ONE OF THE LARGE understated questions in Sons and Lovers is the extent to which individuals are not in control of their own destiny, circumstances, and even their moment-to-moment experiences. Lawrence formulates the idea early in the opening chapter: `Sometimes life takes hold of one, carries the body along, accomplishes one's history, and yet is not real, but leaves one's self as it were slurred over.' (14:26-8)(1)

Such rare authorial philosophising is like a vestigial trace of George Eliot's influence. Thereafter in Sons and Lovers the topic is explored through the narrator's reportage: the characters' thoughts, their experiences of the `self', Paul's reflections on `fate' and so on, as when Paul comments to Miriam: `But you are what your unconscious self makes you, not so much what you want to be' (233:9-10). In addition, the boundary between `life' and `self' is constantly questioned by the narrator's unusual use of vocabulary and syntax. Grammar that seems misaligned dissolves the barriers separating individuals from each other or their surroundings and probes the problematic relationship between identity and consciousness.

In the complete text of the novel the words `conscious', `unconscious' and `self-conscious', occur so often(2) that the reader is led to ponder the ways in which the novel addresses issues of `psychology' and challenges our very use of the word `consciousness'. The four occurrences in the first chapter all arise in the aftermath of the Morels' quarrel, when Walter locks Gertrude out of the house and `she could not control her consciousness' (33:38-9). In the powerfully-written and much-quoted climax to that episode Lawrence presents Mrs Morel as vividly experiencing a loss of `self':

Mrs Morel leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself awhile. She did not know what she thought. Except for a slight feeling of sickness, and her consciousness in the child, her self melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time, the child too melted with her

in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon. (34:33-9)

This is more than an elaborate description of `a kind of swoon': it raises issues of identity and consciousness that will be taken up later in terms of the `child' Paul's experience. Mrs Morel's single unitary identity is far less disrupted by the vocabulary of melting and swooning than by two quirks of grammar: Except for and consciousness in. Mrs Morel's `self' melts except for her `feeling' of sickness and her `consciousness'. She is not conscious of the child, but her consciousness is located in the child. The narrator's unusual syntax has reinforced the impression that within Mrs Morel's totality her `self', her `feelings' and her `consciousness' are separate parts which live in an undefined relationship to each other.
Mrs Morel's initial movement into the full moonlight has been expressed three paragraphs earlier in an even more extraordinary sentence, abounding in unexpected twists of language (here italicised):

She hurried out of the side garden to the front, where she could stand as if in an immense gulf of white light, the moon streaming high in face of her, the moonlight standing up from the hills in front, and filling the valley, where the Bottoms crouched, almost blindingly. (34:11-15)

Mrs Morel hurries to where she can stand in the moonlight. This appears to be her intention. But she cannot intend to stand as if in a gulf. The narrator has conflated two sentences -- 'Mrs Morel hurried ... to the front, where she could stand in the light. It was as if she was standing in an immense gulf'. The fact that the second sentence must have (and is silently heard by the reader to have) an impersonal verb, means that her intentionality is somehow removed as soon as her action of hurrying is Over and she stands still. From then on it is the moon which is the chief actor.

The moon streaming 'in face of her' is another conflation of two 'normal' usages: 'in her face' and 'in front of her'. The effect of this is to make the moon seem curiously challenging, confrontational. The description of the moonlight as 'standing' seems at first to be only a slight extension of the poetic licence of 'streaming', but when combined with 'up from the hills', another more visual conflation seems to have taken place. The hills are standing up and the moonlight is shining down on them. After all these unusual prepositional phrases, 'in front' seems unanchored, particularly in comparison with 'the front' earlier. The expression 'the hills in front' could be misread as distinguishing these hills from others behind. They are as much in front of the houses, and in front of the moon, as they are in front of Mrs Morel. Indeed, the words are so oddly appended to the phrase, that they almost suggest 'in affront' or 'in confrontation'.(3)

The final touch is a violent confrontation of vocabulary and syntax. The houses of the Bottoms 'crouched', in the familiar manner of the miners who inhabit them, and the word-order seems to move confidently on to suggest they are crouching because blinded by the moonlight. But the unexpected 'blindingly' sends the reader back to decode the grammar anew, to find that the centre of this perception, the character being blinded is Mrs Morel. The effect of Lawrence's long complex sentence is to describe a person as a collection of sensations without an active, controlling centre of consciousness. The oddities in this passage are not extreme: they do not go so far as to suggest Mrs Morel is having a lurid hallucination. But the disruptive conflation of common phraseology plays havoc with our normal conception of how an individual perceives her surroundings, and compels us to forego the automatic assumption that Mrs Morel's mind has control over her experience.

Two pages later, Walter Morel is in a parallel condition after their quarrel. He loses consciousness by falling asleep at the kitchen table, and when he wakes, his actions are described in a manner which denies him a single unitary identity:

'Open the door, Walter,' she said coldly.
His hands relaxed -- it dawned on him what he had done. His head dropped, sullen and dogged. She saw him hurry to the door, heard the bolt chock. He tried the latch. It opened -- and there stood the silver grey night, fearful to him, after the tawny light of the lamp. He hurried back. (36:9-14)

His hands and head act; Mrs Morel sees and hears his actions; he does not remember but `it' dawns on him; he does not even open the door: `it' opens -- and grammatically this `it' refers back not to the door but to the latch. The impression that Walter Morel's unitary identity has been scattered is paradoxically reinforced by the tentativeness of the apparently active verb in the sentence, `He tried the latch'. Surely, once the door was unbolted there was nothing to inhibit the working of a simple latch, which Morel might be supposed to have used without hesitation thousands of times. The final stroke in the destruction of Morel's self-determination in this paragraph comes with the verb `stood'. It hints that he might be confronted with a person, his wife, and therefore become present as a person himself. But if the text raises this expectation it does so only to subvert it: `there stood the silver grey night'. The syntax makes the night more active than the man, even while the epithets `silver grey' emphasise the night's intangibility.

These effects are achieved unobtrusively in comparison with the description of Mrs Morel's `swoon', where the reader is aware of a heightened intensity because of the multiple vocabulary of melting and mixing and the strings of `s' and `m' sounds, as well as the unusual syntax. Nothing in the paragraph about Walter Morel calls attention to itself to the same degree (even though there is the usual spattering of vivid adjectives) chiefly because the sentences are short and the syntax very simple. It is this very literalness which makes the verb `stood' seem to announce a person rather than the moonlit night. When used of the moon `standing up' two pages earlier the context had abounded in the stretching and straining of meaning which belongs to poetic licence. It is the contrast between the prosaic bluntness with which Walter Morel is present and the sudden brief metaphor `there stood the silver grey night' which produces the shock. (4) These small touches reinforce the impression that the moonlight is an overpowering, almost personal, and fearful presence which Morel cannot endure, even though seven lines earlier he is described as not having `a grain of physical fear'. The consequence, `He hurried back', by excluding the options that he might hurry away, indoors or within, suggests that, at some emotional level, he is backing away, as from a potent presence.

Lawrence, then, demonstrably uses different styles in these three passages, and the effect each time is to scatter the egocentric `I' of perception and wreck the illusion of a rational consciousness that steadily filters and controls experience. It is as if that illusion is a target which he attacks with all the weaponry at his command: varying the complexity and length of sentences, switching adverbs around and stretching the meanings of verbs, repeating words and sounds, conflating grammar and metaphor.
Lawrence's facility for making the structure of his sentences mimetic of their meaning is amply demonstrated in the opening page of the novel, where the first paragraph mimes the historical sequences of miners 'straying over' the countryside, the second has abrupt short sentences appropriate to the 'sudden change', and the fourth describes the route of the railway line in a long meandering sentence of linked sections. It is not surprising therefore that Lawrence should exploit his mastery of expression to enact the novel's large thematic preoccupations: the dissolving of identity and consciousness, the capacity for individuals to fuse with or be altered by each other or by their environment.

These are aspects of experience of which the individual is often unaware, and Lawrence's narrative frequently conveys experiences of which the characters themselves are, as Lawrence would put it, unconscious. This is why Lawrence seems so often in Sons and Lovers to be making free with what are now designated the conventions of 'free indirect style'. In fact we hardly find 'free indirect speech' in the book, but the wide diversity of 'free indirect thought' reflects Lawrence's tendency to maintain a distinction between the surface of what is actually said and the complex undercurrents of people's feelings. As far as the reporting of speech is concerned Lawrence prefers the dramatist's directness; 'free indirect speech' occurs only as a more direct form than reported speech:

Morel found his wife was not sufficiently subdued. After one inflamed evening, when Jerry had been telling him 'not to put up with any b -- woman's domineering, what was he a man for?', he shouted at her:

'I'll make you tremble at the sound of my footstep.' (49:9-13)

Even here Lawrence cannot resist enclosing the report of Jerry's remarks in single quotation marks as if to insist on their directness.

Conversely, although we often find the characters' thoughts reported in free indirect style, much of the narration operates in the realms beyond the stream of any one individual consciousness, presenting experiences that belong, in a sort of free-play, to either of two characters. For example, whose feelings or thoughts are being represented by each sentence here?

He had a high good time; and yet, when he remembered it, it seemed a pain. His mother was cool with him for a day or two. But he was so adorable -- ! And yet -- a tinge of loneliness was creeping in again, between her and him. (77:19-22)

The modern analysis of free indirect style tends to imply that in the tradition to which Lawrence was heir a convention had become established by which the viewpoint would normally remain constant within such a passage. Here, however, there is an obscure sequence: in the context it is initially from William's point of view that 'his mother' was cool with him, but it must primarily be Mrs Morel who finds William 'so adorable'. And the final sentence applies to them both. The characters' experience of each other is so fused together in the narration as to thwart the reader's habitual perception of characters as discrete consciousnesses.
At least in that example the exclamation and dash indicate that the grammatical form of the passage is not ‘reported’ thought but ‘free indirect’ thought. But in the following example there is no obvious signal to indicate why Paul's perceptions of the situation should be merged with those of Mrs Leivers:

She helped him off with his coat. He was quite unused to such attention.
She was almost smothered under its weight. (175:19-20)

The rapid switching from Mrs Leivers to Paul and back has an almost vertiginous effect, which is compounded by the word ‘its’. In grammar ‘its’ refers back to ‘attention’, but in meaning it refers back to ‘coat’. A reader familiar with continuous viewpoint might expect: ‘He was not used to such attention. He was almost smothered under its weight.’ The fusion is enhanced by the latent echo in the word ‘smothered’ of ‘mothered’.

As more of these oddities in Lawrence’s writing are observed, it becomes increasingly difficult to avoid asking whether the effects we perceive as readers are deliberately created by the author. There persists a nagging doubt that our response can only be validated by evidence of the novelist’s intention. At its most threatening this doubt presents itself as the question: Did Lawrence design this rapid switching and blurring of viewpoint or is it merely an instance of bad writing?

If one looks at the surrounding context of this last example, it appears unmistakable that (at whatever level of ‘intention’) Lawrence’s text conveys his complex meaning: there is almost a family conspiracy of self-smothering by Miriam and Mrs Leivers in their desire to mother and manage Paul and he is complicit because of the frustrated feebleness with which he yields to them, all of which is contrasted with Mr Leivers’s hearty vigour.

‘Let me take the rug,’ said Miriam, over gently.

‘I can carry it,’ he answered, rather injured. But he yielded it to her.

Then Mrs Leivers appeared.
‘I’m sure you’re tired and cold,’ she said. ‘Let me take your coat. It is heavy -- you mustn’t walk far in it.’

She helped him off with his coat. He was quite unused to such attention.
She was almost smothered under its weight.

‘Why mother,’ laughed the farmer, as he passed through the kitchen swinging the great milk churns:

‘You've got almost more than you can manage there.’ She beat up the sofa cushions for the youth. (175:13-24)

By the sudden shifts of viewpoint, by the mixture of meanings in ‘smothered / mother’ and the ambiguity of ‘injured’ and ‘manage’, Lawrence’s language seems not so much to report as to demonstrate the ways in which the characters react to each other without seeming to be aware of anything beyond their own immediate sensations.
A similar effect is achieved by utterly different means when Paul and Miriam take turns on the swing in Chapter VII:

Away he went. There was something fascinating to her in him. For the moment he was nothing but a piece of swinging stuff, not a particle of him that did not swing. She could never lose herself so, nor could her brothers. It roused a warmth in her. It were almost as if he were a flame that had lit a warmth in her, whilst he swung in the middle air. (182:21-6)

Lawrence’s third sentence and in particular the word ‘particle’ presents Paul's body metaphorically as a piece of chemistry. How does Paul light a warmth in Miriam? Even if we are familiar with the concept of body chemistry, we do not imagine it in terms of what the particles or molecules or cells are doing in one person and how their activity is transferred to another person. Lawrence, at this period, was an avid reader of Herbert Spencer, who in First Principles (1860, p. 181) defines heat as the oscillation of molecules:

That mode of force which we distinguished as Heat, is now regarded as molecular motion ... heated bodies expand, and expansion is interpreted as due to movements of the molecules in relation to one another: wider oscillations. That radiation through which anything of higher temperature than things around it, communicates Heat to them, is clearly a species of motion.

Lawrence’s choice of situation in which Paul communicates his higher temperature to Miriam and rouses a warmth in her, precisely enacts Spencer's definition: the motion is oscillation, indeed wider oscillations. Paul swings, all his particles swing, [Miriam's molecules start oscillating,] she becomes warm. Lawrence has taken Spencer's propositional ‘truth’ and presented it as a tacit one. It might be objected that the single word ‘particle’ cannot constitute more than a hint of such meanings. However, it is a word that inevitably directs the question of how one individual becomes different in another's presence into the area of scientific analysis. It is not an isolated reference in the novel to the microscopic dimensions of life. Paul's near-death from pneumonia in the preceding chapter is described thus:

He grew worse, and the crisis approached. One night he tossed into consciousness, in the ghastly, sickly feeling of dissolution, when all the cells in the body seem in intense irritability to be breaking down, and consciousness makes a last flare of struggle, like madness. (171:20-24)

As the novel develops, its exploration of the relationship between states of consciousness and the nature of life at the level of cell structure becomes focussed on Paul as an artist. On the one hand he frequently experiences sensations of dissolving which parallel his mother's ‘swoon’ when pregnant with him; on the other hand his greater awareness of these sensations means that he can integrate them with his perceptions and theories about art. Soon after the session on the swing, Paul explains to Miriam the nature of his interest, as a painter, in plant biology: 'It's as if I'd painted the shimmering protoplasm in the leaves and everywhere, and not the stiffness of the
shape'. When they are older and he has moved on from impressionist representations of plants to symmetrical William Morris-style roses, he justifies his new designs by reference to the effect of gravity on the cell-structure of plants, explaining to Miriam `the theory that the force of gravitation is the great shaper, and that if it had all its own way, it would have a rose in correct geometrical line and proportion -- and so on' (240:27-9).

In Chapter VIII, Paul's extended attempt to explain his theories of art to Miriam as they sit by lake `Nethermere', re-invokes the word `protoplasm' and re-produces in Paul a kind of waking nightmare version of the experience of cellular dissolution during his illness:

He was discussing Michael Angelo. It felt to her as if she were fingering the very quivering tissue, the very protoplasm of life, as she heard him ... There he lay in the white intensity of his search, and his voice gradually filled her with fear, so level it was, almost inhuman as if in a trance.

'Don't talk any more,' she pleaded softly, laying her hand on his forehead. He lay quite still, almost unable to move. His body was somewhere discarded ... (232:6-14)

'... Even now, I look at my hands, and wonder what they are doing there. That water there ripples right through me. I'm sure I am that rippling. It runs right through me, and I through it. There are no barriers between us.'

'But-- !' she stumbled.

'A sort of disseminated consciousness, that's all there is of me. I feel as if my body were lying empty, as if I were in the other things -- clouds and water --' (232:27-34)

Versions of this state of `disseminated consciousness'(5) recur in the novel, and they seem to indicate how it is that as an artist Paul is able to perceive things like the protoplasm beneath the surface of the leaves, and indeed to develop a sort of tactile imagination: `The firmness and softness of her upright body could almost be felt as he looked at her' (375: 14-15). His vision of Clara suggests the extraordinary plasticity of a sculptor's sensations while forming a clay model: ´In the glow, he could almost feel her as if she were present, her arms, her shoulders, her bosom, feel them, almost contain them’ (316:40-317:2). What is outside him is experienced internally, almost as if he himself has a womb: ´he knew the curves of her breast and shoulders as if they had been moulded inside him.’ (319:14-15). In the presentation of Paul's unusual capacity for perceptions and sensations, Lawrence seems constantly to take his bearings from the ante-natal experience he had invented for Paul of sharing in his mother's swoon, when `her self melted out like scent' and `the child too melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight'. After all, from the perspective of a foetus in the womb, the connections between the 'self' and other entities are fluid, constantly forming and transforming. The
portrayal of Paul Morel as an artist suggests that he has unusually free access to the pre-individuated state of consciousness, the `unconscious'.

When Paul, with Clara Dawes, looks down on Nottingham from the Castle, his `brooding' mood produces a vision of the individual forms in the landscape melting and merging into the fundamental `mass' out of which the whole is `composed':

He was brooding now, staring out over the country from under sullen brows. The little, interesting diversity of shapes had vanished from the scene. All that remained was a vast, dark matrix of sorrow and tragedy, the same in all the houses and the river-flats and the people and the birds: they were only shapen differently. And now that the forms seemed to have melted away, there remained the mass from which all the landscape was composed, a dark mass of struggle and pain. The factory, the girls, his mother, the large uplifted church, the thicket of the town, merged into one atmosphere,

dark, brooding and sorrowful, every bit.

`Is that two o'clock striking?' Mrs Dawes said in surprise.

Paul started, and everything sprang back into form, regained its individuality and its forgetfulness, its cheerfulness. (316:13-25)

Amongst its many components, this description contains further intimations of the sculptor's clay in `shapes', `shapen', `forms' and `mass'. There is also a hint of the womb notation in `brooding', `matrix of sorrow' and `brooding and sorrowful'; and although this hint is, admittedly, very subdued, it echoes the verse from John's Gospel that Paul critically failed to read out loud to Miriam in the previous chapter: `A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow ...'.(6) (268:20)

A parallel inheritance from Paul's experience of melting in the womb is his awareness of disparate centres of consciousness within himself. This is most explicit at moments of extreme conflict or crisis, and Paul's inner conflict after escorting Clara to Chapel is described with a degree of syntactic disruption parallel to that in the description of Mrs Morel's `swoon':

They had said Goodbye to Miriam, and his heart had smitten him as he left the girl alone. `But it serves her right,' he said inside himself, and it almost gave him pleasure to go off under her eyes with this other handsome woman.

There was a scent of damp leaves in the darkness. Clara's hand lay warm and inert in his own as they walked. He was full of conflict. The battle that raged inside him made him feel desperate.

Up Pentrich hill Clara leaned against him as he went. He slid his arm round her waist. Feeling the strong motion of her body under his arm as she walked, the tightness in his chest because of Miriam relaxed, and the hot blood bathed him. (370:39-371:9)
As with Mrs Morel's `self', `feelings' and `consciousness', Paul's state of conflict is manifested in the independent activity of parts of him, as in `his heart had smitten him'(7) and `he said inside himself'. The greatest syntactic disruption comes in the penultimate sentence: `Feeling the strong motion ... the tightness ... relaxed ...' The verbal participle `Feeling' is grammatically dependent on the subject, Paul, and should therefore be followed by `Paul' or `he': `Feeling the strong motion ... he relaxed'. Without that anchoring pronoun, `Feeling' is a grammatical error, but since Lawrence has made Paul the object of the sentence -- he does not do the activities described, they happen to him -- the `error' is only technical. In effect it enacts the dispersal of the controlling rational consciousness into different parts of Paul's body; or, to reverse the priorities, it expresses syntactically the assumption that Paul is an agglomeration of organ consciousnesses.

The sensation of disseminated consciousness that Paul experiences in the theatre is so intense that it threatens his whole identity:

The drama continued. He saw it all in the distance going on somewhere, he did not know where, but it seemed far away inside him. He was Clara's white, heavy arms, her throat, her moving bosom. That seemed to be himself.

Then away somewhere the play went on, and he was identified with that also.

There was no himself. (375:34-8)

There can be no doubt that the threat of ultimate annihilation represents one extreme in the novel's probing of identity. On the final page Paul perceives his mother after death as `intermingled' with the universe, and feels himself to be `at the core a nothingness, and yet not nothing'. At the other extreme, Sons and Lovers abounds in minute features of word-play that reinforce in a molecular way the theme of merging identity. For example, when Morel, disaffected from his fellow-miners, emerges from the pit into a rain-filled landscape which is depicted in some detail, the `host' of miners walking home in the rain is described as `streaming':

Over the fields, grey rain was falling. The trucks stood full of wet, bright coal. Water ran down the sides of the wagons, over the white C.W. & Co. Colliers, walking indifferent to the rain, were streaming down the line and up the field, a grey, dismal host. (42:19-21)

The verb `stream' is intransitive but Lawrence uses it transitively in the description of Mrs Morel's home brewing; a passage in which she is also described not as straining the liquid but herself:

Mrs Morel took a panchion, a great bowl of thick red earth, streamed a heap of white sugar into the bottom, and then, straining herself to the weight, was pouring in the liquor.

Just then, Morel came in. (31:17-21)
Lawrence uses the verbs, `streaming' and `straining', which could apply either to people or to their physical surroundings, and he makes them stretch between the two, so that in a sort of reverse pathetic fallacy identity is dictated by context.

Similarly, Morel's non-abstract way of expressing himself is shown to grow directly out of his experience of being a manual worker, by the occurrence together of the verb `handle' to mean `receive' and the noun `hand'. I believe there is even a deliberate resonance of `handle' in `hand all':

`And when does he handle th'money?' asked the collier.

`That I couldn't tell you -- when the picture is sent home, I suppose.'

There was silence. Morel stared at the sugar basin instead of eating his dinner. His black arm, with the hand all gnarled with work, lay on the table. (296:36-40)

By contrast, Paul's tendency to project his inner state onto the objects of his scrutiny is demonstrated by the use of the verb `dazzled' to describe Clara walking down the beach: `As he watched, he lost her. She was dazzled out of sight by the sunshine' (402:8-9). The verb is addressed to the wrong subject -- it is not `She' who is dazzled -- but Paul's sensation is transferred to the object of his vision. Earlier, when Clara undresses for her swim she is described as `a white, velvet-skinned woman with heavy shoulders' and as Paul watches her walk away he perceives the sand, too, as velvet: `She went plodding heavily over the sand, that was soft as velvet.' (401:19, 40)

Lawrence's modes of expression embody his immediate theme, and as in the case of `velvet', he frequently repeats words in ways which complicate the connections inside and outside the individual. For example, when Paul takes his books back to the library, the verb used to describe his action suggests that Paul is unconsciously reacting to the physical presence of Mr Smedley, one of the librarians, whose name could well be a play on `meddling' and `smelly':

Mr Smedley was plump and bald and knowing.

    Paul stood waiting whilst Mr Sleath finished his gossip with the last subscriber. Then he plumped his books onto the counter. (191:2-4; my italics)

Some readers might dismiss this type of repetition as `unconscious' in the sense of `accidental' and therefore non-significant, or perhaps only significant in the manner Freud termed `parapraxis',(8) that is as a pun which erupts uncontrolled from thoughts repressed in the unconscious, and therefore not belonging to the kind of conscious craftsmanship we look for in a creative writer. It may be that our notions of creativity need revising, but in partial reply to the argument that these effects of Lawrence's are accidental, I can cite one example of a manuscript revision which shows him working towards such a repetition:
'Is there nathing to eat in the house?' he asked, insolently, as if to a servant. In certain stages of his intoxication he used the clipped, mincing speech of the towns. Mrs Morel hated him most in this condition.

'You know what there is in the house,' she said, so coldly, it sounded impersonal.

He stood and glared at her without moving a muscle.

'I asked a civil question, and I expect a civil answer,' he said, affectedly. (52:40-53:8)

This is the version of the text as it stood in the third manuscript, but Lawrence revised the page and inserted it into the final manuscript, changing the word 'used' to 'affected' in the second sentence quoted, so as to read 'he affected the clipped, mincing speech of the town'. The shift in meaning is not drastic, but the result is that when 'affectedly' occurs to describe the next words that Morel utters, the almost-identical word has taken on a slightly more complex meaning: 'affectedly' draws out and amplifies the implication of insincerity and offensiveness latent in 'he affected'. Moreover, 'affectedly' includes Mrs Morel's reaction and possibly registers more her repelled judgement than her husband's provocation. This duplication of 'affected' produces a slide in its impact which complicates the emotional connection between the two participants.

The novel abounds in such complicating repetitions. For example, on Walter Morel's first appearance, the word 'wait' establishes, more concretely than any narratorial comment could, how inadequate he is to fulfil his wife's longings:

'I wait,' Mrs Morel said to herself. 'I wait, and what I wait for can never come.' (14:29-30)

'Oh! -- Oh! -- waitin' for me lass? ...' (14:40)

A page earlier Mrs Morel's power to neutralise her husband's influence over his children is almost magically established by the re-use of the words 'allow' and 'window':

'He's helping to wait at the Moon and Stars. I see'd him through that black tin stuff wi' holes in, on the window, wi' his sleeves rolled up --'

'Ha!' exclaimed the mother, shortly. 'He'd got no money. An' he'll be satisfied if he gets his 'lowance, whether they give him more or not.'

The children were allowed to sit at the window of their mother's bedroom, and watch the folk coming home ... (13:6-13; my italics)

There are two salient features in the presentation of this switch of power. First, the sentence that begins the third paragraph has an impersonal form: 'The children were allowed' -- but by whom? It is as if the world of the home is ruled by an abstract authority. Second, the words 'window' and 'lowance' are the chief vehicles whereby William and Mrs Morel convey this spy-hole vignette of Walter Morel's freedom in the
male world of the public house; and so by repeating them as `allowed' and `window' in the third paragraph it is as if Lawrence physically removes that vision of aberration to a safe place within the sphere of Mrs Morel's corrective authority. The implication that Mrs Morel is retrieving something is conveyed at a non-explicit level. (9)

By contrast with the single strategic repetitions here, Lawrence elsewhere sets up waves of wordplay to recreate the tension between Mrs Morel and William over his dancing. On the one hand she fears that he will become irresponsible like his father and that his flirtations will impair his chances of rising in the world. On the other hand William is oblivious of the ambiguity involved in wearing a kilt and bonnet to show off his legs to `ladies'. These two strands are interwoven in a string of associations based on `fancy dress' and `high':

The grievance reached its height when William said he was going to Hucknall Torkard -- considered a low town -- to a fancy dress ball. He was to be a Highlander ...

`How do you fancy your son in this!' he said enraptured, showing her the suit.

`You know I don't want to fancy you in it.'

On the evening of the dance, when he had come home to dress, Mrs Morel put on her coat and bonnet ...

... Then he caught sight of the Highland bonnet with its ribbons. He picked it up gleefully, forgetting her ...

`This is a fancy dress set `Postle ... You see, `Postle, a real Highlander doesn't wear drawers -- he covers his nakedness with a kilt. But if I happened to kick rather high, and all those ladies there -- why -- it wouldn't do!'

... He had a high good time ... (75:30-76:24, 77:19 my italics)

None of the repetitions in this passage draw attention to themselves, and a reader might well not notice them. But the interweaving of height, low town, kick rather high and high good time in a narrative about dressing up as a Highland soldier, is like the orchestration of a theme. It develops the resonances around the `grievance' about dancing, which is fundamentally about high and low moral values and social status, so that these details reinforce and intensify the theme even if not individually registered by the reader.

The instances accumulated here of the ways in which Lawrence's language embodies his meaning suggest that the search for `evidence' of authorial `intention' may be a red-herring.
What matters is the quantity of insight that can be gained by attending to the fine details of linguistic ingenuity in Sons and Lovers which reinforce at a profound level the novel's exploration of interactive human consciousness. Beneath the mere identification of 'word-play', 'pun', 'ambiguity', 'metaphor', 'pathetic fallacy', 'syntactic disruption' etc., it is possible to sense the presence of pre-conscious 'understanding' pressing for articulation within Lawrence's language. This is powerfully exemplified by a comparison of two episodes describing Paul's awareness of his mother and Clara. Paul, travelling in the train, contemplates his mother and Lincoln cathedral:

`There she is, mother!' he cried.

They saw the great cathedral lying couchant above the plain.

`Ah!' she exclaimed. `So she is!'

He looked at his mother. Her blue eyes were watching the cathedral quietly. She seemed again to be beyond him. Something in the eternal repose
of the uplifted cathedral, blue and noble against the sky, was reflected in
her, something of the fatality. What was, was! -- with all his young will he could not alter it. He saw her face, the skin still fresh and pink and downy, but crow's-feet near her eyes, her eyelids steady, sinking a little,
hers mouth always closed with disillusion; and there was on her the same eternal look, as if she knew fate at last. (280:34-281:5)

Mrs Morel's `eternal look' is `the same' as what? Explicitly the same as the cathedral's `eternal repose' which is `reflected in her'. This assimilation is reinforced by the word `blue', used naturally (as often before) of Mrs Morel's eyes, but unnaturally of the cathedral which could not be described in any literal sense as blue, except in an epithet transferred from the sky -- `blue and noble against the sky'. Paul's vision of Mrs Morel's identity as merged with that of the cathedral is strangely intensified by the fact that they both refer to the cathedral as `she', and by the echo in `the uplifted cathedral' of the same adjective in Paul's thoughts about `... his mother, the uplifted church ...' when staring out over Nottingham from the Castle with Clara (316:20-21, quoted above). Finally Mrs Morel comes out of her reverie `breaking bright into life again' at Paul's insistence that the cathedral looks bigger than the whole city.

In the theatre Clara is assimilated to Paul's vision of his mother -- not explicitly, but in Lawrence's wording of Paul's thoughts:

`And he loved her, as she balanced her head and stared straight in front of her, pouting, wistful, immobile, as if she yielded herself to her fate because it was too strong for her. She could not help herself -- she was in
the grip of something bigger than herself. A kind of eternal look about her, as if she were a wistful sphinx, made him mad to kiss her. (375:21-6)
Paul's consciousness gradually becomes disseminated within Clara until he feels 'There was no himself' (in the passage already quoted). She takes on massive proportions in his imagination as if 'couchant above' him:

The grey and black eyes of Clara, her bosom coming down on him, her arm that he held gripped between his hands were all that existed. Then he felt himself small and helpless, her towering in her force above him.

(375:39-376:2)

The 'sphinx' reminds us that the word, 'couchant', used of the cathedral, is also a mediaeval heraldic term for an animal lying with its head held high -- the position traditionally given to the sphinx. Just as the cathedral, lying couchant above the plain and the city, is assimilated to Paul's mother by the 'eternal look' with which she indicates acceptance of her 'fate', so Clara through her 'eternal look' and yielding to her 'fate' becomes something towering above Paul himself.(10) Paul's image of himself as 'small and helpless' beneath the woman's 'bosom coming down on him' seems to be -- and may invoke in the reader -- a memory of babyhood, deepening further the level of consciousness at which Paul's response to Clara is presented. In this context, it is worth noting that the word 'couchant' contains an echo of the French words for childbirth, couche and accouchement. And once it has been recognised that at some level in Paul's mind Clara is assimilated to his mother, then the 'eternal look' which 'made him mad to kiss her' takes on a threatening ambiguity -- mad with desire and mad if he did.

This notation of underneath the birth-giving woman resonates with Lawrence's two different names in Sons and Lovers for the lake based on Moor Green Reservoir. As in The White Peacock, he calls it 'Nethermere' which carries associations of under and mother, but in addition, he calls it, as he is later to do in The Rainbow, 'Willey Water' which suggests in a more colloquial, even childish, register ideas of wetness and penis or phallus. It is 'Nethermere' when Paul is on a walk with his mother (153:2) and when Paul is talking anxiously with Miriam about his state of disseminated consciousness (231:33); but it has become 'Willey Water' when Paul and Miriam take Clara on a walk (274:12). It is true that the latter can be traced to local Eastwood topography around the Haggs Farm, but the significant point is the actual words Lawrence chose to enter into the weave of his fiction. The alternative names locate Paul's gradual and difficult psychological journey from infantile into adult consciousness.

Paul's recognition at an unconscious level of the nature of his difficulty in emerging from underneath the woman is further hinted in the ambiguities, which Freud would have appreciated, in the wording of Paul's final judgement on the failure of his relationship with Clara:

Clara could not stand for him to hold on to. She wanted him, but not to understand him. He felt she wanted the man on top, not the real him that was in trouble. (451:19-20)

The expression 'the man on top' ostensibly indicates Clara's superficial impression of Paul, the public persona, but it also suggests Paul is unconsciously aware of a deeper problem -- that Clara wanted the man to be dominant, sexually orthodox. Paul's use of
the word `understand', following in the wake of `stand for him to hold on to' suggests that he unconsciously acknowledges that for Clara to `understand' him she would have to prop him up. Paul's sense therefore that Clara ignores the `real him' echoes the use of `real' in the passage quoted at the beginning of this article, and suggests that Lawrence's intriguing but obscure observation that life `is not real, but leaves one's self as it were slurred over' refers to one's inability to recognise and acknowledge one's unconscious desires and the reasons behind one's life choices.

In all these examples Lawrence does not discuss and expound a concept of the `Unconscious', but uses his astonishingly varied polysemic registers to mime and present glimpses of it in operation. In the process he constantly challenges the reader's static concepts of the meanings of words by making them recur with and in different connections. Lawrence's exploration of human consciousness, and his challenge to our illusion that there are boundaries inside and outside the individual controlled by the rational will, is so strongly embedded in the narrative tissue that the very words themselves are treated as cells with permeable boundaries. The sentence structure becomes fluid enough to allow the cellular words to modify and regroup, so that `meaning' cannot be a fixity based on separation.(11)

NOTES

(1) All page:line numbers refer to Sons and Lovers, edited by Helen Baron and Carl Baron, Cambridge University Press, 1992; but n.b. the page and line format is identical in Sons and Lovers edited by Helen Baron and Carl Baron, Penguin Books, 1994.

(2) A total of 56 times, 5 of which were cut by Garnett.

(3) Cf. fronted' (49:29)

(4) The public house in which he had been drinking is called the `Moon and Stars'.

(5) Lawrence used the expression also in `Dolour in Autumn', probably written in Autumn 1910: 'For the night, with a great breath taken / Has drawn my spirit outside me / Till I reel with disseminated consciousness / Like a man who has died' (The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence, ed. V. de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts, (1964, repr. with revisions 1972), pp. 107-8, lines 21-4. Lawrence may originally have formulated the idea from Alphonse Daudet's Lettres de mon Moulin (which is mentioned in Sons and Lovers, 307:6), for in the chapter `Le Phare des Sanguinaires' Daudet describes daylong reveries by the sea producing a sensation of `eparpillement', for which `dissemination' is a good translation.

(6) John xv. i.21.

(7) This is the third reference to his heart in the context; see also: 370:23, 26.
(8) In The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, (1901), see especially Chapter IX added by Freud in 1907.

(9) It is unfortunate that Garnett cut the third paragraph in this passage.

(10) It is a puzzling nuance that, while Clara is `in the grip of something bigger than herself', Paul holds her arm `gripped between his hands'. It is as if he is like a child latching onto the maternal fate, but at the same time he is -- or is participating in -- the thing that is bigger than Clara. The big / small contrast is further explored while Clara is swimming in the sea and Paul sees her (like himself later) as a `speck' and `almost nothing among the morning', but then while she is drying herself he sees her as `bigger' than the morning and the sea' (402:10, 11, 13-14, 39-40; cf.464:21, 23, 29).

(11) Some of the passages analysed here are scrutinised in relation to parallel but distinct arguments in my Introduction to the Penguin edition of Sons and Lovers (1994).

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Abstract:

D.H. Lawrence's novel "Sons and Lovers" probes the meaning of human identity by dramatizing the dynamic connection between life's power, represented by the unconscious and natural images, and the individual. Lawrence does not explain the meaning of the unconscious so much as he portrays it through the aural energy of language and images of light confronting individuals. The novel demonstrates boundaries separating one person from another and from the universal life force are permeable and fluid.

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