Throughout his life Lawrence collaborated with women, inviting them into his work, or himself into theirs. One of his earliest short stories, ‘Goose Fair’, was written in collaboration with Louie Burrows. He asked Jessie Chambers to write down her memories of experiences they had shared, to help with his revision of Sons and Lovers. Frieda also claimed to have written “little female bits” for Sons and Lovers,¹ and Lawrence said of The Rainbow “the work is of both of us” (2L 164). He based The Trespasser on Helen Corke’s retrospective diary of her tragic relationship with H. B. Macartney. In New Mexico he began working with Mabel Luhan on a novel about her life – till Frieda put a stop to it. And of course he rewrote Mollie Skinner’s ‘The House of Ellis’ as The Boy in the Bush. The nature of these collaborations, of Lawrence’s relationships with the women concerned and the importance of the resulting work in his oeuvre varies considerably, but they all testify to his interest in female experience and desire to get it into his work. Unfortunately, in only one case has the woman’s writing survived independently – that of Helen Corke, and in this essay I will be looking at Lawrence’s personal and literary relationship with Helen.

One Sunday in July 1910 three young people met together in London. They were a coal-miner’s son, a farmer’s daughter and an insurance salesman’s daughter. But, for all the apparent differences in their backgrounds, their social and economic formations and situations were very similar. They were all partly the product of aspiring working-class or lower-middle-class gentility. All of them had experienced the reality or the threat of extreme poverty. They were all schoolteachers, an occupation which one of the women described as much nearer to the world of extreme poverty than to...
that of wealth, and like “walking firmly along a low dyke which crosses a morass”. All three had, in the words of one of them, “passions in common—reverence for the Word as literature, and the reality it expressed, hatred for the superficiality and falseness of the age in which we lived”.

They were of course D. H. Lawrence, Jessie Chambers and Helen Corke. The two women were meeting for the first time at Lawrence’s instigation, and were to develop a friendship that outlasted both of their relationships with him. They were all to write fictionalised accounts, based on their own family histories, of catastrophic financial collapse: Lawrence’s abortive novel ‘Matilda’, which was a kind of warm-up for *Sons and Lovers*, based on his mother’s family (*PM* 143–60); Jessie’s story ‘The Bankrupt’, inspired by her great-grandfather’s financial ruin and suicide; and Helen’s autobiographical novel *Neutral Ground*, which narrates the failure of her father’s shop-keeping business and the confiscation of the family furniture by bailiffs. These stories all dramatise authorial awareness of the “morass” across which, in Helen’s metaphor, schoolteachers walked on a “low dyke”.

The two women had something more intimate in common. Both had submitted, against their better judgement, to the sexual demands of the men they were in love with: Helen the previous summer with her married violin-teacher H. B. Macartney, during the Isle of Wight holiday that was to form the basis of *The Trespasser*; Jessie with Lawrence himself, so recently that they were still, in July, in the relation of lovers to each other, unofficially “engaged”: a relation that Lawrence was to end the following month.

Both these attempts at sexual fulfilment were frustrating and depressing. Jessie testified that the times of her and Lawrence coming together “would not exhaust the fingers of one hand”. Helen and Macartney probably made love no more frequently on their short holiday in the Isle of Wight. The outcome of their relationship was tragic: Macartney’s suicide immediately after his return to his wife and family. Helen wrote an account of their
holiday, which she called ‘The Freshwater Diary’, and which formed the basis for *The Trespasser*. Lawrence and Jessie’s relationship resulted in *Sons and Lovers*, which secured Lawrence’s reputation as a writer, but which she called “the death-blow” to their friendship.6

The relations between the three were intense and complex: each of them wrote at least three books partly or wholly about their relationships: *The White Peacock, The Trespasser* and *Sons and Lovers*; Helen’s novel *Neutral Ground*, autobiography *In Our Infancy* and memoir *D. H. Lawrence: The Croydon Years*; Jessie’s *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record*, her novel ‘The Rathe Primrose’ which she destroyed, and another abortive memoir that she began in later life, which has also not survived. Lawrence also wrote several short stories and poems that were inspired by Jessie and Helen. Jessie was, and had been for several years, in love with Lawrence. Hers is the only feeling that can be so straightforwardly named. Lawrence persuaded himself at different times (perhaps even at the same time) that he was in love with both Jessie and Helen, and certainly wanted to sleep with both of them. His desire for Helen, which as we shall see was very much entangled with the writing of *The Trespasser*, may partly have prompted, though it was not the ultimate cause of, Lawrence’s rejection of Jessie. Helen may have briefly persuaded herself that she was in love with Lawrence but did not want to sleep with him. She also, in later life, admitted to having been in love with Jessie.

Why were Jessie and Helen so reluctant to have sexual relations with the men they loved? Both were unconventional, independent-minded, freethinking young women. When Lawrence asked Jessie if any girl would give him “that” without marriage, she answered that while all the girls she knew would think it wrong, she would not. She would not think it wrong, “But it would be very difficult”.7 Helen’s reluctance to have sex with a married man might seem to need no explanation, but she agreed to go on holiday with him and, when he tried to back out because he could not afford it, insisted on paying herself. She subsequently dwelt a great deal, in her
autobiography and novel, on her aversion to sexual passion. She acknowledged that she was at least partly, if not predominantly, lesbian. But I do not think this is any kind of simple explanation of the painful situation that drove Macartney to suicide. In *Neutral Ground* the heroine Ellis responds strongly to the embrace of Theresa, the character based on Jessie:

> Theresa’s clasp, and the timbre of her low voice, touched Ellis to an exquisite mingling of pain and pleasure. Her brain sensed the cloudy harmonies of colour associated with the hearing of music. These, resolving, rushed into physical expression, and surged along the nerves of her whole body, singing a strange new theme of delight. She turned suddenly to Theresa and kissed her passionately—then sprang up and away. 

This is obviously a sexual feeling, but Helen also liked to kiss Macartney and Lawrence. The embrace of a woman, especially a heterosexual woman such as Jessie, is unthreatening— it entails none of the consequences that the roused desire of a male lover might have.

I do not think that there is any reason to suppose that Jessie Chambers was, for her time, unusually averse to sexuality. I do not believe that when she and Lawrence made love “her soul had stood apart, in a sort of horror”, as Miriam’s does in *Sons and Lovers* (SL 330). She is much more likely to have been inhibited by the fact that Lawrence suddenly decided he wanted her after years of telling her that she was sexually unattractive. As she wrote in a deleted passage of her memoir, “the tension was greater than I could bear. There were too many contradictory elements. I could not conceal from myself a forced note in L’s attitude, as if he was pushed forwards in his sensual desires—and a lack of spontaneity”. It is painfully likely that Lawrence was forcing himself to have sex with her merely because she had agreed to it. Throughout *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record* she insists that she strove for wholeness in relationships, that Lawrence (at this time) separated
the spiritual and the physical, and this seemed to her “entirely mistaken”. In Helen’s words, Jessie did not “lack the desire of the normal woman for a unique personal right in the man to whom she would devote her life”. Jessie married three years after her final break with Lawrence, and there is no evidence that her marriage was unhappy.

Lawrence’s relationship with Jessie, and her influence on his work, is too big a subject to be encompassed in an essay that is mainly about Helen Corke and *The Trespasser*. I bring her in because of the parallels between the two women’s situations, which might suggest that *The Trespasser*, particularly the character of its heroine and its rather affected literary style, testifies not so much to one woman’s psychological abnormality, and more to the social pressures of the world in which Lawrence was writing. When we think about the unhappy sexual relationships that inform *The Trespasser* and *Sons and Lovers*, we should keep in mind that Jessie and Helen would have lost their jobs if their relationships with Lawrence and Macartney had become known. In Helen’s metaphor, they would have fallen from the “low dyke” into the “morass”.

Helen was three years older than Lawrence. She was born in Hastings where her father Alfred had a grocery store. Alfred was a romantic idealist with literary and intellectual interests. He focused his romantic idealism on his wife Louisa but by the time Helen was born, in her own words, he had discovered that “the woman to whom he had called did not exist”. Throughout her autobiography Helen writes about her mother in a disdainful tone typified by her introduction: “Drama, or indeed melodrama, for which she had a strong instinct, she found in plenty; it was her absorption. She had no intellectual preoccupations, and accepted without question the religion, logic, social values and moral standards of her circle”. Helen felt a much stronger sympathy and sense of kinship with her father, whose romantic idealism she acknowledged that she inherited, while recognising his limitations. She was thus, like Lawrence, born into a not very happy marriage, and was much
closer to the parent of the opposite sex. Unlike Lydia Lawrence, however, Alfred Corke accepted his partner’s limitations and was determined, in his daughter’s words, that Louisa “should never suffer” on account of his disappointment in her. There was in the Corke household none of the overt and sometimes violent conflict that Lawrence grew up with, but Helen’s parents did not provide her with an example of happiness resulting from sexual love.

In her childhood her closest companion was her cousin Evelyn. Even when they were adolescents, a difference between them was evident: “Evelyn associates ideas of love, marriage and babies with her boy friends. Love, as I imagine it, belongs to romance—to the fine, remote lovers of the book world”. When they grew up, and Evelyn’s ideas of love, marriage and babies became a reality, this difference developed into a barrier; Helen no longer felt that they had anything in common. She remained fond of Evelyn, however, and was shocked when her cousin’s fourth pregnancy ended in her death. Her response is revealing of the intensity of her feelings on the subject of sex and marriage: “Her husband’s lust has cut short the life she entrusted to him ... He is guilty of a kind of manslaughter more detestable than that of the jailed criminal who has killed in a moment of desperation”.

Throughout both Helen’s autobiography and her novel a dominant note is literature as a resource for creating an idealised inner world to escape from material existence. The life of genteel poverty that she knew, especially after her father’s business failed and he had to eke out a living as an insurance salesman, offered few pleasures either of the senses or of the imagination. As we have seen, unlike her cousin she did not dream of a real-life lover and husband as a way out of this existence. She became a teacher, but she got little fulfilment out of her work – she regarded it as a life of “routine”, “a time-table existence” whose only recommendation was the long holidays. She asked herself: “What is my life on the other plane—that of the spirit and the imagination?” I decide that only therein is the way of escape from one’s objective limitations. One builds one’s palace of
art, one gazes into the magic mirror. Reality and romance are separate, two distinct, if parallel, phases of existence”.¹⁶

The phrase “palace of art” is an allusion to Tennyson’s poem of that title, in which the speaker’s soul withdraws into a world of art, only to sicken from isolation, stagnation and “shameful sloth”. The “magic mirror” similarly alludes to the same poet’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’ who turns away from the real world to the “mirror’s magic sights” but also becomes “half sick of shadows”. Tennyson’s memorial on the Isle of Wight figures prominently in Helen’s diaries and in The Trespasser. It is a coincidence that she and Macartney saw it on their holiday, but it may have a symbolic significance for her if not for Lawrence. Her allusions to Tennyson in her autobiography are one example – we will see more later – of how objective she was capable of being, in later years, about her younger self.

In her autobiography the statement that “Reality and romance are separate, two distinct, if parallel phases of existence” is followed with “But presently I am to see a figure who would appear to identify the two planes”.¹⁷ This was H. B. Macartney, a professional violinist whose work, at the Gaiety Theatre playing trivial musical comedies and teaching private pupils, was relieved by annual engagements at Covent Garden. In 1908 he played in Wagner’s Ring and in 1909 Tristan and Isolde. Wagner became a constant point of reference between him and Helen, and a major influence on the self-consciously artistic atmosphere of The Trespasser. Macartney was some ten years older than Helen, married with four children. Her account of his marriage, and of his wife’s character, is unlikely to be impartial, but it is the only one we have: it had been “a romantic, runaway marriage” at the age of seventeen, “from which the romantic flavour had long evaporated”, his wife was “slovenly, an inept housekeeper”, and the children were undisciplined.¹⁸ Macartney had aspired to be a solo violinist, but the demands of family life made this impossible. He is another example of the snares of sexual passion, the delusiveness of its
promise of “romance”, and the threat that it poses to the life of the spirit.

Helen became Macartney’s pupil in 1905, when she was twenty-three years old and he in his mid-thirties. The relationship of teacher and pupil soon developed into a friendship. Her first responses to him clearly involve an element of physical attraction: “I look at him less casually, and see the finely balanced proportions of his body, limbs and head. He is tall, but not too tall, his thick, dark hair is shapely, and brushed back from a high forehead; his eyes are dark blue and long-lashed…”19 This is an aestheticized response, but does not seem to be that of someone entirely lacking in heterosexual feeling. In Neutral Ground Corke asserts of her heroine, “Nothing of physical desire entered into her feeling for him” yet “she admitted that she loved him”.20 She certainly successfully persuaded herself that her feelings for him belonged to the spiritual plane – the plane that, as we have seen, her temperament and experience had led her to think of as opposed to physical love. When her mother expressed concerns about the relationship, “hinting at dishonour”, she was outraged:

Dishonour? What is dishonour? It is a lowering of standards. This intimacy of ours—it does not degrade. It brings to us both an enhanced quality of life … I do not want to marry him. Indeed, I am glad that the bounds of our association are defined by the fact of his marriage.21

She later recognised that “Out of [the] new energy” that the relationship had given her, she “made an image” of Macartney “which she clothed in the finery of romantic idealism”.22 Her love of literature was absolutely central to this way of feeling, in marked contrast to the equally literary Jessie Chambers, who as we have seen did not believe in the separation of the physical and the spiritual. Helen writes in Neutral Ground:
Books enshrined the great, the beautiful, the desirable, the Way of the spirit, towards which she turned, to forget the paucity, poverty and ugliness that was the obverse side of life ... She was already closing her eyes upon life at first hand, seeking it only through the medium of the artist.\textsuperscript{23}

the balance of Ellis’s reading, and what passed during childhood and adolescence for social experience, had taught her, in effect, that while the body, with its passions, was in necessary subjection to moral law, the mind moved above it in a state of exalted and unchallenged freedom.\textsuperscript{24}

This is not a view of literature that we associate with D. H. Lawrence, but we should not assume that it was completely alien to him when he first met Helen in 1909. This was a critical year in the shaping of Lawrence’s literary career. It was the year in which Jessie Chambers sent his poems to Ford Madox Hueffer at the \textit{English Review}. Hueffer not only accepted the poems but adopted and promoted Lawrence as the working-class genius the literary world had been waiting for. He was particularly impressed by the opening of ‘Odour of Chrysanthemums’, the first of Lawrence’s working-class stories. It was also in this year that Lawrence wrote his first play, \textit{A Collier’s Friday Night}, the text of which opens with a photographically realistic description of his mother sitting in their kitchen, and includes dialogue like this:

\begin{quote}
NELLIE: Why can’t you keep the table where it was! We don’t want it stuck on top of the fire.
FATHER: Ah dun, if you dunna…. ’An yer got a drink for me?... It’s a nice thing as a man comes home from th’ pit parched up canna ha’e a drink got ’im.
MOTHER: Oh, you needn’t begin! I know you’ve been stopping, drinking.
FATHER: Dun yer?—Well, yer know too much, then. You wiser than them as knows, you are! (\textit{Plays 478})
\end{quote}
It might seem the easiest thing in the world for Lawrence to transcribe dialogue that he had heard every day of his life. But this would be to underestimate the obstacles that the idea of “literature”, expressed in an extreme form by Helen, as a realm to which one turned to escape “the paucity, poverty and ugliness”, places in the way of writing such as this. As Lawrence said to Jessie, when he first confessed his aspiration to be a poet, a few years earlier, “what will the others say? That I’m a fool. A collier’s son a poet!”.

In 1909 he had for three years been writing *The White Peacock*, a book which has its share of “poverty, paucity and ugliness”, but which Lawrence dismissed even before it was published as “a florid prose poem” (*IL* 184), and in which, though he drew heavily on his family background and Jessie’s, he notably elevates the social and economic status at least of his own family. The opening of ‘Odour of Chrysanthemums’ is a fine piece of working-class realism, but it is uncharacteristic of most of the stories he was writing at this time. The following, from ‘The Witch à la Mode’, significantly inspired by his relationship with Helen, is more typical than *A Collier’s Friday Night* or ‘Odour of Chrysanthemums’ of the kind of dialogue he was writing in 1909–10.

“Your foggy weather of symbolism as usual,” he said.

“The fog is not of symbols,” she replied, in her metallic voice of displeasure. “It may be symbols are candles in a fog—.”

“I prefer the fog without candles. I’m the fog, eh? Then I’ll blow out your candles, and you’ll see me better. Your candles of speech, symbols and so forth only lead you wronger. I’m going to wander blind, and go by instinct, like a moth that flies and settles on the wooden box his mate is shut up in.”

“Isn’t it an ignis fatuus you are flying after, at that rate,” she said.

“May be, for if I breathe outwards, in a positive movement towards you, you move off. If I draw in a vacant sigh of soulfulness, you flow nearly to my lips.”
“This is a very interesting symbol,” she said, with sharp sarcasm. (LAH 62)

In case the meaning is completely obscured by the fog of symbols, what is going on here is that the young man wants the woman to sleep with him but she wants to keep the relationship on the spiritual plane. I doubt that Lawrence and Helen actually talked to each other like this and she would probably not have been pleased by the way in which she is portrayed in the story, but stylistically it answers much more than *A Collier’s Friday Night* to her conception of literature as a realm in which the mind moved above the body “in a state of exalted and unchallenged freedom.” As Jane Heath has written, in an essay comparing Lawrence’s and Corke’s writing, “the conjuncture between Corke and Lawrence had to do with the unparalleled importance literature assumed in their lives. Both writers idealized literature as a means of negotiating the difficulties that beset them in their lives.”

Working-class realism was not, despite the achievement of *Sons and Lovers*, to be Lawrence’s métier. Still less was it the high-falutin’ dialogue of ‘The Witch à la Mode’. But work like *A Collier’s Friday Night* was much more of a step towards his fulfilment as an original creative artist. This may have been the piece of writing that he sent in late 1910 to Grace Crawford, one of his early middle-class “literary” correspondents, with the warning:

> I shudder to think of its intruding like a muddy shaggy animal into your ‘den’, sacred to the joss-stick and all vaporous elegantly-wreathed imaginations of literature. I like something in which the outline is fairly definitely laid. I like corporeality. You have a weakness for spirits—not bottled, but booked. (IL 188)

A year earlier, in 1909, he had been enthusiastically pandering to Miss Crawford’s “vaporous elegantly-wreathed imaginations”:

> “It is a shame to break the moment from its stalk, to wither in the
Neil Roberts, ‘Writing with Women’

vase of memory, by thanking you” – which is like the spoof metaphors at the end of the BBC Radio 4 show “I’m Sorry I Haven’t a Clue”. At least Lawrence had the self-awareness to add, “What an ass I am!” (IL 146). “Corporeality” is an early attempt to define his aesthetic. It is crude, but it clearly points to an abiding concern, and it is embodied in the coarse vernacular and behaviour of the father in *A Collier’s Friday Night*.

At Christmas 1908 Helen’s relations with Macartney reached a crisis, when:

he takes me in his arms and pulls me to the settee...I know that the sex impulse—which I think of as “the beast” in him—has broken loose. Against it I pit every volt of my energy, which is reinforced by anger. There is a physical struggle lasting two or three minutes ... It seems as if there is silence everywhere. When he speaks it is to say: “That is the end. You think I am a beast! So I am and I can’t help it!”

A semi-estrangement followed, that Helen called “a semi-formal kind of association” in which he continued to give her lessons but their intimacy was suppressed. But this could not last, and Helen was conscious that “what is for me the supreme joy of friendship in association imposes on H. B. M. an exhausting degree of physical control”. The following summer he asked her to spend a few days’ holiday with him and she agreed, though by now she was regarded with hostile suspicion by his family. In *Neutral Ground*, when the Macartney character tries to withdraw from the holiday because he cannot afford it, Ellis enthusiastically and assertively insists on paying for it herself.

It is not clear whether, by agreeing to the holiday, Helen was consenting to the physical consummation of their relationship. Her own account of their five days on the Isle of Wight makes no explicit mention either of a sexual relationship or of sexual tension. There is however one moment that strongly suggests the emotional
stress that she was under, and the conflict in her feelings for Macartney, whom she calls “Siegmund” in ‘The Freshwater Diary’:

I feel myself slipping into an unforeseen valley of shadows. There is void and darkness around me, and out of it comes only the distant crying of many lives that have touched mine. These I know, but beyond them, low and plaintive, I hear the complaint of a little unknown voice. What have I done to hurt it so?

Siegmund, in an irresponsible mood, is whistling the ‘Spring Song’ from ‘Die Walkure’. He is very far away from me—indeed, I half wonder if I have loved a dream woven soul—and no reality. I call to him, despairingly—only he can silence with comfort those wailing voices. If my Siegmund exists, I must send him back into their darkness.

I cannot find him. I drag myself free from the passionate grip of his arms, and drop down sobbing, in the shelter of the tumuli—trying to shut out the unreasoning pleading of his voice.

He is beaten at last. (T 299)

This incident is isolated and unexplained. Helen’s fear that she has “loved a dream-woven soul” anticipates her later recognition, in Neutral Ground, that she had “made an image” of Macartney “which she clothed in the finery of romantic idealism”.29 If Macartney’s “irresponsible mood” was the result of sexual fulfilment, Helen might have been cast down by the realisation that she could never share that release. Although ‘The Freshwater Diary’ is silent on the matter, another written memoir, known as ‘The Cornwall Writing’, which narrates the events of the days immediately following the holiday, has Helen thinking: “I hold it a crime to bring a child into the world for whom the world has no place. I will never have an illegitimate child” (T 304), implying that she would commit suicide if she became pregnant. And Helen made no objections to ‘The Saga of Siegmund’, the first version of The Trespasser, in which the fact that Siegmund and Helena have made love is as explicit as it could be.
‘The Freshwater Diary’ is a strange and symptomatic piece of writing. John Worthen is rather unfair when he writes that Helen “is unable to mention the most commonplace object without including her ideas about the nature of the universe and man’s place within it”, but the ‘Diary’ certainly bears witness to her belief, at that time, that literature “enshrined the great, the beautiful, the desirable, the Way of the spirit, towards which she turned, to forget the paucity, poverty and ugliness that was the obverse side of life”. Much of it is written in this style:

We have hardly a regret for the vanished beauty of the morning—and it matters not at all that we can scarcely see five yards before us. The sunlight of the inner vision is unclouded—after nearly six years of waiting Fate has granted us five days of each other. Of this eternity the unseen sea is singing below us. Wrap us closer—grey damp shroud of mist. White, singing sea, lure us closer. Take us by the steep cliff pathway into the dark—let our last consciousness be the tighter grasp of each other’s arms. For Fate is already setting upon her favours a price to be paid in agony. (T 294)

It would be very easy for literary criticism to dismember writing like this, but it would be unfair and pointless because I agree with Jane Heath that ‘The Freshwater Diary’ is a traumatic text: that is, its author is attempting to heal the traumatic experience of Macartney’s suicide, and more significantly her part in it, in the only way she knows how, by enveloping herself in the transcendent world of fine writing. It is important to make it clear that Helen’s later autobiographical writing, the novel Neutral Ground written about eight years later and the much later autobiography In Our Infancy, are written in a much more plain and direct style, reflecting an admirable objectivity about the illusions of her younger self. But it is fascinating that even in these books, written at a much greater distance from the experience and with much more self-knowledge, Helen is unable to re-imagine the Isle of Wight holiday. During In
Our Infancy she breaks off the narrative of her relations with Macartney to say “Of our five days’ experience in the Island enough has been written”.33 She refers her reader to The Trespasser and includes ‘The Freshwater Diary’ as an appendix. Neutral Ground also breaks off with Ellis waiting on the Island for her lover to arrive. The narrative resumes four months later to describe Ellis writing the ‘Diary’ and then quotes a revised version of it. Though she is able to bring the maturity and perspective of her later years to bear on every other aspect of her story, the memory of those few days remains stuck in the traumatised and evasive literary prose of ‘The Freshwater Diary’.

Helen had already become acquainted with Lawrence before the fatal holiday. She was introduced to him by Agnes Mason, her close friend who was a fellow-teacher of Lawrence’s and the model for Louisa in The Trespasser. Like many other people she was immediately impressed by the quality of his attention: “for a moment his interest is focused on me with a peculiar awareness: it is as though he were isolating me from all present”.34 She described him to Macartney as a “Wunderkind” suggesting that she was struck by both his genius and his youthfulness.35 By coincidence he went on holiday to the Isle of Wight, with his parents and sister, at exactly the same time as Helen and Macartney. Not knowing whom she was going to meet he suggested that they travel together – an offer that she politely declined.

Later, when he learned from Agnes Mason of Macartney’s suicide and Helen’s consequent depression, he devoted himself with great sensitivity to trying to bring her back to life: “At first I am only aware of his unobtrusive sympathy, then of a tentative endeavour to re-awaken my interest in literature and art, as related to personal experience”.36 He almost certainly felt some sexual fascination with Helen from the start, and this is just the time when, after a long period of apparent latency, he became obsessed with getting sexual experience. But in the autumn of 1909 his sexual attentions were focused on another fellow-teacher, Agnes Holt, and, when that pursuit proved unsuccessful, at Christmas he suddenly
turned his attention to Jessie Chambers. There seems to have been no sexual tension between Lawrence and Helen during this period.

Lawrence became aware that Helen had written an account of the Isle of Wight experience and asked to see it. When he had read it he asked “What are you going to do with these prose poems?”.

Though ‘The Freshwater Diary’ inspired him to write a novel, it seems telling that he described it with the same term that he would soon use to dismiss The White Peacock, which he described as a “florid prose poem” in contrast to the “restrained, somewhat impersonal novel”, Paul Morel, that he began later in 1910 (1L 184).

Lawrence wrote ‘The Saga of Siegmund’, the first version of The Trespasser, between April and August 1910. It was exactly during this period that he had his brief sexual relationship with Jessie. We can only speculate about the influence that experience had on the novel or, more seriously, the effect that writing about a disastrously unhappy sexual relationship had on his feelings about Jessie and ability to make love to her spontaneously and uninhibitedly. His emotional investment in the novel was complex. He clearly identified with Siegmund, but began to think of him as a rival who would come between him and Helen from the grave:

You see, I know Siegmund is there all the time. I know you would go back to him, after me, and disclaim me. I know it very deeply. I know I could not bear it. I feel often inclined, when I think of you, to put my thumbs on your throat … You will sleep with Siegmund in the holiday. A revulsion from me, and put out your arms with passion into the dark, to him. (IL 160)

(The holiday mentioned here is a return to the Isle of Wight that Helen made the following summer.) In this same letter, written shortly before the Whitsun holiday in which he and Jessie became lovers, he wrote that Jessie “will take me. She will do me great, infinite good—for a time”.

Neil Roberts, ‘Writing with Women’
At the same time, John Worthen has persuasively suggested that Lawrence may have seen something of himself in Helen, or Helena as he calls her in the novel: “he would also have wondered whether, although he was a man, he was actually more like Helena than like Siegmund: the Helena who, in ‘The Saga’ makes Siegmund feel ‘she had left him and gone alone, as the sea withdraws itself into solitariness’. Was he, too, fatally unable to give himself, or to love?”

But what I want to concentrate on is the stylistic influence of ‘The Freshwater Diary’ on ‘The Saga of Siegmund’, which still remains, despite Lawrence having removed some of its worst excesses, in The Trespasser. For the central part of his novel, the holiday in Cornwall, Lawrence closely followed Helen’s narrative, and incorporated many phrases of hers into his text. He was obviously working with the ‘Diary’ at his side. He added the narrative of Siegmund’s return home and suicide, and Helen’s return from Cornwall to discover his death, and framed the whole story with episodes drawing on his own relationship with Helen, ending with the rather wishful possibility of their becoming lovers. There is little difference in plot terms between the ‘Saga’ and the finished novel.

As we have seen, Helen believed that literature “enshrined the great, the beautiful, the desirable, the Way of the spirit”, allowing her “to forget the paucity, poverty and ugliness that was the obverse side of life”. Lawrence would never have spoken like this but he too, more subtly, was in danger of being ensnared by a dualism which set an effete conception of literary style above and against the crude substance of life. Did he want to write in the manner of A Collier’s Friday Night or that of ‘The Witch à la Mode’ which is also the predominant manner of The White Peacock and most of what he had written till now? He was understandably reluctant to be pigeonholed as a working-class writer but was the alternative to be, in the worst sense of the word, a bourgeois writer?

Here are some examples of the style of ‘The Saga of Siegmund’:
Siegmund gave himself to the sunshine and the blessed breeze from the sea. In a passion he lay upon the bosom of the heaving noon of the sea and the sun. All his body passionately kissed the fragrant body of the large, magnified sea-noon.\textsuperscript{39}

Her soul clung closely to her body, like a round, solid flame to its oil. The winds could not sweep it away, straining, catching at the wick, almost lost. Death was fascinating for her because the flame of her soul clung always so securely. She was too strong and healthy ever to taste of death, ever to feel her flame blowing fast away from the wick, to be blown out at last. But Siegmund was as passionate as a flaming torch. He flamed strenuously, recklessly, consuming the resin and oil of his life almost to the end, then, with the dead ash threatening extinction upon him, he would wait in heaviness while his body laboured to replenish the fuel of his life.\textsuperscript{40}

He offered his lissom, white masculine body to the sun and the sea and the wind, and the sea was wild with passion, the wind was nestling like a girl, the sun crept into his veins with a wise, kind love.\textsuperscript{41}

The elaborate extended metaphor, on display for its own sake, the gratuitous personification, the facile use of “transcendent” language such as “blessed” and “fragrant” are all examples of what it means to describe this writing as “literary” in a way that echoes the sensibility of Helen Corke herself. But the style is not merely an alien infection caught from her. This literariness is something that Lawrence consciously aspired to, to mark him as something more than a collier’s son, as an entry-card to the literary world, and as a dyke more substantial than school-teaching to keep him above the “morass” that threatened him as much as it did Helen.

When Lawrence had finished the ‘Saga’ in the summer of 1910 he sent it to his mentor Ford Madox Hueffer, whose response was very discouraging. Lawrence later reported Hueffer as saying, “The
book is a rotten work of genius. It has no construction or form—it is execrably bad art, being all variations on a theme. Also it is erotic—not that I, personally, mind that, but an erotic work must be good art, which this is not” (IL 339). Lawrence nevertheless sent the manuscript to Heinemann, the publishers of The White Peacock, to whom he was contracted for a second novel. When Heinemann said they did not like it but would publish it anyway, Lawrence told them that he had decided against publishing it, more or less quoting Hueffer’s opinion as his own (IL 229).

There matters would probably have rested, The Trespasser would never have been published, and Sons and Lovers would have been Lawrence’s second novel if, eighteen months after it was completed, Lawrence’s new mentor Edward Garnett had not asked to see it and been much more enthusiastic than Hueffer. Lawrence set about revising it while he was convalescing in Bournemouth from the near-fatal attack of pneumonia that ended his teaching career and made him desperate to earn more money by writing. It was published in May 1912.

Lawrence rightly thought that his revision was a significant improvement, but the fundamental character of the book remains the same. Here for example are Siegmund and Helena discussing the sunset:

It was a splendid, flaming bridal chamber where he had come to Helena. He wondered how to express it; how other men had borne this same glory.

“What is the music of it?” he asked. She glanced at him. His eyelids were half lowered, his mouth slightly open, as if in ironic rhapsody.

“Of what, dear?”

“What music do you think holds the best interpretation of sunset?”

His skin was gold, his real mood was intense. She revered him for a moment.
“I do not know,” she said quietly; and rested her head against his shoulder, looking out west.

There was a space of silence, while Siegmund dreamed on.

“A Beethoven symphony—the one—the one—” and he explained to her.

She was not satisfied, but leaned against him, making her choice. The sunset hung steady—she could scarcely perceive a change.

“The Grail music, in ‘Lohengrin’”—she decided. \(T\) 61–2

This is based on a conversation that Helen reports in ‘The Freshwater Diary’. Helena and Siegmund’s relationship has very much revolved around music, and one can see why Lawrence should want to illustrate this. But the effect is of a stifling preciosity, in which the natural world is filtered through high culture – very much like the conversation of Clifford Chatterley, who cannot look at flowers without quoting Keats or Shakespeare. The difference of course is that Clifford is satirically portrayed, whereas here the author has as much invested in the high culture references as his characters.

The character as well as the experience of Helen Corke is deeply interfused in *The Trespasser*, but the reason for this is that Lawrence had a great deal in common with her. Fortunately both of them developed out of this stifling literariness, and the dualistic mentality that it expresses. Lawrence we know about. Helen may have gained self-knowledge from reading *The Trespasser*; certainly she gained self-knowledge, for in *Neutral Ground* she has her heroine write: “Out of blind pride of a desire that could content itself with purely emotional satisfactions, I presumed to condemn him. I denied and condemned his body, and made it in his eyes a handicap, a hindrance, an evil thing”.\(^{42}\) *The Trespasser* is the work of both D. H. Lawrence and Helen Corke, and it was almost certainly more significant in her life than in his.
7 Ibid., 167.
13 Ibid., 3.
14 Ibid., 86.
15 Ibid., 168.
16 Ibid., 135–6.
17 Ibid., 136.
18 Ibid., 148.
19 Ibid., 145.
20 Corke, *Neutral Ground*, 123.
21 Corke, *In Our Infancy*, 147.
23 Ibid., 71.
24 Ibid., 123.
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27 Corke, *In Our Infancy*, 162.
28 Ibid., 165–6.
33 Corke, *In Our Infancy*, 169.
34 Ibid., 160.
36 Ibid., 174.
37 Ibid., 177.
39 Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, MSS 72/231z, D. H. Lawrence Collection, *The Trespasser MS*, MSI, 38–9
40 Ibid., 60.
41 Ibid., 76.