder. And then he had this curious delicacy and tenderness and wistfulness. (*IR* 20)

Magnus was very familiar and friendly, chattering in his quaint Italian, which was more wrong than any Italian I have ever heard spoken; very familiar and friendly, and a tiny bit deferential to the monks, and yet, and yet—rather patronising. (28)

Magnus was never indecent, and one could never dismiss him just as a scoundrel. He was not. He was one of these modern parasites who just assume their right to live and live well, leaving the payment to anybody who can, will, or must pay. The end is inevitably swindling— (51)

When faced by Douglas’s criticism that he had misunderstood and slandered Magnus, Lawrence stated that his ‘Memoir’ contained ‘nothing but the exact truth: as far as any human being can write the exact truth’ (*5L* 255). The qualification here is crucial because it makes clear that all a memoirist or biographer can deliver is an honest account of the impression made by an individual, since objective truth is outside his scope. In his preface to *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey asserted that the two rules which a biographer must follow are to ‘preserve ... a becoming brevity’ and to ‘maintain ... freedom of spirit’. It was not, he said, the ‘business’ of a biographer to ‘be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them’ (Strachey 1986: 10). As Lawrence famously wrote in his

conclusion to the 'Memoir', 'Even the dead ask only for *justice*: not for praise or exoneration. Who dares humiliate the dead with excuses for their living?' (*IR* 70).

The stance on life writing revealed in the 'Memoir of Maurice Magnus' is consistent with Lawrence's later reflections on biography and biographical criticism. Members of his inner circle were very much engaged in writing biographies – or producing biographical writing – during the period of 'The New Biography', and he took part with characteristic vigour in the debates raised by their approaches. In May 1927 he took Richard Aldington to task for being too apologetic and skittish in a 7,000-word pamphlet he published about Lawrence entitled *D. H. Lawrence: An Indiscretion*. He asked Aldington, 'Why do you write on the one hand as if you were my grandmother ... And on the other ... as if you were on hot bricks?' (*6L* 64-5). In December of the same year, when Catherine Carswell told Lawrence that she was working on a life of Robert Burns, Lawrence made it clear that she must avoid condescending to Burns and making him a safe historical figure for a bourgeois readership (as he felt J. G. Lockhart had done in his 1828 biography); he instructed her not to be 'mealy mouthed like them' (232), but to take Burns seriously as a rebel working-class poet and to use his life and work to send out a much-needed challenge to her modern-day readers. In 1929 Lawrence responded to John Middleton Murry's *The Life of Jesus* (1926) with a 'squib' intended to satirise what he felt was Murry's complacent attitude to, and identification with, Christ. Lawrence imagined a reversal of author and subject. *The Life of J. Middleton Murry By J. C.* is the shortest of Lawrence's published prose works: 'John Middleton was born in the year of the Lord 1891? It happened also to be the most lying year of the most lying century since time began, but what is that to an innocent babe!' (Roberts and Poplawski 2001: 183).

Lawrence also expressed forthright views on fictional biography and made two abortive attempts to write his own fictional biographies. His negative response to Gilbert

Cannan's fictional biography of Mark Gertler, *Mendel: A Story of Youth* [CROSS REF TO BIOFICTION CHAPTER], published in October 1916, reveals his awareness of the porous boundaries between the roman à clef, which draws selectively on a life – or lives – in order to explore and/or to critique a society or culture, and sensational journalism, which merely recounts the more salacious and sensational aspects of an individual's life to arouse interest and attract readers. Lawrence believed that all historiographical forms should entail a struggle to make sense of past experience with a view to understanding and critiquing contemporary life. He dismissed *Mendel* as 'journalism: statement, without creation' (3L 35). Lawrence would have had in mind a comparison here between *Mendel* and the transformation of life into art which he was himself effecting at this very date in his own roman à clef, *Women in Love*. His failure to complete his own fictional biographies perhaps reveals his sense of the insurmountable difficulties involved in balancing truthfulness to another person's life events with the analytical detachment and clarity required by art. In December 1912, having just completed *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence attempted to write a fictional 'life of Robert Burns'. It was to have been an autobiografiction: he researched the details of Burns's life and told a friend that he would 'make him [Burns] live near home, as a Derbyshire man' and 'do him almost like an autobiography' (IL 487). The project stalled at an early stage; Lawrence admitted that his work on it was 'more clever than good' (491). Almost a decade later, in September 1922, he began writing a biografiction based on the life of his New Mexican host, Mabel Dodge Sterne (SM 199-203), but this project too was soon abandoned, this time because of the tensions between Lawrence, Frieda and the overbearing subject of the fiction.

Conclusion

Gāmini Salgādo suggests that 'it would be absurd to claim for Lawrence, on the basis of

Movements [in European History], the status of an original historiographer' (1988: 236), but taking a wider view of his historiographical writing reveals just how attuned he was to contemporary debates in historiography, and how responsive and opinionated. Lawrence deliberately combined the graphic and scientific approaches to history in *Movements in European History*, articulating a distinctive epochal interpretation of history based on a model of mass psychology; he sought to rehabilitate the reputations of peoples whose cultures had been denigrated or marginalised by academic historians; and he made formal innovations in his fiction to express his awareness of the ways in which the individual is shaped by both historical processes and timeless features such as heredity and human nature. Like his modernist contemporaries, Lawrence sought to 'imagine alternative forms for ... experience', working both with and '*against* the prevailing modes of representation' (Saunders 2010: 444). He approached autobiography and biography in a sceptical and questioning way as modes of writing whose conventions were being challenged in response to the latest thinking about selfhood, subjectivity and relativity. His innovations and experiments in life writing were informed by the full range of his historiographical insights and they carry an implicitly moral implication in their insistence on understanding the individual in relation to wider social, historical and psychological forces, and in the consistent emphasis they place on the partial and contingent nature of our knowledge of ourselves and others.

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