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**Annabel Abbs, *Frieda: A Novel of the Real Lady Chatterley*. London: Two Roads, 2018. Pp 371. £14.99 (hardcover). ISBN 978 1 5293 0018 5**

*Reviewed by Lee M. Jenkins*

Annabel Abbs's *Frieda* belongs to the "author's wife" subgenre of the biographical novel which extends from Robert Graves's *Wife to Mr Milton* (1943) to novels of wives to Messrs. Hemingway and Fitzgerald like Paula McLain's *The Paris Wife* (2012) and Therese Anne Fowler's *Z* (2013). Recuperations of the author's wife inevitably corroborate the cliché that behind every great man there is a great woman, albeit sometimes with a twist. In Meg Wolitzer's novel *The Wife* (2003), for example, as in the 2017 movie adaptation of the same name, the wife of a Nobel Laureate elect is herself the author of her husband's novels, drawing on his life experiences in her writing. More often, however, author's wife fictions replicate the gendered status quo ante they seek to reverse, since in this subset of life-writing the woman is coterminous with life and the man with writing. The eponymous heroine of *Frieda* is wife to D. H. Lawrence, and so Abbs's mission is to restore the original Frieda who survives under Lawrence's pen portraits of her. This proves well-nigh impossible, and as the contradiction-in-terms of its subtitle suggests, Abbs's novel still mediates – and markets – Frieda's life through Lawrence's writing.

Frieda left her own account of her life with Lawrence, of course, and Abbs draws on Frieda's autobiography as well as on Janet Byrne's biography, for instance when "Lorenzo" tells Frieda "You have such a genius for living" (251). In *Not I, But the Wind ...* Frieda also represents herself as an active collaborator in Lawrence's writing, telling us that she "wrote bits of *Sons and Lovers*" (London: Granada, 1983: 50). Abbs's Frieda, who likewise "loved the feeling of collaboration" with Lawrence, has "rewritten great tracts" of *Sons and Lovers* (275). Indeed, when Frieda is briefly reunited with her son, Monty, she goes so far as to tell him

“I wrote a novel”, because “She didn’t want Monty to think of her as a mere muse” (322). Abbs states in her Author’s Note that “This is my story of Frieda as a mother”. But like the biographical Frieda, Abbs’s biofictional Frieda remains caught in the binary of her competing identities as mother and muse.

In chapters alternately titled after and focalised through Frieda, Ernest [Weekley] and two of their three children, Monty and Barby, Abbs’s story takes us from the dissolution of Frieda’s first marriage through her early years with Lawrence to an epilogue set in 1927, when Lawrence is writing the “new novel” that will also be his last, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (349). In Abbs’s account it is not Lawrence but Frieda’s sister Johanna (Nusch) who, with her titillating tales of Munich – “a hot bed of free love” – seduces Frieda away from her “boring” life in Nottingham with Weekley, an etymologist and “dry old stick” (6, 10). Munich – where Frieda embarks on an affair with her other sister’s, Else Jaffe’s, former lover, the psychoanalyst Otto Gross – is the scene of Frieda’s sexual and intellectual awakening, and in the scenes set there Abbs’s novel, too, comes alive, feeding as it does on such rich source material as Martin Green’s fine study, *The von Richthofen Sisters*.

Back in Nottingham, Frieda encounters Lawrence, tells him about Freud, and cures what she has diagnosed as his Oedipus complex when she invites him “to come and lie with her in the woods” (156). There, in the hotbed of love that is Sherwood Forest, Lawrence threads violets through the pubic hair of the “real” Lady Chatterley, who, like her fictional surrogate, “feel[s] herself coming back to life” (172). However, after years of living with an almost wholly unsympathetic Lawrence, Abbs’s Frieda comes to feel that “With Otto she had reclaimed herself. But only to forfeit it as Mrs Lawrence, as a multitude of fictional characters, palimpsests of herself, dredged from Lorenzo’s imagination” (354).

Author’s wife fictions effect no more than a temporary separation of wife from author insofar as the wife is recovered from one author only to become the property of another. Far from

resurrecting the original Frieda, Abbs adds another layer to the “palimpsest” of Frieda’s fictional proxies: Abbs critiques Lawrence for making the living Frieda into a paper doll but also reinscribes her “real” Frieda in the terms of his fiction. Arguably, Abbs’s novel bites the biofictional hand that feeds it, and does so in highly readable prose that is also, in places, a pastiche of Lawrence’s: “His gaze – straight, guileless, blue – seemed to bore into her and she had ... that strangely thrilling sensation of being split open, like a fig” (201).

In another recent Frieda biofiction, *The Novelist’s Wife* (2015) by Sasha Bristol (Marianna Torgovnick), Frieda says that Lawrence is “linking our life to his work” (Northampton MA: The Modernist Press, 2015: n. p. Kindle edition). Annabel Abbs’s Frieda may want to decouple her life from his art, but *Frieda: A Novel of the Real Lady Chatterley* shows us that we cannot recoup Frieda’s “story” from Lawrence’s fiction.

**Indrek Männiste, ed., *D. H. Lawrence, Technology, and Modernity*.**

**London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.**

**Pp xxii + 234. £96 (hardcover). ISBN 978 1 5013 4000 0**

*Reviewed by David Trotter*

There is wall-to-wall D. H. Lawrence in this welcome collection of fifteen essays on a relatively unexamined topic, and a lot of modernity, but not quite as much technology as one might perhaps have expected.

Technology, as the philosopher John Durham Peters has put it, is the externalisation of technique into durable form (*The Marvelous Clouds: Towards a Philosophy of Elemental Media* [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015], 91). As such, it is as old as the wheel, if not older. In literary studies, however, it has not yet shaken off its long association with aspects of “modernity”: a loose,