D. H. Lawrence's *Poetry: Demon* Liberated

A Collection of Primary and Secondary Material

Edited by A. Banerjee

D. H. LAWRENCE'S POETRY: DEMON LIBERATED

Also by A. Banerjee

*SPIRIT ABOVE WARS
MODERN ENGLISH POETRY: A Selection (*editor*)

**Also published by Macmillan*

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MACMILLAN

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1990 978-0-333-49974-0

First published 1990

Published by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
D. H. Lawrence Poetry: Demon Liberated: A Collection of
Primary and Secondary Material.
1. Poetry in English. Lawrence, D. H. (David
Herbert, 1885–1930 – Critical studies
I. Banerjee, A.
821'.912
ISBN 978-1-349-11069-8 ISBN 978-1-349-11067-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-11067-4

To Robin, Nigel and Jackie

Contents

Acknowledgements

I thank the following for their permission to reprint copyright material: Laurence Pollinger Ltd and the Estate of Mrs Frieda Lawrence Ravagli: Excerpts (nos. 1–4, 14, 18) from *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. I James T. Boulton (ed.), and vol. II George Zyaturk and James T. Boulton (eds), (Cambridge University Press, 1979 and 1981); the managing editor, *Poetry*: John Gould Fletcher, 'A Modern Evangelist', *Poetry*, August 1918. The Master and Fellows, Magdalene College, Cambridge: I. A. Richards, 'A Background For Contemporary Poetry', *Criterion*, July 1925; Rosica Colin Ltd: Richard Aldington, 'D. H. Lawrence as Poet', *Saturday Review of Literature*, May 1926; the Society of Authors as the literary executor of the Estate of John Middleton Murry: 'The Poems of D. H. Lawrence', *The New Adelphi*, December 1928; Gunther Stuhlmann and Black Spring Press Ltd: Anais Nin *D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study*, 1932 (copyright 1964 by Anais Nin, copyright 1985 by the Anais Nin Trust); the Estate of Horace Gregory: *Pilgrim of the Apocalypse* (Viking, 1933); New Directions Publishing Corporation: Kenneth Rexroth, *World Outside the Window* (copyright 1947 by Kenneth Rexroth). The Executor of the Estate of James Reeves: *Commitment to Poetry* (Heinemann, 1969); David Higham Associates: Herbert Read, *The True Voice of Feeling* (Faber, 1953); Macmillan, London and Basingstoke and David Higham Associates: Geoffrey Grigson, *Poems and Poets* (Macmillan, 1969); Southern Illinois University Press: Christopher Hassall, 'Black Flowers: A New Light on the Poetics of D. H. Lawrence', from *A D. H. Lawrence Miscellany*, Harry T. Moore (ed.), (Southern Illinois University Press, 1959); Oxford University Press: M. L. Rosenthal, *The Modern Poets: A Critical Introduction* (copyright 1960 by M. L. Rosenthal); Faber & Faber and Random House: W. H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays*, 1962; Peter Fraser and Dunlop Group Ltd: Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Moderns* (Hamish Hamilton, 1963); the author, the publisher and Watson, Little Ltd: D. J. Enright, *Conspirators and Poets* (Chatto & Windus, 1966); the author Joyce Carol Oates, *The Hostile Sun* (Black Sparrow Press, 1973); the author and Routledge: Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British*

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Preface

It is hoped that the growing interest in Lawrence's poetry will be served by this, the first collection of writings exclusively on or about Lawrence's poetry and his poetic personality. I have sought to bring together in one volume diverse material which is not easily accessible for collective consideration. However, in my selection of writings I have avoided following any particular line of thought about Lawrence's poetry. The only unifying principle, if it can be described as such, underlying this selection might be called a historical one: right from the date of the first entry (1908) in this volume to our times (1973), Lawrence emerges as a significant poetic voice of this century.

I am thankful to Kobe College Research Institute for granting me a research subsidy which has facilitated the publication of this book, mainly by covering the substantial copyright fees. I am grateful to Professor James T. Boulton for his interest and help in this work. My thanks go also to the following members of Kobe College library and administrative staff for their help in various ways: Yuriko Kurose, Ryoko Mizoguchi, Noriko Mitani and Mika Nishino.

A. Banerjee

Introduction

In view of Lawrence's pre-eminence as a novelist, his poetry has traditionally been regarded as a mere by-product. But one of the signal achievements of Lawrence criticism in recent decades has been the gradual awareness that 'Lawrence is a great poet in every sense, including the technical'.[1] It is salutary to remind ourselves, at the very outset, that though Lawrence's prose did seem to attract greater attention throughout his life, it is equally clear, from the essays and excerpts collected in this volume, that right from the very beginning both Lawrence and his critics took his poetry very seriously indeed. It is true that there were times like those when the publisher returned *Amores* to him 'with instructions as to how to write poetry',[2] but in general Lawrence was recognized as being among the significant new poetic voices of his time. He was discussed by Harold Monro and Arthur Waugh in their respective books on contemporary poetry: the latter saw Lawrence as a 'typical representative of the [new] literary movement'. And Glenn Hughes is on record as saying that he had been 'told by one of the imagists that Lawrence was included in the anthologies for the simple reason that in 1914 he was looked upon as a writer of genius who would certainly achieve fame and would therefore shed glory on the whole imagist movement.' In 1919 Amy Lowell wrote an article in the *New York Times Review of Books* in order to introduce to the American audience a poet 'who had attained a considerable amount of fame in England even before the war'. I. A. Richards's essay on contemporary poetry in *The Criterion* (1925) amply demonstrated Lawrence's importance in the pantheon. After dismissing poets like Kipling, Masefield, Drinkwater and Noyes who were mainly the objects of 'youthful enthusiasms', Richards went on to discuss more serious poets who were grappling, in their own distinctive ways, with the contemporary situation: Hardy, de la Mare, Yeats and Lawrence.

However, in the subsequent decades, especially with the rise of New Criticism, Lawrence's stock began to fall, and so far as his poetry was concerned, it received a devastating blow from R. P. Blackmur in his well-known (and now generally regarded as misguided) essay, 'Lawrence and the Expressive Form' (1935). When

after the war interest was revived in Lawrence, primarily through the pioneering efforts of F. R. Leavis, it was his prose works that put Lawrence among the major writers of this century. Though his poetry did receive sensitive and appreciative treatments in articles and essays, his entire poetic output began to be subjected to detailed book-length evaluation only in the seventies. There has been a growing feeling among at least some critics and readers that, to borrow the words of the noted American novelist Joyce Carol Oates, Lawrence's poetry 'is more combative than even the greatest of his novels.' Such a view is not without precedent. As early as 1920, the American poet Louis Untermeyer had felt that even in his novels, the poet was waiting in the wings: 'Huge passages in the novels seem like unfinished sketches waiting to be cast in the harder mould of poetic form. The cherry-picking episode in *Sons and Lovers* is perfected and fused in the three quatrains called 'Cherry Robbers': Miriam and Paul among the flowers take on tremendous proportions when they meet in that triumph of raw neuroticism, "Snapdragon".'[3] H. J. C. Grierson and J. C. Smith remarked in their *A Critical History of English Poetry* (1944), that 'good judges believe that [Lawrence's] poems will outlast his novels'.[4] Geoffrey Bullough and Geoffrey Grigson also made similar predictions. What all this may suggest is that Lawrence's artistic vision was essentially a poetic one, and that it was most persuasively expressed in his poetry. After all, he started as well as ended his artistic career as a poet: his first publication in a literary magazine was five poems which Ford Madox Ford printed in the *English Review* in 1909 (and, incidentally, this resulted in Lawrence's receiving his first critical notice when Henry Yoxall reviewed these poems in *Schoolmaster* and hailed Lawrence as a 'true-born poet'[5]), and the last of his creative writings, written on his death-bed, were poems.

Many people who knew Lawrence, notably Ford Madox Ford, commented on the unexpectedly sophisticated aspects of his upbringing despite the fact that his father was a miner. This was mainly due to Lawrence's mother's determination that her children would be inspired to lead more refined lives than the one that seemed to have been destined for them by the circumstances of their birth. Ada, Lawrence's sister, recalled how their mother loved to read books borrowed from the local libraries, and to discuss religion and philosophy with the clergyman. In her teens, she [the mother] had published poems in local journals. Lawrence

too started to write poems while in college. His sister has recorded how 'in a Nottingham University College note-book, containing his notes on botany and drawings of specimens, he also wrote poems'.[6] He was apparently quite diffident then: the first time Lawrence told Jessie Chambers of his ambition to become a writer, he added that he would like to write poetry though he wondered 'what will others say? That I am a fool. A collier's son a poet!'[7] However, this collier's son not only got his poems published in the *English Review* (which had a remarkable array of contributors ranging from Yeats, Bridges, Hardy, Conrad, Shaw, Galsworthy, Wells, Bennett to the great Russians of the time, Tolstoy, Chekov and Gorky), but was also hailed as 'a wonderful poet'. Ford took Lawrence to a poetry-reading session of the Rhymers' Club where 'this completely unknown poet' who looked 'shy and countrified'[8] read his poems, including those written in dialect, before an audience which included some of the rising stars of the day like Pound and Yeats. Lawrence apparently soon acquired the 'looks' of a poet too. Professor Weekley's remark on first meeting Lawrence was: 'I am sure he is a poet. I could see it in his face . . .'.[9]

But Lawrence soon realised, was perhaps made to realise, that if he was to earn his living as a writer, which he had decided to do, he must turn to prose. After Ford had 'discovered' Lawrence, he introduced him to the influential literary figure Edward Garnett, whose father's (Richard's) edition of *The International Library of Famous Literature* (1889) in twenty volumes had been the major source of Lawrence's literary education during his early manhood. Edward Garnett, being an adviser to various publishing firms in London, helped in the editing and publishing of Lawrence's novels, short stories and plays. But he showed little interest in his verse: in an early letter to Garnett, dated 20 October 1911, Lawrence said: 'I know you are not keen on my verse' [*Letters*, I, 90].[10] Even Ford's successor at the *English Review*, Arthur Harrison, wanted prose rather than poems from Lawrence [see *Letters*, I, 90]. However, as Hardy had done before him, Lawrence continued to write poems along with his prose works. The similarity between these two poet-novelists is instructive. Hardy's first love in literature was poetry. In the words which are technically attributed to his second wife, Hardy's 'verse had been written before their author [had] dreamt of novels'. She had also noted Hardy's dissatisfaction with those critics who had a tendency to conclude, unjustly, that 'an author who has published prose first and that

largely, must necessarily express himself badly in verse'.[11] This, *mutatis mutandis*, could be said about Lawrence's poetic career too. In one respect, however, Lawrence was luckier than Hardy: while the older poet was able to publish only four poems (and two of them in his prose writings) before 1898 when he abandoned the novel form and devoted himself to writing and publishing poetry exclusively, Lawrence was able to publish *his* poems steadily alongside his novels and other works. Thus, after the appearance of his first two novels, his *Love Poems and Others* was published in 1913. Until the recent discovery of Lawrence's letters to Walter de la Mare it was not generally known that the latter, as Heinemann's 'reader', had facilitated the publication of Lawrence's verse. De la Mare was not much impressed by the manuscript of *Sons and Lovers*, which had originally been submitted to Heinemann, but he encouraged Lawrence to offer his poems for publication. He had been initially instrumental in the appearance of Lawrence's series of poems entitled 'The Schoolmaster' in *Saturday Westminster Gazette* (May 1912), and later on he helped him in arranging the publication of his first volume of verse which, ironically, came out under the imprint of Duckworth rather than Heinemann. Lawrence was deeply grateful to de la Mare for all his help. He wrote to him: 'I know you did what you could for my poems . . . Thanks for arranging those verses. I should have botched it horribly' [*Letters*, I, 447]. Despite the fact that he had already published two novels, Lawrence was looking forward to the publication of his first volume of poetry with almost boyish enthusiasm: 'I should love to have a volume of verses in my hand, in hard, rough covers, on white, rough paper' [*Letters*, I, 442]. And again, a few years later: 'There is something peculiarly exciting and delightful about a book of verse, more than about prose' [*Letters*, II, 596].

His special regard for his first volume of poetry, which he described as 'my dearest treasure' [*Letters*, I, 313], can be better appreciated in the light of his conception of poetic art and confidence in himself as poet. He complained that in 'England people have got that loathsome superior knack of refusing to consider me as a poet at all: "Your prose is so good" say the fools "that we are obliged to forgive you your poetry." How I hate them' [*Letters*, II, 146]. He himself, on the other hand, believed that poetry in general, and his own in particular, was more significant because it aimed at capturing the living quality of life at its perfection: 'It is lovely to have poetry, either one's own or that of one's friends. It

seems that there, in the poems, at least, living has come to perfection and to an unchanging absoluteness, that is completely satisfying' [*Letters*, II, 516]. This was how he saw poetry in 1917, but he soon realized that he himself was, in fact, more concerned with the 'instantaneous living' which had 'no perfection, no consummation', whereas poets had been traditionally writing about either the past or the future. He formulated his ideas after the publication of his *New Poems* in England in 1918, and published them under the title 'Poetry of the Present' in the magazine *Playboy* in 1919 (and it was afterwards used as introduction to the American edition of his *New Poems* in 1920):

> Poetry is, as a rule, either the voice of a far future, exquisite and ethereal, or it is the voice of the past, rich, magnificent. . . . Perfected bygone moments in the glimmering futurity, these are the treasured gemlike lyrics of Shelley and Keats.
>
> But there is another kind of poetry: the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. In the immediate present there is no perfection, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon. . . . ['Poetry of the Present']

Lawrence was aware that he was attempting to write poetry which was different from that which had hitherto been written in English. However, the 'new poetry' that he had thus defined had little in common with the 'modernist' poetry that people like Pound and Eliot were launching around the time Lawrence wrote this piece. Arguably, the distinguishing characteristic of 'modernist' poetry was its unorthodox and complex technique. Eliot explained that such a technique was necessary if the poet was to respond to his (i.e. modern) predicament:

> We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.[12]

Lawrence also felt the need to break away from the traditional

forms of versification, and write in free verse, but for different reasons:

> We can get rid of the stereotyped movements and the old hackneyed associations of sound or sense. We can break down those artificial conduits and canals through which we do so love to force our utterance. We can break the stiff neck of habit. We can be ourselves spontaneous and flexible as flame, we can see that utterance rushes out without artificial foam or artificial smoothness. But we cannot positively prescribe any motion, any rhythm. All the laws we invent or discover – it amounts to pretty much the same – will fail to apply to free verse. They will only apply to some form of restricted, limited unfree verse. ['Poetry of the Present']

But in order to appreciate such ideas about versification, we do not have to put Lawrence in the context of his age as we must do in the case of Pound or Eliot. Of course, Lawrence was a modern poet but he was modern in the sense Shakespeare was Elizabethan, each having unselfconsciously imbibed the spirit of his own age. Contemporaneity as such held little attraction for Lawrence. He showed scant regard for contemporary poets or poetry: he dismissed Yeats as 'vapourish, too thin,' and Helen Corke recalled how Lawrence 'had read with slashing criticism a book of modern verse'.[13]

However, Lawrence has been associated with at least two poetic movements of the early twentieth-century because his poems appeared in the *Georgian Poetry* volumes and in Imagist anthologies. But it was not only ironical but also indicative of his cavalier attitude towards these movements that he willingly appeared in their respective anthologies, even though their aims were, in many ways, mutually hostile. The simple explanation for this inconsistency is that Lawrence welcomed the money as well as the publicity which these associations brought him. When he received his first cheque for his poem 'Snap-Dragon' which was printed in the first volume of *Georgian Poetry* (December 1912), he was deeply grateful to its editor Edward Marsh: 'What a joy to receive £3 out of the sweet heavens! I call that manna. I suppose you are the manipulatory Jehovah. I will sing you a little "Te Deum"' [*Letters*, II, 35–36]. And again: 'That *Georgian Poetry* book is a veritable alladin's lamp. I little thought that my "Snapdragon" would go on blooming and

seeding in this prolific fashion. So many thanks for four pounds, and long life to GP' [*Letters*, II, 140].

But in reality, Lawrence had little in common with the Georgian ideals of poetry or Marsh's poetic principles. True, Lawrence wrote a favourable review of *Georgian Poetry*, but it seems that this was his way of repaying Marsh's kindness (and earning a little money [see *Letters*, I, 508]) rather than his considered opinion of that poetry which he had elsewhere criticised quite scathingly. Without going, at this stage, into a consideration of Lawrence's mature poetry, which would automatically put the simple-mindedness of much Georgian poetry into the shade,[14] one may refer to some of his letters, which show that both Lawrence and Marsh were dissatisfied with each other's ideas about what poetry should be. For instance, when Marsh complained about the poetic pattern (or rather the lack of it) in Lawrence's poetry, the latter wrote the now-famous letter of 18 November 1913 in which he explained in detail, giving illustrative examples, his own conception of poetic pattern: '. . . it is the hidden *emotional* pattern that makes poetry, not the obvious form'. Lawrence also criticised some of the more regular, and in many ways typical, Georgians like Abercrombie, Davies and Hodgson. But in spite of all this, Lawrence seemed constantly to be trying to ingratiate himself with Marsh, allowing him to suggest, and make, alterations as he deemed fit: '. . . tell me the faults you find and I will try to put them right' [*Letters*, II, 154]. He did so not only for the reasons I have mentioned above but also because Marsh, being an extremely influential political and literary figure, helped Lawrence in various other ways, which included introducing him to prominent personalities – literary as well as social – of his time.

Lawrence's links with Imagism were, if anything, more tenuous. When he contributed seven poems to Amy Lowell's *Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology*, he did so, according to Richard Aldington, 'for financial profit'.[15] And in his book *Imagism and Imagists* (1931), Glenn Hughes has explained that 'Lawrence took no real interest in Imagism as a theory of poetry or as a movement' – which he dismissed as a 'joke'. Nor was Lawrence much in sympathy with Futurism and Vorticism (the latter being 'both an outgrowth from and a rebellion against Futurism').[16] Lawrence did admire the Futurists' attempt to reject 'old forms and sentimentalities' and their insistence on the spontaneity of art, but he felt that 'the one thing about their art is that it *isn't* art, but ultra-scientific attempts

to make diagrams of certain physic or mental states. It is ultra-ultra intellectual, going beyond Maeterlinck and the Symbolistes, who are intellectual'.

This, Lawrence's impatience with 'old forms and sentimentalities' on the one hand, and his refusal to subscribe to the new poetic movements of his time, makes it very difficult for one to classify and categorise him in the history of modern English poetry. Frequent attempts have been made to place him within the Romantic poetic tradition. Few will deny the presence of Romantic elements in Lawrence's poetry: his deep subjectivity, his emotionalism, his belief in the organic relationship between man and nature and, above all, his restless quest for truth which lay beyond the social and material realities. But, surely, the perception of this yields only a partial truth about Lawrence's poetry, because it fails to do justice to its very distinctive quality. The fact of the matter is that Lawrence was both a traditionalist and anti-traditionalist. Without quite attempting to revolutionise English poetry in the manner of the avant-garde poets of the early twentieth-century, and being content to write within the existing poetic tradition, he wrote poems which are strikingly individualistic and distinctly Lawrentian, both in subject-matter and style.

Lawrence's style has been the object of attacks, anger and even dismay because his critics have seen evidence in his versification of eccentricity at best and sheer carelessness and ignorance at worst. In writing differently Lawrence did not have the benefit of being an Eliot or a Pound, who were self-professed revolutionaries in poetic style and who set before the critics the challenging task of explaining, elucidating and justifying their new techniques. Lawrence's plea, for a shift within the accepted mode, had gone largely unheeded. As a result, he has been accused of formlessness and a lack of prosodic skills. And yet, ironically, his severest critics have granted that, despite his technical oddities, Lawrence's poetry cannot be ignored. One can rest one's case on this matter by quoting D. J. Enright's remark: 'If these poems are lacking in craftsmanship, then so much the worse for craftsmanship'.

What makes Lawrence's poetry so distinctive (as well as distinguished) is the stamp of his personality, his personal vision of life and his personal voice. When he declared, 'I always say, my motto is "Art for my sake"' [*Letters*, I, 491], he was rejecting the ideals of the art for art's sake movement not only because his working-class upbringing, without much *formal* education, made that kind of

alliance impossible but also because his central concern was life as he knew it, experienced it and thought about it. Like Yeats, who had believed that a 'poet is by the very nature of things a man who lives with entire sincerity, or rather, the better his poetry the more sincere his life', Lawrence was a deeply subjective writer who channelled (and analysed) his own experiences through the medium of art. Life, as he lived and experienced it, was the central theme of his poetry, and everything else was subordinate to it. Art was subordinate to life because Lawrence was convinced that it was life's experiences themselves that created their own artistic forms (*pace* Blackmur). He did not subscribe to the neo-classical view that art was a received form the skilful use of which gave significance to the artist's vision of life ('What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed'). Rather, it was the quality of the mind of the artist which, because it looked at the world in its own unique way, created its own artistic form. Lawrence had an unusually sensitive personality, which would have easily measured up to Wordsworth's definition of a poet. Many of those who knew him have said that they were struck by it. Aldous Huxley remarked:

> 'Different and superior in kind'. I think almost everyone who knew him well must have felt that Lawrence was this. A being, somehow, of another order, more sensitive, more highly conscious, more capable of feeling than even the most gifted men.[18]

It is therefore not surprising that such a man viewed life differently, and reacted to his experiences with extraordinary sensitivity, and projected his vision in his art. Some readers have been bowled over by such a personality, such intense vision. Middleton Murry seems to have spoken for them all: 'He [Lawrence] is like a creature of another kind than ours, some lovely unknown animal with the gift of speech. With a strange sixth sense he explores the world of ours . . . We gasp and try to receive them. But, alas! we do not know what to do with them'.

Others, more determined than Murry, on the other hand, have tended to deduce Lawrence's 'philosophy' from his reactions to life as they were embodied, dramatised or implied in his writings. But we must remember that Lawrence himself had warned against subjecting his work to this search for a 'philosophy' or 'doctrine'. In the Foreword to *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, he explained what he regarded as the right relationship between the two:

> This pseudo-philosophy of mine – 'pollyanalytics' as one might say – is deduced from the novels and poems, not the reverse. And then the absolute need which one has for some sort of satisfactory mental attitude towards oneself and things in general makes one try to abstract some definite conclusions from one's experiences as a writer and as a man. The novels and poems are pure passionate experience. These 'pollyanalytics' are inferences made afterwards, from the experience.[19]

However, it would appear that more than the novels, it is his poems which present the 'passionate experience'. This is because, as Lawrence has said, verse, by its very nature, is a more suitable medium for such a purpose:

> . . . it has always seemed to me that a real thought, not an argument, can exist easily in verse, or in some poetic form. There is a didactic element about prose thoughts which make them repellent, slightly bullying. 'He who hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune.' There is a thought well put; but immediately it irritates by its assertiveness. It applies to actual practical life. If it were put into poetry it wouldn't nag at us so practically. We don't want to be nagged at.[20]

It is true that Lawrence was a self-professed 'preacher' [*Letters*, II, 387] who wanted to convey a message to his readers. But he also knew that, as an artist, he could do so only by presenting his ideas poetically in such a way that they revealed his thoughts or 'philosophy' unobtrusively. What Eliot had said about Donne – 'A thought to Donne was an experience: it modified his sensibility'[21] – could be applied to Lawrence with equal justice. In this connection one is reminded, once again, of Thomas Hardy, who, after reading 'various philosophical systems, and being struck with their contradictions and futilities', came to this conclusion: *'Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience'*[22] [Hardy's italics]. Lawrence had instinctively come to a similar understanding, without reading much philosophy. The 'philosophical' doctrine which his early upbringing might be said to have exposed him to was Christianity, but he soon found it to be untenable. A few of the surviving letters that he wrote on the subject to Reverend Robert Reid, the minister who had recommended Lawrence for a teaching post at the British School in Eastwood, show how

Lawrence found it difficult to reconcile his human experiences with the Christian doctrine, very much in the manner that led to Ursula's disenchantment with religion in *The Rainbow*. In a letter to the minister that Lawrence wrote when he was barely 22, he explained his belief that one evolved one's 'religion' in the light of one's own experiences:

> I believe that a man is converted when he first hears the low, vast murmur of life. I believe a man is born first unto himself–for the happy developing of himself, while the world is a nursery, and the pretty things are to be snatched for, and pleasant things tasted; some people seem to exist thus right to the end. But most are born again on entering manhood; then they are born to humanity, to a consciousness of all the laughing, and the never-ceasing murmur of pain and sorrow that comes from the terrible multitudes of brothers. Then, it appears to me, a man gradually formulates his own religion, be it what it may. A man has no religion who has not slowly and painfully gathered one together, adding to it, shaping it: and one's religion is never complete and final, it seems, but must always be undergoing modifications. [*Letters*, I, 39–40]

This was about religion. Likewise, as he went through life he formulated his own philosophy of life, and embodied it memorably in his poetry. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to use the word 'vision' because, as Graham Hough has pointed out, Lawrence never cared for philosophical consistency in his writings:

> At the back of every philosophy is a vision, but the philosopher's claim is that the vision has been corrected – checked for internal consistency with reports derived from other modes of experience than his own. Lawrence could make no such claim: what he offers is a *Weltanschauung*, his own vision of life.[23]

It is useful to remember this distinction because Lawrence has been often, and unjustly, accused of philosophical inconsistencies. Blackmur's charges against Lawrence included the one that he was unable to offer 'the orderly insight' of the 'great mystics'.[24]

But Lawrence was neither a mystic nor a philosopher. He was a poet: his imagination was essentially poetic, which enabled him to explore unknown modes of being. His response to life was instinc-

tive rather than intellectual, and thus he was able to see realities to which the ordinary man is blind. Even a mundane act, like taking a walk in the woods, revealed this unique capacity of his. Douglas Goldring, an editor and critic, noted:

> . . . to go for a walk with Lawrence through the English countryside was an unforgettable experience. It is one of the characteristics of a genius to be able to see things which normal people miss. Lawrence made me feel that I had never really 'seen' a wood before.[25]

More specifically, Lawrence's perception of the reality of life and the universe, and the relationship between the two, grew out of a startling rediscovery of a now forgotten truth which the primitive man had grasped instinctively. Lawrence became convinced that human life was organically related to the universe, and that Christian religion as well as the modern sciences have tended to ignore this vital connection. The modern man must try to re-establish this relationship by shedding his egotism and selfconsciousness:

> We need to find some terms to express such elemental connections as between the ocean and the human soul. We need to put off our personality, even our individuality, and enter the region of the elements. . . . The religious systems of the pagan world did what Christianity never tried to do: they gave the true correspondence between the material cosmos and the human soul. The ancient cosmic theories were exact, and apparently perfect. In them science and religion were in accord.[26]

This also provides a clue to Lawrence's so-called 'primitivism'. Despite the warnings and protestations of the Victorian 'prophets', scientific rationalism and materialism continued to gather momentum, and by the time Lawrence came on the scene they had become not only integral to but also characteristic of modern living and thinking. One fatal result of this, according to Lawrence, was the estrangement of human life from nature. On a purely physical level, this had meant that the natural world had been blighted by machines, mines and mills and, in general, man's acquisitiveness and greed for material possessions. Much as Lawrence lamented such despoiling of nature, he was more deeply concerned about

the psychological damage that man's alienation from nature had caused. Man had lost his 'primitive' instinctual response to life and had become more and more rationalistic and materialistic in his outlook. With complete trust in reason, he sought material satisfaction rather than inner fulfilment. This, according to Lawrence, accounted for most of the problems of the modern man whose single-minded quest for material well-being had left him humanly unfulfilled. The more he tried with his rationalism and scientific skills to conquer nature the more fragmented he became as a human being. This was because, Lawrence believed, the achievement of man's full identity depended on his being part of nature as birds, beasts and flowers are. The 'primitive' man instinctively saw himself as organically related to nature. Free from the egotism and selfconsciousness of the 'civilized' man who tries helplessly for a self-contained and self-sufficient individuality, the 'primitive' man could never envision himself alone in this world. When he saw himself in his shadow or in his reflection on water, he found himself surrounded by nature. The modern man, on the other hand, was a victim of an illusion of individualism and false connections. Only four months before he died, Lawrence spoke of this, his profound faith:

> . . . my individualism is really an illusion. I am part of the greater whole, and I can never escape. But I *can* deny my connections, break them, and become a fragment. Then I am wretched.
>
> What we want is to destroy our false, inorganic connections, especially those related to money, and re-establish the living organic connections with the cosmos, the sun and the earth, with mankind and nation and family. Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen.[27]

These characteristically subjective perceptions and beliefs were not matters of rational discourse but of poetic evocation for Lawrence. Despite his not too seldom didacticism and hectoring tone, mainly in his prose, he felt no need to explain his ideas and faith in his poetry logically. He just wanted his readers to share his intuitive and intensely emotional apprehension of life. And verse proved to be the ideal medium for him, because through the poetic use of words, images and symbols he could embody his perceptions. Through his verse he tried to recapture the basic *unconscious*

state of man and to reveal his true identity and his relationship with the cosmos. Lawrence had evolved his own ideas about the 'unconscious' which were different from those that had been recently expounded by psychologists and psycho-analysts like Freud and Jung. Whereas they took as their province what Lawrence called 'mental consciousness' (suppressed or sublimated), he believed that man's true identity lay in his 'pristine' unconscious before thought or intelligence altered or modified it. An attempt must be made to discover that basic source of life if human life is to achieve fulfilment:

> We must discover, if we can, the true unconscious, where our life bubbles up in us, prior to any mentality. The first bubbling life in us, which is innocent of any mental alteration, this is the unconscious. It is pristine, not in any way ideal. It is the spontaneous origin from which it behoves us to live.
>
> What then is the true unconscious? It is not shadow cast from the mind. It is the spontaneous life-motive in every organism. Where does it begin? It begins where life begins.[28]

Since the 'true unconscious' is the 'spontaneous life-motive in every organism', all forms of life – human, animal, vegetable – originally inhabited the same cosmos, or 'chaos' as Lawrence termed it in his Preface to Harry Crosby's *Chariot of the Sun*. Animals have continued to live contentedly and gracefully, but man's desire for 'form, stability, fixity' has led him away from chaos. Though physically man's life is 'ordered' and 'civilized', humanly it is sterile and stifling. Lawrence believed that it is through poetry that man could get a glimpse of the life-sustaining 'living chaos' from which he had banished himself:

> [Poetry] is a glimpse of chaos not reduced to order. But the chaos *alive*, not the chaos of matter. A glimpse of the living, untamed chaos. For the grand chaos is all alive and everlasting. From it we draw our breath of life. If we shut ourselves from it we stifle. The animals live with it, as they live in grace.

If man could live instinctively and spontaneously like the animals do, he too would be able to respond to 'the tremendous unknown forces of life' [*Letters*, II, 218] and experience the miracle of living: 'For man, as for flower, beast and bird, the supreme triumph is to

be most vividly, most perfectly alive. Whatever the unborn and the dead may know, they cannot know the beauty, the marvel of being alive in the flesh'.[29] It is not difficult, against this background, to understand how Lawrence came to evolve his 'religion of the blood': 'My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says is always true' [*Letters*, I, 503]. What the blood 'feels and believes and says' is the subject of Lawrence's poetry.

Mention of Lawrence's ideas about the man-woman relationship becomes inevitable at this juncture. Inevitable, because he believed that a proper relationship between the two was a prerequisite for man's contact with the cosmos as well as for human fulfilment. As Lawrence sees it, this relationship is based on polarity, that is to say, both the male and the female, being opposite, start in clash and conflict, but they achieve equilibrium not by yielding of individuality on either side but by transcending the conflicts and arriving at a state of creative tension, of complementary balance. For this to happen, both man and woman must respond to the psychic forces within their respective selves and follow their intuition. Lawrence believes that one way man can realise his intuition is through sex. However, the modern man has become too selfconscious about sex: he has debased it by 'mental consciousness' and materialism, and this has resulted in the thwarting of his instinctive life:

> The deep psychic disease of modern man and woman is the diseased, atrophied condition of the intuitive faculties. There is a whole world of life that we might know and enjoy by intuition, and by intuition alone. This is denied us because we deny sex and beauty, the source of the intuitive life and of insouciance which is so lovely in free animals and in plants.[30]

When man is able to regain his intuitive life, he can, through unselfconscious sex with the woman he loves, keep himself in 'direct communication with the unknown' [*Letters*, I, 503]. Thus, human beings can become one with the cosmos by achieving the right man–woman relationship. Such an union will bring about the kind of fulfilment that is denied to men and women who remain fragmented and isolated in their ego-entrapped selves:

> . . . let those who are single, man torn from woman, woman from man, men all together, women all together, separate, violent and deathly fragments, each returning and adhering to its own kind, the body of life torn in two, let these finish the day of destruction, and those who have united go into the wilderness to know a new heaven and a new earth [*Letters*, II, 638].

As an artist, Lawrence's aim was to bring this 'new heaven and a new earth' within the reach of ordinary men and women. It is true that in his 'Why the Novel Matters' he had claimed that 'if you are a novelist, you know that paradise is in the palm of your hand, and on the end of your nose, because both are alive'.[31] But even a casual reader of that particular piece – in which Lawrence goes on to claim that 'the Bible – but *all* the Bible – Homer and Shakespeare: these are the supreme old novels'[32] would know that Lawrence was there explaining not so much the importance of novels and novelists as of art and artists. One might even say that he was actually thinking of poetry and poets as the collocation of the Bible, Homer and Shakespeare makes it abundantly clear. It seems to me that Lawrence himself was more successful in carrying out his intent – to make his readers know a 'new heaven and a new earth' – in his poetry more than in his prose writings. If we approach Lawrence without any preconceptions about poetry in general and his works in particular, he would emerge as a great poet who gave, through the medium of verse, a memorable expression to his profoundly poetic vision of life.

Notes

* Where the sources of quotations have not been cited, they appear in this volume.

1. Keith Sagar (ed.), Introduction to *D. H. Lawrence: Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, rev. ed. 1986) p. 11.
2. Catherine Carswell, *The Savage Pilgrimage* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1932, revised 1981) p. 41.
3. 'D. H. Lawrence', *New Republic* (11 August 1920) 315.
4. (London: Chatto & Windus) p. 506.
5. Reprinted in R. P. Draper (ed.), *D. H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) p. 32.
6. Ada Lawrence and G. Stuart Gelder, *Young Lorenzo* (New York:

Russell and Russell, 1932, reprinted 1966) pp. 66–7.
7. Jessie Chambers, *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record*, (Cambridge University Press, 1935, reprinted 1982) p. 57.
8. Edward Nehls, *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography*, vol. I (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957) p. 129.
9. See James T. Boulton (ed.), *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. I, (Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 51.
10. This, and all subsequent quotations from Lawrence's letters, are from *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. I, James T. Boulton (ed.) and vol. II, George Zyaturk and James T. Boulton (eds). Both the volumes have been published by Cambridge University Press, 1979 and 1981.
11. Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840–1928* (London: Macmillan, 1962, reprinted 1975) p. 299.
12. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1932) p. 289.
13. Helen Corke, *D. H. Lawrence: The Croydon Years* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965) p. 12.
14. cf. 'Even in his early poems, he [Lawrence] had a mythopoeic intensity the Georgians lacked. Animistic responses were already stirring, and the "dark gods" were more real to him than the deities were to the Georgians.' David Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) p. 442.
15. See Frank MacShane, *The Life and Works of Ford Maddox Ford* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965) p. 101.
16. Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt* (London: Faber, 1965) pp. 169–70.
17. Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Mask* (New York: Dutton, 1948) p. 5.
18. Aldous Huxley (ed.), Introduction to *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Heinemann, 1932, reprinted 1956) p. xxx.
19. D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1923) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) p. 15.
20. D. H. Lawrence, Foreword to *Pansies* in *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (eds), two vols (London: Heinemann, 1964) p. 423.
21. T. S. Eliot, p. 287.
22. Florence Emily Hardy, p. 310.
23. Graham Hough, *The Dark Sun* (London: Duckworth, 1956) p. 218.
24. R. P. Blackmur, *Language As Gesture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935, reprinted 1980) p. 299.
25. Quoted in Edward Nehls, p. 492.
26. Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore (eds), *Phoenix II* (London: Heinemann, 1968) p. 227.
27. D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (1931) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974) p. 126.
28. D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, p. 212.
29. D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, p. 222.
30. *Phoenix II*, p. 528.
31. Edward D. McDonald (ed.), *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Heinemann, 1936), p. 533.
32. *Phoenix*, p. 536.

PART I Lawrence's Writings on Poetry/Poets

Excerpts From Lawrence's Letters

1. To Blanche Jennings, 31 December 1908

[. . .] The little red book you sent me delighted me like a glass of wine poured out for me. But the wine was home-made; it was elderberry, turbid, inky, flat, with a rough medicinal flavor suggestive of colds on the chest. 'The Shropshire Lad' is, I presume, a lad. He gives himself out a ploughman; I could conceive him a little independent farmer; but that he really has broad shoulders I will not believe. He is thin, gloomy, I swear he sits by the fire after a raw day's singling the turnips, and does not doze, and does not talk, but reads occasionally Blatchford, or perhaps *Night Thoughts;* he is glum; Death has filched the pride out of his blood, and there is the conceit of death instead in his voice. Do you know anything of A. E. Housman? He is no poet; he can only sing the stale tale of the bankruptcy of life, — in death. I believe he comes of a consumptive family; I believe he is consumptive. Bah! To a man, and supremely to a man who works on the wholesome happiness on a farm, Life is the fact, the everything: Death is only the 'To be concluded' at the end of the volume. *A Shropshire Lad* ought not to be found in red: black, white, or grey, are his colours. Nevertheless, I thank you heartily for the volume. I have now a passion for modern utterances, particularly modern verse; I enjoy minor poetry, no matter how minor; I enjoy feeling that I can do better; I have a wicked delight in smashing things which I can make better; besides, I *do* so much want to know, now, the comrades who are shuffling the days in the same game with me. I put out my hands passionately for modern verse, and drama – and, in less degree, novels [. . .]

2. To Blanche Jennings, 20 January 1909

[. . .] What I do love are the little volumes of poetry, quite fresh acquaintances. I do thank you for the *Shropshire Lad*, though I stick to it his poetry is rotten. I have got W. H. Davies' *Nature Poems*, and those poems which *are* poems – like those about rain – and leaves – and robins – are delightful – about cities, purblind and nonsensical. I have a lot of Yeats – he is vapourish, too thin. Now I have *City of the Soul*: Alfred Douglas has some lovely verses; he is affected so deeply by the new French poets, and has caught their beautiful touch. But, being a Lord, the fathead writes 'A Prayer' – 'Images of Death' 'Ennui', 'Garden of Death', just because he feels himself heavy with nothing and thinks it's death when it's only the burden of his own unused self. Bah! Do you remember Gissing's *Henry Ryecroft* — a tour de force, the *Times* calls it – I agree – but Henry Ryecroft says that the essence of art is to express the zest of Life, whatever that may be. Nevertheless, he means something to me, and I accord. Machen – a writer to the *Academy* I believe – says that the touchstone of art is ecstasy – whatever that may be. I think he means crying out the mysteries and possibilities. But 'ecstasy' leads to so much vapour of words, till we are blind with coloured wordiness. But, I say, all mysteries and possibilities lie in things and happenings, so give us the things and happenings, and try just to show the flush of mystery in them, but don't begin with a mystery and end with a foolish concrete thing, like taking Death and making a figure with 'yellow topaz eyes – each a jewel', or a vulgar bestial *Mammon*, with long teeth, as Watts does. Some of Watts' pictures are commonplace, and a trifle vulgar. But look at his *Love and Death* – its beauty lies in the aesthetic unknowable effect of line, poise, shadow, and then in the blurred idea that Death is shrouded, but a dark, embracing mother, who stoops over us, and frightens us because we are children. It is no good trying to model a definite figure out of mystery; it only cheapens the great thing. Watts' mystical pictures are half failures, and you cannot *say* what the successes mean or teach: you can *say* what the failures are meant to mean and teach.

I feel I am arguing for my sake, for my own soul; because I have been reading Machen.

But you will perhaps appreciate the few verses I send you in the light of what I say. I want to write live things, if crude and half formed, rather than beautiful dying decadent things with sad odors. [. . .]

3. To Louie Burrows, 11 September 1909

[. . .] The editor of the *English Review* has accepted some of my Verses, and wants to put them into *English Review*, the November issue. But you see they are all in the rough, and want revising, so this week and so on I am very hard at work, slogging verse into form. [. . .] I never thought of myself blossoming out as a poet – I had planted my belief in my prose. [. . .]

4. To Arthur McLeod, 17 December 1912

[. . .] Thanks for the Yeats. Why didn't you put my name in? He seems awfully queer stuff to me now – as if he wouldn't bear touching. But Frieda's fond of him.

I am going to begin again my work. One works in two bursts – Sept. to the beginning of Dec.–Jan. to March or April. The rest are more or less trivial and barren months. I feel that I am *resisting* too hard to write poetry – *resisting* the strain of Weekley, and the tragedy there is in keeping Frieda. To write poetry one has to let oneself fuse in the current – but I daren't. This state of mind is more like a business man's, where he stands firm and keeps his eyes open, than an artist's, who lets go and loses himself. But I daren't let go just now. This strain makes me tired. [. . .]

5. To Edward Marsh, 18 August 1913

[. . .] I think you will find my verse smoother – not because I consciously attend to rhythm, but because I am no longer criss-crossy in myself. I think, don't you know, that my rhythms fit my mood pretty well, in the verse. And if the mood is out of joint, the rhythm often is. I have always tried to get an emotion out in its own course, without altering it. It needs the finest instinct imaginable, much finer than the skill of the craftsmen. That Japanese Yone Noguchi tried it. He doesn't quite bring it off. Often I don't — sometimes I do. Sometimes Whitman is perfect. Remember skilled verse is dead in fifty years – I am thinking of your admiration of Flecker. [. . .]

6. To Edward Marsh, 28 October 1913

[. . .] Poor Davies – he makes me so furious, and so sorry. He is really like a linnet that's got just a wee little sweet song, but it only sings when it's wild. And he's made himself a tame bird – poor little devil. He makes me furious. 'I shall be all right now the winter's coming', he writes, 'now I can sit by the fire and work'. As if he could sing when he's been straining his heart to make a sound of music, for months. It isn't as if he were a passionate writer, writing his 'agon'. Oh my God, he's like teaching a bull-finch to talk. I think one ought to be downright cruel to him, and drive him back: say to him 'Davies, your work is getting like Birmingham tinware; Davies, you drop your h's, and everybody is tempering the wind to you, because you are a shorn lamb; Davies, your accent is intolerable in a carpeted room; Davies, you hang on like a mud on a lady's silk petticoat.' Then he might leave his Sevenoaks room, where he is rigged up as a rural poet, proud of the gilt mirror and his romantic past: he might grow his wings again, and chirrup a little sadder song.

And now I have got to quarrel with you about the Ralph Hodgson poem: because I think it is banal in utterance. The feeling is there, right enough – but not in itself, only represented. It's like 'I asked for bread, and he gave me a penny'. Only here and there is the least touch of personality in the poem: it is the currency of poetry, not poetry itself. Every single line of it is poetic currency – and a good deal of emotion handling it about. But it isn't really poetry. I hope to God you won't hate me and think me carping, for this. But look

> 'the ruby's and the rainbow's song
> the nightingale's — all three'

There's the emotion in the rhythm, but it's loose emotion, inarticulate, common — the words are mere currency. It is exactly like a man who feels very strongly for a beggar, and gives him a sovereign. The feeling is at either end, for the moment, but the sovereign is a dead bit of metal. And this poem is the sovereign. 'Oh, I do want to give you this emotion', cries Hodgson, 'I do'. And so he takes out his poetic purse, and gives you a handful of cash, and feels very strongly, even a bit sentimentally over it.

'. . . the sky was lit
The sky was stars all over it,
I stood, I knew not why'

No one should say 'I knew not why' any more. It's as meaningless as 'yours truly' at the end of a letter. [. . .]

7. To Edward Marsh, 18 November 1913

You *are* wrong. It makes me open my eyes. I think I read my poems more by length than by stress – as a matter of movements in space than footsteps hitting the earth. . . . It all depends on the *pause* – the natural pause, the natural *lingering* of the voice according to the feelings – it is the hidden *emotional* pattern that makes poetry, not the obvious form.

Ĭ haṽe fŏrgŏt much, Cynără, gone wĭth thĕ wind

It is the lapse of the feeling, something as indefinite as expression in the voice, carrying emotion. It doesn't depend on the ear, particularly, but on the sensitive soul. And the ear gets a habit, and becomes master, when the ebbing and lifting emotion should be master, and the ear the transmitter. If your ear has got stiff and a bit mechanical, *don't* blame my poetry. That's why you like *Golden Journey to Samarkand* — it fits your habituated ear, and your feeling crouches subservient and a bit pathetic. 'It satisfies my ear' you say. Well, I don't write for your ear. This is the constant war, I reckon, between new expression and the habituated, mechanical transmitters and receivers of the human constitution.

I can't tell you what *pattern* I see in any poetry, save one complete thing. But surely you don't class poetry among the decorative or conventional arts. I always wonder if the Greeks and Romans really did scan, or if scansion wasn't a thing invented afterwards by the schoolmaster. — Yet I seem to find about the same number of long, lingering notes in each line. – I know nothing about it. I only know you aren't right. [. . .]

I think I came a *real* cropper in my belief in metre, over Shelley. I tried all roads to scan him, but could never *read* him as he could be

scanned. And I thought what a bit of Latin scansion I did was a *horrible* fake: I never believed for an instant in the Sapphic form – and Horace is already a bit of a mellow varsity man who never quite forgot Oxford. [. . .]

8. To Henry Savage, 22 December 1913

[. . .] Whitman is like a human document, or a wonderful treatise in human self-revelation. It is neither art nor religion nor truth: Just a self-revelation of a man who could not live, and so had to write himself. But writing should come from a stronger root of life: like a battle song after a battle. – And Whitman did this, more or less. But his battle was not a real battle: he never gave his individual self into the fight: he was too much aware of it. He never fought with another person – he was like a wrestler who only wrestles with his own shadow – he never came to grips. He chucked his body into the fight, and stood apart saying 'Look how I am living'. He is really false as hell. – But he is fine too. Only, I am sure, the generalizations are *no good* to the individual: the individual comes first, then the generalization is a kind of game, not a reality: just a surplus, an excess, not a whole. [. . .]

9. To Edward Marsh, 24 May 1914

[. . .] The other day I got the second *New Numbers*. I was disappointed, because I expected Abercrombie's long poem to be great indeed. I can't write to Wilfrid because I think I have never seen him to worse advantage than in this quarter. And it is no good your telling me Lascelles' 'End of the World' is great, because it isn't. There are some fine bits of rhetoric, as there always are in Abercrombie. But oh, the spirit of the thing altogether seems mean and rather vulgar. When I remember even H. G. Wells' *A Country of the Blind*, with which this poem of Abercrombie's had got associated beforehand in my mind, then I see how beautiful is Well's conception, and how paltry this other. Why, why, in God's name, is Abercrombie messing about with Yokels and Cider and runaway wives? No, but it is *bitterly* disappointing. He who loves

Paradise Lost, must don the red nose and the rough-spun cloak of Masefield and Wilfrid. And you encourage it – it is too bad. Abercrombie, if he does anything, surely ought to work upon rather noble and rather chill subjects. I hate and detest his ridiculous imitation yokels and all the silly hash of his bucolics; I loathe his rather nasty efforts at cruelty, like the wrapping frogs in paper and putting them for cart wheels to crush; I detest his irony with its clap-trap solution of everything being that which it seemeth not; and I hate the way of making what Meredith called cockney metaphors: – moons like a white cat and meteors like a pike fish. And nearly all of this seems to me an Abercrombie turning cheap and wicked. What is the matter with the man? – there's something wrong with his soul. *Mary and the Bramble* and *Sale of St Thomas* weren't like this. They had a certain beauty of soul, a certain highness which I loved: – though I didn't like the Indian horrors in the *St Thomas*. But here everything is mean and rather sordid, and full of rancid hate. He talked of *Sons and Lovers* being all odi et amo. Well, I wish I could find the 'Amo' in this poem of his. It is sheer Odi, and rather mean hatred at that. The best feeling in the thing is a certain bitter gloating over the coming destruction. What has happened to him? Something seems to be going bad in his soul. Even in the poem before this, the one of the Shrivelled Zeus, there was a gloating over nasty perishing which was objectionable. But what is the matter with him? The feelings in these late things are corrupt and dirty. What has happened to the man? I wish to heaven he were writing the best poems that ever were written, and there he turns out this. [. . .]

10. To Arthur McLeod, 2 June 1914

[. . .] I have been interested in the futurists. I got a book of their poetry – a very fat book too – and a book of pictures – and I read Marinetti's and Paolo Buzzi's manifestations and essays – and Soffici's essays on cubism and futurism. It interests me very much. I like it because it is the applying to emotions of the purging of the old forms and sentimentalities. I like it for its saying – enough of this sickly cant, let us be honest and stick by what is in us. Only when folk say, 'let us be honest and stick by what is in us' — they always mean, stick by those things that have been thought horrid,

and by those alone. They want to deny every scrap of tradition and experience, which is silly. They are very young, infantile, college-student and medical student at his most blatant. But I like them. Only I don't believe in them. I agree with them about the weary sickness of pedantry and tradition and inertness, but I don't agree with them as to the cure and the escape. They will progress down the purely male or intellectual or scientific line. They will even use their intuition for intellectual and scientific purpose. The one thing about their art is that it *isn't* art, but ultra scientific attempts to make diagrams of certain physic or mental states. It is ultra-ultra intellectual, going beyond Maeterlinck and the Symbolistes, who are intellectual. There isn't one trace of naïveté in the works – though there's plenty of naïveté in the authors. It's the most self-conscious, intentional, pseudo-scientific stuff on the face of the earth. Marinetti begins 'Italy is like a great Dreadnought surrounded by her torpedo boats'. That is it exactly – a great mechanism. [. . .]

11. To Harriet Monroe, 31 July 1914

[. . .] Why oh why do you want to cut off poor *Ophelia's* ballad. Don't you see the poor thing is cracked, and she used all those verses – apples and chickens and rat – according to true instinctive or *dream* symbolism. This poem – I am very proud of it – has got the quality of a troublesome dream that seems incoherent but is selected by another sort of consciousness. The latter part is the waking up part – yet never really awake, because she is mad. No, you mustn't cut it in two. It is a good poem: I couldn't do it again to save my life. Use it whole or not at all. I return you the MS. If you don't use it, please destroy it.

I was at dinner with Miss Lowell and the Aldingtons last night, and we had some poetry. But, my dear God, when I see all the understanding and suffering and the pure intelligence necessary for the simple perceiving of poetry, then I know it is an almost hopeless business to publish the stuff at all, and particularly in magazines. It must stand by, and wait and wait. I don't urge anybody to publish me. [. . .]

12. To Harriet Monroe, 17 November 1914

[. . .] Today came the War Number of *Poetry*, for which also I thank you. It put me into such a rage – how dare Amy talk about bohemian glass and stalks of flame? – that in a real fury I had to write my war poem, because it breaks my heart, this war.

I hate, and hate, and hate the glib irreverence of some of your contributors – Aldington with his 'do you know what it's all about, brother Jonathan, we don't? It's obvious he doesn't. And your nasty, obscene, vulgar in the last degree – 'Hero' – John Russel McCarthy – may God tread him out – why did you put him in? You shouldn't.

At least I like the woman who wrote 'Metal Checks' – her idea, her attitude – but her poetry is pretty bad. I rather like the suggestion of Marian Ramie's *Face I shall never see – man I shall never see*. And *Unser Gott* isn't bad – but unbeautifully ugly. Your people have such little pressure: their safety valve goes off at the high scream when the pressure is still so low. Have you no people with any force in them? Aldington almost shows most — if he weren't so lamentably imitating Hueffer.

I don't care what you do with my war poem. I don't particularly care if I don't hear of it any more. The war is dreadful. It is the business of the artist to follow it home to the heart of the individual fighters – not to talk in armies and nations and numbers – but to track it home – home – their war – and it's at the bottom of almost every Englishman's heart – the war – the desire of war – the *will* to war – and at the bottom of every German's. [. . .]

13. To Amy Lowell, 18 November 1914

[. . .] Why don't you always be yourself? Why go to France or anywhere else for your inspiration. If it doesn't come out of your own heart, real Amy Lowell, it is no good, however many colours it may have. I wish one saw more of your genuine strong, sound self in this book, full of common-sense and kindness and the restrained, almost bitter, Puritan passion. Why do you deny the bitterness in your nature, when you write poetry? Why do you take a pose? It causes you always to shirk your issues, and find a banal resolution at the end. So your romances are spoiled. When

you are full of your own strong gusto of things, real old English gusto it is, like tulips, then I like you very much. But you shouldn't compare the sun to the yolk of an egg, except playfully. And you shouldn't spoil your story-poems with a sort of vulgar, artificial 'flourish of ink'. If you had followed the real tragedy of your own man, or woman, it had been something. [. . .]

14. To Robert Nichols, 17 November 1915

[. . .] I have your poetry safe. (I had not read it – I began here.) The 'Fragment of a poem of Vision' is good, and 'Marsyas'. I *don't* care for the 'Sonnet' and the 'Invocation'. The Courage of death is *no courage* any more: *the courage to die has become a vice*. Show me the courage to live, to live in spirit with the proud, serene angels. Some of 'Jerusalem' is *very good*. I think you are a poet: take care, and save yourself, above all, save yourself: there is such need of poets, that the world will all perish, without them. You have a mission, to be a living poet. For God's sake fulfil it – 'Jerusalem' is very very good, at the end – the last two stanzas. I *must* get some of these printed for you. 'The Hill' – *very* good. I must go over them with you. You are a poet, my dear fellow: I am *so glad*: the first I have found: the future. *Only be still*, be very still, and let the poetry come. [. . .]

15. To Catherine Carswell, 31 December 1915

[. . .] The poem I liked – but you had scarcely put enough into it, enough passion, to create it. It is not sufficiently fused: the heat of creation was not great enough. In the second stanza 'pale' is somehow wrong – cliché – and 'brow' is wrong – false metaphor. There is really a good conception of a poem: but you have not given yourself with sufficient passion into creating, to bring it forth. I'm not sure that I want you to – there is something tragic and displeasing about a woman who writes – but I suppose Sappho is as inevitable and right as Shelley – but you must burn, to be Sappho – burn at the stake. And Sappho is the only woman poet. [. . .]

16. To Catherine Carswell, [11 January 1916]

[. . .] The grave yard poem is *very* good. I *do* wish, however, you didn't use metre and rhythm. It is verse which in spirit bursts all the old world, and yet goes corseted in rhymed scansion. Do leave it free – perhaps not this poem: the 'there' is good, so hard – but even here, do not use *lair*: break the rhyme rather than the stony directness of speech.

The essence of poetry with us in this age of stark and unlovely actualities is a stark directness, without a shadow of a lie, or a shadow of deflection anywhere. Everything can go, but this stark, bare, rocky directness of statement, this alone makes poetry, today. That poem is *very good*, the best yet. My scribblings on it are only impertinent suggestions.

But you know it isn't rhythmed at all, metrically. So why rhyme if you don't rhythm, I mean that for your other poems. This has got its own form as it stands. But in general, why use rhyme when you don't use metrical rhythm – which you don't – you'd lose all reality if you did. Use rhyme *accidentally*, not as a sort of draper's rule for measuring lines off.

The second poem is not good. It is again not created. Do it in free verse accidentally rhymed, and let us see.

I send you the *Spoon River Anthology*. It is good, but too static, always stated, not really art. Yet that is the line poetry will take, a free, essential verse, that cuts to the centre of things, without flourish. [. . .]

17. To Catherine Carswell, [22 July 1916]

[. . .] I think the poem is good – but of death, too deathly. There is not enough of the *opposition* of life to give it form – it falls over on the side of death, and so is vicious, uncreated. The 7th Hoop Epitaph must absolutely be crossed out. 'And yet – there's no great harm in being dead' – that is good. The whole poem is good. It really expresses the horrible and iridescent dissolution of physical death. But as I say – for me – it falls before it reaches the borderline of art, because there is not quite enough *resistance* of life to bring that solid equilibrium which is the core of art, an absolute reached by the sheer tension of life stubborn against death, the two in

opposition creating the third thing, the pure resultant, absolved, art. [. . .]

18. To Barbara Low, 11 September 1916

Thank you very much indeed for the Swinburne. I lie in bed and read him, and he moves me very deeply. The pure realization in him is something to reverence: he is [. . .] very like Shelley, full of philosophic spiritual realisation and revelation. He is a great revealer, very great . I put him with Shelley as our greatest poet. He is the last fiery spirit among us. How wicked the world has been, to jeer at his physical appearance etc. There was more powerful rushing flame of life in him than in all the heroes rolled together. One day I shall buy all his books. I am very glad to have these poems always by me.

The cake and the book and the sweets all came this morning: what a wealth! [. . .] I *do* want to invite the invisible hosts to tea. I will have Swinburne and Shelley and Herodotus and Flaubert: just the four, round the table in the tower. [. . .]

19. To Amy Lowell, 23 March 1917

[. . .] Hilda Aldington sent me your Japanese poems, for the new anthology. I don't like them *nearly* so well as your other things, and I do wish you hadn't put them in. *Don't* do Japanese things, Amy, if you love us. I would do a million times rather have a fragment of 'Aquarium' than all the Japanese poems put together. I am so disappointed with this batch you have decided to put in, it isn't you at *all*, it has nothing to do with you, and it is not real. Alas and alas, why have you done this thing? [. . .]

Rachel Annand Taylor

(Originally read as a paper before the English Association of Croydon, circa October–November 1910)

Mrs Rachel Annand Taylor is not ripe yet to be gathered as fruit for lectures and papers. She is young, not more than thirty; she has been married and her husband has left her, she lives in Chelsea, visits Professor Gilbert Murray at Oxford, and says strange, ironic things of many literary people in a plaintive peculiar fashion.

This then is raw green fruit to offer to you, to be received with suspicion, to be tasted charily and spat out without much revolving and tasting. It is impossible to appreciate the verse of a green fresh poet. He must be sun-dried by time and sunshine of favourable criticism, like muscatels and prunes: you must remove the crude sap of living, then the flavour of his eternal poetry comes out unobscured and unpolluted by what is temporal in him — is it not so?

Mrs Taylor is, however, personally, all that could be desired of a poetess: in appearance, purely Rossettian: slim, svelte, big beautiful bushes of reddish hair hanging over her eyes which peer from the warm shadow; delicate colouring, scarlet, small, shut mouth; dark, plain dress with a big boss of a brooch in the bosom, a curious carven witch's brooch; then long, white, languorous hands of correct, subtle radiance. All that a poetess should be.

She is a Scotch-woman. Brought up lonelily as a child, she lived on the Bible, on the 'Arabian Nights', and later, on Malory's 'King Arthur'. Her upbringing was not Calvinistic. Left to herself, she developed as a choice romanticist. She lived apart from life, and still she cherishes a yew-darkened garden in the soul where she can remain withdrawn, sublimating experience into odours.

This is her value, then: that to a world almost satisfied with the excitement of Realism's Reign of Terror, she hangs out the flag of Romance, and sounds the music of citterns and viols. She is mediaeval; she is pagan and romantic as the old minstrels. She belongs to the company of Aucassin and Nicolette, and to no other.

The first volume of poems was published in 1904. Listen to the titles of the poems: 'Romances', 'The Bride', 'The Song of Gold',

'The Queen', 'The Daughter of Herodias', 'Arthurian Songs', 'The Knights at Kingstead', 'Devotional', 'Flagellants', 'An Early Christian', 'Rosa Mundi', 'An Art Lover to Christ', 'Chant d'Amour', 'Love's Fool to His Lady', 'Saint Mary of the Flowers', 'The Immortal Hour', 'Reveries', 'The Hostel of Sleep'.

I will read you four of the love songs. Against the first, in the book Mrs Taylor gave me, I found dried lilies of the valley, that the author had evidently overlooked. She would have dropped it in the fire, being an ironical romanticist. However, here is the poem, stained yellow with a lily: it is called 'Desire'.

That is the first of the love songs. The second is called 'Surrender'. The third, which is retrospective, is 'Unrealized', and the fourth is 'Renunciation'. There is the story of Mrs Taylor's married life, that those who run may read. Needless to say, the poetess' heart was broken.

"There is nothing more tormenting," I said to her, "than to be loved overmuch."

"Yes, one thing more tormenting," she replied.

"And what's that?" I asked her.

"To love," she said, very quietly.

However, it is rather useful to a poetess or poet to have a broken heart. Then the rare fine liquor from the fragile vial is spilled in little splashes of verse, most interesting to the reader, most consoling to the writer. A broken heart does give colour to life.

Mrs Taylor, in her second volume, 'Rose and Vine,' published last year, makes the splashes of verse from her spilled treasure of love. But they are not crude, startling, bloody drops. They are vermeil and gold and beryl green. Mrs Taylor takes the pageant of her bleeding heart, first matches ironically by the brutal daylight, then lovingly she draws it away into her magic, obscure place apart where she breathes spells upon it, filters upon it delicate lights, tricks it with dreams and fancy, and then re-issues the pageant.

'Rose and Vine' is much superior to the Poems of 1904. It is gorgeous, sumptuous. All the full, luscious buds of promise are fullblown here, till heavy, crimson petals seem to brush one's lips in passing, and in front, white blooms seem leaning to meet one's breast. There is a great deal of sensuous colour, but it is all abstract, impersonal in feeling, not the least sensual. One tires of it in the same way that one tires of some of Strauss' music — 'Electra,' for instance. It is emotionally insufficient, though splendid in craftsmanship.

Mrs Taylor is, indeed, an exquisite craftsman of verse. Moreover, in her metres and rhythms she is orthodox. She allows herself none of the modern looseness, but retains the same stanza form to the end of a lyric. I should like more time to criticize the form of this verse.

However, to turn to 'Rose and Vine.' There is not much recognizable biography here. Most of the verses are transformed from the experience beyond recognition. A really new note is the note of motherhood. I often wonder why, when a woman artist comes, she never reveals the meaning of maternity, but rather paints horses, or Venuses or sweet children, as we see them in the Tate Gallery, or deals with courtship, and affairs, like Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. Mrs Taylor has a touch of the mother note. I read you 'Four Crimson Violets' and now 'A Song of Fruition' ('An October Mother'). What my mother would have said to that when she had me, an Autumn baby, I don't know!

A fine piece of thoughtful writing is 'Music of Resurrection,' which significantly opens the 'Rose and Vine' volume.

That was last year. This year came the 'Hours of Fiammetta' – a sonnet sequence. There are sixty-one sonnets in the Shakespearean form, and besides these, a 'Prologue of Dreaming Women', an 'Epilogue of Dreaming Women' and an Introduction. In the Introduction Mrs Taylor says there are two traditions of women – the Madonna, and the dreaming woman.

The latter is always, the former never, the artist: which explains, I suppose, why women artists do not sing maternity. Mrs Taylor represents the dreaming woman of today – and she is almost unique in her position, when all the women who are not exclusively mothers are suffragists or reformers.

Unfortunately, Mrs Taylor had begun to dream of her past life and of herself, very absorbedly; and to tell her dreams in symbols which are not always illuminating. She is esoteric. Her symbols do not show what they stand for of themselves: they are cousins of that Celtic and French form of symbolism which says — 'Let X = the winds of passion, and Y = the yearning of the soul for love.'

Now the dim, white-petalled Y
Draws dimly over the pallid atmosphere
The scalded kisses of X.

Mrs Taylor has begun the same dodge.

> *Since from the subtle silk of agony*
> *Our lamentable veils of flesh are spun.*

'Subtle silk of agony' may claim to sound well, but to me it is meaningless.

But I read to you the 'Prologue of Dreaming Women', which surely is haunting.

How dare a woman, a woman, sister of Suffragists and lady doctors, how dare she breathe such a thing! But Mrs Taylor is bolder still. Listen to the 'Epilogue of Dreaming Women'. It is, I think, a very significant poem, to think over and to think of again when one reads 'Mrs Bull.'

But these are not Fiammetta. They are her creed. Her idiosyncrasies are in the sonnets, which, upon closer acquaintance, are as interesting, more interesting far to trace than a psychological novel. I read you only one, No 18. Some of these sonnets are very fine: they stand apart in an age of 'open road' and Empire thumping verse.

A Review of *Contemporary German Poetry*
Selected and translated by Jethro Bithell

(*English Review*, November 1911)

This *Contemporary German Poetry* is very much like the recent *Contemporary Belgian Poetry*. The bulk of the verse is of the passionate and violent kind. This may be largely owing to the author's taste. His own poem, which dedicates the volume to Richard Dehmel, contains "Clashing Clouds that Terrorise" and "Feverous Sands of Modern Ache." However, we accept the collection as representative.

It is remarkable how reminiscent of Verhaeren and Iwan Gilkin, and the like, these poems sound. Either it is owing to the translation, or else the influence of the Belgians on Germany is beyond all proportion. The very subjects of many of these poems could be found in the Belgian book, wearing the same favour. These poets seem like little brothers of Verhaeren and Albert Mockel and the rest, young lads excitedly following the lead of their scandalous elders. Baudelaire, a while back, sent round with a rather red lantern, showing it into dark corners, and saying "Look here!"; considerably startling most folk. Verhaeren comes after with a bull's-eye lantern of whiter, wider ray than Baudelaire's artistic beam, and flashes this into such obscure places – by no means corners – so that they stand out stark and real. He also, in the daylight, makes a hollow of his hand, and shades his eyes, and sees, deep in the light, the fabric of shadow. These Germans follow like tourists after a guide. They stop at the places Verhaeren stopped at; they excitedly hold out their candle lanterns; they peer under hollowed hands to find the shadow set deep in the light.

This may be the fault of the translator, though it scarcely seems likely. He speaks of "the beautiful translation of the poem 'Grey', the work of Miss Friederichs":

GREY

Gowns of soft grey I now will wear,
Like willow trees all silvery fair;

My lover, he loves grey.
Like clematis, with silky down,
Which lend the dew-sprent hedge a crown;
My love, he loves grey.

Wrapped in a dream, I watch where slow
Within the fire the wood-sparks glow;
My love, thou art away . . .
The soft grey ashes fall and shift,
Through silent spaces smoke clouds drift,
And I too, I love grey.

I think of pearls, where grey lights dream,
Of alders, where the mist-veils gleam:
My love, thou art away . . .
Of grey-haired men of high renown,
Whose faded locks were hazel brown,
And I too, I love grey.

The little grey moth turns its flight
Into the room allured by light;
My lover, he loves grey.
O, little moth, we are like thee,
We all fly round a light we never see
In swamp or Milky Way.

After that, one thinks of Verlaine's "Green."

The Germans in this volume are very interesting, not so much for the intrinsic value of the pieces of poetry here given, as for showing which way the poetic spirit trends in Germany, where she finds her stuff, and how she lifts it. Synge asks for the brutalising of English poetry. Thomas Hardy and George Meredith have, to a certain extent, answered. But in point of brutality the Germans – and they are at the heels of the French and the Belgians – are miles ahead of us; or at the back of us, as the case may be.

With Baudelaire, Verlaine and Verhaeren, poetry seems to have broken out afresh, like a new crater. These men take life welling out hot and primitive, molten fire, or mud, or smoke, or strange vapour. But at any rate it comes from the central fire, which feeds all of us with life, although it is gloved, clotted over and hidden by earth and greenery and civilization. And it is this same central well of fire which the Germans are trying to tap. It is risky, and they

lose their heads when they feel the heat. But sometimes one sees the real red jet of it, pure flame and beautiful; and often, the hot mud – but that is kin. Why do we set our faces against this tapping of elemental passion? It must, in its first issuing, be awful and perhaps, ugly. But what is more essentially awful and ugly than Oedipus? And why is sex passion unsuited to handling, if hate passion, and revenge passion, and horror passion are suitable, as in Agamemnon and Oedipus, and Medea. Hate passion, horror passion, revenge passion no longer move us so violently in life. Love passion, pitching along with it beauty and strange hate and suffering, remains the one living volcano of our souls. And we must be passionate, we are told. Why, then not take this red fire out of the well, equally with the yellow of horror, and the dark of hate? Intrinsically, Verhaeren is surely nearer the Greek dramatists than is Swinburne.

The Germans indeed are sentimental. They always belittle the great theme of passion. In this book, one turns with great disgust from Dehmel's 'Venus Pandemos'. It is like the lurid tales the teetotallers tell against drink. And one turns with impatience from Peter Hille's 'Morn of a Marriage Night'. It is the slop of philosophy muddled and mixed with a half-realised experience: the poet was not able to *imagine* the woman, so he slopped over the suggestion of her with sentimental philosophy. It is not honest, it [is] as bad as jerry work in labour. But that doesn't say the subject is wrong. And if the work is offensive, we can wash our hands after it. And it does not mean to say that no man shall try to treat a difficult subject because another man has degraded it. Because a subject cannot be degraded. Sex passion is not degraded even now, between priests and beasts. Verhaeren, at his best, is religious in his attitude, honest and religious, when dealing with the 'scandalous' subject. Many of the Germans are not; they are sentimental and dishonest. So much the worse for them, not for us.

The translation of these poems is not remarkably good; but good enough, as a rule, to transfer the rhythm and progress of the feeling of each poem. A perfect translator must be a twin of his original author, like in feeling and age, and even in the turn of his expression and the knack of his phrases. It is absurd to think of translating the spirit and form of a whole host of poets. But here, each poem retains its personality, some of its distinct, individual personality, that it had in the original. The translator is best when he has the plain curve of an emotion – preferably dramatic – to convey.

A Review of *The Oxford Book of German Poetry*
Edited by H. G. Fiedler

(*English Review*, January 1912)

This book seems to us extraordinarily delightful. From Walther von der Vogelweide onwards, there are here all the poems in German which we have cherished since school days. The earlier part of the book seems almost like a breviary. It is remarkable how near to the heart many of these old German poems lie; almost like scriptures. We do not question or examine them. Our education seems built on them.

> Geh aus, mein Herz, und suche Freud,
> In dieser lieben Sommerzeit
> An deines Gottes Gaben. .

Then again so many of the poems are known to us as music, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Wolf, that the earlier part of the book stands unassailable, beyond question or criticism.

There are very few of the known things that we may complain of missing. Heine's 'Thalatta' is not included — but it is foolish to utter one's personal regrets, when so much of the best is given.

For most of us, German poetry ends with Heine. If we know Morike we are exceptional. In this anthology, however, Heine is finished on page 330, while the last poem in the book, by Schaukal, is on page 532; that is, two hundred pages of nineteenth-century verse. It is a large proportion. And it is this part of the book that, while it interests us absorbingly, leaves us in the end undecided and unsatisfied.

Lenau, Keller, Meyer, Storm, Mörike are almost classics. Over the seven pages of Paul Heyse we hesitate uncertainly; would we not rather have given more space to Liliencron, and less to Heyse? — although Liliencron is well represented. But this soldier poet is so straight, so free from the modern artist's hypersensitive self-consciousness, that we would have more of him. We wish England had a poet like him, to give grit to our modern verse.

TOD IN AHREN

Im Weizenfeld, in Korn und Mohn
Liegt ein Soldat, unaufgefunden,
Zwei Tage schon, zwei Nachte schon,
Mit schweren Wunden, unverbunden.

Durstüberquält und fieberwild,
Im Todeskampf den Kopf erhoben.
Ein letzter Traum, ein letztes Bild,
Sein brechend Auge schlägt nach oben.

Die Sense sirrt im Ährenfeld,
Er sieht sein Dorf im Arbeitsfrieden.
Ade, ade du Heimatwelt —
Und beugt das Haupt und ist verschieden.

The selections from Dehmel are not so satisfactory. It is not at all certain whether these poems are altogether representative of the author of 'Aber die Liebe' and the 'Verwandlungen der Venus.' Dehmel is a fascinating poet, but he for ever leaves us doubtful in what rank to place him. He is turgid and violent, his music is often harsh, usually discomforting. He seems to lack reserve. It is very difficult to decide upon him. Then suddenly a fragment will win us over: —

NACH EINEM REGEN

Sieh, der Himmel wird blau;
Die Schwalben jagen sich
Wie Fische uber den nassen Birken.
Und du willst weinen?

In deiner Seele werden bald
Die blanken Bäume und blauen Vögel
Ein goldnes Bild sein.
Und du weinst?

Mit meinen Augen
Seh' ich in deinen
Zwei kleine Sonnen,
Und du lächelst.

Hauptmann is dramatic and stirring, Bierbaum sings pleasantly, Max Dauthendey's brief, impersonal sketches have a peculiar power; one returns to them, and they remain in mind. Hofmannsthal, the symbolist, has three very interesting poems. There are many other names, some quite new, and one's interest is keenly aroused. It is a question, where so many are admitted, why Geiger and Peter Baum and Elsa Lasker-Schüle have been excluded. But nothing is so easy as to carp at the compiler of an anthology; and no book, for a long time, has given us the pleasure that this has given.

The Georgian Renaissance: A Review of *Georgian Poetry: 1911–12*

(*Rhythm*, March 1913)

Georgian Poetry is an anthology of verse which has been published during the reign of our present king, George V. It contains one poem of my own, but this fact will not, I hope, preclude my reviewing the book.

This collection is like a big breath taken when we are waking up after a night of oppressive dreams. The nihilist, the intellectual, hopeless people – Ibsen, Flaubert, Thomas Hardy – represent the dream we are waking from. It was a dream of demolition. Nothing was, but was nothing. Everything was taken away from us. And now our lungs are full of new air, and our eyes see it is morning, but we have not forgotten the terror of the night. We dreamed we were falling through space into nothingness, and the anguish of it leaves us rather eager.

But we are awake again, our lungs are full of new air, our eyes of morning. The first song is nearly a cry, fear and the pain of remembrance sharpening away the pure music. And that is this book.

The last years have been years of demolition. Because faith and belief were getting pot-bound, and the Temple was made a place to barter sacrifices, therefore faith and belief and the Temple must be broken. This time art fought the battle, rather than science or any new religious faction. And art has been demolishing for us: Nietzsche, the Christian religion as it stood; Hardy, our faith in our own endeavour; Flaubert, our belief in love. Now, for us, it is all smashed, we can see the whole again. We were in prison, peeping at the sky through loop-holes. The great prisoners smashed at the loop-holes, for lying to us. And behold, out of the ruins leaps the whole sky.

It is we who see it and breathe in it for joy. God is there, faith, love, everything. We are drunk with joy of it, having got away from the fear. In almost every poem in the book comes this note of exultation after fear, the exultation in the vast freedom, the illimitable wealth that we suddenly got.

But send desire often forth to scan
The immense night that is thy greater soul,

says Mr Abercrombie. His deadly sin is Prudence, that will not risk to avail itself of the new freedom. Mr Bottomley exults to find men for ever building religions which yet can never encompass all.

Yet the yielding sky
Invincible vacancy was there discovered

Mr Rupert Brooke sees

every glint
Posture and jest and thought and tint
Freed from the mask of transiency
Triumphant in eternity,
Immote, immortal

and this at Afternoon Tea. Mr John Drinkwater sings:

We cherish every hour that strays
Adown the cataract of days
We see the clear, untroubled skies,
We see the glory of the rose —

Mr Wilfrid Wilson Gibson hears the "terror turned to tenderness", then

I watched the mother sing to rest
The baby snuggling on her breast.

And to Mr Masefield:

When men count
Those hours of life that were a bursting fount
Sparkling the dusty heart with living springs,
There seems a world, beyond our earthly things,
Gated by golden moments.

It is all the same — hope, and religious joy. Nothing is really wrong. Every new religion is a waste-product from the last, and

every religion stands for us for ever. We love Christianity for what it has brought us, now that we are no longer on the cross.

The great liberation gives us an overwhelming sense of joy, *joie d'être, joie de vivre.* This sense of exceeding keen relish and appreciation of life makes romance. I think I could say every poem in the book is romantic, tinged with a love of the marvellous, a joy of natural things, as if the poet were a child for the first time on the seashore, finding treasures. "Best trust the happy moments," says Mr Masefield, who seems nearest to the black dream behind us. There is Mr W. H. Davies's lovely joy, Mr De La Mare's perfect appreciation of life at still moments, Mr Rupert Brooke's brightness, when he "lived from laugh to laugh", Mr Edmund Beale Sargant's pure, excited happiness in the woodland — it is all the same, keen zest in life found wonderful. In Mr Gordon Bottomley it is the zest of activity, of hurrying, labouring men, or the zest of the utter stillness of long snows. It is a bookful of Romance that has not quite got clear of the terror of realism.

There is no *carpe diem* touch. The joy is sure and fast. It is not the falling rose, but the rose for ever rising to bud and falling to fruit that gives us joy. We have faith in the vastness of life's wealth. We are always rich: rich in bud and in shed blossoms. There is no winter that we fear. Life is like an orange tree, always in leaf and bud, in blossom and fruit.

We ourselves, in each of us, have everything. Somebody said: "The Georgian poets are not love poets. The influence of Swinburne had gone." But I should say that the Georgian poets are just ripening to be love poets. Swinburne was no love poet. What are the Georgian poets, nearly all, but just bursting into a thick blaze of being? They are not poets of passion, perhaps, but they are essentially passionate poets. The time to be impersonal has gone. We start from the joy we have in being ourselves, and everything must take colour from that joy. It is the return of the blood, that has been held back, as when the heart's action is arrested by fear. Now the warmth of blood is in everything, quick, healthy, passionate red blood running its way, sleuthing out Truth and pursuing it to eternity, and I am full of awe for this flesh and blood that holds this pen. Everything that ever was thought and ever will be thought, lies in this body of mine. This flesh and blood sitting here and writing, this great impersonal flesh and blood, greater than me, which I am proud to belong to, contains all the future. What is it but the quick of all growth, the seed of all harvest, this

body of mine? And grapes and corn and birds and rocks and visions, all are in my fingers. I am so full of wonder at my own miracle of flesh and blood that I could not contain myself, if I did not remember we are all alive, have all of us living bodies. And that is a joy greater than any dream of immortality in the spirit, to me. It reminds me of Rupert Brooke's moment triumphant in its eternality; and of Michelangelo, who is also the moment triumphant in its eternality; just the opposite from Corot, who is the eternal triumphing over the moment, at the moment, at the very point of sweeping it into the flow.

Of all love poets, we are the love poets. For our religion is loving. To love passionately, but completely, is our one desire.

What is "The Hare" but a complete love poem, with none of the hackneyed "But a bitter blossom was born" about it, nor yet the Yeats, "Never give all the heart." Love is the greatest of all things, no "bitter blossom" nor such-like. It is sex-passion, so separated, in which we do not believe. The *Carmen* and *Tosca* sort of passion is not interesting any longer, because it cannot progress. Its goal and aim is possession, whereas possession in love is only a means to love. And because passion cannot go beyond possession, the passionate heroes and heroines – Tristans and what-not – must die. We believe in the love that is happy ever after, progressive as life itself.

I worship Christ, I worship Jehovah, I worship Pan, I worship Aphrodite. But I do not worship hands nailed and running with blood upon a cross, nor licentiousness, nor lust. I want them all, all the gods. They are all God. But I must serve in real love. If I take my whole passionate spiritual and physical love to the woman who in return loves me, that is how I serve God. And my hymn and my game of joy is my work. All of which I read in the anthology of *Georgian Poetry*.

Poetry of the Present

(*Playboy*, 1919. Subsequently appeared as the Preface to the American edition of *New Poems*, 1920)

It seems when we hear a skylark singing as if sound were running forward into the future, running so fast and utterly without consideration, straight on into futurity. And when we hear a nightingale, we hear the pause and the rich, piercing rhythm of recollection, the perfect past. The lark may sound sad, but with the lovely lapsing sadness that is almost a swoon of hope. The nightingale's triumph is a paean, but a death-paean.

So it is with poetry. Poetry is, as a rule, either the voice of the far future, exquisite and ethereal, or it is the voice of the past, rich, magnificent. When the Greeks heard the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, they heard their own past calling in their hearts, as men far inland sometimes hear the sea and fall weak with powerful, wonderful regret, nostalgia; or else their own future rippled its time-beats through their blood, as they followed the painful, glamorous progress of the Ithacan. This was Homer to the Greeks: their Past, splendid with battles won and death achieved, and their Future, the magic wandering of Ulysses through the unknown.

With us it is the same. Our birds sing in the horizons. They sing out of the blue, beyond us, or out of the quenched night. They sing at dawn and sunset. Only the poor, shrill, tame canaries whistle while we talk. The wild birds begin before we are awake, or as we drop into dimness out of waking. Our poets sit by the gateways, some by the east, some by the west. As we arrive and as we go out our hearts surge with response. But whilst we are in the midst of life, we do not hear them.

The poetry of the beginning and the poetry of the end must have that exquisite finality, perfection which belongs to all that is far off. It is in the realm of all that is perfect. It is of the nature of all that is complete and consummate. This completeness, this consummateness, the finality and the perfection are conveyed in exquisite form: the perfect symmetry, the rhythm which returns upon itself like a dance where the hands link and loosen and link for the supreme moment of the end. Perfected bygone moments in the glimmering

futurity, these are the treasured gem-like lyrics of Shelley and Keats.

But there is another kind of poetry: the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon. There is no round, consummate moon on the face of the running water, nor on the face of the unfinished tide. There are no gems of the living plasm. The living plasm vibrates unspeakably, it inhales the future, it exhales the past, it is the quick of both, and yet it is neither. There is no plasmic finality, nothing crystal, permanent. If we try to fix the living tissue, as the biologists fix it with formalism, we have only a hardened bit of the past, the bygone life under our observation.

Life, the ever-present, knows no finality, no finished crystallization. The perfect rose is only a running flame, emerging and flowing off, and never in any sense at rest, static, finished. Herein lies its transcendent loveliness. The whole tide of all life and all time suddenly heaves, and appears before us as an apparition, a revelation. We look at the very white quick of nascent creation. A water-lily heaves herself from the flood, looks round, gleams and is gone. We have seen the incarnation, the quick of the ever-swirling flood. We have seen the invisible. We have seen, we have touched, we have partaken of the very substance of creative change, creative mutation. If you tell me about the lotus, tell me of nothing changeless or eternal. Tell me of the mystery of the inexhaustible, forever-unfolding creative spark. Tell me of the incarnate disclosure of the flux, mutation in blossom, laughter and decay perfectly open in their transit, nude in their movement before us.

Let me feel the mud and the heavens in my lotus. Let me feel the heavy, silting, sucking mud, the spinning of sky winds. Let me feel them both in purest contact, the nakedness of sucking weight, nakedly passing radiance. Give me nothing fixed, set, static. Don't give me the infinite or the eternal: nothing of infinity, nothing of eternity. Give me the still, white seething, the incandescence and the coldness of the incarnate moment: the moment, the quick of all change and haste and opposition: the moment, the immediate present, the Now. The immediate moment is not a drop of water running downstream. It is the source and issue, the bubbling up of

the stream. Here, in this very instant moment, up bubbles the stream of time, out of the wells of futurity, flowing on to the oceans of the past. The source, the issue, the creative quick.

There is poetry of this immediate present, instant poetry, as well as poetry of the infinite future. The seething poetry of the incarnate Now is supreme, beyond even the everlasting gems of the before and after. In its quivering momentaneity it surpasses the crystalline, pearl-hard jewels, the poems of the eternities. Do not ask for the qualities of the unfading timeless gems. Ask for the whiteness which is the seethe of mud, ask for that incipient putrescence which is the skies falling, ask for the never-pausing, never-ceasing life itself. There must be mutation, swifter than iridescence, haste, not rest, come-and-go, not fixity, inconclusiveness, immediacy, the quality of life itself, without dénouement or close. There must be the rapid momentaneous association of things which meet and pass on the forever incalculable journey of creation: everything left in its own rapid, fluid relationship with the rest of things.

This is the unrestful, ungraspable, poetry of the sheer present, poetry whose permanency lies in its wind-like transit. Whitman's is the best poetry of this kind. Without beginning and without end, without any base and pediment, it sweeps past for ever, like a wind that is forever in passage, and unchainable. Whitman truly looked before and after. But he did not sigh for what is not. The clue to all his utterances lies in the sheer appreciation of the instant moment, life surging itself into utterance at its very well-head. Eternity is only an abstraction from the actual present. Infinity is only a great reservoir of recollection, or a reservoir of aspiration: man-made. The quivering nimble hour of the present, this is the quick of Time. This is the immanence. The quick of the universe is the *pulsating, carnal self,* mysterious and palpable. So it is always.

Because Whitman put this into poetry, we fear him and respect him so profoundly. We should not fear him if he sang only of the "old unhappy far-off things", or of the "wings of the morning". It is because his heart beats with the urgent, insurgent Now, which is even upon us all, that we dread him. He is so near the quick.

From the foregoing it is obvious that the poetry of the instant present cannot have the same body or the same motion as the poetry of the before and after. It can never submit to the same conditions. It is never finished. There is no rhythm which returns

upon itself, no serpent of eternity with its tail in its own mouth. There is no static perfection, none of that finality which we find so satisfying because we are so frightened.

Much has been written about free verse. But all that can be said, first and last, is that free verse is, or should be, direct utterance from the instant, whole man. It is the soul and the mind and body surging at once, nothing left out. They speak all together. There is some confusion, some discord. But the confusion and the discord only belong to the reality as noise belongs to the plunge of water. It is no use inventing fancy laws for free verse, no use drawing a melodic line which all the feet must toe. Free verse toes no melodic line, no matter what drill-sergeant. Whitman pruned away his clichés – perhaps his clichés of rhythm as well as of phrase. And this is about all we can do, deliberately, with free verse. We can get rid of the stereotyped movements and the old hackneyed associations of sound or sense. We can break down those artificial conduits and canals through which we do so love to force our utterance. We can break the stiff neck of habit. We can be in ourselves spontaneous and flexible as flame, we can see that utterance rushes out without artificial foam or artificial smoothness. But we can not positively prescribe any motion, any rhythm. All the laws we invent or discover – it amounts to pretty much the same – will fail to apply to free verse. They will only apply to some form of restricted, limited unfree verse.

All we can say is that free verse does *not* have the same nature as restricted verse. It is not of the nature of reminiscence. It is not the past which we treasure in its perfection between our hands. Neither is it the crystal of the perfect future, into which we gaze. Its tide is neither the full, yearning flow of aspiration, nor the sweet, poignant ebb of remembrance and regret. The past and the future are the two great bournes of human emotion, the two great homes of the human days, the two eternities. They are both conclusive, final. Their beauty is the beauty of the goal, finished, perfected. Finished beauty and measured symmetry belong to the stable, unchanging eternities.

But in free verse we look for the insurgent naked throb of the instant moment. To break the lovely form of metrical verse, and to dish up the fragments as a new substance, called *vers libre*, this is what most of the free-versifiers accomplish. They do not know that free verse has its own *nature*, that it is neither star nor pearl, but instantaneous like plasm. It has no goal in either eternity. It has no

finish. It has no satisfying stability, satisfying to those who like the immutable. None of this. It is the instant; the quick; the very jetting source of all will-be and has-been. The utterance is like a spasm, naked contact with all influences at once. It does not want to get anywhere. It just takes place.

For such utterance any externally-applied law would be mere shackles and death. The law must come new each time from within. The bird is on the wing in the winds, flexible to every breath, a living spark in the storm, its very flickering depending upon its supreme mutability and power of change. Whence such a bird came: whither it goes: from what solid earth it rose up, and upon what solid earth it will close its wings and settle, this is not the question. This is a question of before and after. Now, *now*, the bird is on the wing in the winds.

Such is the rare new poetry. One realm we have never conquered: the pure present. One great mystery of time is terra incognita to us: the instant. The most superb mystery we have hardly recognised: the immediate, instant self. The quick of all time is the instant. The quick of all the universe, of all creation, is the incarnate, carnal self. Poetry gave us the clue: free verse: Whitman. Now we know.

The ideal — what is the ideal? A figment. An abstraction. A static abstraction, abstracted from life. It is a fragment of the before or the after. It is a crystallised aspiration, or a crystallised remembrance: crystallised, set, finished. It is a thing set apart, in the great storehouse of eternity, the storehouse of finished things.

We do not speak of things crystallised and set apart. We speak of the instant, the immediate self, the very plasm of the self. We speak also of free verse.

All this should have come as a preface to *Look! We Have Come Through!* But is it not better to publish a preface long after the book it belongs to has appeared? For then the reader will have had his fair chance with the book, alone.

From 'Whitman'

(First published in *Nation and Athenaeum*, 23 July 1921)

[. . .] Whitman, the great poet, has meant so much to me. Whitman, the one man breaking a way ahead. Whitman, the one pioneer. And only Whitman. No English pioneers. No French. No European pioneer-poets. In Europe the would-be pioneers are mere innovators. The same in America. Ahead of Whitman, nothing. Ahead of all poets, pioneering into the wilderness of unopened life, Whitman. Beyond him, none. His wide, strange camp at the end of the great high-road. And lots of new little poets camping on Whitman's camping ground now. But none going really beyond. Because Whitman's camp is at the end of the road, and on the edge of a great precipice. Over the precipice, blue distances, and the blue hollow of the future. But there is no way down. It is a dead end.

Pisgah. Pisgah sights. And Death. Whitman like a strange, modern, American Moses. Fearfully mistaken. And yet the great leader.

The essential function of art is moral. Not aesthetic, not decorative, nor pastime and recreation. But moral. The essential function of art is moral.

But a passionate, implicit morality, not didactic. A morality which changes the blood, rather than the mind. Changes the blood first. The mind follows later, in the wake.

Now Whitman was a great moralist. He was a great leader. He was a great changer of the blood in the veins of men.

Surely it is especially true of American art, that it is all essentially moral. Hawthorne, Poe, Longfellow, Emerson, Melville: it is the moral issue which engages them. They all feel uneasy about the old morality. Sensuously, passionately, they all attack the old morality. But they know nothing better, mentally. Therefore they give tight mental allegiance to a morality which all their passion goes to destroy. Hence the duplicity which is the fatal flaw in them: most fatal in the most perfect American work of art, *The Scarlet Letter*. Tight mental allegiance given to a morality which the passional sense repudiates.

Whitman was the first to break the mental allegiance. He was the

first to smash the old moral conception that the soul of man is something 'superior' and 'above' the flesh. Even Emerson still maintained this tiresome 'superiority' of the soul. Even Melville could not get over it. Whitman was the first heroic seer to seize the soul by the scruff of her neck and plant her down among the potsherds.

'There!' he said to the soul. 'Stay there!'

Stay there. Stay in the flesh. Stay in the limbs and lips and in the belly. Stay in the breast and the womb. Stay there, Oh Soul, where you belong.

Stay in the dark limbs of the Negroes. Stay in the body of the prostitute. Stay in the sick flesh of the syphilitic. Stay in the marsh where the calamus grows. Stay there, Soul, where you belong.

The Open Road. The great home of the Soul is the open road. Not heaven, not paradise. Nor 'above'. Not even, 'within'. It is a wayfarer down the open road.

Not by meditating. Not by fasting. Not by exploring heaven after heaven, inwardly, in the manner of the great mystics. Not by exaltation. Not by ecstasy. Not by any of those ways does the soul come into her own.

Only by taking the open road. [. . .]

Then Whitman's mistake. The mistake of his interpretation of his watchword: Sympathy. The mystery of SYMPATHY. He still confounded it with Jesus' LOVE, and with Paul's CHARITY. Whitman, like the rest of us, was at the end of a great emotional highway of LOVE. And because he couldn't help himself, he carried on his Open Road as a prolongation of the emotional highway of LOVE, beyond Calvary. The highway of love ends at the foot of the Cross. There is no beyond. It was a hopeless attempt to prolong the highway of love.

He didn't follow his Sympathy. Try as he might, he kept on automatically interpreting it as Love, as Charity. Merging![. . .]

Love, and Merging, brought Whitman to the Edge of Death! Death! Death!

But the exultance of his message still remains. Purified of MERGING, purified of MYSELF, the exultant message of American Democracy, of Souls in the Open Road, full of glad recognition, full of fierce readiness, full of the joy of worship, when one soul sees a greater soul.

The only riches, the great souls.

A Spiritual Record: A Review of *A Second Contemporary Verse Anthology*

(*New York Evening Post Literary Review*, 29 September 1923)

"It is not merely an assembly of verse, but the spiritual record of an entire people." — This from the wrapper of *A Second Contemporary Verse Anthology*. The book as a matter of fact is a collection of pleasant verse, neat and nice and easy as eating candy.

Naturally, any collection of contemporary verse in any country at any time is bound to be more or less a box of candy. Days of Horace, days of Milton, days of Whitman, it would be pretty much the same, more or less a box of candy. Would it be at the same time the spiritual record of an entire people? Why not? If we had a good representative anthology of the poetry of Whitman's day, and if it contained two poems by Whitman, then it would be a fairly true spiritual record of the American people of that day. As if the whole nation had whispered or chanted its inner experience into the horn of a gramophone.

And the bulk of the whisperings and murmurings would be candy: sweet nothings, tender trifles, and amusing things. For of such is the bulk of the spiritual experience of any entire people.

The Americans have always been good at "occasional" verse. Sixty years ago they were very good indeed: making their little joke against themselves and their country. Today there are fewer jokes. There are also fewer footprints on the sands of time. Life is still earnest, but a little less real. And the soul has left off assuring that dust it isn't nor to dust returneth. The spirit of verse prefers now a "composition salad" of fruits of sensation, in a cooked mayonnaise of sympathy. Odds and ends of feelings smoothed into unison by some prevailing sentiment:

> My face is wet with the rain
> But my heart is warm to the core . . .

Or you can call it a box of chocolate candies. Let me offer you a sweet! Candy! Isn't everything candy?

> There be none of beauty's daughters

With a magic like thee —
And like music on the waters
Is thy sweet voice to me.

Is that candy? Then what about this?

But you are a girl and run
Fresh bathed and warm and sweet.
After the flying ball
On little, sandalled feet.

One of those two fragments is a classic. And one is a scrap from the contemporary spiritual record.

The river boat had loitered down its way
The ropes were coiled, and business for the day
Was done —

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds:
Save where —

Two more bits. Do you see any intrinsic difference between them? After all, the one *means* as much as the other. And what is there in the mere stringing together of words?

For some mysterious reason, there is everything.

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed —

It is a string of words, but it makes me prick my innermost ear. So do I prick my ear to: "Fly, low, vermilion dragon." But the next line: "With the moon horns" makes me lower that same inward ear once more, in indifference.

There is an element of danger in all new utterance. We prick our ears like an animal in a wood at a strange sound.

Alas! though there is a modicum of "strange sound" in this contemporary spiritual record, we are not the animal to prick our ears at it. Sounds sweetly familiar, linked in a new crochet pattern. "Christ, what are patterns for?" But why invoke Deity? Ask the *Ladies' Home Journal*. You may know a new utterance by the element of danger in it. "My heart aches," says Keats, and you bet it's no joke.

Why do I think of stairways
With a rush of hurt surprise?

Heaven knows, my dear, unless you once fell down.

The element of danger. Man is always, all the time and for ever on the brink of the unknown. The minute you realize this, you prick your ears in alarm. And the minute any man steps alone, with his whole naked self, emotional and mental, into the everlasting hinterland of consciousness, you hate him and you wonder over him. Why can't he stay cozily playing word-games around the camp fire?

Now it is time to invoke the Deity, who made man an adventurer into the everlasting unknown of consciousness.

The spiritual record of any people is 99 per cent a record of games around a camp fire: word-games and picture-games. But the one per cent is a step into the grisly dark, which is for ever dangerous and wonderful. Nothing is wonderful unless it is dangerous. Dangerous to the *status quo* of the soul. And therefore to some degree detestable.

When the contemporary spiritual record warbles away about the wonder of the blue sky and the changing seas etc., etc., etc., it is all candy. The sky is a blue hand-mirror to the modern poet and he goes on smirking before it. The blue sky of our particular heavens is painfully well known to us all. In fact, it is like the glass bowl to the gold fish, a *ne plus ultra* in which he sees himself as he goes round and round.

The actual heavens can suddenly roll up like the heavens of Ezekiel. That's what happened at the Renaissance. The old heavens shrivelled and men found a new empyrean above them. But they didn't get at it by playing word-games around the camp fire. Somebody has to jump like a desperate clown through the vast blue hoop of the upper air. Or hack a slow way through the dome of crystal.

Play! Play! Play! All the little playboys and playgirls of the western world, playing at goodness, playing at badness, playing at sadness, and playing deafeningly at gladness. Playboys and playgirls of the western world, harmlessly fulfilling their higher destinies and registering the spiritual record of an entire people. Even playing at death. Oh, poetry, you child in a bathing-dress, playing at ball!

You say nature is always nature, the sky is always sky. But sit still and consider for one moment what sort of nature it was the Romans saw on the face of the earth, and what sort of heavens the medievals knew above them, and your sky will begin to crack like glass. The world is what it is, and the chimerical universe of the ancients was always child's play. The camera cannot lie. And the eye of man is nothing but a camera photographing the outer world in colour-process.

This sounds very well. But the eye of man photographs the chimera of nature, as well as the so-called scientific vision. The eye of man photographs gorgons and chimeras, as the eye of the spider photographs images unrecognizable to us and the eye of the horse photographs flat ghosts and looming motions. We are at the phase of scientific vision. This phase will pass and this vision will seem as chimerical to our descendents as the medieval vision seems to us.

The upshot of it all is that we are pot-bound in our consciousness. We are like a fish in a glass bowl, swimming round and round and gaping out our own image reflected on the walls of the infinite: the infinite being the glass bowl of our conception of life and the universe. We are prisoners inside our own conception of life and being. We have exhausted the possibilities of the universe, as we know it. All that remains is to telephone to Mars for a new word of advice.

Our consciousness is pot-bound. Our ideas, our emotions, our experiences are all pot-bound. For us there is nothing new under the sun. What there is to know, we know it already, and experience adds little. The girl who is going to fall in love knows all about it beforehand from books and the movies. She knows what she wants and she wants what she knows. Like candy. It is still nice to eat candy. But the spiritual record of eating candy is a rather thin noise.

There is nothing new under the sun once the consciousness becomes pot-bound. And that is what ails all art today. But particularly American art. The American consciousness is peculiarly pot-bound. It doesn't even have that little hole in the bottom of the pot through which desperate roots straggle. No, the American consciousness is not only potted in a solid and everlasting pot, it is placed moreover in an immovable ornamental vase. A double hide to bind it and a double bond to hide it.

European consciousness still has cracks in its vessel and a hole in the bottom of its absoluteness. It still has strange roots of memory groping down to the heart of the world.

But American consciousness is absolutely free of such danglers. It is free from all loop-holes and crevices of escape. It is absolutely safe inside a solid and ornamental concept of life. There it is Free! Life is good, and all men are meant to have a good time. Life is good! that is the flower-pot. The ornamental vase is: Having a good time.

So they proceed to have it, even with their woes. The young maiden knows exactly when she falls in love: she know exactly how she feels when her lover or her husband betrays her or when she betrays him: she knows precisely what it is to be a forsaken wife, an adoring mother, an erratic grandmother. All at the age of eighteen.

Vive la vie!

There is nothing new under the sun, but you can have a jolly good time all the same with the old things. A nut sundae or a new beau, a baby or an automobile, a divorce or a troublesome appendix: my dear, that's Life! You've got to get a good time out of it, anyhow, so here goes!

In which attitude there is a certain piquant stoicism. The stoicism of having a good time. The heroism of enjoying yourself. But, as I say, it makes rather thin hearing in a spiritual record. *Rechauffés* of *rechauffés*. Old soups of old bones of life. Heated up again for a new consommé. Nearly always called *printanier*.

I know a forest, stilly-deep . . .

Mark the poetic novelty of stilly-deep, and then say there is nothing new under the sun.

My soul-harp never thrills to peaceful tunes;

I should say so.

For after all, the things to do
Is just to put your heart in song —

Or pickle.

I sometimes wish that God were back
  In this dark world and wide;
For though some virtues he might lack,
  He had his pleasant side.

"Getting on the pleasant side of God, and how to stay there." — Hints by a Student of Life.

Oh, ho! Now I am masterful!
Now I am filled with power.
Now I am brutally myself again
And my own man.

For I have been among my hills today,
On the scarred dumb rocks standing;
And it made a man of him . . .
Open confession is good for soul.
The spiritual record of an entire . . . what?

A Britisher Has a Word with an Editor

(*Palms*, Christmas 1923)

In October's *Poetry*, the Editor [Harriet Monroe] tells what a real tea-party she had in Britain, among the poets: not a Bostonian one either.

But she, alas, has to throw the dregs of her tea-cup in the faces of her hosts. She wonders whether British poets will have anything very essential to say, as long as the King remains, and the "oligarchic social system" continues. The poor King, casting a damper on poetry! And this about oligarchies is good, from an American.

"In England I found no such evidence of athletic sincerity in artistic experiment, of vitality and variety, and — yes! — (YES!!) beauty, in artistic achievement, as I get from the poets of our own land."

YANKEE DOODLE, KEEP IT UP.

As for that "worthless dude," George IV, what poet could possibly have flourished under his contemptible regime? Harriet, look in the history book, and see.

Oh what might not Milton have been, if he'd written under Calvin Coolidge!

From 'The Nightingale'

(*Forum*, September 1927)

[. . .] The nightingale, let us repeat, is the most unsad thing in the world; even more unsad than the peacock full of gleam. He has nothing to be sad about. He feels perfect with life. It isn't conceit. He just feels life-perfect, and he trills it out — shouts, jugs, gurgles, trills, gives long, mock-plaintiff calls, makes declarations, assertions, triumphs; but he never reflects. It is pure music, in so far as you could never put words to it. But there are words for the feelings aroused in us by the song. No, even that is not true. There are no words to tell what one really feels, hearing the nightingale. It is something so much purer than words, which are all tainted. Yet we can say, it is some sort of feeling of triumph in one's own life-perfection.

> 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
> But being too happy in thine happiness —
> That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
> In some melodious plot
> Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
> Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

Poor Keats, he has to be "too happy" in the nightingale's happiness, not being very happy in himself at all. So he wants to drink the blushful Hippocrene, and fade away with the nightingale into the forest dim.

> Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
> What thou among the leaves hast never known,
> The weariness, the fever, and the fret. . . .

It is such sad, beautiful poetry of the human male. Yet the next line strikes me as a bit ridiculous.

> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last, grey hairs. . . .

This is Keats, not at all the nightingale. But the sad human male still tries to break away, and get over into the nightingale world. Wine will not take him across. Yet he will go.

> Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
> Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
> But on the viewless wings of Poesy. . . .

He doesn't succeed, however. The viewless wings of Poesy carry him only into the bushes, not into the nightingale world. He is still outside.

> Darkling I listen; and for many a time
> I have been half in love with easeful Death. . . .

The nightingale never made any man in love with easeful death, except by contrast. The contrast between the bright flame of positive pure self-aliveness, in the bird, and the uneasy flickering of yearning selflessness, for ever yearning for something outside himself, which is Keats:

> To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
> While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
> In such an ecstacy!
> Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain,—
> To thy high requiem become a sod.

How astonished the nightingale would be if he could be made to realize what sort of answer the poet was answering to his song. He would fall off the bough with amazement.

Because a nightingale, when you answer him back, only shouts and sings louder. Suppose a few other nightingales pipe up in neighbouring bushes – as they always do. Then the blue-white sparks of sound go dazzling up to heaven. And suppose you, mere mortal, happen to be sitting on the shady bank having an altercation with the mistress of your heart, hammer and tongs, then the chief nightingale swells and goes at it like Caruso in the Third Act – simply a brilliant, bursting frenzy of music, singing you down, till you simply can't hear yourself speak to quarrel.

There was, in fact, something very like a nightingale in Caruso – that bird-like, bursting, miraculous energy of song, and fullness of himself, and self-luxuriance.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down.

Not yet in Tuscany, anyhow. They are twenty to the dozen. Whereas the cuckoo seems remote and low-voiced, calling his low, half secretive call as he flies past. Perhaps it really is different in England.

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.

And why in tears? Always tears. Did Diocletian, I wonder, among the emperors, burst into tears when he heard the nightingale, and Aesop among the clowns? And Ruth, really? Myself, I strongly suspect that young lady of setting the nightingale singing, like the nice damsel in Boccaccio's story, who went to sleep with the lively bird in her hand, "– *tua figliuola e stat a si vaga dell'usignuolo, ch'ella l'ha preso e tienlosi in mano!*"

And what does the hen nightingale think of it all, as she mildly sits upon the eggs and hears milord giving himself forth? Probably she likes it, for she goes on breeding him as jaunty as ever. Probably she prefers his high cockalorum to the poet's humble moan:

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain. . . .

That wouldn't be much use to the hen nightingale. And one sympathizes with Keat's Fanny, and understands why she wasn't having any. Much good such a midnight would have been to *her*!

Perhaps, when all's said and done, the female of the species gets more out of life when the male isn't wanting to cease upon the midnight, with or without pain. There are better uses for midnights. And a bird that sings because he's full of his own bright life, and leaves her to keep the eggs cosy, is perhaps preferable to one who moans, even with love of her.

Of course, the nightingale is utterly unconscious of the little dim hen, while he sings. And he never mentions her name. But she knows well enough that the song is half her; just as she knows the

eggs are half him. And just as she doesn't want him coming in and putting a heavy foot down on her little bunch of eggs, he doesn't want her poking into his song, and fussing over it, and mussing it up. Every man to his trade, and every woman to hers:

> Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades. . . .

It never was a plaintive anthem – it was Caruso at his jauntiest. But don't try to argue with a poet.

Foreword to *'Collected Poems' (1928)*

(The unused version, written in 1928 but first published in *Phoenix*, 1936)

Instead of bewailing lost youth, a man nowadays begins to wonder, when he reaches my ripe age of forty-two, if ever his past will subside and be comfortably by-gone. Doing over these poems makes me realise that my teens and my twenties are just as much me, here and now and present, as ever they were, and the pastness is only an abstraction. The actuality, the body of feeling, is essentially alive and here.

And I remember the slightly self-conscious Sunday afternoon, when I was nineteen, and I "composed" my first two "poems." One was to *Guelder-roses*, and one to *Campions*, and most young ladies would have done better: at least I hope so. But I thought the effusions very nice, and so did Miriam.

Then much more vaguely I remember subsequent half-furtive moments when I would absorbedly scribble at verse for an hour or so, and then run away from the act and the production as if it were secret sin. It seems to me that "knowing oneself" was a sin and a vice for innumerable centuries, before it became a virtue. It seems to me, it is still a sin and vice, when it comes to new knowledge. – In those early days – for I was very green and unsophisticated at twenty – I used to feel myself at times haunted by something, and a little guilty about it, as if it were an abnormality. Then the haunting would get the better of me, and the ghost would suddenly appear, in the shape of a usually rather incoherent poem. Nearly always I shunned the apparition once it had appeared. From the first, I was a little afraid of my real poems — not my "compositions," but the poems that had the ghost in them. They seemed to me to come from somewhere, I didn't quite know where, out of a me whom I didn't know and didn't want to know, and to say things I would much rather not have said: for choice. But there they were. I never read them again. Only I gave them to Miriam, and she loved them, or she seemed to. So when I was twenty-one, and went to Nottingham University as a day student, I began putting them down in a little college notebook, which was the foundation of the poetic me. *Sapientiae Urbs Conditur*, it said on

the cover. Never was anything less true. The city is founded on a passionate unreason.

To this day, I still have the uneasy haunted feeling, and would rather not write most of the things I do write – including this note. Only now I know my demon better, and, after bitter years, respect him more than my other, milder and nicer self. Now I no longer like my "compositions." I once thought the poem *Flapper* a little masterpiece: when I was twenty: because the demon isn't in it. And I must have burnt many poems that had the demon fuming in them. The fragment *Discord in Childhood* was a long poem, probably was good, but I destroyed it. Save for Miriam, I perhaps should have destroyed them all. She encouraged my demon. But alas, it was me, not he whom she loved. For her too it was a catastrophe. My demon is not easily loved: whereas the ordinary me is. So poor Miriam was let down. Yet in a sense, she let down my demon, till he howled. And there it is. And no more *past* in me than my blood in my toes or my nose is my past.

I have tried to arrange the poems in chronological order: that is, in the order in which they were written. The first are either subjective, or Miriam poems. *The Wild Common* was very early and very confused. I have re-written some of it, and added some, till it seems complete. It has taken me twenty years to say what I started to say, incoherently, when I was nineteen, in this poem. The same with *Virgin Youth* and others of the subjective poems with the demon fuming in them smokily. To the demon, the past is not past. The wild common, the gorse, the virgin youth are here and now, the same: the same me, the same one experience. Only now perhaps I can give it more complete expression.

The poems to Miriam, at least the early ones like *Dog Tired* and *Cherry Robbers* and *Renascence* are not much changed. But some of the later ones had to be altered, where sometimes the hand of the commonplace youth had been laid on the mouth of the demon. It is not for technique these poems are altered: it is to say the real say.

Other verses, those I call imaginative or fictional, like *Love on the Farm* and *Wedding Morn*, I have sometimes changed, to get them into better form, and take out the dead bits. It took me many years to learn to play with the form of a poem: even if I can do it now. But it is only in the less immediate, the more fictional poems that the form has to be played with. The demon, when he is really there, makes his own form willy-hilly, and is unchangeable.

The poems to Miriam run into the first poems to my mother.

Then when I was twenty-three, I went away from home for the first time, to the south of London. From the big new red school where I taught, we could look north and see the Crystal Palace; to me, who saw it then for the first time, in lovely autumn weather, beautiful and softly blue on its hill to the north. And past the school, on an embankment, the trains rushed south to Brighton or to Kent. And round the school the country was still only just being built over, and the elms of Surrey stood tall and noble. It was different from the Midlands.

Then begin the poems to Helen, and all that trouble of *Lilies in the Fire*: and London, and school, a whole new world. Then starts the rupture with home, with Miriam, away there in Nottinghamshire. And gradually the long illness, and then the death of my mother; and in the sick years after, the collapse for me of Miriam, of Helen, and of the other woman of *Kisses in the Train* and *The Hands of the Betrothed*.

Then, in that year, for me, everything collapsed, save the mystery of death, and the haunting of death in life. I was twenty-five, and from the death of my mother, the world began to dissolve around me, beautiful, iridescent, but passing away substanceless. Till I almost dissolved away myself, and was very ill: when I was twenty-six.

Then slowly the world came back: or I myself returned: but to another world. And in 1912, when I was still twenty-six, the other phase commenced, the phase of *Look! We Have Come Through!* — when I left teaching, and left England, and left many other things, and the demon had a new run for his money.

But back in England again during the war, there are the war poems from the little volume: *Bay*. These, beginning with *Tommies in the Train*, make up the end of the volume of Rhyming Poems. They are the end of the cycle of purely English experience, and death experience.

The first poems I had published were *Dreams Old* and *Dreams Nascent*, which Miriam herself sent to Ford Madox Hueffer, in 1910 I believe, just when the *English Review* had started so brilliantly. Myself, I had offered the little poem *Study* to the Nottingham University Magazine, but they returned it. But Hueffer accepted the *Dreams* poems for the *English Review*, and was very kind to me, and was the first man I ever met who had a real, and a true feeling for literature. He introduced me to Edward Garnett, who, somehow, introduced me to the new world. How well I remember the

evenings at Garnett's house in Kent, by the log fire. And there I wrote the best of the dialect poems. I remember Garnett disliked the old ending to *Whether or Not*. Now I see he was right, it was the voice of the commonplace me, not the demon. So I have altered it. And there again, those days of Hueffer and Garnett are not past at all, once I recall them. They were good to the demon, and the demon is timeless. But the ordinary meal-time me has yesterdays. And that is why I have altered *Dreams Nascent*, that exceedingly funny and optimistic piece of rhymeless poetry which Ford Hueffer printed in the *English Review*, and which introduced me to the public. The public seemed to like it. The M. P. for school-teachers said I was an ornament to the educational system, whereupon I knew it must be the ordinary me which had made itself heard, and not the demon. Anyhow, I was always uneasy about it.

There is a poem added to the second volume, which had to be left out of *Look! We Have Come Through!*, when that book was first printed, because the publishers objected to mixing love and religion, so they said, in the lines:

> But I hope I shall spend eternity
> with my face down buried between
> her breasts . . .

But surely there are many eternities, and one of them Adam spends with his face buried and at peace between the breasts of Eve: just as Eve spends one of her eternities with her face hidden in the breast of Adam. But the publishers coughed out that gnat, and I was left wondering as usual.

Some of the poems in *Look!* are re-written, but not many, not as in the first volume. And *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* are practically untouched. They are what they are. They are the same me as wrote *The Wild Common*, or *Renascence*.

Perhaps it may seem bad taste to write this so personal foreword. But since the poems are so often personal themselves, and hang together in a life, it is perhaps only fair to give the demon his body of mere man, as far as possible.

Chaos in Poetry

(*Echanges*, December 1929. It was used as Lawrence's Introduction to Harry Crosby's poems, *Chariot of the Sun* 1931. The following version, probably written on 1 May 1928, was printed, from Lawrence's typescript, for the first time in *Phoenix*, 1936)

Poetry, they say, is a matter of words. And this is just as much true as that pictures are a matter of paint, and frescoes a matter of water and colour-wash. It is such a long way from being the whole truth that it is slightly silly if uttered sententiously.

Poetry is a matter of words, Poetry is a stringing together of words into a ripple and jingle and a run of colours. Poetry is an interplay of images. Poetry is the iridescent suggestion of an idea. Poetry is all these things, and still it is something else. Given all these ingredients, you have something very like poetry, something for which we might borrow the old romantic name of poesy. And poesy, like bric-à-brac, will for ever be in fashion. But poetry is still another thing.

The essential quality of poetry is that it makes a new effort of attention, and "discovers" a new world within the known world. Man, and the animals, and the flowers, all live within a strange and for ever surging chaos. The chaos which we have got used to we call a cosmos. The unspeakable inner chaos of which we are composed we call consciousness, and mind, and even civilization. But it is, ultimately, chaos, lit up by visions. Just as the rainbow may or may not light up the storm. And, like the rainbow, the vision perisheth.

But man cannot live in chaos. The animals can. To the animal all is chaos, only there are a few recurring motions and aspects within the surge. And the animal is content. But man is not. Man must wrap himself in a vision, make a house of apparent form and stability, and fixity. In his terror of chaos he begins by putting up an umbrella between himself and the everlasting whirl. Then he paints the under-side of his umbrella like a firmament. Then he parades around, lives and dies under his umbrella. Bequeathed to his descendants, the umbrella becomes a dome, a vault, and men at last begin to feel that something is wrong.

Man fixes some wonderful erection of his own between himself and the wild chaos, and gradually goes bleached and stifled under his parasol. Then comes a poet, enemy of convention, and makes a slit in the umbrella; and lo! the glimpse of chaos is a vision, a window to the sun. But after a while, getting used to the vision, and not liking the genuine draught from the chaos, commonplace man daubs a simulacrum of the window that opens on to chaos, and patches the umbrella with the painted patch of the simulacrum. That is, he has got used to the vision; it is part of his house-decoration. So that the umbrella at last looks like a glowing open firmament, of many aspects. But alas! it is all simulacrum, in innumerable patches. Homer and Keats, annotated and with glossary.

This is the history of poetry in our era. Someone sees Titan in the wild air of chaos, and the Titan becomes a wall between succeeding generations and the chaos they should have inherited. The wild sky moved and sang. Even that became a great umbrella between mankind and the sky of fresh air; then it became a painted vault, a fresco on a vaulted roof, under which men bleach and go dissatisfied. Till another poet makes a slit on to the open and windy chaos.

But at last our roof deceives us no more. It is painted plaster, and all the skill of all human ages won't take us in. Dante or Leonardo, Beethoven or Whitman: lo! it is painted on the plaster of our vault. Like St Francis preaching to the birds in Assisi. Wonderfully like air and birdy space and chaos of many things – partly because the fresco is faded. But even so, we are glad to get out of that church, and into the natural chaos.

This is the momentous crisis of mankind, when we have to get back to chaos. So long as the umbrella serves, and poets make slits in it, and the mass of people can be gradually educated up to the vision in the slit: which means they patch it over with a patch that looks just like the vision in the slit: so long as this process can continue, and mankind can be educated up, and thus built in, so long will civilization continue more or less happily, completing its own painted prison. It is called completing the consciousness.

The joy men had when Wordsworth, for example, made a slit and saw a primrose! Till then, men had only seen a primrose dimly, in the shadow of the umbrella. They saw it through Wordsworth in the full gleam of chaos. Since then, gradually, we have

come to see primavera nothing but primrose. Which means, we have patched over the slit.

And the greater joy when Shakespeare made a big rent and saw emotional, wistful man outside in the chaos, beyond the conventional idea and painted umbrella of moral images and iron-bound paladins, which had been put up in the Middle Ages. But now, alas, the roof of our vault is simply painted dense with Hamlets and Macbeths, the side walls too, and the order is fixed and complete. Man can't be any different from his image. Chaos is all shut out.

The umbrella has got so big, the patches and plaster are so tight and hard, it can be slit no more. If it were slit, the rent would no more be a vision, it will only be an outrage. We should dab it over at once, to match the rest.

So the umbrella is absolute. And so the yearning for chaos becomes a nostalgia. And this will go on till some terrific wind blows the umbrella to ribbons, and much of mankind to oblivion. The rest will shiver in the midst of chaos. For chaos is always there, and always will be, no matter how we put up umbrellas of visions.

What about the poets, then, at this juncture? They reveal the inward desire of mankind. What do they reveal? They show the desire for chaos, and the fear of chaos. The desire for chaos is the breath of their poetry. The fear of chaos is in their parade of forms and technique. Poetry is made of words, they say. So they blow bubbles of sound and image, which soon burst with the breath of longing for chaos, which fills them. But the poetasters can make pretty shiny bubbles for the Christmas-tree, which never burst, because there is no breath of poetry in them, but they remain till we drop them.

What, then, of *Chariot of the Sun*? It is a warlike and bronzy title for a sheaf of flimsies, almost too flimsy for real bubbles. But incongruity is man's recognition of chaos.

If one had to judge these little poems for their magic of words, as one judges Paul Valéry, for example, they would look shabby. There is no obvious incantation of sweet noise; only too often the music of one line deliberately kills the next, breathlessly staccato. There is no particular jewellery of epithet. And no handsome handling of images. Where deliberate imagery is used, it is perhaps a little clumsy. There is no coloured thread of an idea; and no subtle ebbing of a theme into consciousness, no recognizable

vision, new gleam of chaos let in to a world of order. There is only a repetition of sun, sun, sun, not really as a glowing symbol, more as a bewilderment and a narcotic. The images in "Sun Rhapsody" shatter one another, line by line. For the sun,

> it is a forest without trees
> it is a lion in a cage of breeze
> it is the roundness of her knees
> great Hercules
> and all the seas
> and our soliloquies

The rhyme is responsible for a great deal. The lesser symbols are as confusing: sunmaids who are naiads of the water world, hiding in a cave. Only the forest becomes suddenly logical.

> I am a tree whose roots are tangled in the sun
> All men and women are trees whose roots are tangled in the sun
> Therefore humanity is the forest of the sun

What is there, then, in this poetry, where there seems to be nothing? For if there is nothing, it is merely nonsense.

And, almost, it is nonsense. Sometimes, as in the "verse" beginning: "sthhe fous on ssu eod," since I can at least make no head or tail of it, and the mere sound is impossible, and the mere look of it is not inspiring, to me it is just nonsense. But in a world over-loaded with shallow "sense," I can bear a page of nonsense, just for a pause.

For the rest, what is there? Take, at random, the poem called "Néant:"

> Red sunbeams from an autumn sun
> Shall be the strongest wall
> To shield the sunmaids of my soul
> From worlds inimical
>
> Yet sunflakes falling in the sea
> Beyond the outer shore
> Reduplicate their epitaph
> To kill the conqueror.

It is a tissue of incongruity, in sound and sense. It means nothing, and it says nothing. And yet it has something to say. It even carries a dim suggestion of that which refuses to be said.

And therein lies the charm. It is a glimpse of chaos not reduced to order. But the chaos *alive*, not the chaos of matter. A glimpse of the living, untamed chaos. For the grand chaos is all alive, and everlasting. From it we draw our breath of life. If we shut ourselves off from it, we stifle. The animals live with it, as they live in grace. But when man became conscious, and aware of *himself*, his own littleness and puniness in the whirl of the vast chaos of God, he took fright, and began inventing God in his own image.

Now comes the moment when the terrified but inordinately conceited human consciousness must at last submit, and own itself part of the vast and potent living chaos. We must keep true to ourselves. But we must breathe in life from the living and unending chaos. We shall put up more umbrellas. They are a necessity of our consciousness. But never again shall we be able to put up The Absolute Umbrella, either religious or moral or rational or scientific or practical. The vast parasol of our conception of the universe, the cosmos, the firmament of suns and stars and space, this we can roll up like any other green sunshade, and bring it forth again when we want it. But we mustn't imagine it always spread above us. It is no more absolutely there than a green sunshade is absolutely there. It is casually there, only; because it is as much a contrivance and invention of our mind as a green sunshade is. Likewise the grand conception of God: this already shuts up like a Japanese parasol, rather clumsily, and is put by for Sundays, or bad weather, or a "serious" mood.

Now we see the charm of *Chariot of the Sun*. It shuts up all the little and big umbrellas of poesy and importance, has no outstanding melody or rhythm or image of epithet or even sense. And we feel a certain relief. The sun is very much in evidence, certainly, but it is a bubble reality that always explodes before you can really look at it. And it upsets all the rest of things with its disappearing.

Hence the touch of true poetry in this sun. It bursts all the bubbles and umbrellas of reality, and gives us a breath of the live chaos. We struggle out into the fathomless chaos of things passing and coming, and many suns and different darknesses. There is a bursting of bubbles of reality, and the pang of extinction that is also liberation into the roving, uncaring chaos which is all we shall ever know of God.

To me there is a breath of poetry, like an uneasy waft of fresh air at dawn, before it is light. There is an acceptance of the limitations of consciousness, and a leaning-up against the sun-imbued world of chaos. It is poetry at the moment of inception in the soul, before the germs of the known and the unknown have fused to begin a new body of concepts. And therefore it is useless to quote fragments. They are too nebulous and *not there*. Yet in the whole there is a breath of real poetry, the essential quality of poetry. It makes a new act of attention, and wakes us to a nascent world of inner and outer suns. And it has the poetic faith in the chaotic splendour of suns.

It is poetry of suns which are the core of chaos, suns which are fountains of shadow and pools of light and centres of thought and lions of passion. Since chaos has a core which is itself quintessentially chaotic and fierce with incongruities. That such a sun should have a chariot makes it only more chaotic. [. . .]

Now, after a long bout of conceit and self-assurance and flippancy, the young are waking up to the fact that they are starved of life and of essential sun, and at last they are being driven, out of sheer starvedness, to make the act of submission, the act of attention, to open into inner naïveté, deliberately and dauntlessly, admit the chaos and the sun of chaos. This is the new naïveté, chosen, recovered, regained. Round it range the white and golden soft lions of courage and the sun of dauntlessness, and the whorled ivory horn of the unicorn is erect and ruthless, as a weapon of defence. The naïve, open spirit of man will no longer be a victim, to be put on a cross, nor a beggar, to be scorned and given a pittance. This time it will be erect and a bright lord, with a heart open to the wild sun of chaos, but with the yellow lions of the sun's danger on guard in the eyes.

The new naïveté, erect, and ready, sufficiently sophisticated to wring the neck of sophistication, will be the new spirit of poetry and the new spirit of life. Tender, but purring like a leopard that may snarl, it may be clumsy at first, and make gestures of self-conscious crudity. But it is a real thing, the real creature of the inside of the soul. And to the young it is the essential reality, the liberation into the real self. The liberation into the wild air of chaos, the being part of the sun. A long course of merely negative "freedom" reduces the soul and body both to numbness. They can feel no more and respond no more. Only the mind remains awake,

and suffers keenly from the sense of nullity; to be young, and to feel you have every "opportunity", every "freedom" to live, and yet not to be able to live, because the responses have gone numb in the body and soul, this is the nemesis that is overtaking the young. It drives them silly.

But there is the other way, back to the sun, to faith in the speckled leopard of the mixed self. What is more chaotic than a dappled leopard trotting through dappled shade? And that is our life, really. Why try to whitewash ourselves? — or to camouflage ourselves into an artificially chaotic pattern? All we have to do is to accept the true chaos that we are, like the jaguar dappled with black suns in gold.

Part II Writings on Lawrence's Poetry

The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence

Olivia Shakespear

(*The Egoist*, 1 May 1915)

Mr Lawrence's work is full of contradictions: he is both crude and subtle, rough and tender; but these opposing elements are welded into a whole by a vitality so great as to be always arresting; a burning aliveness which has something of the qualities of fire — wildness, remorselessness, and beauty. In the "Love Poems" he writes of love which is primitive, yet not wholly unsubtle: the man is the eternal pursuer, ardent, slightly brutal, yet sometimes overcome by a sudden diffidence, by a fleeting shock of tenderness; the woman is the snared animal, shrinking but not untamable. She is not the only victim, for the man suffers the pains of baulked and unappeased desires, because she is elusive, cold, and unable to give herself with generosity. Many of the poems are on this note: "Lilies in the Fire," "Coldness in Love", "Reminder", "Return", and "The Appeal" – these last two, exquisite little poems – and "Repulsed", of which I give the last two verses:

The night is immense and awful, Helen, and I an insect small
In the fur of this hill, cling on to the fur of shaggy black
heather,
A palpitant speck in the fur of the night and afraid of all,
Seeing the world and sky like creatures hostile together.

And I in the fur of the world, and you a pale fleck from the
sky,
How we hate each other to-night, hate, you and I,
As the world of activity hates the dream that goes on on
high,
As a man hates the dreaming woman he loves, but who will not
reply.

There are three little poems which I do not think I am wrong in calling, "imagist", for they each contain two "images", one superimposed upon the other. I have only space to quote "Aware", which is perfect from beginning to end. "Reminiscence" and "A

White Blossom" both lapse into a banalité in the last line:

> A tear which I had hoped even hell held not in store;
> and
> She shines, the one white love of my youth, which all
> sin cannot stain.

AWARE

> Slowly the moon is rising out of the ruddy haze,
> Divesting herself of her golden shift, and so
> Emerging white and exquisite; and I in amaze
> See in the sky before me a woman I did not know
> I loved; but there she goes and her beauty hurts my heart;
> I follow her down the night, begging her not to depart.

The influences which have formed Mr. Lawrence are not obvious; here and there a line reminds me of Browning – the last two lines, for example, of "Fooled", a fine poem which has appeared in THE EGOIST:

> She clung to the door in her haste to enter, opened, and
> quickly cast
> It shut behind her, leaving the street aghast.

He is simpler, less concerned with technical experiments than most of his contemporaries; his manner and his matter are inevitably one, especially in the poems in dialect, which are the finest in the book. "The Drained Cup" is a masterpiece of passion and understanding; it is written with straight naked simplicity, and is realistic in a true sense – that is to say, it does not deal with external realities only. I cannot quote from "The Drained Cup", "Whether or Not", or "A Collier's Wife" without spoiling them as a whole, for each is a little drama in itself, tragic and full of irony.

I end by suggesting – I hope without obscuring my appreciation of Mr. Lawrence's work – that if he could add two qualities to it he would be a great writer indeed; I mean the quality of "strangeness", which some one has declared to be a necessary part of beauty, and that of "distinction" – so difficult to analyse, which is perhaps the indirect expression of a philosophy of life which rejects everything but essentials.

A Modern Evangelist

John Gould Fletcher

(*Poetry*, August 1918)

D. H. Lawrence has recently published a third volume of poetry to stand beside his *Love Poems* and *Amores*. This event has, so far as I am aware, passed almost without notice in the English press. The reviewers of the English press know perfectly well that Mr. Lawrence is supposed to be a dangerous man, writing too frankly on certain subjects which are politely considered taboo in good society, and therefore they do their best to prevent Mr. Lawrence from writing at all, by tacitly ignoring him. If they are driven to the admission, these selfsame reviewers are obliged grudgingly to acknowledge that Mr. Lawrence is one of the most interesting of modern writers. Such are the conditions which a modern writer with something new to say is obliged to accept in England today. The Press can make a great to-do about the innocuous, blameless and essentially minor poetry of Edward Thomas (to take but one example); they politely refuse to discuss the questionable, but essentially major effort of a D. H. Lawrence. Is it any wonder that such an attitude drives a man to sheer fanaticism?

For a fine, intolerant fanatic D. H. Lawrence undoubtedly is. That is his value for our present day, so rich in half-measures and compromises. Lawrence does not compromise. In this last collection of poetry he gives us works which are not good poetry, which are scarcely readable prose. He includes them because they are necessary to the complete understanding of his thought and gospel. We, if we are wise, will read them for the same reason. For Lawrence is an original thinker, and his message to our present day is a valuable message.

Briefly, the message is this: that everything which we call spiritual is born and comes to flower out of certain physical needs and reactions, of which the most patent is the reaction of sex, through which life is maintained on this planet. Lawrence therefore stands in sharp contrast to the Christian dogma of the Middle Ages, and to those writers of the present day who still maintain an attitude of respect to the Christian view, which is that we are each endowed with an immortal soul, at strife with our physical needs, which can

only be purged by death. Lawrence, like a recent French writer, 'does not desire to spit out the forbidden fruit, and recreate the Eden of the refusal of life'. He is frankly a pagan. To him, the flesh is the soil in which the spirit blossoms, and the only immortality possible is the setting free of the blossoming spirit from the satiated flesh. When this is accomplished, then the spirit becomes free, perfect, unique, a habitant of paradise on earth. This is the doctrine of which he is the zealot, the intolerant apostle.

The specific value of this idea need not concern us very greatly. The question is, rather, of its poetical value; and there is no doubt that it is a system of philosophy which is essentially poetical. Poetry is at once highly objective and highly subjective. It is objective in so far as it deals with words, which are in a strong sense objects, and with the external world in its objective aspects. It is subjective, because it also states the poet's subjective reactions to words and to all external phenomena. Lawrence is one of the few poets in England today who keeps this dual role of poetry well in mind; and that is why his poetry, though it may often be badly written, is never without energy and a sense of power.

The reason for his failings as a poet must be sought elsewhere than in his attitude to life. We can only understand why he fails if we understand the conditions under which he is forced to write. With a reasonable degree of independence, a public neither openly hostile nor totally indifferent, an intellectual *milieu* capable of finer life and better understanding, Lawrence would become nothing but an artist. He has none of these things; and so he is forced, by destiny itself, to become the thing he probably began by loathing, a propagandist, a preacher, an evangelist.

This brings him into close connection with Walt Whitman, who similarly spent his life in preaching with puritanical fervour a most unpuritan gospel. Indeed, if one examines closely Lawrence's latest technique as shown here in such poems as 'Manifesto' and 'New Heaven and Earth', one is surprised to see how close this comes in many respects to that of the earlier Whitman, the Whitman of 'The Song of Myself'. For example, note the selfsame use of long, rolling, orchestral rhythm in the two following passages:

When I gathered flowers, I knew it was myself plucking my own flowering,
When I went in a train, I knew it was myself travelling by my own invention,

When I heard the cannon of the war, I listened with my own
ears to my own destruction.
When I saw the torn dead, I knew it was my own torn dead body.
It was all me, I had done it all in my own flesh.

Every kind for itself and its own, for me, mine, male and
female,
For me those that have been boys and that love women,
For me the man that is proud and feels how it stings to be
slighted
For me the sweet-heart and the old maid, for me mothers and
the mothers of mothers,
For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,
For me children and the begetters of children.

The difference is (and this too is curiously brought out in the technique) that Lawrence is more delicate, more sensitive, more personal. He deliberately narrows his range, to embrace only life and his own life in particular. Unlike Whitman, he has a horror of the infinite, and I am sure that he could never bring himself to 'utter the word Democracy, the word *en-masse*'. He is an aristocrat, an individualist, and indeed, he has only a horror of the collective mass of mankind, which he sees (and in this case, he sees more clearly than Whitman) to have been always conservative, conventional, timid, and persecutors of genius. In fact, the only similarity is, that both he and Whitman are preachers of new gospels, and therefore are obliged to adopt a similar tone of oratory in their work.

For this reason, Lawrence in his best poetry is unquotable, as is the case with all poets who depend rather on the extension of emotion, than on its minute concentration. But now and again he produces something that seems to transform all the poetry now written in English into mere prettiness and feebleness, so strong is the power with which his imagination pierces its subject. Such a poem, for example is the one called 'The Sea'. I have space for only its last magnificent stanza:

You who take the moon as in a sieve, and sift
Her flake by flake and spread her meaning out;
You who roll the stars like jewels in your palm,
So that they seem to utter themselves aloud;

You who steep from out the days their colour,
Reveal the universal tint that dyes
Their web; who shadow the sun's great gestures and expressions
So that he seems a stranger in his passing;
Who voice the dumb night fittingly:
Sea, you shadow of all things, now mock us to death with your shadowing.

The man who wrote this, and many other passages in this volume, has at last arrived at this maturity – the maturity of the creative artist who is able to grasp a subject through its external aspect and internal meaning simultaneously, and to express both aspects in conjunction, before the subject is laid aside.

A New English Poet

Amy Lowell

(*New York Times Book Review*, 20 April 1919)

When one comes to think of it, the bringing over of the work of the writers of one country to another is determined in a singularly haphazard manner. As kissing goes by favor, so does this transatlantic transplanting. A publisher naturally issues what will please him, or what he fondly imagines will please his public. He stands, therefore, to this public in somewhat the position of a schoolmaster. It is, after all, a sort of course of prescribed reading to which the general reader has access, and much that he might like to read he has no opportunity even to see, because, for one reason or another, the books have not been published in this country.

We in America, know a certain section of English poetry well. Not to speak of the established names like Yeats and Masefield, or even of Rupert Brooke, we have become familiar with the poems of Walter de la Mare, of Siegfried Sassoon, of Francis Ledwidge, of Walter Gibson. We may think we are aware of all the divagations of modern English poetry, particularly if our knowledge include the work of such men as Richard Aldington or Ralph Hodgson, but it is ten to one that most of us are ignorant of some poet of whom his countrymen think highly, but whom the accident of non-publication has kept from our knowledge. So true is this, that it is only very recently that the American reader has had a chance to read and know the work of a man who has attained a considerable fame in England even before the war. The man is D. H. Lawrence, novelist and poet.

It would be unfair not to acknowledge that some of Mr Lawrence's books were issued in this country shortly after their publication in England. His greatest novel, 'Sons and Lovers,' although it never attained quite the recognition here that it did in England, was by no means ignored, and this is also true of his play 'The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd'. But the man is not only dramatist and novel-writer, he is poet as well, having no less than four volumes to his credit. The first, 'Love Poems and Others', bears the American imprint of Mitchell Kennerly; the second, 'Amores', was published by B. W. Huebsch; the last, 'New Poems', has only just

appeared in London and it is too soon to look for it here; but the third book, 'Look! We Have Come Through!' has just been issued, again from the presses of Mr B. W. Huebsch, who deserves greatly to be congratulated on his perspicacity in realizing its remarkable beauty and strength and making himself its American sponsor.

It would be interesting to American readers to learn something of a man who has made no little stir in England, and of whom Henry James thought well enough to consider among the very small handful of young writers whose works he analyses in his essay 'The New Novel' in 'Notes on Novelties'. Mr Lawrence is more widely known as a novelist than as a poet; and no summary of his work can be complete which does not include both sides of his talent. But it is with his poetry that I am concerned at the moment, and particularly with 'Look! We Have Come Through!' although I shall give a few illustrations of his original peculiarities of style from the earlier books.

I know very little about Mr Lawrence's life, a few facts merely. He is the descendent of a Huguenot family who fled the persecutions in France and settled in the Northern manufacturing district of England. His father was a miner, and I have reason to believe that his novel 'Sons and Lovers' is largely autobiographical. He won various scholarships at school, and his literary bent led him to become a schoolmaster. His first novel, 'The White Peacock', issued in 1911, gained him immediate recognition; and shortly afterwards, in 1912, the appearance of 'The Trespasser' deepened the impression made by the earlier book. Literature seemed to offer a promising career, and he gave up teaching school. The high-water mark of his reputation was reached on the publication of 'Sons and Lovers,' in 1913.

I do not know whether it was before or after the appearance of this latter book that his health broke down, but about this time he was obliged to seek a milder climate, and went to Italy.

The outbreak of the war found him on a summer visit to England, and it was impossible to return. His health was in so precarious a state that there was no question of the army. Since 1914 he has lived in England, writing constantly. Three volumes of poems, two novels, and a book of Italian sketches have come from his pen in the last four years.

Mr Lawrence has thrown a gallant gauntlet to Fate and with a smile, caught perhaps from his unflinching Huguenot ancestors.

Mr Lawrence and his style are both perfectly original and per-

fectly sincere. He has no prototype that I can find. He is a poet of sensation, but of sensation as the bodily efflorescence of a spiritual growth. Other poets have given us sensuous images; other poets have spoken of love chiefly as desire; but in no other poet does desire seem so surely the 'outward and visible form of an inward and spiritual grace.' Mr Lawrence does not do this by obscuring passion in a poetical subterfuge, he gives the naked desire as it is; but so tuned is his mind that it is always the soul made visible in a supreme moment. In the last two stanzas of 'Lilies in the Fire,' he says:

> With the swiftest fire of my love, you are destroyed.
> 'Tis degradation deep to me, that my best
> Soul's whitest lightning which should bright attest
> God stepping down to earth in one white stride,
>
> Means only to you a clogged, numb burden of flesh
> Heavy to bear, even heavy to uprear
> Again from earth, like lilies wilted sere
> Flagged on the floor, that before stood up so fresh.

Mr Lawrence has been spoken of as an erotic poet, and that is true, but it is only one half of the truth; for his eroticism leans always to the mystic something of which it is an evidence. Not to understand this is to fail completely to comprehend the whole meaning of his work.

I shall come back to it presently in speaking of his last book, but now I want to turn for a moment to other sides of his genius, for I do not hesitate to declare Mr Lawrence to be a man of genius. He does not quite get his genius into harness, the cart of his work frequently overturns or goes awry, but it is no less Pegasus who draws it, even if Mr Lawrence is not yet an entirely proficient charioteer.

Professor Lowes once employed a happy phrase of George Meredith's to describe the Imagists. It was: 'Men lying on their backs, flying imagination like a kite'. Mr Lawrence possesses a soaring kite, and all nature lets loose the string. Let me take a few lines at random from various poems which show how truly he possesses the poet's twin gifts of sight and expression:

> The morning breaks like a pomegranate

In a shining crack of red.
. . . . . .
. . . the festoon
Of the sky sagged dusty as a spider cloth,
And coldness clogged the sea. [. . .]

Those are evidences of visual imagination; now let us see how he manages auditory:

The moon-mist is over the village, out of the mist speaks
the bell,
And all the little roofs of the village bow low, pitiful,
beseeching, resigned:
Oh, little home, what is it I have not done well?
Ah, suddenly I love you,
As I hear the sharp clear trot of a pony down the road,
Succeeding sharp little sounds dropping into silence,
Clear upon the long-drawn hoarseness of a train down the
valley.

Notice how well the first lines give the stillness, the hush of a quiet night, and how suddenly it is shattered by the quick beating of the pony's hoofs.

Mr Lawrence is also the possessor of a most vivid color sense, witness this little piece:

The dawn was apple-green
The sky was green wine held up in the sun,
The moon was a golden petal between.

She opened her eyes, and green
They shone, clear like flowers undone
For the first time, now for the first time seen. ['GREEN']

That poem will show Mr Lawrence's original blending of free rhythms with metrical form. He seldom writes *vers libre*, although in 'Look! We Have Come Through!' he seems to be leaning more towards it, but this poetry which the pedants say 'will not scan' is almost as much of a distinct form. In other hands, I fear the results would be excruciating; in Mr Lawrence's, some happy instinct causes the jars in the metre to become an added beauty.

This queer use of metrical verse may almost be styled an invention, but one feels that it came to Mr Lawrence inevitably, while he was pursuing something else, for there never was a poet more bent upon saying things, and less concerned with mere beauty of trapping. This beauty, which he has in abundance, is innate.

Mr. Lawrence makes no compromise with stark and violent truth. He sees life as a war between the dull and the visionary. Here are two characters. They love, but cannot understand each the other; it is a theme he comes back to again and again.

FIREFLIES IN THE CORN

A Woman taunts her Lover

> Look at the little darlings in the corn!
> The rye is taller than you, who think yourself
> So high and mighty: look how its heads are borne
> Dark and proud in the sky, like a number of knights
> Passing with spears and pennants and manly scorn. [. . .]

The Man answers and she mocks

> You're a fool, woman. I love you and you know I do!
> – Lord, take his love away, it makes him whine.
> And I give you everything that you want me to.
> – Lord, dear Lord, do you think he ever *can* shine?

'Look! We Have Come Through!' is an amazing book. It is to my mind a greater novel even than 'Sons and Lovers', for all that it is written in a rather disconnected series of poems. The 'Foreword' and the 'Argument' tell the story:

FOREWORD

> These poems should not be considered separately, as so many single pieces. They are intended as an essential story, or history, or confession, unfolding one from the other in organic development, the whole revealing the intrinsic experience of a man during the crisis of manhood, when he marries and comes into himself. The period covered is, roughly, the sixth lustre of a man's life.

ARGUMENT

After much struggling and loss in love and in the world of man, the protagonist throws in his lot with a woman who is already married. Together they go into another country, she perforce leaving her children behind. The conflict of love and hate goes on between the man and the woman, and between these two and the world around them, till it reaches some sort of conclusion, they transcend into some condition of blessedness.

Beautiful as the individual poems are, it is only when one reads the book from the first page to the last that one realizes the extraordinary truth, the naked simplicity and vigour, of it. I dislike the expression 'human document', it is so often employed to designate vulgar outpourings of no real merit, but if we forget its abuse for a moment, this is the only term to apply to Mr Lawrence's book. It is sorrow made flesh. It is courage 'coming through.' It is illusion, disillusion, mounting at last to vision, to a humble, even a grateful, acceptance of life. [. . .] It is difficult to analyse dispassionately the poetry in a volume so full of travail. The bitterness, the anguish, the hard clarity, of the revelation all disarm us. The poems are born in a rush of passionate eloquence, and they are poetry because the man who wrote them is a poet, not because he has been at pains to make them so.

As a book, the volume is a masterpiece; as poetry, perhaps it is not quite that. Art is not raw fact. Poetry cannot rise into its rightful being as the highest of all arts if it be tied down to the coarse material of bald, even if impassioned, truth. Truth has its own beauty, but it is not the beauty of poetry. In the greatest poets, the two go, or seem to go, hand in hand, for the highest poetry is also the most simple. Sappho's "I loved you once, Atthis" gives us this shock of poetry and truth in one. Dante, Shakespeare, have no fear of losing passion by transmuting it into poetry. In Mr Lawrence's case, the God-given spark of poetry in the man often saves him, and yet, as poetry, the volume fails by a too loud insistence upon one thing, by an almost neurotic beating, beating, upon the same tortured note. It is not because the effect of the volume is over-sensual, for we have seen how Mr Lawrence regards the sensual; it is because of the way in which it is done. 'Look! We Have Come Through!' is all the more a 'human docu-

ment,' perhaps it is unbalanced; but on that very account it falls short of being the immortal poetry it might have been.

Yet, after all, who are we to say what is or what is not 'immortal'? Mr. Lawrence, in spite of his inclusion in the Imagist Anthologies, cannot be confined within the boundaries of any school. His is realism, but not the realism of Masefield or Gibson; his is romance, but not the romance of de la Mare or James Stephens; his is simplicity, but scarcely that charming *fausse naïveté* of Hodgson; his is the nature and flowers and fields, but not the nature of Siegfried Sassoon. He is neither worldling nor rustic. He has none of the weary culture of Rupert Brooke, nor has he the cosmopolitan tolerance of James Elroy Flecker. He sounds an original note in English poetry, and is unconcerned with his originality. So occupied is he to express what is in him that his manner is inevitable. He studies no tricks of difference, he simply is different. Sincere, loyal, serious, strong, permeated with beauty, scored upon by tragedy, he is himself and no other. We may like him or dislike him, but we cannot ignore him if we would know the full circle of English poetry today.

MR D. H. LAWRENCE

Arthur Waugh

(From *Studies in Contemporary English Literature*, 1919)

The modern conception of poetry is so astonishingly different from the conception, for example, of the last generation before our own, that it is worth while to take stock of the situation now and again, and to try to get some clear notion of the direction in which we are drifting. Changes there must be, of course; and the critic who withstands change for its own sake is self-condemned already. But in the realm of the arts there are certain fixed principles which have survived all the vagaries of fashion; and work which has defied those principles has never lasted. Novelty and audacity attract their momentary public; but novelty is soon stale, and audacity has an awkward way of petering out into impertinence. It is a good thing to overhaul our equipment from time to time, and to refer it by comparison to those irrefutable truths upon which all sincere art must be grounded.

Some such comparison seems to be particularly invited in the case of the poetry of Mr D. H. Lawrence. It would appear that the newest school of criticism is in no sort of doubt about the quality of his performance; he can point to a glittering consensus of eulogy from the Press; and he has been admitted into that privileged circle of Georgian Poetry which issues crowned with the imprimatur of the Poetry Bookshop. And yet, surely, even those who are most completely dazzled by the novelty of his work must admit that Mr Lawrence's verse is of a kind which, before the coming of the most recent impressionist movement in letters, not gods, nor men, nor booksellers have ever recognised under the name of poetry. Much controversy, of course, has raged from time immemorial around the limits of the poet's art; and (to go no further back than our own time), since the experiments of Robert Browning were recognised at their true value, the boundaries of poetry have been perpetually enlarged. But two essentials have hitherto been required inexorably of the poet: it has been demanded of him that his work should be dominated by an idea, and that the idea should be expressed in terms of technical beauty. Without an animating idea a poem drifts away into a mist of words: without beauty, alike of vision and of

melody, the form of the expression degenerates into mere rhetoric. All the great poetry in all languages will be found to base its claim upon these two qualities: it has survived by virtue of the ideas that it expresses, and by the perfect beauty of the expression in which those ideas are embodied and translated into words.

Mr Lawrence, on the contrary, is a typical representative of a literary movement which deliberately eschews these qualities. He is concerned not with ideas but with moods, while the object of his art is to express those moods with as much vivid actuality as he can cram into metrical form, without regard for the restraints or responsibilities of prosody or technique. If the metre will hold the bubbling mood within its cup, all well and good; but if the mood runs over the metre's brim — never mind, let it go; the one thing needful is to keep the realism of the passionate moment intact. So you write like this, and impressionism is held justified of its effect:

> Into a deep pond, an old sheep-dip
> Dark, overgrown with willows, cool, with the brook
> ebbing through so slow,
> Naked on the steep, soft lip
> Of the bank I stand watching my own white shadow
> quivering to and fro.
>
> What if the gorse flowers shrivelled and kissing were
> lost?
> Without the pulsing waters, where were the marigolds
> and the songs of the brook?
> If my veins and my breasts with love embossed
> Withered, my insolent soul would be gone like flowers
> that the hot wind took.

And you make no trouble about a clash of discordant consonants:

> Though her kiss betrays to me this, this only
> Consolation, that in her lips her blood at climax clips
> Two wild, dumb paws in anguish on the lonely
> Fruit of my heart, ere down, rebuked, it slips.

And if a Cockney rhyme falls easily into its place, you leave that standing also:

Over the nearness of Norwood Hill, through the mellow veil
Of the afternoon glows to me the old romance of David and Dora,
With the old, sweet, soothing tears, and laughter that shakes the sail
Of the ship of the souls over seas where dreamed dreams lure the unoceaned explorer.

It was not so that they sang in the golden days, when Plancus was consul; but Plancus himself, no doubt, is out of date to-day, and the new impressionism aims rather at violent effect than at charmed and charming minstrelsy. Mr Lawrence is only too wisely aware that his audacities will shock convention, and forestalls the criticism in a pungent quatrain:

Ah, my darling, when over the purple horizon shall loom
The shrouded mother of a new idea, men hide their faces,
Cry out, and fend her off, as she seeks her procreant groom,
Wounding themselves against her, denying her fecund embraces.

Let us, then, at any rate not hide our faces; but do our best to follow the "shrouded mother" to the secret nuptials of mood and expression. It is not always an easy path, for the poet's method (as perhaps our quotations have already suggested) is congenitally obscure and murky. Nevertheless, by degrees a certain recognisable scheme appears to emerge from the tangle of Mr Lawrence's over-heated phrase-making, and that scheme is evidently deliberate and purposeful.

The principle of Mr Lawrence's poetry, then (as it seems to one sincere, if somewhat uninitiated reader), is the exposition in high light of a momentary mood, preferably sensuous, expressed in glowing terms of an elaborately-wrought symbolism of the senses. As the nature-poets of the nineteenth century represented the heaven and earth as sharing in the emotions of humanity, and so set their pictures in a harmonious environment of storm and sunlight; so Mr Lawrence, allowing his imagination freer rein,

conceives the whole natural world as a passionate allegory of human desire, human satisfaction, and human satiety. This world of emotion is physical, not spiritual. The very flowers, in a riot of suggestion, tempt the lover to the gratification of his desire; the roving bee is a profligate ravisher of innocence. The earth is full of hidden imagery, and its apparent peace is tortured by secret sensuality:

> You amid the bog-end's yellow incantation,
> You sitting in the cowslips of the meadow above,
> Me, your shadow on the bog-flame, flowery may-blobs,
> Me full length in the cowslips, muttering you love;
> You, your soul like a lady-smock, lost, evanescent,
> You with your face all rich, like the sheen of a dove.

And again:

> Ah, love, with your rich, warm face aglow,
> What sudden expectation opens you
> So wide as you watch the catkins blow
> Their dust from the birch on the blue
> Lift of the pulsing wind — ah, tell me you know
>
> Ah, surely! Ah, sure from the golden sun
> A quickening, masculine gleam floats in to all
> Us creatures, people and flowers undone,
> Lying open under his thrall,
> As he begets the year in us. What then, would you shun?

The entire firmament is summoned to assist the lover in his wooing; and virgin youth is displayed as a tossing torrent of "urgent, passionate waves," where "docile, fluent arms" knot themselves "with wild strength to clasp" the imagined nymph; where the body is all a "wild strange tyranny," and the eyes reassert themselves with difficulty in "relentless nodality." It will be conceived that this riotous symbolism can soon become uncommonly sultry; indeed, if there is a more suggestive poem in the English language than "Snapdragon," we should be sorry to be set the task of unravelling its allegory.

Well, what are we to make of it all? For Mr Lawrence is clearly

not a writer to be dismissed in a flash of quotation. He has caught the ear of critics who demand respect. He has an overwrought, perverted, but very powerful imagination. You may not like him, but you cannot deny that he cuts into your perception. His lack of taste may revolt you, but he hits his mark. He is not negligible, though you may confess that there are times when his fancy seems little less than disgusting. He can write, undoubtedly: but does he write poetry? If so, it is certainly a sort of poetry that runs upon entirely different lines from all the proved traditions of the past. Technically, it is at intervals only a little less inchoate than Walt Whitman, and in expression it is invariably much more nebulous. The poet indulges his symbolism until it becomes his master; his fecund fancy overwhelms him, like the serpents of Laocoön. He is perpetually struggling with his own wilful and contorted metaphors. Almost every verse that he writes requires to be read more than once, before its meaning takes definite shape in the mind; and by dropping the connecting links of his thought, in a sort of post-Browningesque obliquity, he is apt to render confusion doubly confounded. Worst of all, he does outrageous violence to Nature, by dragging her beauties into a sort of guilty condonation of the excesses of his imagination; he is not ashamed to ravish the goddess Flora in sudden spasms of a tortured imagery. What Mr Lawrence's art stands most desperately in need of is a shower-bath of vital ideas. At present his fancy is half asleep upon a foetid hot-bed of moods. It is a vigorous, masculine fancy, but it seems to have got into bad company, and to have been left deserted on a midden. Perhaps some vivifying, ennobling, human experience will yet help it to save its soul alive.

D. H. Lawrence

Harold Monro

(From *Some Contemporary Poets*, 1920)

The figure of D. H. LAWRENCE presents a picture of the power of intellect grappling with the idea of sense. His poetry is competent but wearisome. Has he then loved so much and so often? Has woman no beauty but that which can be perceived through the horn-rimmed spectacles of sex?

> Patience, little Heart
> One day a heavy, June-hot woman
> Will enter and shut the door to stay.

But meanwhile: –

> My mouth on her pulsing
> Neck was found,
> And my breast to her beating
> Breast was bound.

and –

> How caressingly she lays her hand on my knee,
> How strangely she tries to disown it, as it sinks
> In my flesh and bone and forages into me,
> How it stirs like a subtle stoat, whatever she thinks!

Swinburne's sensuality was subject to his art. Lawrence has but little power to transmute his feelings, and writes almost entirely in the first person singular. He has neither the eloquence of the courtier, nor the open exuberance of the healthy lover.

He has descriptive powers, of course, but his verse never settles down to any subject. Things outside himself are only beautiful as symbols of his own sexual emotions. Natural beauty is relentlessly dragged down into the hot chamber of the human senses. His rhythms waver, stutter, and often evaporate, for his intellect cannot control them. Yet: –

Bitter, to fold the issue, and make no sally;
To have the mystery, but not go forth;
To bear, but retaliate nothing, given to save
To spark in storms of corrosion, as seeds from the north.

"Cruelty and Love" is one of his most objective poems. Here he has cast the *ego* into a scene of dramatic significance. There is a curious relation between this poem and Charlotte Mew's "Farmer's Bride."

I only know I let him finger there
My pulse of life, letting him nose like a stoat
Who sniffs with joy before he drinks the blood:
And down his mouth comes to my mouth, and down
His dark bright eyes descend like a fiery hood
Upon my mind: his mouth meets mine, and a flood
Of sweet fire sweeps across me, so I drown
Within him, die, and find death good.

In his youth apparently D. H. Lawrence was a schoolmaster. It was full of weariness to him: –

For myself a heap of ashes of weariness, till sleep
Shall have raked the embers clear: I will keep
Some of my strength for myself, for if I should sell
It all for them, I should hate them –
– I will sit and wait for the bell.

He wrote a series of country poems, and it is noticeable that in a dialect medium his intense egoism disappears almost entirely. In a recent poem he asks: –

Have I profaned some female mystery, orgies
Black and phantasmal?

Egoism is diminishing too in his later poems, but its absence leaves them deprived of much of their force:

Perhaps 'twas a dream of warning,
For I've lost my peace.

When his senses are not roused he records events that are often not worth the record. The intellectually "Chosen" of this earth adore their Lawrence. Fundamentally they are right. He has himself a brilliant intellect. Their adoration is based on root fact: these comments refer to the taste of fruit.

A Background for Contemporary Poetry

I. A. Richards

(*The Criterion*, July 1925)

[. . .] Mr Yeats and Mr Lawrence present two further ways of dodging those difficulties which come from being born into this generation rather than into some earlier age. Mr de la Mare takes shelter in the dream-world of the child, Mr Yeats retires into black velvet curtains and the visions of the Hermetist, and Mr Lawrence makes a magnificent attempt to reconstruct in himself the mentality of the Bushman. There are other modes of escape open to the poet. Mr Blunden, to name one other poet only, goes into the country, but few follow him there in his spirit, whereas Mr Yeats and Mr Lawrence, whether they are widely read or not, do represent tendencies among the defeated which are only too easily observable. [. . .]

The resort to trance, and the effort to discover a new world-picture to replace that given by science are the most significant points for our purpose in Mr Yeats's work. A third might be the singularly bitter contempt for the generality of mankind which occasionally appears.

The doctrinal problem arises again, but in a clearer form with Mr Lawrence. But here (Mr Yeats's promised treatise on the state of the soul has not yet appeared) we have the advantage of an elaborate prose exposition, *Phantasia of the Unconscious*, of the positions which so many of the poems advocate. It is not unfair to put the matter in this way, since there is little doubt possible that the bulk of Mr Lawrence's published verse is prose, scientific prose too, jottings, in fact, from a psychologist's notebook, with a commentary interspersed. Due allowance being made for the extreme psychological interest of these observations, there remains the task of explaining how a poet, who has shown himself sometimes, as in the *Ballad of Another Ophelia* and *Aware*, to possess such remarkable gifts, should have wandered, through his own zeal misdirected, so far from the paths which once appeared to be his alone to open.

Mr Lawrence's revolt against civilization seems to have been originally spontaneous, an emotional revulsion free from *ad hoc* beliefs. It sprang directly from experience. He abhorred the atti-

tudes men adopt, not through the direct prompting of their instincts, but because of the supposed nature of the objects to which they are directed. The conventions, the idealisations, which come between man and man and between man and woman, which often queer the pitch for the natural responses, seemed to him the source of all evil. Part of his revolt was certainly justified. These idealisations – representative examples are the dogma of the equality of man and the doctrine that Love is primarily sympathy – are beliefs illicitly interpolated in order to support and strengthen attitudes in the manner discussed at length above. Mr. Lawrence's original rejection, of a not self-supporting morality based upon beliefs, makes his work an admirable illustration of my main thesis. But two simple and avoidable mistakes deprived his revolt of the greater part of its value. He overlooked the fact that such beliefs commonly arise because the attitudes they support are already existent. He assumed that a bad basis for an attitude meant a bad attitude. In general, it does mean a forced attitude, but that is another matter. Secondly, he tried to cure the disease by introducing other beliefs of his own manufacture in place of the conventional beliefs and in support of very different attitudes.

The genesis of these beliefs is extremely interesting as an illustration of primitive mentality. Since the attitudes on which he fell back are those of a very early stage of human development, it is not surprising that the means by which he has supported them should be of the same era, or that the world-picture which he has worked out should be similar to that described in *The Golden Bough*. The mental process at work is schematically as follows: First, undergo an intense emotion, located with unusual definiteness in the body, which can be described as "a feeling *as though* the solar plexus were connected by a current of dark passional energy with another person." Those whose emotions tend to be localised will be familiar with such feelings. The next step is to say "I must trust my feelings." The next is to call the feeling an intuition. The last is to say "*I know* that my solar plexus, etc." By this means we arrive at indubitable knowledge that the sun's energy is recruited from the life on the earth and that the astronomers are wrong in what they say about the moon, and so on.

The illicit steps in the argument are not quite so evident as they appear to be in this analysis. To distinguish an intuition *of* an emotion from an intuition *by* it is not always easy, nor is a description of an emotion always in practice distinguishable from an

emotion. Certainly we must trust our feelings – in the sense of acting upon them. We have nothing else to trust. And to confuse this trusting with believing an emotive description of them is a mistake which thinkers of Mr Lawrence's school are unfortunately not alone in making.

The significance of such similar disasters in the work of poets so unlike and yet so greatly gifted as Mr Yeats and Mr Lawrence is noteworthy. For each the traditional scaffolding of conventional beliefs has proved unsatisfying, unworkable as a basis for their attitudes. Each has sought, in very different directions it is true, a new set of beliefs as a remedy. For neither has the world-picture of science seemed a possible substitute. And neither seems to have envisaged the possibility of a poetry which was independent of all beliefs, probably because, however much they differ, both are very serious poets. A great deal of poetry can, of course, be written for which total independence of all beliefs is an easy matter. But it is never poetry of the more important kind, because the temptation to introduce beliefs is a sign and measure of the importance of the attitudes involved. At present it is not primarily religious beliefs, in the stricter sense of the word, which are most likely to be concerned. Emphases alter surprisingly. University societies founded fifteen years ago, for example, to discuss religion, are usually found to be discussing sex to-day. And serious love poetry, which is independent of beliefs of one kind or another, traditional or eccentric, is extremely rare.

Yet the necessity for independence is increasing. This is not to say that traditional poetry, into which beliefs readily enter, is becoming obsolete; it is merely becoming more and more difficult to approach without confusion; it demands a greater imaginative effort. A poet to-day, whose integrity is equal to that of the greater poets of the past, is inevitably plagued by the problem of thought and feeling as poets have never been plagued before. Mr. Lawrence is probably not the last poet who will go astray through mistakes as to their natural relations.

D. H. Lawrence as Poet

Richard Aldington

(*Saturday Review of Literature*, 1 May 1926)

If a difficult problem were being set for what Mr Bennet calls the 'young aspirant' in criticism, there could scarcely be found a better topic than Mr D. H. Lawrence. He is not the sort of man who becomes master of Balliol or an Oracle to thoughtful, cautious *rentiers*. His personality is abrupt, independent, and unreliable. His writings are full of faults and also of possible qualities. You can dislike him irrelevantly, or because you have the Anglo-Saxon complex about sexual matters or because you share the pedant's follies about correctness and 'models' or because you hate a man with a red beard. You may like him equally irrelevantly, because you share his lust for metaphysics, or because you think he has a working hypothesis of Love and Hate, or because he was stupidly persecuted during the war. But the point I wish to make about Mr Lawrence's work in general, and his poetry in particular, is simply this; he is a great artist in words. And he is an artist almost unconsciously, certainly without troubling about it. To me it is a matter of indifference whether Mr Lawrence's philosophical and psychological notions are accurate and original or not. (Who wants to argue Dante's theology or Tasso's history?) What I seek in poetry is poetry. In some of Mr Lawrence's free verse I seem to find it.

Like many writers of wayward and independent genius, Mr Lawrence has been more influenced by contemporaries – often far less gifted – than his professed admirers would admit. Take his three salient books of poetry, *Amores, Look! We Have Come Through!* and *Birds Beasts and Flowers*. The first is not a little Georgian; the second shows the influence of the Imagists; the third of the modern Americans. A tendency to redundant and merely decorative language in the first book is purged away in the next, which shows a tight discipline, and this is abandoned in turn for a reckless liberty and colloquialism in the last. But, in a larger sense, these are mere accidents of form, and are more interesting to other poets than to the public. The permanent interest of Mr Lawrence's poetry lies in his essentially poetical way of seeing and feeling.

That poetic mind is startlingly present in his novels. Even the preface to the 'M. M.' book contains that marvellous evocation of the Italian hill monastery; even the *Dial* articles gave us the vivid and penetrating dance of the Indians. These things live in one's mind with a special vitality of impression given us only by great poetry. And the wonderful thing is that this is given us, not by some long dead and consecrated master, but by a living man who has passed through the same great events as ourselves, whose work, therefore, has a peculiar poignancy and meaning for us, such as it will never have for the future which can only make up in reverence for prestige what we gain from intimacy and sympathy.

In judging poetry, remember Schlegel's 'Internal excellence is alone decisive', and 'there is no monopoly of poetry for particular ages and nations'. What is it one admires in Mr Lawrence's poetry? It seems to me he is one of the small number of men who think, feel, and live for themselves, a man intensely alert to the life of the senses and the mind, whose great purpose and pleasure are the explanation of himself and the universe. Add to this the talent for conveying these discoveries in poetic symbols. Mr. Lawrence lives poetically. I don't mean that he dresses a part or is languishing or literary or any of the stock libels of the ignorant; I mean that he apprehends the world directly by images. How useless is the discussion about Mr Lawrence's 'attitudes', and whether he has taken the wrong or the right philosophical path! *D'abord il faut être poete.* And a poet is the antithesis of the English gentleman, educated or the reverse. In our society, and in all over-organized societies, poetry either droops heavily and wearily or dances and giggles politely, or the poet becomes an outcast. Even Voltaire was an outcast in an unpoetical society. For it is the glory of a poet like Mr Lawrence that he does not accept a ready-made existence, that he scorns futile social laws, amusements, behaviour, all herd-suggestions, and tastes the dangerous voluptuousness of living.

Take Mr Lawrence's poems and observe how absolutely free his mind and body are; his revolt against stale, tame lives is perhaps too vehement and scornful, but how comprehensible! See the pallid senses, the cautious, confined spiritual and mental life of our tame intellectuals and *arrivistes*, and then observe the sensual richness, the emotional variety, of Mr Lawrence. 'Better to see straight on a pound a week, than squint on a million,' said Mr G. B. Shaw; and better, how much better, to starve and suffer and endure pangs of intolerable pleasure and bitter disappointment

and ecstasies for the love of beauty with Lawrence, an outcast, a wanderer, than to live in the dull monotony of comfort. 'The world's good word, the Institute!' All that a man like Lawrence asks of the world is to be left alone; it is all the world can do for him.

Now that ecstasy for life and beauty blows through Mr Lawrence, as he says, 'like a fine wind', and he has an almost mystic sense of loyalty to his talent:

> If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!
> If only I am sensitive, subtle, oh, delicate, a winged gift! [. . .]

'Sensitive, subtle, delicate!, these Mr Lawrence is indeed in his poetry, though he has other and uglier moods, the worst of which is the poetical equivalent to that little mocking titter of his – a useful thing, though, to keep him hard and unsentimental. Perhaps that sense of mockery has been as valuable as his fearlessness in exploring and expressing a whole country of emotions into which nearly all contemporary English poets are afraid to penetrate. They are eaten up with the disease of self-love and respectability. Mr Lawrence is a poet as untrammelled as an Elizabethan. To me he seems one of the last authentic voices of the great but decaying English people. Angry revolt against the grey, servile, querulous, futile, base personalities of the world, stabs Mr Lawrence to almost hysterical denunciation:

> I long to see its chock-full crowdedness
> And glutted squirming populousness on fire
> Like a field of filthy weeds
> Burnt back to ash,
> And then to see the new, real souls sprout up.

I do not think that Mr Lawrence is at his best in such passages, but they have a sinister significance for those who understand the meaning of poetry in human life. It should be sinister, at least for the modern society to know that its best poets despair of it utterly, as they do. Life, said Marcus Aurelius, may be lived well even in a palace; but in a ruthless, mechanistic commercialism—? If the poetry of D. H. Lawrence is largely a revolt, it is a revolt against a non-human scale of values.

The Poems of D. H. Lawrence

John Middleton Murry

(*The New Adelphi*, December 1928)

Mr Lawrence has done his readers the service of arranging his poems in a time sequence; and he has re-written some of the early ones. The result is prodigiously impressive. If the best work of all his contemporary poets were pooled, it could not make up a book so manifestly the work of genius as the first of these volumes. The second is different: there is a change of some sort. There are, in it, magnificent, lovely, disturbing poems; but something has been lost. A hard, bleak quality of dogmatic asseveration creeps in. The extraordinary richness of Mr Lawrence's experiencing nature is curbed and straitened. He is rigid, where he was flexible: poetry gives way to prophecy. And we seem to see behind his second volume a figure of a gaunt John the Baptist, threatening woe.

We do not pretend to understand change. It is beyond us, as Mr Lawrence himself is beyond us. No such astonishing elemental force has burst into literature since – but since whom? To Whitman, perhaps. But he is more *different* than Whitman ever was. He is like a creature of another kind than ours, some lovely unknown animal with the gift of speech. With a strange sixth sense he explores this world of ours, first revealing wonders, then discovering horrors. He moves us to the depths, stirs old memories from slumber. All this at first he does unconsciously; he pours out the treasure of his unparalleled sense of experience before us in his first volume. We gasp and try to receive them. But, alas, we do not know what to do with them. We cannot look upon them and say "How Beautiful!" There is something terribly intimate in this gift of his. There is a fearful demand behind it all. "Feel like this!" it commands and implores. And, for the moment, we do not feel like that; but when the actual communication is over, we lapse back into what we were. From these wonderful poems we retain only the memory of sensation. In order to comprehend them we had to achieve nothing in ourselves: they were given, royally given. But we are not the richer, because we cannot keep hold of the gift.

The distinction is hard to make, and some exaggeration is inevitable if it is to be made at all. But, perhaps, it may be conveyed by

contrast. Keats described poetry "as a wording of our highest thoughts," which "should come to us almost as a remembrance." The definition seems, from experience, to be a true one. Mr Lawrence's poetry will not come under it at all. Not that it *fails* to satisfy the definition. Mr Lawrence's poetry fails in nothing. It is simply a different kind of poetry altogether. It arouses no conquest in ourselves, and leaves no peace: only an almost unbearable excitement, and afterwards a devouring and intolerable sense of pain. We cannot feel like that. Perhaps we ought to be like that. Who can say? But we are not, and never can be, like that. And we are many and he is one. Our sense of pain, therefore, is ultimately for him. How wonderful, but how fearful, is this uniqueness!

Once having felt it, we know that a final isolation is inevitable for him. Perhaps there was a way by which he could have reduced himself to our measure, and taken on our humanity. There are moments when his appeal to us is that of an exquisite and perfect tenderness. A passion of sheer love (like lightning in the collied night) will flame out even to the last. The poem to the baby tortoise towards the end of the second volume:

> Alone, small insect,
> Tiny bright eye,
> Slow one

is lovely with a passion that all the sons of women have it in them to understand. It is the same passionate tenderness that thrills in *The Virgin Mother* in the earlier volume; but we feel now that Mr Lawrence would not allow himself to feel it any more, save for a tortoise or a snake, or, as in almost the last of his poems, *Spirits Summoned West*, for women remote in space and time. He will stand to the world as Spinoza did to God; love it only when it cannot love him in return. He hates love — has he not told us again and again? — but there are flashes enough in his latest poems to warn us that this victory over love that he has won is perilously like a violation of his own nature. We others can love in safety, for our capacity in the kind at best is small. But his receiveth as the sea; it might have shaken the universe.

He fled the danger and stamped on the impulse. He withdrew into his inviolable otherness. For him there was no middle way: either to love everything or to love nothing. We have no temptation to love everything – it needs a vision we do not possess. And

because we are incapable of loving everything, we are incapable also of loving nothing. We strive and weep for "the poor thing, but mine own"; and Mr Lawrence loathes us for it. We are the Laodiceans and he spews us out of his mouth. We understand the verdict; he has seen us in our nakedness, as the little boy the Emperor, and we are not lovely. But we cannot help it, though Mr Lawrence believes we can. Nature is a mother to one man, and a stepmother to the million. Mr Lawrence did not win or conquer his sixth sense; it was given him, and it was denied to us. He has no right to turn upon us and curse us because we are not as he. Other prophets have held out to us the hope of a rebirth we might achieve; Mr Lawrence demands only that we should enter the womb of Nature once more. It is impossible, and he is wrong to require it. Let him curse us for failing to be what we might be, not for failing to be what was never in our power to become.

Is a shepherd angry with his sheep because they follow one another through a gap in the hedge? If he is, he is no shepherd, but a fool. There is a point at which Mr Lawrence's wisdom seems to us absolute foolishness – a repudiation of the nature of things. Perhaps, because he understands us so deeply, he understands us not at all. Perhaps he understands only that in ourselves which we do not understand; and does not understand what we do. How often when we have emerged from the thick warm spell of one of his novels, have we said to ourselves: "But then men and women are not *like* that." That element is there, no doubt, and we have forgotten it; and it is right that we should be reminded, and it would be happy for us if we could remember. But other things are there, things that we do not know, and where are those in the strange mirror Mr Lawrence holds up to the world? There we see ourselves as trees walking, and it is not due to our blindness merely. Mr Lawrence has made us into trees; or fishes, or birds, or beasts. We are not trees. There is tree in us, and fish, and bird and beast; but there is something else. It should be in the picture.

This element by which we hold – call it personality, or the intellectual consciousness, or what you will – exasperates Mr Lawrence. He wills to annihilate it, and declares it a nothingness. And we may grant, fully and freely, that it breeds falsity upon falsity, and that when it is predominant it drains the richness and the sap out of life like a parasitic plant. Yet it is not evil, because it is evilly abused; or nothing, because it can engender nonentity. Something, we must and do believe, can be made of it:

a harmony achieved between it and the unconsciousness it so often denies and destroys. Of such a solution Mr Lawrence gives no hope; he has no use for the intellectual consciousness at all. That is well enough for him, with his sixth sense; but for the rest, who have only five, it is suicide – a suicide which we neither will nor *can* commit. And, after all, even if the choice were really before us, what encouragement have we even from Mr Lawrence's own example? As we read on through his poems, their richness seems gradually to wane. Towards the end the beauty becomes precarious and ascetic, as though Mr Lawrence were being starved to death. Is it we who have starved him by denying him; or has he starved himself by denying us? That is the question.

D. H. Lawrence: The Passionate Psychologist

Glenn Hughes

(From *Imagism and Imagists: A Study in Modern Poetry*, 1931)

[. . .] Lawrence is better known as a novelist than as a poet, yet there are those who affirm that his novels are great because of the poetry that permeates them. That his work should claim a chapter in this book is the result of sheer accident, for which a personal whim of Amy Lowell's must be held completely responsible. Lawrence took no real interest in imagism as a theory of poetry or as a movement. He happened to be in London when Miss Lowell was collecting the material for the imagist anthologies, and was asked by her to contribute to them. He replied that he was not an imagist. She insisted that he was, and by way of proof quoted the opening lines of one of his early poems ['Wedding Morn']:

> The morning breaks like a pomegranate
> In a shining crack of red;

As though images could not be plucked from the work of any poet! Lawrence, of course, was not taken in by this frail argument, but having no conscientious objection to his poems appearing under the imagist banner he gave Miss Lowell what she wanted, and was ever after under the necessity of explaining how he got into such company. The whole thing amused him. During a conversation I had with him in May 1929, he joked a good deal about it and declared there never had been such a thing as imagism. It was all an illusion of Ezra Pound's, he said, and was nonsense. "In the old London days Pound wasn't so literary as he is now. He was more of a mountebank then. He practiced more than he preached, for he had no audience. He was always amusing." Lawrence's blue eyes danced. For the professional imagists he had little praise. H. D. was an exception. He admired her poems, though he couldn't read many of them at once, and the longer ones, he thought, got rather boring. "She is like a person walking a tight-rope; you wonder if she'll get across."

I have been told by one of the imagists that Lawrence was included in the anthologies for the simple reason that in 1914 he

was looked upon as a writer of genius who would certainly achieve fame and would therefore shed glory on the whole imagist movement. I am inclined to believe that some idea of this kind prompted Miss Lowell's invitation. I have also been told by one of the imagists that in spite of Lawrence's protestations to the contrary, he was influenced by the imagist credo, and composed certain poems in conscious conformity with the principles enunciated therein. This point cannot be proved or disproved. So far as I can determine, however, there was no radical change in Lawrence's poetry as a result of his association with the imagists. Even the poems by which he is represented in the anthologies are only occasionally imagistic – accidentally so, I would say. The strongest influence in his work – and this he himself admits – is Whitman. He derived little or nothing from the Greek poets, and nothing at all, he says, from the French, whose verse he has always considered "piffling, like lacy valentines". He began writing free verse not because of any theories, but because of an inner need. "It is so much easier to handle some themes without a regular pattern."

Lawrence began writing poems when he was nineteen. Of his first pieces, he has said, "Any young lady might have written them and been pleased with them; as I was pleased with them." When he was twenty he began to write what he considers his "real poems." These went toward the making of his first published collection, *Love Poems and Others*, which, as I have already mentioned, appeared in 1913. Six other volumes of his verses were published between 1913 and 1923, and in 1928 appeared his *Collected Poems*, in which one may find the sum of his poetic output for the years 1906–1923. In the collected edition, Volume One is designated as "Rhyming Poems" and includes the contents of *Love Poems and Others, Amores, New Poems*, and *Bay*. Volume Two, called "Unrhyming Poems," include *Look! We Have Come Through!, Tortoises*, and *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. As readers will quickly notice, and as reviewers were amused to point out, Volume Two contains a considerable number of rimed poems. J. C. Squire, writing in the London *Observer* for October 7, 1928, takes this discrepancy as an example of Lawrence's logic, and concludes that "He did not arrange this as a feeble, practical joke . . . he merely did not notice. He is too febrile, hectic, full of blood, and haunted by dreams to be precise about title-pages and the arrangement of the books." Which is perhaps partially true, though it fails to take into account Lawrence's explanation in the prefatory note to the effect that in

arranging the poems he "tried to establish a chronological order, because many of the poems are so personal that, in their fragmentary fashion, they make up a biography of an emotional and inner life." It so happened that practically all of his early poems were rimed, and that most of his later poems were unrimed. This led to the general designations, which, though not accurate, seemed true enough to Lawrence. What makes matters even worse is that he did not follow the chronological method either. He sacrificed it for his desire to keep intact the various collections of poems which had appeared together in separate volumes, and also for less obvious psychological reasons. Thus the contents of *Bay* (written chiefly in 1917 and 1918) appear at the end of Volume One, whereas, *Look! We Have Come Through!* (written between 1912 and 1917) forms the first part of Volume Two. This order is chronologically incorrect from the standpoint of either composition or publication. In other words the *Collected Poems* is arranged according to at least three conflicting plans – chronological, technical, and psychological – and is therefore annoying to those who prize neatness and consistency. This confusion is, of course, a purely superficial defect, and has nothing to do with the fundamental worth of the poetry. It would not even merit our attention were it nor for the fact that Lawrence himself emphasizes the arrangement as being valuable to an understanding of his work.

The "Rhyming Poems" of Volume One are for the most part love poems. A few are poems of mood and circumstance, a few are descriptive nature pieces, and the rest are dramatic narratives or character studies in dialect. All but one of the poems are rimed, and most of them fall under the rules of metrical scansion. Only occasionally in this volume does Lawrence betray the Whitman influence; more often he suggests an English heritage – not from specific poets, but from late nineteenth-century poetry in general. In the love poems there is a suggestion, perhaps, of Meredith, and in the dialect pieces one is aware of Housman; otherwise the clues are vague. Even as a young man, Lawrence was remarkably himself. It is obvious that he always wrote from personal emotion and in an unusually personal way. His work is almost free from exercises, from conscious efforts toward the development of a poetic technique. For this reason his poems are authentic even when they are infelicitous.

For those who are familiar with Mr Lawrence's novels and with his later poems it is interesting and significant that one of the first

poems in Volume One should be concerned with the violence of sex, for this is a theme from which he never escaped. And as a matter of fact he seldom treated the theme more impressively than in this eight-line poem which he must have written when he was quite a young man:

DISCORD IN CHILDHOOD

Outside the house an ash tree hung its terrible whips,
And at night when the wind rose, the lash of the tree
Shrieked and slashed the wind, as a ship's
Weird rigging in a storm shrieks hideously.

Within the house two voices arose, a slender lash
Whistling she-delirious rage, and the dreadful sound
Of a male thong booming and bruising, until it had drowned
The other voice in a silence of blood, 'neath the noise of the ash.

We sense in this awful and yet beautiful recollection the morbid preoccupation which dominated a great deal of Lawrence's writing and which critics have been at some pains to explain. This one poem, taken by itself, would not, of course, indicate an abnormal interest in the male-female struggle; but taken in conjunction with the later poems it is prophetic. There are readers, undoubtedly, who look upon Lawrence as an embodiment of sexual energy, as a kind of superman who was driven by abundance of vitality to something that can perhaps be described as sophisticated savagery. There are others, more discriminating, I believe, who take an opposite view, and who look upon Lawrence's obsession as an indication of debility and frustrated desires. To these his amorous poems are attempts at compensation by imaginative means, and are not, like the pagan chants of Whitman, the exuberant expression of a healthy lover.

The most interesting exposition of this latter view is given by Joseph Collins in his volume of interpretative essays, *The Doctor Looks at Literature* [New York: Doran. 1923]. Dr Collins is not, I think, an impeccable critic, and to many he appears, no doubt, a Puritan. He is, nevertheless, a physician of experience and repute, one who has devoted his life, as he himself says, to the "study of

aberrations, genesic and mental, as they display themselves in geniuses, psychopaths, and neuropaths, as well as in ordinary men." He has read with considerable care all of Lawrence's important works (up to 1923), and although he expresses admiration for their style, he is forced to unpleasant conclusions regarding their psychological and moral values. He disparages Lawrence's "scientific" writing, and deplores his attempt to foist upon modern life a barbarous mysticism based upon sexual ecstasy. He identifies Lawrence with certain characters in his novels, and implies that the weaknesses of the latter are inherent in the former. Particular identification is made between the author and those male characters who are "mother-sapped" and who progress from the love of woman to the love of man.

Dr Collins declares that Lawrence as a youth read and was greatly influenced by the doctrines of two Austrian psychologists, Weininger and Freud, and that, like the former of these, he evolved a plan of life in which woman is eventually eliminated, "and the polarity is between man and man." To quote the physician:

> Mr Lawrence thinks there are three stages in the life of man: the stage of sexless relations between individuals, families, clans, and nations; the stage of sex relations with an all-embracing passional acceptance, culminating in the eternal orbit of marriage; and, finally, the love between comrades, the manly love which only can create a new era of life. One state does not annul the other; it fulfils the other. Such, in brief, is the strange venture in psychopathy Mr Lawrence is making. . . .

He gives many instances of Lawrence's abnormal preoccupation with sex-symbols, and points out that even the flowers which his characters look upon and the food which they eat are charged with sexual significance. Indeed, the very names of the characters are symbolic of their sex-characteristics. Following his analysis, he remarks that:

> My experience as a psychologist and alienist has taught me that pornographic literature is created by individuals whose genetic endowment is subnormal *ab initio*, or exhausted from one cause or another before nature intended that it should be, and that those who would aid God and nature in the ordering of

creation are sterile, or approximately so. This is a dispensation for which we cannot be too grateful.

His conclusion is that much of Lawrence's writings is obscene, in both etymological and the legal senses of the word, and that society is justified in censoring it. That this opinion is shared by some others is evident from the experience which Lawrence had with government officials in England and in the United States. Several of his books have been banned, and in the spring of 1929 there was a furor in England over the seizure by Scotland Yard operatives of the manuscript of his new collection of poems, entitled *Pansies*, intercepted in the mails while on its way from Lawrence to his literary agent.

But although sex is the chief motive of Lawrence's work, it is not the only one. A less delicate aspect of the poet's life is presented in a series of schoolroom pieces, with himself as teacher. In "A Snowy Day in School," we are let into the dark, brooding mind of the unhappy man, and into the hushed, charged atmosphere of the room where he is prisoner. Falling snow muffles the outer world; tedium and the drone of the schoolroom muffle his mind. A sense of unreality comes over him:

> But the faces of the boys, in the brooding, yellow light
> Have been for me like a dazed constellation of stars.
> Like half-blown flowers dimly shaking at the night,
> Like half-seen froth on an ebbing shore in the moon. [. . .]

Less atmospheric, and less poetic, but no less unhappy in its mood, is "Last Lesson of the Afternon", where we find the poet in open revolt against pedagogy:

> I will not waste my soul and my strength for this.
> What do I care for all that they do amiss!
> What is the point of this teaching of mine, and of this
> Learning of theirs? It all goes down the same abyss. [. . .]

No one else has ever, so far as I know, written so well of the schoolroom and the emotions of the teacher. Even the pleasant, one is inclined to say the "inspiring," side of the profession finds perfect expression in "The Best of School":

This morning, sweet it is
To feel the lads' looks light on me
Then back in a swift, bright flutter to work;
Each one darting away with his
Discovery, like birds that steal and flee.
Touch after touch I feel on me
As their eyes glance at me for the grain
Of rigor they taste delightedly. [. . .]

No one who can write so beautifully can go on indefinitely teaching school.

The love poems which make up the bulk of this volume are no less autobiographical than the school poems. Several women appear in them, and the aspects of love which they show are diverse. Yet the dominant tone is melancholy and the sense of frustration is frequent. Even when the affection is reciprocal there is a cry of dissatisfaction and of mocking hatred. The pain of love invariably outweighs the joy – the dream is of bliss, but the fact is torture. When the trouble is not physical it is psychological, or else the two causes intertwine. And through all these sorrowful songs runs a gleaming vein of imagery, such pure poetry that no one can mistake it. The opening lines of "Repulsed" offer an illustration:

The last silk-floating thought has gone from the dandelion stem,
And the flesh of the stalk holds up for nothing a blank diadem.
So night's flood-winds have lifted my last desire from me,
And my hollow flesh stands up in the night like vanity.

And the concluding lines reiterate the striking simile:

The night is immense and awful, yet to me it is nothing at all.
Or rather 'tis I am nothing, here in the fur of the heather
Like an empty dandelion stalk, bereft of connection, small
And nakedly nothing 'twixt world and heaven, two creatures hostile together.

I in the fur of the world, alone: but this Helen close
by!
How we hate one another tonight, hate, she and I
To numbness and nothingness; I dead, she refusing to die.
The female whose venom can more than kill, can numb and
then nullify.

It is the woman, usually, who is blamed in Lawrence's poems. Either she shuns and repulses the poet-lover, or she proves her incapacity for perfect love. In both instances the poet denounces her bitterly. Occasionally, as in "Release," there is a note of satisfaction, but at such times, one hears also a plaintive protest against enslavement. There are no echoes of mutual and equal joy.

Woven among the poems to Helen, to Miriam, and to the unnamed woman of "Kisses in the Train" and "Hands of the Betrothed," are the poems to the poet's mother. And so strong is the affection they betray that it is necessary for the reader to look twice at them to discern them from the others; an interesting phenomenon, and one which holds particular interest for those familiar with Lawrence's novels, in which the mother–son relationship plays such an important part. The poems form a sequence, beginning with the mother's illness and continuing for some time after her death. The idolatry which permeates them is religious in its solemnity and in its fervor. It verges on the mystical. The poems of anxiety and first grief are fairly natural: the opening stanzas of "The Virgin Mother" illustrate their tenderness:

My little love, my darling,
You were a doorway to me;
You let me out of the confines
Into this strange country
Where people are crowded like thistles,
Yet are shapely and comely to see.

My little love, my dearest,
Twice you have issued me,
Once from your womb, sweet mother,
Once from your soul, to be
Free of all heart, my darling,
Of each heart's entrance free.

But the silence which surrounds the poet afterward, the brooding grief which envelops him, gives rise to more somber and imaginative reveries, in which symbols and strange forces appear. In "Troth with the Dead" the conception is grotesque:

> The moon is broken in twain, and half a moon
> Beyond me lies on the low, still floor of the sky;
> The other half of the broken coin of troth
> Is buried away in the dark, where the dead all lie.
> They buried her half in the grave when they laid her away;
> Pushed gently away and hidden in the thick of her hair
> Where it gathered towards the plait, on that very last day;
> And like a moon unshowing it must still shine there. [. . .]

As a relief from the subjectivity of the poems of which I have spoken, one may turn to the descriptive pieces or to those in dialect. The descriptions are not so coldly objective as some to be found in the work of the purer imagists, for Lawrence's introspective nature never permitted him to maintain for long a detached attitude; yet by comparison with his love poems they are strongly externalized. Superior, I think, are the character studies and narratives in Midland dialect. In this genre Lawrence equals any of his contemporaries. The directness and simplicity of his style suggests the older ballads, and his understanding of human motives is remarkably sure. Less ingratiating than Housman, a better craftsman than Masefield, he achieves a combination of reality and art which one must go far to match. "The Collier's Wife" and "Whether or Not," each too long to quote here, are dramatic lyrics of great power, and they represent a Lawrence too little known, a Lawrence free from his ego.

Volume One concludes with the war poems – in which subjectivity and objectivity alternate or combine to form an effective if not supreme expression of the moods and sensations of the soldier (though Lawrence was never a soldier) and the war-time citizen. Among them we find examples of this poet's most imagistic writing. The following, for instance, with its description of London during an air-raid:

The town has opened to the sun.
Like a flat lily with a million petals
She unfolds, she comes undone.

A sharp sky brushes upon
The myriad glittering chimney-tips
As she gently exhales to the sun.

Hurrying creatures run
Down the labyrinth of the sinister flower.
What is it they shun?

A dark bird falls from the sun.
It curves in a rush to the heart of the vast
Flower: the day has begun. ('BOMBARDMENT')

Volume Two of the *Collected Poems*, though by no means monotonous or even unified, presents less diversity than its predecessor. The first section, published originally as *Look! We Have Come Through!*, is a poignant record of the poet's major experience with love; the second, published as *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*, consists of rhapsodies arising from the contemplation of the workings of love (or, should we say, the 'sex'?) in all creatures and growing things. In the latter scheme, man, and particularly Lawrence, is a part, for he feels himself blood-brother of the lower forms of life, and partakes of their mysteries.

Prefaced to *Look! We Have Come Through!* (a perfect title, incidentally, for the poems of one who "goes through" as much as Lawrence did) is the following "Argument," which may be taken literally as an autobiographical statement:

> After much struggling and loss in love and in the world of man, the protagonist throws in his lot with a woman who is already married. Together they go to another country, she perforce leaving her children behind. The conflict of love and hate goes on between the man and the woman, and between these two and the world around them, till it reaches some sort of conclusion.

Please note that Lawrence is a realist; he does not say "till it

reaches a happy conclusion." Still, the poems themselves indicate the attainment of much more happiness than is indicated by any of the earlier poems. The storms of hatred and struggle are more bitter, but so is the peace which follows, deeper. The psychology of Lawrence is like that of Strindberg. The poems are another "Dance of Death." The theme may be found in the opening lines of "Both Sides of the Medal":

> And because you love me,
> think you you do not hate me?
> Ha, since you love me
> to ecstasy
> it follows you hate me to ecstasy.

The marital dance is a mad one, and we follow it from England to Germany, and at last to Italy, where sunshine blesses the final conciliatory movement. In its course we run the gamut of male emotions, expressed in all the poetic modes, from lashing scorn and blind vituperation to dove-like wooing and mystic adoration. There is no good of reproducing fragments of this "Portrait of an Artist as Married Man." To do so would be to betray the effectiveness of the whole. The poems must be read completely, and in sequence; then the experience is revealed, an experience guaranteed to frighten into spinsterhood any but the most adventurous maid.

Under the stress of these emotions, Lawrence burst the bonds of meter and of rime; not regularly, but often enough to establish a free-verse style. In his next book, *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers,* he threw conventions overboard, and leaped up free, a very Whitman. His spirit, too, rose on new wings. Where before he had taunted himself, or the women he loved, he now taunted the whole wide world. The opening lines of the first poem in this group are:

> You tell me I am wrong.
> Who are you, who is anybody to tell me I am wrong?
> I am not wrong.

To be sure, this is only meant as a prelude to a discussion of pomegranates and their symbolic significance, yet it may be taken as an indication of the provocativeness of the poems which follow,

provocative especially to those who dislike having their world turned into a museum of sex symbols. The pomegranate is interpreted, and after it the peach, the medlar, the fig, and the grape. And so beautiful is the performance that one forgets, or forgives, the obscenity. So rich an imagination falls over the humblest fruit, such symphonies of mystery are woven about its familiar form, that one yields perforce to the poet's magic, and becomes as sensuous as he. Hear how he chants of the peach:

> Blood-red deep;
> Heaven knows how it came to pass.
> Somebody's pound of flesh rendered up. [. . .]

He is less whimsical, more ecstatic, over the medlars and sorb-apples:

> I love you, rotten,
> Delicious rottenness.
>
> I love to suck you out from your skins
> So brown and soft and coming suave,
> So morbid, as the Italians say. [. . .]

The fig stirs him to even greater frenzy – to what may be described only as a poetic orgy. It is above all others the secretive fruit, the feminine fruit:

> Folded upon itself, enclosed like any Mohammedan woman,
> Its nakedness all within-walls, its flowering forever
> unseen,

and in its ripeness he sees the symbol of human fruition, the uttering of the eternal secret of life. It is a long poem, and a highly indelicate poem, but it is pure Lawrence. It is the psychologist on a mystic spree, and at his rhapsodic best. Someone, William Lyon Phelps, I think it was, said recently that D. H. Lawrence grew inflamed at the sight of a feminine ending on a French adjective (I quote from memory and perhaps inaccurately). This witty exaggeration is true enough. And a fig is much more stimulating than an adjective.

Following the fruits, trees, flowers, birds, beasts, and reptiles

pass in parade before the poet's inward-seeing eye. He questions them, and then supplies the answers. The old habit of the lyricist – identifying himself with his subject, feeling what he deems it must feel – is here exhibited fully, and with much success. Keats may have looked through his window at a sparrow pecking among the gravel and felt himself pecking among the gravel too; but Lawrence sucks blood with a mosquito, darts with a fish, swoops with a bat, wriggles over the desert floor with a snake, shuffles through the tropics with an elephant, hops with a kangaroo, and makes love with goats and tortoises. With the tortoises he remains the longest, recording their emotional life from babyhood until their crucifixion on the cross of love, which is always the real cross to Lawrence. Wonderful excursions, these, into dark realms of sense where the life-force stirs and urges, finding imperfect voice. Not sentimental excursions, either, but fanatically persistent probings after the secret, the germ, the soul – adventures of a passionate psychologist. [. . .]

Lawrence was easy prey for critics. His armor was full of holes. But it is a fact that even his greatest detractors found him an admirable victim. He was something like the Irish rebel of whom I once heard Yeats tell. The rebel was stood against a wall and shot. Afterward his official slayers reported: "A brave man, a wonderful man – it was a pleasure to shoot him." What Lawrence's critics all agree on is that somehow, in spite of his egoism, his crudities of style, his sex-mania, and the rest, he was a great writer. Above all, he was a personality. Like Ezra Pound, he was hot-tempered, arrogant, insulting, and forever scornful of diplomacy. Like Pound, too, he was revered by those who had most reason to hate him. The best picture of him as a man and as a writer is to be found in Richard Aldington's essay, *D. H. Lawrence — An Indiscretion* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1930]. Aldington knew Lawrence from the pre-war London days when imagism was just being born. He calls him "a great living example of the English Heretic," one of those rampant personalities whom the English persecute but love, "for somewhere, deep down, they know that their Heretics are the life of the race, the salt of the earth." He deplores Lawrence's mysticism, and finds him, when in that vein, "a crashing bore." He deplores his errors of style, but his virtues he finds so numerous that they crowd the pages of his essay. I cannot find space to reproduce them here.

Mr Aldington, of course, is somewhat of a rebel himself, and his estimate of a fellow-rebel may be discounted. But no such reservation can be made in the case of J. C. Squire, who, in his review of Lawrence's *Collected Poems* [The *Observer* (London), October 7, 1928], asserted:

> The fact remains that Mr Lawrence, passionate, brooding, glowering, worshipping man, is undoubtedly a man of genius and big and fiery enough to eat a dozen of his merely clever contemporaries.

Big and fiery in his writing, yes; but in the flesh he was a small man, quiet and incisive. Illness gave his figure an added slenderness and his manner an unusual delicacy. His head, which Aldington described as looking "moulded of some queer-colored stone," was long, and it narrowed as it descended. Dark red hair fell loosely over the forehead; a beard concluded the downward sweep of the face. The very blue eyes were sharp, alert, quizzical, and taunting. "And his voice –" (I am quoting again from Aldington) "such a pleasant devil's voice, with its shrill little titters and sharp mockeries and even more insulting flatteries. At any moment one expects to see him sprout horns and a tail and cloven hoofs and to run trotting about poking his dull or resentful guests with a neat little pitchfork."

Meeting him, one found it difficult to believe him the creator of the many powerful works which bear his name. There appeared to be no physical basis for such energy. The easiest explanation of the anomaly would be one suggested by his own semi-mystical beliefs – one which would make him the sensitive medium of great hidden forces. Any non-magical theory must certainly tax the resources of the analyst.

Two volumes of poetry by D. H. Lawrence have been published since the appearance of his *Collected Poems*. The first of these, *Pansies*, is a rather large collection of work extremely varied in style and filled with brilliance and power. The second, *Nettles*, is a thin book, containing only twenty-five short poems, most of which are inartistic rimes dashed off in petulant moods during the last year of his life, when his health was desperate and his temper was unusually aggravated by trouble with the censors. Not only was the manuscript of *Pansies* seized in the mails by order of the Home

Secretary, certain poems being deleted before publication was permitted, but Lawrence's first public exhibition of paintings in London was raided by the police and certain paintings were forcibly unhung. His pride was severely wounded by these interferences, and he struck back with all the scorn of which he was capable. In *Nettles* he excoriates the censors in rime, and in an essay, *Pornography and Obscenity*, published two days before his death, he contributes a courageous and sincere, if not entirely logical, argument to the prose literature on the vexed subject of artistic freedom versus morality.

I shall not concern myself here with the question of Lawrence's rightness or wrongness in his fight with the police. I wish only to emphasize his sincerity. Through his entire literary career, covering approximately twenty years, he fought for certain standards of honesty and frankness in matters of sex relationship, and these standards he considered more wholesome than those generally in effect. That he scolded his adversaries in too shrill a voice and in too authentically Derbyshire profanity must be admitted. But though his technique was often at fault, his motives were always, I think, sincere and idealistic. He was too high-strung for strategical debate. He was a poet. [. . .]

D. H. Lawrence: The Poet

Anais Nin

(From *D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study*, 1932)

In considering Lawrence's poetry it is necessary to set to one side that part which is merely expository and didactic, where he was repeating ideas better expressed in his prose and belonging more properly to prose, as distinct from the relatively few poems in which the true poet in him spoke naturally and spontaneously. Lawrence himself recognized that this separation was necessary when he wrote in *Chaos in Poetry*: "The suffused fragments are the best, those that are only comprehensible with the senses, with a vision passing into touch and sound, then again touch and the bursting of a bubble of an image."

It is impossible, even if it were necessary, to criticize these "suffused fragments". Edward Titus in his "Criticism of Poetry" (*This Quarter*) has stated clearly the nature of the difficulty: "Stated summarily, poetry, as we conceive it, by its nature, does not lend itself to criticism. Poetry may be sung, it may be read silently or aloud; poetry may be dreamed, it may be lived, laughed, loved or hated; it may be discussed as one would a pleasant or unpleasant experience; it may be treated with indifference, liked or disliked or ignored, it may or may not be a stimulus, but one may as well bay at the moon as criticize it."

This is particularly applicable to the group of poems entitled *Creatures* in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. For here there is not only acute observation of nature but a strange penetration into and identification with the life and world of animals. Evidences of Lawrence's gift for projecting himself into nature were not lacking in his prose. One has only to remember that passage in *Women in Love* where Gudrun is watching the water plants: "But she could feel their turgid, fleshly structure as in a *sensuous vision*, she knew how they rose out of the mud, she knew how they thrust out from themselves, how they stood stiff and succulent against the air."

In the same manner Lawrence, in these poems, closes all his human senses, in order to live for one moment in the senses of the animal whose world he enters. He does not attribute human feelings to animals as sentimental poets have been in the habit of

doing, but the feelings he conceives to be their own, and which have little or no connection with ours. In the *Fish* for example, we are not merely *looking* at a fish, or it would be "silvery", "swimming" or "sleeping". We are, by a kind of magic shedding our human feelings like a costume, to enter that most foreign of foreign worlds – the world of the fish:

> Aqueous, subaqueous,
> Submerged
> And wave-thrilled.
>
> As the waters roll
>
> Roll you.
> The waters wash,
> You wash in oneness
>
> And never emerge.
>
> Never know,
> Never grasp.
>
> Your life a sluice of sensation along your sides,
> A flush at the flails of your fins, down the whorl of your tail,
> And water wetly on fire in the grates of your gills;
> Fixed water eyes.

This is as wordlessly suggestive as music, as for example the "Poisson d'Or" of Debussy.

> To sink, and rise,
> And go to sleep with the waters;
> . . . . . .
> Loveless and so lively!

Slowly he realizes that in the "feelingless" life of the fish there is another world:

> I didn't know his God,
> . . . . . .

I am not the measure of creation.
. . . . . .
His God stands outside my God.

And the gold-and-green pure lacquer mucus comes off in
my hand,
And the red-gold mirror-eye stares and dies,
And the water-suave contour dims.

But not before I have had to know
He was born in front of my sunrise,
Before my day.

Here it is almost as if he were in a trance in which he communicates with another plane of existence. Approaching with wary sensitivity he leaves us with a completely objective image:

No fingers, no hands and feet, no lips;
No tender muzzles,
No wistful bellies,
. . . . . .
. . . they swarm in companies
But soundless, and out of contact.
A magnetism in the water between them only.
. . . . . .
And their pre-world loneliness,
And more-than-lovelessness,
They move in other circles.

He shows the same acute observation when he watches a baby tortoise:

To take your first solitary bite
And move on your slow, solitary hunt.
Your bright, dark little eye,
Your eye of a dark disturbed night,
Under its slow lid, tiny baby tortoise,
So indomitable.

Do you wonder at the world, as slowly you turn your
head in its whimple,

And look with laconic, black eyes?
Or is sleep coming over you again,
The non-life?

The "non-life" of certain animals fascinates Lawrence. "Non-life" as compared particularly with our life of the mind and its activities but life on another perhaps dimly remembered plane which it is strange to re-enter through Lawrence.

Fulfilled of the slow passion of pitching through
immemorial ages
Your little round house in the midst of chaos.

Just as he resurrected the ancient cult of phallic worship, so he resurrects other forgotten worlds buried in our memories. As in the *Humming-Bird*:

I can imagine, in some other world
Primeval-dumb, far back,
In that most awful stillness, that only gasped and
hummed,
Humming-birds raced down the avenues.

The snake "comes from the burning bowels of the earth." And the ass:

His big, furry head,
His big, regretful eyes,
His diminished, drooping hindquarters,
His small toes
. . . . . .
He regrets something that he remembers.

In poems of lesser quality Lawrence fails to remain within the world of nature. Too often he uses animal life or nature to illustrate some human principle or emotion. And then worlds and metaphors are mixed, his plants and animals lose their identities, and his abstractions are made no clearer. Poetry as distinguished from prose is essentially that moment of ecstasy, like moments in music, in which senses and imagination fuse and flame. Lawrence had many such moments but not all of them reached that white heat of

fusion. Of course as ideas they are always interesting and revealing, but he usually expressed them more fittingly in his prose.

That Lawrence was, however, quite capable of fusing his philosophic ideas in poetry is shown in the poem *New Heaven and Earth.* Nowhere in his prose did Lawrence reach out further mystically, and at the same time the poem itself sustains throughout a fittingly high note and a deep rhythmic undercurrent, rising to a climax when he enters and possesses the "unknown world."

The poem begins with a simple description of his "old world," the everyday world of which he had been too much a part:

> I was so weary of the world,
> I was sick of it,
> Everything was tainted with myself,
> . . . . . .
> . . . it was all tainted with myself,
> I knew it all to start with
> Because it was all myself.

He had reached the extreme of self-consciousness:

> When I gathered flowers, I knew it was myself plucking my own flowering.

Living that everyday life, letting his mind associate and merge with the world's mind and its activities, he realizes that he had become an inseparable fragment of that world. So long as he should identify himself with that world he was responsible for it; all was in him, and he in all. He was its creator until he should create something new. This is a recurrence of Lawrence's idea, with which we are already familiar, of the evolution of the universe reduced to terms of our individual souls:

> When I saw the torn dead I knew it was my own torn dead body
> It was all me, I had done it all in my own flesh.
> . . . . . .
> I was the God and the creation at once;
> Creator, I looked at my creation;
> Created, I looked at myself, the creator.

So the creator must die, he must bury himself, which was his world, his creation. Here follows inevitably the process of disintegration which Lawrence believed was a part of the cycle through which each soul must pass to reach life.

> At last came death, sufficiency of death,
> And that at last relieved me, I died.
> . . . . . .
> Dead and trodden to naught in the sour black earth
> Of the tomb; dead and trodden to naught, trodden to naught.

And so he comes to the eternal non-being, which, as he has said in *Twilight in Italy*, is the same as eternal being: the seeming paradox that in the final analysis positive meets negative, that eternal being and eternal non-being are the same in the origin and in the issue, that has been the common property of all the great mystics.

> For when it is quite, quite nothing, then it is
> everything;
> When I am trodden quite out, quite, quite out,
> Every vestige gone . . .

At that moment when the world died in him and he with it, at that moment he rose:

> Risen, and setting my foot in another world
> Risen, accomplishing a resurrection . . .

And so he discovers a new world:

> . . . that which was verily not me . . .
> . . . . . .
> It was the unknown.

New Heaven and Earth is an allegory of Lawrence's cycle of experience. Widening and widening the boundaries of experience and understanding he inevitably reached the breaking point in his own disintegration through which in turn he touched the secret mysteries of the earth and so found new sources of strength and deeper life:

The unknown, strong current of life supreme
Drowns me and sweeps me away and holds me down
To the sources of mystery, in the depths,
Extinguishes there my risen resurrected life
And kindles it further at the core of utter mystery.

The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence

Horace Gregory

(From *The Pilgrim of the Apocalypse*, 1933)

Some effort is required to get at the Lawrence of the early poems, to get behind the beard of the prophet, the half-closed eyes and the red, V-shaped, pointed smile. The early poems belong to a white-skinned boy, back in Nottinghamshire, a boy who had the clear, water-translucent stare of an H. G. Wellsian hero. All this, of course, was long before World War I and he was a Georgian poet long before the Georgians appeared.

In the preface to his *Collected Poems* (1928) Lawrence was a bit uneasy about his early poems first printed as *Love Poems and Others* and *Amores*. He went to no small trouble to rewrite them, for he believed in his "demon" rather than in "the young man" making a tentative approach to writing poetry. It was natural for the later Lawrence to believe that this young man was quite a different person, and the change to him seemed greater than to us now who read the poems and have no more than an historical concern about the writing of them. In the later Lawrencean sense the young man was not a good poet, nor will many of the poems stand rigid examination by a standard set for English poetry of the past, but before we take them in a biographical context (as Lawrence urged us to do) it is important to remember that they are good examples of Georgian poetry, and that even here Lawrence stepped out ahead in the main current of his time.

It is easy to discover the immediate source of the poems, for their vocabulary and the feeling they contain were products of a general reaction against drawing-room poetry – the echoes of Swinburne and the later Tennyson, and, perhaps, most of all the popular verse of Stephen Phillips and Sir William Watson. Lawrence was among the first to feel the need of a change in temperature, the need to open wide doors outward to the English countryside, to walk naked in the sun. Perhaps he had read the verse of Edward Thomas, another forerunner of his time, but it is by no means necessary that he should. The closet fog of late Victorian British interiors, the gas-lit boudoir, "the roses and raptures of vice" with a grave onyx clock upon the mantelpiece, faded in sunlight

streaming through a shutterless windowpane. At the moment (and I am speaking of that moment between 1903 and 1910) the epigrams of Oscar Wilde left a stale taste between the lips, and apparently few people read poetry at all. If we are to trust Ford Madox Ford's memory of that time we may accept his restatement of a wry comment made by Richard Garnett: that the trial of Oscar Wilde killed English poetry for the wide reading-public, that they saw Keats in retrospect dressed in a velvet jacket and holding with obscene tenderness a huge sunflower in his right hand. One need not take this statement for literal truth, yet forward-looking young men in England (of which Lawrence was one) had little desire to build their work upon the immediate past – they turned abruptly to prose, read Stevenson, then H. G. Wells, then Shaw, and subconsciously decided that the "poetic" mood of a Stephen Phillips was not theirs and they began to cry him down. It was in this period that the poetry of Thomas Hardy began to take root, for his realism, his sense of fatalistic disaster, were of the earth itself and his people, stark, plain-spoken, were the very antithesis of the gay creatures who walked behind the footlights in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

It was in Hardy that Lawrence found a precedent for his early dialect poems. The speech was changed from Wessex (*Wessex Poems*, 1898) to Nottinghamshire, and the rugged metric (in Lawrence never firmly spoken nor controlled) has its parallel in *Time's Laughingstocks* (1909) and *Satires of Circumstance*, published in book form during 1914. Ezra Pound remembers these dialect poems as the only "original" poems that Lawrence ever wrote and wishes to believe that his later free verse is an offshoot of a method first practised by Ford Madox Ford. Just what Pound means here is a bit difficult to guess at, but I would say that his intention is double-barrelled criticism, an effort to dismiss both Hardy and Lawrence with one round of shot. A specimen of the verse itself will clarify the point:

> But I thowt ter mysen, as that wor th' only bit
> O' warmth as 'e got down theer; th' rest wor stone cold.
> From that bit of a wench's bosom; 'e'd be glad of it,
> Gladder nor of thy lilies, if tha maun be told.

The direct imitation of Hardy was not a happy choice, but it shows Lawrence's early desire to cleave to the earth, to select his

materials at first hand, to deal as best he can with an immediate environment. He did not repeat this particular kind of experiment often, yet he absorbed its influence and reshaped it into his personal idiom. The impulse to use immediate subject-matter never left him and one feels always the speed of his writing even here at a time when the results cannot keep pace with his intentions. In his note he listed "The Wild Common" among his first poems and confessed that he had revised it to suit a later purpose, but rewrite the poem as he would he could not erase the marks of its original reason for being. The poem retains its close relationship to that small group who accepted Edward Marsh as their editor and Rupert Brooke, W. H. Davies, Ralph Hodgson, and Wilfred [sic] Gibson as their leaders. The poem "dates" not merely as biographical evidence but as the kind of poetry that was being written in a noon-day peace before the war. The very first stanza betrays the spirit of the time, a spirit that produced *The Everlasting Mercy*, "Grantchester," Ralph Hodgson's "Song of Honour" and "The Bull"; the actual writing of the poem began some few years before the movement found group-expression:

> The quick sparks on the gorse-bushes are leaping
> Little jets of sunlight texture imitating flame;
> Above them, exultant, the peewits are sweeping:
> They have triumphed again o'er the ages, their screamings proclaim.

No "demon" wrote this poem, but a young amateur painter, son of a Nottinghamshire miner, who was rather painfully growing into a provincial schoolteacher. He foresaw, however, a brief Romantic revival, tasted its flavour on the wind and some instinct told him that simple though awkward speech came nearer to poetry of his kind than the histrionic nobility or wit, or sense of sin, that had so lately preceded his arrival. One has only to reread Marsh's brief introduction to the first of the "Georgian" anthologies to realize how deeply the conviction of a poetry renascense had entered the blood of a pre-war generation. "Renascence" seems to be the one word to describe the feeling of the time and yet not one of the young men could point out the direction in which they were going. To them rebirth seemed more than a reassertion of a spring season; the outdoor world was theirs to rediscover — a

new freedom spread over hills and valleys and Socialism rising in the cities carried forward the earlier promises of Nineteenth-Century Evolution. We must remind ourselves that all this was quite vague in the minds of Lawrence's generation and that the young poets, most of them recruited from Cambridge or Oxford, did not rush out to join the Socialist Party but went instead to afternoon teas and garden parties. The "New Freedom" idealized physical well-being, strength in the naked body and a certain frankness concerning the purpose of women on earth and the natural union of young women with young men.

To this spirit Lawrence brought his intensely personal problems and, having been among the first to recognize its power of regeneration, offered the first direct analysis of sexual emotion. I refer to his "Snap-Dragon," which was reprinted with the early poems of Brooke, Davies, and Gibson in Marsh's anthology. From this time onward we see the consistent growth of Lawrence's individual pattern.

It became Lawrence's duty to accept the "New Freedom" with stringent personal reservations; he needed but half an eye to show him that he was not free and here the biographical importance of the early poems begins to take on meaning. We begin to read a warning between the lines, an undercurrent of ominous meaning, a stream tunnelling through rock and flowing deeper than a somewhat literary affectation of Hardy's gloom or the familiar moods of adolescent despair. If his contemporaries wrote with the exuberance of a "Grantchester" or a *Tono-Bungay*, very well, he could supply a vitality equal to theirs; but the young man was trapped, not merely in the physical sense of being a miner's son quite without social status, but in a spiritual sense, in which his emotions flowed inward to his mother and the darkness of the womb, the coal-pit darkness of the Apocalypse riding from the pulpit shouting fire and sin on midnight air. The phallic "Virgin Youth" anticipates "Snap-Dragon" in the use of sexual imagery, and for that reason, if no other, Lawrence gave special attention to it in editing the poem for final publication. "Virgin Youth," however, lacks the complex interchange of imagery that "Snap-Dragon" offers – the sense of mingled release and frustration that was to enter the larger design of *Sons and Lovers*. Lawrence's "demon" fell short of his power in an attempt to rewrite "Virgin Youth," but he was present from the very start in the composition of "Snap-Dragon":

And her bosom couched in the confines of her gown
Like heavy birds at rest there, softly stirred
By her measured breaths: "I like to see," said she,
"The snap-dragon put out his tongue at me,"

She moved her hand, and again
I feel the brown bird cover
My heart; and then
The bird came down on my heart;
As on a nest the rover
Cuckoo comes, and shoves over
The brim each careful part
Of love, takes possession, and settles her down,
With her wings and her feathers to drown
The nest in a heat of love.

And I do not care, though the large hands of revenge
Shall get my throat at last, shall get it soon,
If the joy that they are lifted to avenge
Have risen red on my night as a harvest moon.

One sees here a rather successful union of Georgian poet and his "demon." The young man is still busily perfecting his craft, a craft soon to be dropped in favor of prose. More important than the evidence of a young poet writing a complex love poem is the power to place the entire situation within the bounds of a convincing emotional experience. We may forget the particular hero of the poem, the young man transfixed by an equal distribution of male and female impulses in conflict with one another, but it is not so easy to forget the quality of emotion that the poem contains – no other Georgian could have written this entire poem, and, though its last two lines:

Which even death can only put out for me;
And death, I know, is better than not-to-be.

are spoken with Georgian confidence, the ominous snap-dragon symbol remains a note of disharmony within the neatly clipped green-grass and sunlight pastures of Marsh's hopeful anthology. A year after the poem was accepted and praised by Marsh, Lawrence submitted his manifesto to the Georgians in a letter to their editor:

[. . .] And now I've got to quarrel with you about the Ralph Hodgson poem: because I think it's banal utterance. The feeling is there right enough – but not in itself, only represented. [. . .] And so he takes out his poetic purse and gives you a handful of cash, and feels very strongly, even a bit sentimentally over it.

— the sky was lit,
The sky was stars all over it,
I stood, I knew not why.

No one should say, "I knew not why" any more. It is as meaningless as "yours truly" at the end of a letter.

The poem was Hodgson's "Song of Honour", which expressed with reasonable accuracy the full credo of the Georgians. Today it is little use to flog a dead poem; it is enough for us to know that Lawrence quickly saw *through* the Georgians, saw through them into something (he was not quite sure just what) beyond their purpose. The "I knew not why" phrase of Hodgson's gave them away and Lawrence leaped at it, tore at it, worried it as a lean cat might worry a sluggish, overfed mouse. Lawrence was already beyond that bright exuberance of youth that was to produce Rupert Brooke's war sonnets. For Lawrence the time was past for the emotional facility of Davies and the rest; the time was past for "the currency" of Georgian poetry which was so soon to dwindle into the habit of observing hearty old men eating apples in warm October sunlight, so soon to lose its speech in the onrushing roar of guns.

II

With "Snap-Dragon" and this letter, Lawrence freed himself from the majority of Georgian influences, from the spirit that flowered with sunset brilliance in the short hours before the war. The "school" poems show us clearly enough what he felt about teaching; at first there was a kinship with his students, as though any relationship away from his mother's household was welcome, another kind of rebirth, a contact with a force outside himself:

I feel them cling and cleave to me
As vines going eagerly up; they twine

My life with other leaves, my time
Is hidden in theirs, their thrills are mine.

This was very well, but it was soon necessary for Lawrence to feel a deeper current of life than that which a classroom filled with boys had to offer. The place was prison to them and soon it was no less to him; if they were caged, he, too, sat behind iron bars – the very schoolroom seemed to smell of sterility, of frustration.

When will the bell ring, and end this weariness? Relief was only looking beyond the suburban iron and stone of South London toward the blue dome of the Crystal Palace, floating in the North against the sky:

– How can I answer the challenge of so many eyes?
What was my question? My God, must I break this hoarse
Silence that rustles beyond the stars?

And all things are in silence, they can brood
Alone within the dim and hoarse silence.
Only I and the class must wrangle;
  this work is a bitter rood!

Nor was this the last that we were to hear about the schoolroom; the theme was to be repeated later in *The Rainbow* and again the plaster walls were turned to stone. The writing of verse was not enough to spring open the trap held fast by poverty, by having to teach long hours of the day for a livelihood. Some means of escape was to be found, and the practical means came through the writing of prose. We are too likely to forget the solid, practical side of Lawrence's character, his direct way of meeting a personal economic situation. He was never to write for money in a commercial sense. His need for money and his way of handling it was on the scale of a Nottinghamshire miner who respected a neat home and clean linen – but there was to be no extravagance, no waste. His personal economics resembled that of an honest day-labourer's; one has only to examine the gamekeeper's lodge in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to realize how deeply Lawrence's personal thrift took root. A little money was quite enough, and that little enough to insure personal liberty, but no more.

The White Peacock and *The Trespasser* were the first steps towards liberation, and behind them lay the triple motive of the same

young man who wrote the very early poems. The two novels were to effect an enlargement of the poems, to secure a hearing where the poems would excite no more than transitory interest. Though Lawrence's attitude toward his work was quite uncritical (I mean uncritical in the sense that he could not successfully rewrite a particular line or with assurance revamp an isolated paragraph) his instinct told him that the poems were incomplete. Emotionally they lacked the full body of what he had to say, and, for the moment, he lacked the patience of craftsmanship to infuse them with the power that he felt growing within him. They were not sufficient either in quantity or form. In 1909 he wrote to Heinemann: "I have as yet published nothing but a scrap of verse" and I think we may accept his modesty as genuine. *The White Peacock* was apprenticeship, a proof that he could extend the lyricism of "The Wild Common" and "Virgin Youth" until it filled a larger canvas, and, incidentally, it served to bring forward the first tentative offering of his personal problem, the complex nature of deflected, inward-turning love which was to become the theme of *Sons and Lovers*. Though Middleton Murry makes much of the "Poem of Friendship" chapter in *The White Peacock* and builds upon it a sinister foreshadowing of *Aaron's Rod*, its idyllic passages which glorify the male body are no more ominous than a general spirit of out-door romanticism which is identified with the bulk of Georgian poetry. Whatever promise *The White Peacock* held lay in its power to give its symbol, the White Peacock, a growth that was to break through all established rules of narrative form. From now onward we are to find his precedent in English Romantic poetry rather than in English prose. In this sense the writing of *Sons and Lovers* concluded Lawrence's career as a novelist, yet the bulk of his important work was still unwritten and for many years to come the best of his writing was contained in prose.

Before I close this stage of Lawrence's growth, it would be well to return a moment to his poetry. Closely following his anti-Georgian manifesto he wrote another letter to Edward Marsh:

> You *are* wrong. It makes me open my eyes. I think I read my poetry more by length than by stress – as a matter of fact movements in space than footsteps hitting the earth. . . .

Then follows a rescansion of one of his own poems, and its method is applied to Ernest Dowson's Cynara poem. Lawrence's theory is

neat but quite unconvincing until he states his personal reaction to all poetry:

> It is the lapse of the feeling, something as indefinite as expression in the voice carrying emotion. It doesn't depend on the ear, particularly, but on the sensitive soul. The ear gets a habit, and becomes master, and the ear the transmitter. If your ear has got stiff and a bit mechanical, *don't* blame my poetry. That's why you like "Golden Journey to Samarcand" – it fits your habituated ear and your feeling crouches subservient and a bit pathetic. "It satisfies my ear," you say. Well, I don't write for your ear. . . .
>
> I can't tell you what *pattern* I see in any poetry, save one complete thing. But surely you don't class poetry among the decorative or conventional arts. . . .

The point of difference between the two men was that Marsh *did* see poetry as a conventional art and Lawrence at this moment had too much to say to stop the flow of poetry rising from its fountainhead within himself. To Lawrence emotional satisfaction overruled the technic of minor verse; he could not abide rules such as those that governed the prettily tuned stanzas of James Elroy Flecker's work. Such felicity was not his and his ease in writing was of an entirely different order. The compulsion to make other people hear what he was saying was no longer an effort to please but to impose an emotional conviction upon the feelings of others. To Lawrence each poem that he wrote had utilitarian value as well as beauty; and from now on each poem was to carry a double burden: its own emotional truth as an entity and the seed of symbols, ideas, images, and faith to be expanded into the larger structures of prose. The poems lay at the core of his existence – but hear what he had to say of them in 1928:

> It seems to me that no poetry, not even the best, should be judged as if it existed in the absolute in the vacuum of the absolute. Even the best poetry, when it is at all personal, needs the penumbra of its own time and place and circumstance to make it full and whole.

III

Lawrence was to leave unpublished at his death his last book of

poems, and until we read it the final circle of his life is unclosed and broken. Just as the need for leadership dropped from him, so his old impatience with poetry as an immediate expression of his experience dropped away.

From the early poems to the last *Pansies* included in his final volume his motives for writing the individual poems were impure. It was evident, I think, that he regarded his poetry as incomplete, and so began to treat it as one might use a source book of emotional notations. His introduction to the *Collected Poems* of 1928 is an apology. He was not satisfied with the poems as they were written and to make matters worse he attempted in some cases to rewrite them. He insists at last that they are not poems at all, but a kind of biographical backdrop for his career. The measure of his discomfort may be shown in quoting the second paragraph of his "Note":

> I have now tried to arrange the poems, as far as possible, in chronological order, the order in which they were written. The first poems I ever wrote, if poems they were, was when I was nineteen: now twenty-three years ago. I remember perfectly the Sunday afternoon when I perpetrated those first two pieces: "To Guelder-Roses" and "To Companions"; in springtime, of course, and, as I say, in my twentieth year. Any young lady might have written them and been pleased with them; as I was pleased with them. But it was after that, when I was twenty, that my real demon would now and then get hold of me and shake more real poems out of me, making me uneasy. . . .

Then comes the statement of actual confession: "*I never 'liked' my real poems as I like 'To Guelder-Roses.'*"

In other words Lawrence could not sit down to write poetry with the feeling of conscious effort behind him. Consciousness always spoiled the game; it was consciousness that broke his union with his unseen forces of power, the life-flow backward into darkness, into oblivion. The quarrel with poetry came to this: in writing a poem certain attention must be directed toward its formal structure – so much must be said and no more – but Lawrence often had too much to say and could not wait for the moment when the emotion or idea became fully rounded into formal utterance. Meanwhile, he had become conscious of his role as poet and that consciousness

was not satisfied by anything less than the realization of his purpose.

Looking backward in 1928 over all the poems he had written, he was disquieted by the feeling that they were inadequate – all seemed too fragmentary when compared to the actual richness of the life that had produced them. Therefore he tried to make up a little theory about them, to say that even the best poetry, when it is at all personal, needs the penumbra of its own time and place and circumstance to make it full and whole. This was, I think, a rather transparent piece of self-deception; he was troubled and a bit naïve in trying to cover his lack of confidence in what he had just reread. These poems had fallen far short of what he hoped for in the writing of them, and now it was too late for him to make himself over into another kind of poet.

Meanwhile, the strength of each poem he wrote had been drained off into another medium, the novel. The unfinished poem had been re-created and completed in a paragraph of prose. Or as in the case of the early "mother" poems, they had been supplied with richness of detail and developed into the unit of *Sons and Lovers*. This process was to be repeated again and again until the poems were given a valid excuse for being. Even the fine passages in *Apocalypse* owe their origin to the Evangelistic Beasts of *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*. Witness these lines from "St. Matthew":

> I am man, and therefore my heart beats,
> and throws the dark blood from side to side
> All the time I am lifted up.
> Yes, even during my uplifting.
>
> And if it ceased?
> If it ceased, I should be no longer man
> As I am, if my heart in uplifting ceased to beat,
> to toss the dark blood from side to side,
> causing my myriad secret streams. [. . .]
> But I, Matthew, being a man
> Am a traveller back and forth.

And this traveller, man, is the pilgrim of the *Apocalypse*, Lawrence, ex-prophet, his end half-anticipated before the writing of the last will and testament.

Before the end, the travelling back and forth was to find a

substitute by entering blind alleys, oscillating, trembling with the fury of the little *Pansies*, fragments of doggerel out of which poured pus and venom. I have already said that the *Pansies* were a species of journalism, a means by which Lawrence emptied his veins of the bile that had turned his blood into a poisonous, amber fluid. His hatred could not flow into the channels of epigram – petty, malicious anger made him dull and the visions that he held in his mind's eye dissolved into yellow waters that fed a sewer. *Nettles* and *Pansies* are dull to read and the odour that rises from them is the smell of a world that is "tainted with myself," a sick world that was to bury a dead prophet.

It may seem remarkable that the half-dozen magnificent poems of Lawrence's posthumous *Last Poems* should be found in proximity to the later *Pansies* — remarkable unless one remembers his two travel books, *Sea and Sardinia*, written in 1921, and *Etruscan Places*, written in 1927–28. These extended essays, along with his Introduction to *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion* by M. M. (1925), are among the very best examples of his prose. It should be admitted that most of Lawrence's novels, like most of the *Pansies*, are dated and bear the marks of time as ominously as so many of the once popular novels of H. G. Wells. It may seen ironical that Lawrence's travel books were frankly written for the immediate purpose of raising money — in that sense the travel essays were more "commercial" than the short stories and novels that Lawrence wrote; like his book reviews and occasional essays, posthumously collected in a volume under the title of *Phoenix* (1936), they were written on order for or with the hope of publication in magazines.

In fact the descriptive genius of Lawrence's prose has its best expression in his travel pieces and it has proved to be more enduring than in so many of his narratives. In the travel essays his imagination was guided by what he felt to be the timeless, living presence of Mediterranean myth and legend. It was that presence, as he perceived it and then disclosed it to his readers, which endows his travel pieces with the essential qualities of poetry written in prose.

In his last years the figure of Lawrence resembled in outline the figure of a great poet; his writings and his personality were but the partial fulfillment of a large design, and despite his failures, he entered into the great tradition of Romantic literature that had produced a Rousseau, a Dostoevsky, and a Whitman.

In his *Last Poems* Whitman's influence is written large on every

page. This is so obvious that one feels half-apologetic in mentioning the fact at all, but its significance is linked with Whitman's own source, the King James version of the Bible. In the writing of *Apocalypse* the Bible was revived in Lawrence's mind and its images took on fresh meaning, travelling backward to their pagan origins in Asia Minor and skirting the fringes of Greek culture. In reviving them Lawrence was performing his own service of the Extreme Unction, as though his body were already embalmed in a lead coffin or his ashes deposited in a replica of the Greek funeral urn. His *Nettles* and *Pansies* had effected a strong catharsis. The issues raised by the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were dead – nothing remained but the last statement, the final convulsion of Lawrence's "demon" in his blood, then the peace that follows death and in this afterglow, in twilight, poetry.

In the security of death, Lawrence looked backward over the fading world behind him. Its physical aspects are of an Italian landscape, the Italy of the long dead Etruscans:

> Sleeping on the hearth of the living world
> yawning at home before the fire of life
> feeling the presence of the living God

Then the last dim memory of the modern city:

> In London, New York, Paris
> in the bursten cities
> the dead tread heavily through the muddy air
> For thine is the kingdom
> the power and the glory.
> Hallowed be thy name,
>
> Thou who art nameless.
>
> Give me, Oh give me
> besides my daily bread
> my kingdom, my power, and my glory
>
> And the moon that went
> so queenly, shaking her glistening beams
> is dead too, a dead orb wheeled once a month round the park

In the hearse of night you see their tarnished coffins
travelling, travelling still, still travelling
to the end, for they are not yet buried.

Then suddenly the spark of life beyond death in the version of "Bavarian Gentians," MS. A:

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!
Let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of a flower
Down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness
Down the way Persephone goes, just now,
in first-frosted September
To the sightless realm where darkness is married to dark
And Persephone herself is but a voice, as a bride
A gloom invisible enfolded in the deeper dark
Of the arms of Pluto as he ravishes her once again
And pierces her once more with his passion of the utter dark

Among the splendor of black-blue torches,
shedding fathomless darkness on the nuptials.

Give me a flower on a tall stem, and three dark flames,
For I will go to the wedding, and be wedding-guest
At the marriage of the living dark.

Here one sees again the interior of an Etruscan tomb; the figures half-obliterated in darkness on the walls, the Bavarian gentian torch lighting the way back to the myths of a forgotten people.

Lawrence again sees the mid-world, the Mediterranean:

This sea will never die, neither will it ever
grow old nor cease to be blue, nor in the dawn
cease to lift up its hills
and let the slim black ship of Dionysos
come sailing in with grape-vines up the mast,
and dolphins leaping.

The Man of Tyre goes down to the sea,

> So in the cane-brake he clasped his hands in delight
> that could only be god-given, and murmured:
> Lo! God is one god! But here in the twilight
> godly and lovely comes Aphrodite out of the sea . . .

At last we have "*The Ship of Death,*" one of the few memorable poems of our generation. Of the two versions published in *Last Poems*, the version marked MS. B is the better and is included in the Appendix: from the first lines onward one hears the authentic music of great poetry and echoing through it are the undertones of Whitman's "Passage to India":

> I sing of autumn and the falling fruit
> and the long journey toward oblivion.
>
> The apples falling like great drops of dew
> to bruise themselves an exist from themselves.
>
> Have you built your ship of death, oh, have you?
> Build then your ship of death for you will need it!
>
> Can a man his own quietus make
> with a bare bodkin?

Onward then to the last lines, the poem came from Lawrence's hand fully formed, each image clear and final:

> Oh lovely last, last lapse of death, into pure oblivion
> at the end of the longest journey
> peace, complete peace!
> But can it be that it is also procreation?
>
> Oh build your ship of death
> Oh build it!
> Oh, nothing matters but the longest journey.

Lawrence's ashes did not rest at Vence in Southern France; their "longest journey" was from the Mediterranean across the Atlantic, across the North American continent to New Mexico. The phoenix.

now so closely associated with everything he wrote, has become an ikon of what his writings mean; the sight of the mythical bird in flames rising from its own ashes is in itself a memorial to an English poet who wrote better prose and fewer actual poems than any of his predecessors in the Romantic tradition.

D. H. Lawrence

Geoffrey Bullough

(From *The Trend of Modern Poetry*, 1934)

[. . .] The work of D. H. Lawrence was in every way a complete antithesis to that of Mr Read. I have no hesitation in saying that Lawrence's poetry is greater than his novels. In poetry he never entirely lost his sense of form; the purely didactic element is less; the childish prejudices, the pseudo-philosophy, the jargon, are absent; the lyrical genius is not overlaid with tedious digression.

His early verse, influenced by Browning and perhaps Meredith, was full of the wild vitality of nature. "How splendid it is to be substance here!" But colour, scent, movement, bring intimations of human emotion. In dialect poems, like *The Collier's Wife, Violets, Whether or Not*, he portrayed passionate moments in the lives of his own shrewd working-class people. This directness and passion, with a foretaste of his own peculiar mixture of cruelty and tenderness, marked such poems as *Love on the Farm* and *Snapdragon* (which appeared like a portent among the paler flowers of *Georgian Poetry, 1911–12*).

Already he wrote in symbols, and dealt veraciously in the sexual conflict. From the ithyphallic yearnings of *Virgin Youth* (later rewritten) he passed to the first experiments in love, to raptures in which natural phenomena were caught up into the life of the senses, and to subtle moods complex with desire and revulsion, as in *Lightning, Hands of the Beloved, Lilies in the Fire, Repulsed.*

This precision of emotional suggestion is most clearly shown in the poems on the relationship of mother and son. He declared that the first period of his poetry came to its crisis with "the death of the mother, with the long haunting of death in life which continues" through the war. An occasional sentimentality mars the poems of this phase, but on the whole they are powerful, in their portrayal of the mother's grief as her son breaks away from her too importunate love, and of the son's remorse, impatient of her demands, yet recognising her need. But the fullness of their relationship is revealed in the lovely lyrics after her death, "If I could put you in my heart," "My love looks like a girl to-night," *The Virgin-Mother* and the many poems haunted by her shadow.

From the first he dabbled in impressionism, shown in such poems as *Corot, Picadilly Circus at Night, Morning Walk.* "I admit your accusations of impressionism and dogmatism," he wrote to a friend in 1909. "Suddenly, in a world full of tones and tints and shadows, I see a colour and it vibrates on my retina. I dip my brush in it and say, 'See, *that's* the colour.'" This and his clear-cut imagery brought him to the notice of Ezra Pound and the Imagists, and he contributed to Miss Lowell's anthology of 1915. What they lacked, Lawrence had, a power of infusing his gorgeous images with human passion. Not for him the flight to Ancient Greece, Italian Comedy, or the Far East. He felt the omnipresent conflict of life,

> . . . our fire to the innermost fire
> Leaping like spray, in the return of passion.

In his struggle with his mother, and his early loves, he held fast to the "secret places" of his soul (*Tease*). Because he knew industrialism he had none of the love of the machine now popular among the utopian and the "aesthetic"; he wrote of

> the soul of a people imprisoned asleep in the rule
> of the strong machine that runs mesmeric . . .

The machine was the opposite of his ideal: "My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says is always true. The intellect is only a bit and a bridle." The strength – and the weakness – of his poetry came from this assumption that instinct alone repays study. His own special aim was "the establishment of a new relation, or the readjustment of the old one, between men and women."

This is not the place to trace the story of Lawrence's marriage and of his vicissitudes at home and abroad after 1912. Poetically, however, the change in his mode of life was decisive for form and content. Hitherto he had experimented little outside traditional metres, and although he had already obtained a free, idiomatic expression, much of his diction and rhythm was derived from the Romantics and Victorians. Emotional liberation, and the influence of Imagism and Walt Whitman, led him to free verse. The transition coincided with a revulsion from the Georgians, and was made

easier by the fact that his scansion of metres had always been unconventional, as his discussion of Dowson's *Cynara* shows: "I think more of a bird with broad wings flying and lapsing through the air than anything, when I think of metre." At its best his free verse has natural cadence, most harmonious in its balancing of strophes, achieving its end by an adroit tempering of emotion rather than by external rule. Imagist parsimony and preciosity were alien to his nature; in later poems, under the conscious influence of Whitman, he was betrayed by excitement into diffuseness.

The poems of *Look! We have come through!*, embody the quickened apprehension occasioned by his great adventure. "The conflict of love and hate goes on between the man and the woman, and between these two and the world around them, till it reaches some sort of conclusion" (*Argument*). Here the brilliant scenery of Germany and Italy, the brooding energy of hot lands, is interpenetrated with the fervour of spirit leaping through the body, the assurance or the questioning of love's union. At the heart of his imaginative struggle was the problem of sexual polarisation, of the reconciliation of self-surrender with spiritual integrity. Such poems as *In the Dark* and *Both Sides of the Medal* are full of this. His attitude might seem superficially to resemble Milton's:

> And serve now, woman, as a woman should,
> Implicitly. (*Lady Wife*)

Yet this is not subordination of one partner to another; he desired for each a distinctness both physical and mental (e.g. *She Said as Well to Me, Wedlock*). Love must bring a reintegration of individuality. But this could come only through the surrender of self in the act of loving, by a kind of death in "the unknown strong current of life supreme." Out of this dark depth of unconsciousness came rebirth, a true recognition of "the other," a new equality of the sexes.

It was a mysticism of sex where the senses played their part in a union of the soul with the unconscious forces within life itself. What Mr Read tried to perceive intellectually, in isolation, Lawrence achieved through the elimination of intellect in a rapture of flesh and blood. While the end of Mr Read's course was nonentity, that of Lawrence was resurrection, a return to the earth, no longer as "God and the creation at once," but as

the discoverer!
I have found the other world!

Such doctrines give to his poetry its full significance. The theory, however, is only one aspect of the power which makes him a great love poet. In *A Young Wife, Green, Gloire de Dijon, I am like a Rose, Misery, Winter Dawn, December Night, New Year's Eve, New Year's Night, Birth Night, Coming Awake,* explicit doctrine is consumed in passion, and the form is most perfect. But he wore the loose mantle of Walt Whitman with a brave new air in the prophetic poems in which he announced the triumph of love over self, and over the wartime horror which afflicted him with a strange Hebraic sense of responsibility and atonement. The new man demanded a new world of his own creation:

A fine wind is blowing the new direction of time.
. . . . . .
If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of a wedge
Driven by invisible blows,
The rock will split, we shall come at the wonder, we shall find the Hesperides.

For a time it seemed easy: "there will only remain that all men detach themselves and become unique" (*Manifesto*). But his several biographers show how much his later life was embittered by his failure to stir the world.

To me, men are palpable, invisible nearnesses in the dark,
Sending out magnetic vibrations of warning, pitch-dark,
throbs of invitation . . .

This objective perception and acceptance of the barriers between people and things was a faculty quite alien to the romanticism of his earlier work. We may trace it in the growth of his aversion to the Georgian poets, and in his (qualified) admiration for the Futurists under Marinetti. Its operation is strikingly displayed in *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers.* He is the Van Gogh of poetry, subjecting the forms of subhuman nature to his impersonal *daemon.* Unlike most of the Georgians, he acknowledges the alien life, does not sentimentalise over snakes, elephants, kangaroos, or dogs (cf. *Bibbles*), does not try to shed his humanity and *become* them; but stands

outside and watches their essential difference. So he contemplates the Mosquito, amused and horrified at its manoeuvres, feels terror at the obscene flight of a bat in his room, wonders at the shape, the secret meaning of the peach. Some creatures he treats as symbols of civilisation; for instance, the burst fig suggest the blatancy of modern feminism. But more often he sees them as symbols of the "dark forces" of life. Medlars and Sorb Apples evoke death and the Underworld; grapes suggest "the world before the flood, where man was dark and evasive. . . ." Cypresses in Tuscany bring back the secret of sensual life which he believed the Etruscans possessed (cf. *Etruscan Places*). Under the comedy and grotesqueness of animal life he sees the community of principle. If he mocks at the He-Goat's lascivious capers as the symptom of enervating domestication, he hears in the cry of the rutting tortoise the eternal cry of sex "which breaks up our integrity, our single inviolability, our deep silence."

It is more than a Priapic religion of fertility that Lawrence preaches. It is a psycho-physical unity below the effervescent intelligence. His value as a poet arises from the intensity with which this profound apprehension brings the external world into intimate relationship with the inner world of instinct and emotion. Despite his occasional turgidity, hysteria, crudities, imitations of Whitman's barbaric yawp, he was a great poet. [. . .]

The Burden of the Mystery

Babette Deutsch

(From *This Modern Poetry*, 1936)

Greater glory in the sun
An evening chill upon the air,
Bid imagination run
Much on the Great Questioner;
What He can question, what if questioned I
Can with a fitting confidence reply. — YEATS

There are several reasons why men write poetry, and obedience to any one of them may produce memorable things. But the reason which has the most significant appeal for the reader is likely to be that most urgent for the poet – the need to find adequate form for the eternal question, and, by giving it shape, temporarily to silence it. There have been those who, serving a serene aristocracy, have produced gay, gracious, elegant verse. But the periods when such allegiance seems possible are rare, and the sensitive man is apt, even in the face of the triumphs of the race, to hear at his back time's hurrying chariot-wheels, to see at his feet that fine and private place where nothing is done, suffered, or enjoyed, or, looking at the evil end of the just, 'Call no man fortunate that is not dead.' The tragic sense of life which is felt to be basic in *Samson Agonistes*, as in *Lear*, which must be allowed brief utterance even in *Hyperion*, and which exercised a poet as close to us as Hardy, is complicated for later generations by the immediate evils of our present society. It is not strange, then, that those contemporaries who have been most oppressed by

the heavy and the weary weight,
Of all this unintelligible world,

have sometimes spoken unintelligibly of their travail. Yet under the spell of a tale not altogether unlike that of the wretched mariner, we are arrested as was the wedding-guest: we cannot choose but hear.

Thus it is that D. H. Lawrence holds us as only those can hold us

who have borne, if not a body of the albatross, 'the burthen of the mystery.' The greater part of Lawrence's work (omitting consideration of his novels, which have also been estimated as poetry), is flawed by his lack of control over his material. His technique is slipshod: his diction is sometimes inexact, sometimes verbose; his cadences are faulty (witness, for example, *Frohnleichnam*, which stumbles where it should dance). Not seldom his ineptitude is the outward and visible sign of his inward confusion. Good poetry, whether it be emotion recollected in tranquillity, or tranquillity recollected with emotion, always exhibits order. Much of Lawrence's work appears to be mere jottings for poems which he might some day have written, had he imposed on himself the necessary discipline. Some of his verse is no more than the groans and retchings and curses of a sick man. Yet if one examines the whole body of his poetry, one finds in it an attitude towards life which makes him free of the company of a Blake, a Rimbaud, a Whitman.

It is easy enough to hear the voice of Blake in these poems, the voice fulminating against the 'dark Satanic mills', framing the *Proverbs of Hell*: 'He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence', the voice of the Bard

> Calling the lapsèd Soul,
> And weeping in the evening dew;
> That night controll
> The starry pole,
> And fallen, fallen light renew.

Even more clearly sounds the voice of Walt, though Lawrence deprecated a barbaric yawp only less than he hated the smooth tone of civility, though the America he saw was no eagle but perhaps a goose laying a golden egg. 'Which is just a stone to anyone asking for meat' – an 'addled golden egg.' Yet here, plain upon page after page, is Whitman's sensual delight in the earth, in the sun and the serpent which it brings forth, in the darkness, and the miracle of the senses which are alive in the dark. Here, stronger than the rage against the arrogant stupidity of the well-born, the fatuous stupidity of the rich, the violent stupidity of the mob (all of which Whitman heavily discounted), is the will to preserve, to consecrate, the integrity of the individual. Here, in the last poems, are echoes of Whitman's *Passage to India*, of *Whispers of Heavenly Death*, of the *Last Invocation*.

At the last, tenderly
From the walls of the powerful fortress'd house,
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from the keeps of
the well-closed doors,
Let me be wafted.

Let me glide noiselessly forth,
With the the key of softness unlock the locks – with a
whisper,
Set ope the doors O soul.

Tenderly — be not impatient,
(Strong is your hold O mortal flesh,
Strong is your hold O love).

Using almost the same images, speaking, perhaps, too much, as a man will who has not much time to speak, Lawrence tells of his *Ship of Death*:

I sing of autumn and the falling fruit
and the long journey towards oblivion.

The poem moves on slowly, gathering power as it moves, to the implacable urgency of the final lines:

Oh, lovely last, last lapse of death, into pure
oblivion
at the end of the longest journey
peace, complete peace!
But can it be that also it is procreation?

Oh build your ship of death
oh build it!
Oh, nothing matters but the longest journey.

The vision of Blake, who had cleansed 'the doors of perception', and looked out upon a universe throbbing with infinite energy; the summons of Whitman, singing the body electric – Lawrence's poems are luminous with that insight, resonant with that call. One may find other influences here: in the early poems, with their glimpses of Nottinghamshire tragedies, traces of Hardy; in a few lyrics, oblique tributes to the imagists, of whom he was mistakenly

accounted one. But what of Rimbaud? Why name in this connection a man who personified so much of what Lawrence was fighting? Lawrence tolerated neither the bohemian, nor the revolutionary, nor the trader: Rimbaud had chosen all three avatars. Lawrence shuddered back from that 'long, immense, deliberate derangement of all the senses' whereby Rimbaud had sought to become a seer, a poet in the magical sense of the term. Certainly Lawrence, although a symbolist without question, lacked the technical precision which belonged to the school; and where its members would distil into their lyrics the volatile essences of feeling, he poured into his poems the crude emotion of the moment, in all its turbidness. True, he, like Rimbaud, had spent a season in hell. He, too, strove perpetually for an image great enough to body forth his struggle. Is this sufficient to make him kindred to that tormented and savage genius? Say, rather, that at the core of Lawrence's poetry pulsed a like flame.

At the close of *Saison en enfer* occurs a line which might be the epigraph for the best of Lawrence's work: 'Welcome every influx of true vigour and tenderness.' In a letter written to Harriet Monroe two years before his death, speaking of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence repeated what so many of his poems reiterate, his belief in the necessity for restoring what he called 'the phallic consciousness' in our lives: 'because', he wrote, 'it is the source of all beauty, and all real gentleness. And those are the two things, tenderness and beauty, which will save us from horrors . . . In my novel I work for them directly, and direct from the phallic consciousness, which, you understand, is not the cerebral consciousness, but something really deeper, and the root of poetry, lived or sung.'

Rimbaud had said true vigour and tenderness. Lawrence said, tenderness and beauty. It comes to the same thing. *The Wild Common*, which opens his *Collected Poems*, for all its ineptness of phrase and cadence, utters this conviction:

> The quick sparks on the gorse-bushes are leaping
> Little jets of sunlight texture imitating flame. . . .
>
> Sun, but in substance, yellow water-blobs!
> Wings and feathers on the crying, mysterious ages, peewits wheeling!
> All that is right, all that is good, all that is God takes substance! a rabbit lobs
> In confirmation, I hear sevenfold lark-songs pealing.

Virgin Youth, a hymn to the risen phallus, a cry for pardon for denial of life, sounds the key-note of his major work. There are other early lyrics which are an index of his weakness, his need to retreat from a world which failed to honour his god – witness *From A College Window*, with its

> I sit absolved, assured I am better off
> Beyond a world I never want to join.

There are scattered throughout his poems confessions of the bond which held him to a buried past, so that having crossed the threshold of maturity he could still say to his dead mother:

> . . . that is not your grave, in England,
> The world is your grave.

And in the very breath with which he would have denied her, cry out:

> I am a naked candle burning on your grave.

Yet his later poems are reiterations of that initial statement in *Wild Common*: 'all that is God takes substance', – are affirmations of life. Even his elaborate fantasies about birds, beasts, and flowers, where he shows a creation distorted under the load of his own anger and scorn, offer signs and tokens of his deep-seated passion for the world in all its fierce strangeness. And in the final poems, after his endlessly renewed battles with abstractions, he asserts the profoundest of sensual experiences to be the sense of truth and the sense of justice, in protest against an anaemic Platonism, in defence of true vigour and tenderness. It is among these lyrics that one finds two short poems which, together with the *Ship of Death*, may be taken as the substance of Lawrence's legacy: *Bavarian Gentians*, wherein he invokes the blue torch of the flower as a symbol of the fructifying dark, and *Flowers And Men*, which is a variant of his demand for

> lovely dangerous life
> And passionate disquality of men . . .

Here again is the blue gentian, bluer and richer for the memory of the earlier lyric in which he made it Persephone's flower:

Flowers achieve their own floweriness and it is a miracle.
Men don't achieve their own manhood, alas, oh alas! alas!

All I want of you, men and women,
All I want of you
is that you shall achieve your beauty
as the flowers do.

Oh leave off saying I want you to be savages.
Tell me, is the gentian savage, at the top of its coarse
stem?
Oh what in you can answer to this blueness?
. . . as the gentian and the daffodil . . .
Tell me! tell me! is there in you a beauty to compare
to the honeysuckle at evening now
pouring out his breath.

Perhaps because, as the son of a coal-miner, he came to the cultural tradition of England half a stranger, Lawrence seems to have as strong filiations with American as with British poets. Certainly one finds a distrust of the intellect which is apparent in Whitman, and a need for escape from society felt by a poet who is in some ways an offshoot of Whitman: Robinson Jeffers. For Lawrence the principle of evil rests in the egocentric man and the soulless machine; God realizes Himself in substance, yet life is rooted in profound impalpable darkness; the promise of oblivion is blessed. For Jeffers, the principle of evil is introverted man and his self-centered civilization; the universe is the body of God; the ultimate values are strength to endure life and the promise of oblivion. The thinking of both men is more complex and more flexible than such a summary would imply. Yet it reveals, with due allowance for simplification, the kinship between these two poets. [. . .]

Poetry, Regeneration and D. H. Lawrence

Kenneth Rexroth

(From *World Outside the Window,* 1947)

At the very beginning Lawrence belonged to a different order of being from the literary writers of his day. In 1912 he said: "I worship Christ, I worship Jehovah, I worship Pan, I worship Aphrodite. But I do not worship hands nailed and running with blood upon a cross, nor licentiousness, nor lust. I want them all, all the gods. They are all God. But I must serve in real love. If I take my whole passionate, spiritual and physical love to the woman who in turn loves me, that is how I serve God. And my hymn and my game of joy is my work. All of which I read in . . ."

Do you know what he read all that in? It makes you wince. He thought he found that in *Georgian Poetry 1911–12.* In Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfrid Gibson, John Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke, John Masefield, Walter de la Mare, Gordon Bottomley! What a good man Lawrence must have been. It is easy to understand how painful it was for him to learn what evil really was. It is easy to understand why the learning killed him, slowly and terribly. But he never gave up. He was always hunting for comradeship – in the most unlikely places – Michael Arlen, Peter Warlock, Murry, Mabel Dodge. He never stopped trusting people and hoping. And he went on writing exactly the gospel he announced in 1912, right to the end.

Lawrence thought he was a Georgian, at first. There are people who will tell you that his early poetry was typical Georgian countryside poetry – *Musings in the Hedgerows,* by the Well Dressed Dormouse. It is true that early poems like *The Wild Common, Cherry Robbers,* and the others, bear a certain resemblance to the best Georgian verse. They are rhymed verse in the English language on "subjects taken from nature." Some of the Georgians had a favorite literary convention. They were anti-literary. Lawrence was the real thing. His "hard" rhymes, for instance, "quick-kick, rushes-pushes, sheepdip-soft lip, gudgeon-run on." I don't imagine that when Lawrence came to "soft lip" he remembered that bees had always sipped at soft lips and that, as a representative of the new tendency it was up to him to do something about it. I think his

mind just moved in the regions not covered by the standard associations of standard British rhyme patterns. At the end of his life he was still talking about the old sheep dip, with its steep soft lip of turf, in the village where he was born. Why, once he even rhymed wind and thinned, in the most unaware manner imaginable. That is something that, to the best of my knowledge, has never been done before or since in the British Isles.

The hard metric, contorted and distorted, and generally banged around, doesn't sound made up, either. Compulsion neurotics like Hopkins and querulous old gentlemen like Bridges made quite an art of metrical eccentricity. You turned an iamb into a trochee here, and an anapest into hard spondee there, and pretty soon you got something that sounded difficult and tortured and intense. I think Lawrence was simply very sensitive to quantity and to the cadenced pulses of verse. In the back of his head was a stock of sundry standard verse patterns. He started humming a poem, hu hu hum, hum hum, hu hu hum hu, adjusted it as best might be to the remembered accentual patterns, and let it go at that. I don't think he was unconscious of the new qualities which emerged, but I don't think he went about it deliberately, either.

This verse is supposed to be like Hardy's. It is. But there is always something a little synthetic about Hardy's rugged verse. The smooth ones seem more natural, somehow. The full dress, Matthew Arnold sort of sonnet to Leslie Stephen is probably Hardy's best poem. It is a very great poem, but Arnold learned the trick of talking like a highly idealized Anglican archbishop and passed it on to Hardy. That is something nobody could imagine Lawrence ever learning, he just wasn't that kind of an animal.

Hardy could say to himself: "To-day I am going to be a Wiltshire yeoman, sitting on a fallen rock at Stonehenge, writing a poem to my girl on a piece of wrapping paper with the gnawed stub of a pencil," and he could make it very convincing. But Lawrence really was the educated son of a coal miner, sitting under a tree that had once been a part of Sherwood Forest, in a village that was rapidly becoming part of world-wide, disemboweled hell, writing hard, painful poems, to girls who carefully had been taught the art of unlove. It was real. Love really was a mystery at the navel of the earth, like Stonehenge. The miner really was in contact with a monstrous, seething mystery, the black sun in the earth. There is a vatic quality in Lawrence that is only in Hardy rarely, in a few poems, and in great myths like *Two on a Tower*.

Something breaks out of the Pre-Raphaelite landscape of *Cherry Robbers*. That poem isn't like a Victorian imitation of medieval illumination at all. It is more like one of those crude Coptic illuminations, with the Christian content just a faint glaze over the black, bloody "babylonian turbulence" of the Gnostic mystery. I don't know the date of *Hymn to Priapus*, it seems to lie somewhere between his mother's death and his flight with Frieda, but it is one of the Hardy kind of poems, and it is one of Lawrence's best. It resembles Hardy's *Night of the Dance*. But there is a difference. Hardy is so anxious to be common that he just avoids being commonplace. Lawrence *is* common, he doesn't have to try. He is coming home from a party, through the winter fields, thinking of his dead mother, of the girl he had just had in the barn, of his troubled love life, and suddenly Orion leans down out of the black heaven and touches him on the thigh, and the hair of his head stands up.

Hardy was a major poet. Lawrence was a minor prophet. Like Blake and Yeats, his is the greater tradition. If Hardy ever had a girl in the hay, tipsy on cider, on the night of Boxing Day, he kept quiet about it. He may have thought that it had something to do with "the stream of his life in the darkness deathward set", but he never let on, except indirectly.

Good as they are, there is an incompleteness about the early poems. They are the best poetry written in England at that time, but they are poems of hunger and frustration. Lawrence was looking for completion. He found it later, of course, in Frieda, but he hadn't found it then. The girl he called Miriam wrote a decent, conscientious contribution to his biography. She makes it only too obvious that what he was looking for was not to be found in her. And so the Miriam poems are tortured, and defeated, and lost, as though Lawrence didn't know where he was, which was literally true.

Between Miriam and Frieda lies a body of even more intense and troubled poems. Those to his mother, the dialect poems, and the poems to Helen are in this group. The "mother" poems are amongst his best. They are invaluable as direct perspectives on an extraordinary experience.

From one point of view Lawrence is the last of a special tradition that begins with St. Augustine and passes through Pascal and Baudelaire amongst others, to end finally in himself. There is no convincing evidence for Freud's theory that the Oedipus Complex

dates back to some extremely ancient crime in the history of primitive man. There is ample evidence that Western European civilization is specifically the culture of the Oedipus Complex. Before Augustine there was nothing really like it. There were forerunners and prototypes and intimations, but there wasn't the real thing. The *Confessions* introduce a new sickness of the human mind, the most horrible pandemic and the most lethal ever to afflict man. Augustine did what silly literary boys in our day boast of doing. He invented a new derangement. If you make an intense effort to clear your mind and then read Baudelaire and Catullus together, the contrast, the new thing in Baudelaire, makes you shudder. Baudelaire is struggling in a losing battle with a ghost more powerful than armies, more relentless than death. I think it is this demon which has provided the new thing in Western Man, the insane dynamic which has driven him across the earth to burn and slaughter, loot and rape.

I believe Lawrence laid that ghost, exorcised that demon, once for all, by an act of absolute spiritual transvaluation. *Piano, Silence, The Bride,* and the other poems of that period, should be read with the tenth chapter of the ninth book of the *Confessions*. It is the beginning and the end. Augustine was a saint. There are acts of salvation by which man can raise himself to heaven, but, say the Japanese, a devil is substituted in his place. Lawrence drove out the devil, and the man stepped back. Or, as the Hindus say, with an act of absolute devotion from the worshipper, the goddess changes her aspect from maleficent to benign.

It is not only that Lawrence opened the gates of personal salvation for himself in the "mother" poems. He did it in a special way, in the only way possible, by an intense realization of total reality, and by the assumption of total responsibility for the reality and for the realization. Other people have tried parts of this process, but only the whole thing works. This shows itself in these poems, in their very technique. There, for the first time, he is in full possession of his faculties. He proceeds only on the basis of the completely real, the completely motivated, step by step along the ladder of Blake's "minute particulars." Ivor Richard's *Practical Criticism* contains a symposium of his students on Lawrence's *Piano*. It makes one of the best introductions to Lawrence's poetry ever written. And one of the qualities of his verse that is revealed there more clearly is the uncanny, "surreal" accuracy of perception and evaluation. Objectivism is a hollow word beside this complete precision and purposiveness.

From this time on Lawrence never lost contact with the important thing, the totality in the particular, the responsibility of vision. Harrassed by sickness and betrayal, he may have faltered in fulfilling that most difficult of all the injunctions of Christ, to suffer fools gladly. He may have got out of contact with certain kinds of men at certain times. He may have become cross and irritable and sick. But he never lost sight of what really mattered: the blue vein arching over the naked foot, the voices of the fathers singing at the charivari, blending in the winter night, Lady Chatterley putting flowers in Mellor's hair.

The "Helen" poems are strange. (See *A Winter's Tale, Return, Kisses in the Train, Under the Oak, Passing Visit to Helen, Release, Seven Seals.*) They all have a weird, dark atmosphere shot through with spurts of flame, a setting which remained a basic symbolic situation with Lawrence. It is the atmosphere of the pre-War I novel, young troubled love in gaslit London – draughty, dark, and flaring, and full of mysterious movement. Probably the girl's name was not Helen. Lawrence thought of her as dim, larger than life, a demi-goddess, moving through the smoke of a burning city. For certain Gnostics Helen was the name of the incarnate "female principle", the power of the will, the sheath of the sword, the sacred whore who taught men love. Helen seems to have been the midwife of Lawrence's manhood. At the end, something like her returns in the Persephone of *Bavarian Gentians*. Re-birth. No one leaves adolescence cleanly without a foretaste of death.

Ezra Pound said that the dialect poems were the best thing Lawrence ever wrote. This is just frivolous eccentricity. But they are fine poems, and in them another figure of the myth is carefully drawn. They are poems about Lawrence's father, the coal miner who emerges nightly from the earth with the foliage of the carboniferous jungles on his white body. Lawrence's little dark men, his Gypsies, and Indians, and Hungarians, and Mexicans, and all the rest, are not dark by race, but dark with coal dust. The shadow of forests immeasurably older than man has stained their skins. Augustine was never at peace until he found his father again in the pure mental absolute of Plotinus. Lawrence found his father again in the real man, whose feet went down into the earth. In certain poems where he speaks as a fictional woman, the erotic intensity is embarrassing to those of us who still live in the twilight of the Oedipus Complex. What had been evil in the father image becomes a virtue, the source of the will; deep behind the mother image lies the germ of action, the motile flagellate travelling up the

dark hot tube seeking immortality. The boy watching the miners rise and descend in the yawning maw of the earth in Nottinghamshire grows into the man of forty watching the Indians pass in and out of a lodge where an old man is interminably chanting – there is a sense of strangeness, but no estrangement. There is no effort to violate the mystery of paternity because it is known in the blood. Lawrence knew by a sort of sensual perception that every cell of his body bore the marks of the striped Joseph's coat of the paternal sperm. [. . .]

Some shockingly ill-informed things have been written about Lawrence's relation to psychoanalysis. In the first place, he was not a Freudian. He seems to have read little Freud, not to have understood him any too well, and to have disliked him heartily. In the winter of 1918–1919 he read Jung, apparently for the first time, in English. Presumably this was *The Psychology of the Unconscious*. Jung was very much in the air in those days, as he is again. There was probably a great deal of amateur talk about his ideas amongst Lawrence's friends. But Lawrence does not seem to have had much more to go on, and *The Psychology of the Unconscious* is only the beginning of the system later elaborated by Jung. Nor did he ever become intimate with any of his students. Later Mabel Dodge tried to bring them together by correspondence. The story goes that Jung ignored her letters because they were written in pencil. So much for that.

Lawrence wrote quite a bit on psychoanalysis. There are the two books, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, a somewhat sketchy popularization of some of Jung's basic concepts, and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, of which, more in a moment. And then there are the reviews of Trigant Burrow's book, and miscellaneous remarks scattered through correspondence and reviews. This is all of the greatest importance to the understanding of Lawrence. [. . .]

There is a hallucinatory quality in the images of the poems which precede Frieda which it is interesting to compare with the induced hallucination of H.D. The conflict in H.D. is hidden in herself. It is still there to this day, although her latest prose work has been the journal of a Freudian analysis. Her images are purified of conflict, then the intensity which has been distilled from the sublimation of conflict is applied from the outside. ("Your poetry is not pure, eternal, sublimated," she told Lawrence.) What results is a puzzling hallucination of fact, a contentless mood which seems to reflect something tremendously important but whose mystery always retreats before analysis.

Lawrence's early poems are poems of conflict. The images are always polarized. Antagonisms struggle through the texture. But the struggle is real. The antagonisms are struggling toward the light. The conflict yields to insight, if not to analysis. It is like the propaedeutic symbolism of the dream, as contrasted to the trackless labyrinths of falsification which form the patterns of most waking lives. The hallucination is real, the vision of the interior, personal oracle. Its utterance has meaning, more meaning than ordinary waking reality because the subjective reality is seen in the objective, emerging from it, the dream from the reality – not dislocated or applied from outside the context.

The poems of *Look! We Have Come Through!* fall into three groups. First there are the structurally more conventional pieces like *Moonrise*, which sounds a little like Masefield's sonnets though it is incomparably finer, and the *Hymn to Priapus*, and the others – they are all probably earlier and have already been discussed. Second, there are the poems of the Rhine Journey, *December Night, New Year's Eve, Coming Awake, History;* erotic epigrams, intense as Meleager, more wise than Paul the Silentiary. Lawrence was still a young man, and had many great poems to write – but put these beside the few poets who have survived from that day, Sturge Moore, Monro, De La Mare, they look like pygmies. Only Yeats stands up against Lawrence. And last, there are the Whitmanic free verse manifestoes, "explaining" marriage to people who had forgotten what it was.

When Frieda the sleeper wakes, the man walks free, the "child" of the alchemists is born. Reality is totally valued, and passes beyond the possibility of hallucination. The clarity of purposively realized objectivity is the most supernatural of all visions. Bad poetry always suffers from the same defects: synthetic hallucination and artifice. Invention is not poetry. Invention is defence, the projection of pseudopods out of the ego to ward off the "other." Poetry is vision, the pure act of sensual communion and contemplation.

That is why the poems of Lawrence and Frieda on their Rhine Journey are such great poetry. That is why they are also the greatest imagist poems ever written. Reality streams through the body of Frieda, through everything she touches, every place she steps, valued absolutely, totally beyond time and place, in the minute particular. The swinging of her breasts as she stoops in the bath, the roses, the deer, the harvesters, the hissing of the glacier water in the steep river – everything stands out lit by a light not of

this earth and at the same time completely of this earth, the light of the Holy Sacrament of Marriage, whose source is the wedded body of the bride.

The accuracy of Lawrence's observation haunts the mind permanently. I have never stood beside a glacier river, at just that relative elevation, and just that pitch, with just that depth of swift water moving over a cobbled bed, without hearing again the specific hiss of Lawrence's Isar. These poems may not be sublimated (whatever Y.M.C.A. evasion that may refer to) but they are certainly pure and eternal.

Again, it is fruitful to compare the Rhine Journey poems with the only other poems of our time which resemble them much, Ford Madox Ford's *Bucksbee*. Ford was writing about something very akin to what Lawrence was, about an aspect of marriage. But he was writing about its impossibility, about how life had bled away its possibility from both him and his girl, and how they had taken, in middle age and in the long Mediterranean drouth, the next best thing – intense erotic friendship. And about now, every once in a while, marriage comes and looks in at the window. The contrast with Lawrence and Frieda, sinking into the twilight in the fuming marsh by the Isar, "where the snake disposes," is pathetic past words.

Ford's *L'Oubi — Temps de Secberesse* and Lawrence's *River Roses* and *Quite Forsaken* are things of a kind and the best of their kind, but like the north and south poles, there is all the difference in the world between them. There is more communion in Frieda's temporary absence than in the closet possible "under the catalpa tree, where the strange birds, driven north by the drought, cry with their human voices." "Singular birds, with their portentous, singular flight and human voices," says Ford. This is the Persephone of *Bavarian Gentians* and the Orphic birds which flutter around the dying who are withdrawing themselves, corpuscle by corpuscle, from communion. Lawrence would come there one day, with the dark blue flowers on the medicine table and Frieda sleeping in a chair beside him, but he was on the other side of the universe then – the early summer of 1912, in the Isartal the snow leaving the mountains.

After the Rhine Journey come the poems of struggle for a living adjustment. The ceremonial glory of the sacrament passes from the forefront of consciousness and the period of adjustment to the background of life begins. Every detail of life must be transformed

by marriage. This means creative conflict on the most important level.

Sacramental communion is bound by time. Mass does not last forever. Eventually the communicant must leave the altar and digest the wafer, the Body and Blood must enter his own flesh as it moves through the world and struggles with the devil. The problem lies in the sympathetic nervous system, says Lawrence. And it is not easy for two members of a deranged race, in the Twentieth Century, to learn again how to make those webs mesh as they should.

Some of these poems are, in a sense, Frieda's – records of her own interior conquest. It is amazing how much they accomplished, these two. Today, revisiting this battlefield between love and hate that is so carefully mapped in certain of the poems, it is like Gettysburg, a sleepy, pastoral landscape dotted with monuments and graves. Only maimed women and frightened men are Suffragettes any more. Hedda Gabler is dead, or lurking in the suburbs. We should be grateful to Frieda. It was she who gave the dragon its death-blow, and the Animus no longer prowls the polls and bed-rooms, seeking whom it may devour.

The Whitmanic poems seem to owe a good deal to *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*. They look like Whitman on the page. But if read aloud with any sort of ear, they don't sound much like him. Whitman flourished in the oratorical context of Nineteenth Century America. He isn't rhetorical in the invidious sense, that is, there is nothing covert or coercive about him. He says what he means, but he says it in the language of that lost art of elocution so popular in his day. There is little of this in Lawrence. At this period his long-lined free verse is derived almost entirely from the poetry of the Bible, the Psalms, the song of Deborah, the song of Hezekiah, of Moses, the Benedicite, the Magnificat, the Nunc Dimittis. All the devices of Hebrew poetry are there, and in addition, the peculiar, very civilized, selfconscious "sympathetic" poetry of St. Luke – those poems which have made his the "women's Gospel," and which all good Englishmen must learn in childhood as part of the Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church.

In the volume *Look! We Have Come Through!* Lawrence was just beginning to learn to write free verse. I don't think some of the poems are completely successful. They are diffuse and long-winded. He tries to say too much, and all at the same pitch of intensity; there are no crises, no points of reference. On the whole

the most successful is *New Heaven and Earth*. It may not be a perfect object of art, but it is a profound exhortation.

Beyond Holy Matrimony lies the newly valued world of birds, beasts and flowers. "Look, we have come through" – to a transformed world, with a glory around it everywhere like ground lightning. The poems of *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* have the same supernatural luster that shines through the figures of men and animals and things, busy being part of a new redeemed world, as they are found carved around the mandala of the Blessed Virgin above some cathedral door or on some rose window.

Birds, Beasts, and Flowers is the mature Lawrence, in complete control of his medium, or completely controlled by his demon. He never has any trouble. He can say exactly what he wants to say. Except for the death poems, he would never write better. (And too, after this, he would never be well again.) He seems to have lived in a state of total realization – the will and its power, positive and negative, at maximum charge, and all the universe streaming between them glowing and transformed. The work of art grows in that electric field, is a "function" of it. It is the act of devotion in the worshipper that forces the god to occupy the statue. It is the act of devotion in the sculptor that forces the god to occupy the stone which the artist then pares to his invisible limbs, tailors like cloth. It is never theology in the first; it is never aesthetics or any teachable craft in the second. The craft is the vision and the vision is the craft. [. . .]

Lawrence's free verse in *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* is amongst the small best ever written. It can be analysed, but the paradigms produced by the analysis are worthless. It cannot be explained away, demonstrated in a mathematical sense, Neither, certainly, can any other great poetry; but at least a convincing illusion can be created, and the young can be provided with something to practice. A poem like *Bat*, or *St. Mark*, moves with a stately, gripping sonority through the most complex symphonic evolutions. The music is a pattern of vibration caught from the resonant tone of Lawrence himself. The concerto is not on the page, little spots with flags and tails on a stave, but the living thing, evolving from the flesh of the virtuoso. It is like Gregorian chant or Hindu music, one thing when sung at Solesmes, or in the ruins of Konarak, another when "rendered" by the Progressive Choral Group or at a concert of the Vedanta Society of Los Angeles.

Again, the faults of *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* are the excess of

virtue. Like anyone who knows he has something intensely important to say, Lawrence found it hard to keep from being long-winded. I think a good deal of his over-expansiveness and repetition is due to his methods of composition.

Some poets meditate in stillness and inactivity, as far away as possible from the creative act. We know that Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot, by their own testimony, spent long periods of time quiescent, inert as artists, turning over and over the substance of vision within themselves. Sometimes, as in Baudelaire, this process is extremely painful, a true desert of the soul. Months went by in which the paper and pen were red hot, it was impossible for him to read, his whole personality seemed engulfed in a burning neurasthenia. And then there would come a period of peace, and slowly growing exaltation, and finally the creative act, almost somnabulistic in its completion. Actual composition by this sort of personality tends to be rare, and usually as perfect as talent permits.

Lawrence meditated pen in hand. His contemplation was always active, flowing out in a continuous stream of creativity which he seemed to have been able to open practically every day. He seldom reversed himself, seldom went back to re-work the same manuscript. Instead, he would lay aside a work that dissatisfied him and re-write it all from the beginning. In his poetry he would move about a theme, enveloping it in constantly growing spheres of significance. It is the old antithesis: centrifugal versus centripetal, Parmenides versus Heraclitus. He kept several manuscript books of his verse, and whenever he wanted to publish a collection he would go through them and pick out a poem here and there, the ones he considered had best handled their themes. Behind each poem was usually a group of others devoted to the same material. His selection was always personal, and sometimes it was not very "artistic." *Nettles*, for instance, is a selection of what are, by any standard, the poorer poems of the collections of epigrams printed in *Last Poems*.

There are those who think these epigrams, the ones in *Pansies*, and those in *Last Poems*, aren't art. This opinion is the product of a singular provincialism. It is true that, due to the reasons just mentioned, they aren't all successful, but they belong to a tradition, are members of a species, which has produced some of the greatest poetry. Epigram or maxim, Martial or La Rochefoucauld, the foundations of this tradition are far more stable than those of the neo-metaphysical poetry produced, with seven ambiguities

carefully inserted in every line, by unhappy dons between the wars.

Any bright young man can be taught to be artful. It is impossible to teach taste, but you can teach most people caution. It is always the lesser artists who are artful, they must learn their trade by rote. They must be careful never to make a false step, never to speak out of a carefully synthesized character. The greatest poetry is nobly disheveled. At least, it never shows the scars of taking care. "Would he had blotted a thousand lines," said Ben Jonson of Shakespeare. Which thousand? Lawrence was always mislaying those manuscript books of poetry and writing around the world for them, just as Cèzanne left his paintings in the fields. Not for any stupid reason – that they are not Perfect Works of Art – but simply because he forgot. [. . .]

As far as I know the poems in the novel *The Plumed Serpent* have never been printed separately. This book is one of the most important (he thought it the most important) Lawrence ever wrote. It has brought forth all sorts of pointless debate. People are always saying: "Well, I have lived in Mexico for years and it *simply* isn't like that." Lawrence was not an idiot. He knew it wasn't. And in the first chapter he gave a very accurate and pitiful picture of the "real" Mexico, sterile, subcolonial, brutal, with the old gods gone, and the church gone, and the revolution a swindle, and nothing left but a squalid imitation of Ashtabula, Ohio. And he knew the other side too, the pasty frigid nymphomaniacs, the deranged women of Europe and America, who consider themselves disciples of Lawrence and prowl the earth seeking Dark Gods to take to bed. He wrote a story which should have destroyed them forever – *None of That*. It should be read with *The Plumed Serpent*.

Every year there is less, but in Lawrence's day there was still something, of the primeval Mexico – at the great feast in Oaxaca, in the life of the peasant in the remote villages, in the Indian communities in the back country. Lawrence did not make any very definite contact with the ancient Mexico but he could see and sense it, and he was fresh from a much less-touched primitive world – that of the Navaho and Pueblo Indians of the Southwest. His materials were not as abundant as they might have been, but they were enough to build a book of ritual, of the possible that would never be, of potentialities that would never emerge. It is a book of ceremonial prophecy, but prophecy uttered in the foreknowledge it would never be fulfilled.

The re-awakening of mystery, the revival of the Aztec religion, the political "Indianism" – even if it all came true, one knows it would be a fraud, a politician's device, as Indianism is in Latin America today. Lawrence knew that, of course, and so the book is dogged with tragedy. One constantly expects the characters to go out in a blazing Götterdämmerung in some dispute with the police, like a gangster movie. They don't, but maybe it would have been better if they had, for eventually they tire; they seem to become secretly aware that all this gorgeous parading around in primitive millinery, this Mystery, and Fire, and Blood, and Darkness, has been thought up. There is something Western European, British Museum, about it. The protagonist, Kate, submits to her lover's insistent Mystery, but rather out of ennui and loathing of Europe than out of any conviction, and one feels that the book could have no sequel, or only a sequel of disintegration, like *Women in Love*.

Still, in the middle of the book, before the fervor dies out, Lawrence wrote as nearly as he could what be believed should be. If the religion of Cipriano and Ramon is taken as an other-worldly system of values, it is profound and true, and, due to the freshness of its symbols, tremendously exciting. Also, it differs very little from any other religion that has maintained its contacts with its sources. Ramon and Cipriano short-circuit themselves where Christianity was short-circuited by Constantine, in the desire to have both worlds, to found a political religion – a Church. That, if any, is the "message" of the book.

The mystery survives in the poems, just as the sacraments survived Constantine. They are not the greatest poems Lawrence ever wrote, but they are amongst the most explicit. This is Lawrence's religion. Wherever he found it he is now in complete possession of a kind of orthodoxy, the orthodoxy of the heterodox – the symbolic world of the Gnostics, the Occultists, Tantrism, Jung. In a sense they are failures, these poems, in the way that the Indian songs published by the United States Bureau of Ethnology are not failures. But, again, that is the message of the book. Finally you discover that you cannot make up paganism. What you make up is a cult. There is nothing primitive about Gnosticism, any more than there is anything primitive about Theosophy. It is the creation of over-civilized Hellenistic intellectuals. Tantrism too grew up in India, in Buddhism and Hinduism, when civilization was exhausting itself. Jung comes, with Lawrence, at the end of the career of

Western European Man. Lawrence, after all, was a contemporary of Niels Bohr and Picasso. And so his poems are mystical poems – and the Aztecs were not mystics, they were just Aztecs. This doesn't invalidate the poems. They have very little to do with ancient or modern Mexico but they do express, very well, the personal religion of D. H. Lawrence. They may be full of "occult lore", but behind the machinery is an intense, direct, personal, mystical apprehension or reality.

In the last hours Lawrence seems to have lived in a state of suspended animation, removed from the earth, floating, transfigured by the onset of death. Poems like *Andraitix – Pomegranate Flowers* have abstracted, disinterested intensity, as though they were written by a being from another planet. Others are short mystical apothegms. There is no millinery any more, no occultism, they differ only in their modern idiom from any and all of the great mystics. And finally there are the two death poems, *Bavarian Gentians*, and *The Ship of Death*. Each was written over several times. There exists a variant which can be taken as a final, or prefinal, version of *Bavarian Gentians*, but both are clusters of poems rather than finished products.

The Ship of Death material alone would make a small book of meditations, a contemporary *Holy Dying*. It is curious to think that once such a book would have been a favorite gift for the hopelessly ill. Today people die in hospitals, badgered by nurses, stupefied with barbiturates. This is not an age in which a "good death" is a desired end of life.

All men have to die, and one would think a sane man would want to take that fact into account, at least a little. But our whole civilization is a conspiracy to pretend that it isn't going to happen – and this, in an age when death has become more horrible, more senseless, less at the will of the individual than ever before. Modern man is terribly afraid of sex, of pain, of evil, of death. Today childbirth, the ultimate orgiastic experience, has been reduced to a meaningless dream; dentists insist on injecting novocaine before they clean your teeth; the agonies of life have retreated to the source of life. Men and women torture each other to death in the bedroom, just as the dying dinosaurs gnawed each other as they copulated in the chilling marshes. Anything but the facts of life. Today you can take a doctor's degree in medicine or engineering and never learn how to have intercourse with a woman or repair a car. Human self-alienation, Marx called it. He

said that was all that was really wrong with capitalism. "Let us live and lie reclined" in a jet-propelled, streamlined, air-cooled, lucite incubator. When we show signs of waking, another cocktail instead of the Wine of God. When we try to break out, flagellation instead of Holy Matrimony, psychoanalysis instead of Penance. When the machinery runs down, morphine for Extreme Unction.

In a world where death had become a nasty, pervasive secret like defecation or masturbation, Lawrence re-instated it in all its grandeur – the oldest and most powerful of the gods. The *Ship of Death* poems have an exaltation, a nobility, a steadiness, an insouciance, which is not only not of this time but which is rare in any time. It doesn't matter who: Jeremy Taylor, the Orphic Hymns, the ancient Egyptians – nobody said it better. And there is one aspect of *The Ship of Death* which is unique. Lawrence did not try to mislead himself with false promises, imaginary guarantees. Death is the absolute, unbreakable mystery. Communion and oblivion, sex and death, the mystery can be revealed – but it can be revealed only as totally inexplicable. Lawrence never succumbed to the temptation to try to do more. He succeeded in what he did do.

D. H. Lawrence

James Reeves

(From *Introduction* to *Selected Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, 1951)

Lawrence was not a great poet – if only because poetry was not his main concern as a writer; he was not a good poet in the technical sense. Yet he had touches of greatness, as in a few poems where his dignity as a man transcends the irritation and maladjustment which characterized his normal relations with life. In *Bavarian Gentians*, for instance, he attains to something of the earnestness and composure which seem to go with true greatness. He might have been a good poet had he been less himself. Impatience with poetic technique was, however, a part of him. He had not the craftsman's sense of words as living things, as an end in themselves; words were too much a means to an end. What that end was will be considered.

But Lawrence was an exciting and original poet. If he bores or exasperates, it is seldom because of his subject-matter but usually because of his handling of it. Yet a poet of today – especially a young poet – can learn more from the imperfections of Lawrence than from the technical perfection of many better poets. Technical perfection without poetic insight – in short, slickness – is the commonest fault of young poetry today. There are not enough young poets prepared to give themselves away by writing badly. Lawrence was always prepared to give himself away, and often wrote badly.

There has been too much curiosity about Lawrence's life in proportion to the serious critical interest shown in his work. It is enough to say that he was a gifted and sensitive child of proletarian parents, and that he was a chronically sick man. With his working-class origin are connected his independence of mind, developing at its worst into a cocky self-assertiveness; his limited traditional education, which forced him to be original but made his judgements often wild and unsystematic; and his originality. He did not derive his experience from books, nor his urge to literary expression from a literary family tradition. He was gifted with acute emotional and physical sensibility, derived perhaps from his refined and sensitive mother, and this drove him naturally to a

continuous effort of self-expression. His early work – indeed, all his work – was born out of his acute awareness of physical and emotional experience. With this abnormal sensitiveness is connected also the tubercular malady which afflicted him throughout his forty-five years of life. Like many others so afflicted, he was restless, excitable and at times irritable. His best work, however, especially his early poetry, shows little sign of this irritability; and it is in this work that we see his physical sensibility at its finest. In reading it one has so often the feeling of being in contact with nature at a level just below one's skin. This hypersensitive, as it were, subcutaneous, quality in Lawrence's poetry is what makes it exciting, even painful to read. It gives one the feeling that only the finest descriptive poetry gives – that of seeing things for the first time, and of being in direct sensuous touch with the external world.

Lawrence's principal energy as a writer went into the creation of psychological fiction. As a novelist he was concerned chiefly with the relations between men and women. At his best he represented as no other writer so far had done the conflicts and strains of adolescent growth, the nervous battles just below the surface of emotional and domestic life. There is always strain, conflict, restlessness; his characters live and grow, they are never mature and completed. Lawrence used poetry, as I have suggested, more as a means than as an end. He wrote poems, not as finished creations to be added to the store of English poems, but as a way of expressing his relations with the world. He can seldom have conceived a poem as a whole before he sat down to write it. It grew under his pen. It took a life of its own, or rather it derived its life from his continuous flow of sensation and impression. Consider, for instance, the poem entitled *End of Another Home Holiday*. Here Lawrence realizes vividly the nostalgia, the sense of personal inadequacy, the intense feeling for his mother which characterize much of his writing at this period. The emotion, like so many youthful emotions, was all the more painful for being confused and only semi-articulate. The form of the poem – if it has any form – is organic. It resembles that of a musical impromptu, a series of loosely connected variations. Notice how the poem is first written, then re-written in a more expanded version. Only occasionally does Lawrence seem to be concerned with the poetic form as such – in, for instance, *Piano* and *A Youth Mowing*. These poems are different from most of the others in that they are more complete,

and more memorable. We find here something of the compression, the economy, the felicity of phrase which we associate with poems we call classical. Lawrence's poetry is not memorable, for all its interest; it is not quotable, it is not, in my opinion, best read aloud. He wrote as it were with the inward eye, not for the outward ear; he writes for the silent reader's inward response.

For the most part, Lawrence's poems were the reverse of classical. What he valued in a thought, as he says in the Foreword to the volume called *Pansies*, was its fleeting quality. He wanted these poems to be regarded, not as 'immortelles', but as living flowers. His method hovered, to use the jargon of painting, between impressionism and expressionism. He was fascinated by pictures and was himself a painter. One of the poems in this book is the expression of his reactions to the impressionist pictures of Corot. As an impressionist Lawrence was concerned to convey, with the utmost purity possible, his sensations of the external world as it appeared to him at the moment of experience. In *Baby Running Barefoot*, *After the Opera*, *Morning Walk*, and *Coming Awake*, there is an acute realization of physical impressions based on the purest possible observation. It is in this sense that his poems are valuable for their originality. He shows little 'influence', in the accepted sense, but that of Whitman and in comparison Whitman was a crude observer. If Lawrence's poems had betrayed more of the influence of other writers, his observation could not have been so pure, fresh and true. In *Letter from Town: On a Grey Morning in March* the imagery is throughout rich in clear and vivid impressions. In particular the comparison between the rushing car and the wind conveys just that hint of nostalgia for the country which is intended.

But it was not the limited ends of impressionism at which Lawrence was aiming. This objectivity was quite outside his nature. Even at his most objective, he was never content merely to observe. Just as in his novels he was concerned with the sensations and emotions of his characters, so in his poems he was concerned above all with his own sensations; with the world, that is, not as it might have been to some dispassionate eye, but as it was to *him*, at that particular moment and in that particular state of mind. From this concern arose the faculty of self-projection, of seeing nature not as it was but as it expressed the artist's own moods, which characterizes the expressionist, as distinct from the impressionist approach. The distortions of, for instance, Van Gogh in painting

arise from the same urge to interpret the visible world in terms of the artist's own temperament which led Lawrence to write such poems as *Weeknight Service* and *Bat*.

The idea of Lawrence as an expressionist poet must be considered more closely. Like Van Gogh, Lawrence was a romantic, with the same restless, dissatisfied, somewhat violent temperament. Both used the external world on which to project their own original natures. Both distorted nature for this purpose. Lawrence's *Mosquito* is no entomologist's specimen. There never was a mosquito quite like it. But how exactly Lawrence realizes it as the expression of his intense anger and irritation. The poem is repetitive, wasteful and explosive, like the feelings aroused by the mosquito. One cannot help perceiving the contrast with Donne's *Flea*, in which he makes no attempt to picture the insect, but uses it simply as the occasion of an intricate intellectual speculation. The flea itself is hardly present in the poem except as the starting-point for the argument. But Lawrence's mosquito is only too maddeningly present. It is a remarkable feature of Lawrence's expressionism that, even when – as in *Kangaroo* – he intellectualizes the experience, the occasion of the poem is always physically present, with an acute, sometimes uncomfortable, actuality. *Kangaroo* is, indeed, one of the most completely successful of Lawrence's animal-poems. It expresses a wonderful sensitivity to the physical actuality of the animal. The 'philosophy' may or may not be nonsense, but if the kangaroo has a 'meaning', surely Lawrence came nearer to realizing it than any other writer could have done.

What is the external world which Lawrence experienced so acutely? And what were the sensations which he strove to project upon it? In his early poems the recurrent theme is that of nostalgia for the scenes of his mother-dominated childhood in the Midland countryside where his father worked as a miner. As in most youthful poetry there is much self-pity, much half-articulate adolescent agony, but also a painful and tender delight in the beauty of spring, of flowers, and of early love. Lawrence's imaginative sympathy with the moods and struggles of childhood is profound. *Discord in Childhood* is a terrifyingly successful poem. *Baby Running Barefoot* is one of the few poems on babyhood which show absolutely no trace of sentimentality. In *Snapdragon* (a sort of psychological short story in verse) and the poems of the Bavarian and Italian period, he has overcome the adolescent introspectiveness of the earlier period and has begun to feel his way into the emotional

lives of others, such as German and Italian peasants. He had begun to diagnose the malady of the civilized, urban society – particularly that of the middle class into which his literary aspirations had projected him – in terms of his own lack of balance between mental experience and physical fulfilment. He came to distrust mind as the agency by which civilization had torn men from their roots in bodily well-being and the awareness of physical life. Men's psychological balance was destroyed by the strains placed upon them through the necessity of following the artificial routine of urban convention; the machine had destroyed man's dignity and taken away from him the joy of creative work with his hands; if man tried to live separated from the forces that bind him to nature and the origins of his own being, he became nervously exhausted, fretful and dissatisfied. This is the theme of many of the poems in *Pansies*. It is, of course, a common-place of much romantic thought from Rousseau onwards. But Lawrence was the most striking protagonist of the natural man since the maturity of industrialism. Much of his life, therefore, was spent in search not only of bodily and spiritual health for himself, but of whatever traces still remained of the perfect 'natural' society which was postulated by all romantic idealists. London and the English Midlands, Bavaria, Sicily, Australia, Mexico – the search led Lawrence across the world, and in this book are poems written in all these places. There is in many of the poems a lively vein of social criticism. In the half-dozen poems beginning with *A Living*, Lawrence appears directly as a moralist; and in the passage from *Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers* he expresses detestation of modern egalitarian socialism and a longing for the lost dignity of royalty. This thought recurs in *Snake*, where he recounts with wearied self-disgust how his 'accursed human education', made him dishonour a creature who appeared like a lost king of the underworld.

The peasants of Italy and Bavaria he found to be in reality not much less removed from the fundamental natural life than were the schoolboys of Croydon or the shop-girls of the industrial Midlands. So his eager desire for communion with natural forces led him to an imaginative study of birds, beasts and flowers. From this were produced his mature poems of self-projection. The circus-elephant, the bat, the tortoise, the kangaroo, the hummingbird, the blue jay – all seemed to Lawrence living evidence of a

primordial, instinctive existence in which man had once participated but from which he was now, to his destruction, cut off.

This return, in spirit, to an animal world, as a relief from, and a solution to, the despair which civilization produced, suggests a tragic view of life – a view which was the result of Lawrence's own life, in a sense tragic, despite the measure of self-fulfilment which he achieved. Lawrence is always written of as a gay companion, and there is in his poems much gaiety, though it is often drowned by a note of shrill expostulation against the stupidity of society and the interference of policemen with his writings and paintings. The small volume, called *Nettles*, is nothing but a self-righteous scream of exasperation against authority. In his fight with the censorship Lawrence, sick as he was, was amply justified in his exasperation and petulance, but it would have been more poetic not to have published his exasperation so stridently.

Tragic as was Lawrence's view of civilization, there is always sufficient truth in the warning against mechanization, industrialism and intellect for it to have recurrent significance at least as a corrective. That Lawrence's thought has had immense influence is proof that many are aware of the danger of separating life too completely from its physical roots. Wordsworth had realized that the springs of our nature lie deeper than convention, and in retreating from the implications of his discovery he stultified himself as a poet during the latter half of his life. Lawrence never flinched from his search, and in following it he wore himself out.

Even though Lawrence did not devote his main creative energy to writing poems, he lived the life of a poet. The extraordinary sensitiveness to impressions and his extraordinary command of imagery in which to express it never failed him. In his later poems there is no diminution of nervous sensibility; there is even an increase in dignity, seriousness and the suggestion of hidden sources of evocation. Lawrence relied less than nearly all other poets on the established symbolism of the past. In *Last Poems*, which contains *The Argonauts*, *They Say the Sea is Loveless*, *Bavarian Gentians* and *The Ship of Death*, there appears a realization of the beauty of classical myth. But just as Lawrence had never looked at an express train, a London suburb or a wild bird with the eyes of another poet, so in *Bavarian Gentians*, one of his most impressive and beautiful poems, he gave his own interpretation to the peren-

nial myth of Persephone. And in the mysterious and moving *Ship of Death* he turns his oldest and most persistent fault, that of repetitiveness, into a virtue, for here the repetition becomes a ritual incantation suggesting the solemnity of his own approaching end.

I have tried to show how Lawrence's thought was bound up with his life and how his poems were connected with his thought. Life, thought and poems make – with the novels and other writings – a unity more clearly exemplified, without irrelevant deviation, than is the case with any other writer of modern times. Why Lawrence was not wholly and successfully a poet is too big a question to consider here. It is bound up with the difficult question of *form* in the poems. For the form of a poem *is* the poem; and the more a writer appears to despise form, or to be impatient with it, the more he evades the problem of how to be a poet. In so far as Lawrence was not a poet, it was because he was not interested in poetic form, or failed to evolve new forms. His repetitiveness has been commented on. There are poems which any competent craftsman could 'improve' by condensation. It may be asked why Lawrence did not do this himself. It seems as if he was afraid of alteration, afraid that his poems would lose spontaneity and something of the life which they drew from him as he wrote them. Many of them are straggling notebook pieces without design or conclusion. Many are almost 'automatic'. In searching for a word to convey an impression, or hit off a mood, he stumbles on one which he finds felicitous and is sidetracked from his theme, repeating the word again and again, as if to reinforce the impression by sheer willpower. As often as not, the impulse is not reinforced but dissipated and the poem sprawls in pieces on the page. This effect is heightened by Lawrence's use of a slack, conversational rhythm. This rhythm is of course inseparable from Lawrence's method of expression. In his best poems the rhythm is absolutely right for the feeling and mood he wishes to communicate. How perfectly, for instance, is the authenticity of the experience in *Snake* rendered in the conversational, informal rhythm. How perfectly the nervous, unequal, jerky lines of *Bat* express the bat's flight and the writer's uneasy discomfort. Lawrence's free rhythm is characteristic. But it is a rhythm which can only reinforce the effect of formlessness. Since Chaucer established the supremacy of iambic metres over the native alliterative verse, no poet has successfully deviated for long from the iambic norm. Even a considerable

achievement like the poems of Whitman seems rough, shapeless and somehow provincial. To go further, however, would be to make the mistake of writing of Lawrence as if he could have been otherwise than he was. If he was not a poet in any traditional sense, it was because he was not interested in being one. What we have is not a body of formally memorable and satisfying poems, but the almost unshaped utterance of a keen and vital poetic sensibility, valuing the expression of feeling and mood, rebelling against discipline and control.

The Artist in Spite of Himself

Witter Brynner

(from *Journey With a Genius*, 1951)

A great deal of his [Lawrence's] verse, is to my ear, a collection of notes which resolved elsewhere into better music as prose, verse not being the born beat of his heart, as it was of Whitman's or Hodgson's. He has set down carefully, mathematically – in one of his letters – I think, the way his ear and voice heard and spoke prosody; but for me his calculations seldom resulted in a natural song or chanting – there was seldom the rounding flow of the chords of Whitman, which he took for a model but could not match. Said Whitman:

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself,
> (I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Lawrence, who later pitied Jesus because he who had "never truly embraced even one," yet "would embrace multitudes," snaps in his own turn:

> You tell me I am wrong.
> Who are you, who is anybody to tell me I am wrong?
> I am not wrong.

Here, aloud, from two poems, are the accents of calm on the one hand and of petulance on the other – the flow and ebb of a wave and a faucet sputter. The difference is not only in the content but in the sound. Music happens constantly in Lawrence's prose but less often in his verse. When he turns to verse he continually becomes self-conscious, forsakes native cadence and substitutes mannered artifice. He lames the rhythm, to make it more noticeable; he ends a line or a stanza with an ugly or weak word, in order not to sound obvious. The result is that in verse he speaks less naturally, less rhythmically, and less well than in prose. While his verse is rigid with prose, his prose is firm with poetry. Too often when he composes verse, he descomposes prose. I doubt if in prose he was

ever very conscious of his medium. Here is an instance where he uses the same material in both forms of writing. In his poem, "The Greeks are Coming," from the volume *Last Poems*,

> . . . an ocean liner, going east, like a small beetle
> walking the edge
> is leaving a long thread of dark smoke
> like a bad smell.

Earlier, in the prose of *Kangaroo*, he had seen "on the sea's horizon . . . a steamer like a beetle walking slowly along." He had written to Edward Marsh, as early as 1913: "I think more of a bird with broad wings flying and lapsing through the air, than anything, when I think of metre." Why then, did not his ear feel the difference between the two passages about the beetle? The passage he presents as meter walks like a hurt dog, whereas in the prose a bird with broad wings is flying.

Leonora Speyer has called to my notice a rhymed poem of Lawrence's "Piano," which, not much liking his use of rhyme, I had overlooked:

> Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;
> Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
> A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of
> tingling strings
> And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who
> smiles as she sings. [. . .]

With Mrs Speyer and others I find these lines moving; but, studying them, I am convinced that their poignant human content is what moves one and that the same memory and emotion, if he had set them down in prose, when they were flooding him, would, in his more natural medium, have contained even more of his heart's rhythm.

He did write early a few dialect poems in ballad form, like "The Collier's Wife," which carried through effectively; and, at the end, his written and re-written "Ship of Death" has, especially in its transcript form, a grave, fine beauty. It is interesting to note, in *Etruscan Places*, his surmise at Cerveteri that alongside the buried Lucumo in one of the tombs, among "sacred treasures of the dead," was laid "the little bronze ship of death that should bear

him over to the other world." This image stayed with him to his final days when he wrought and rewrought the poem. His "Invocation to the Moon" has beauty too — peculiar, haunting beauty – and so have other poems, especially if one is lucky enough to hear them spoken in the rich, tender, understanding modulations of Frieda's voice – the moon itself with shadows crossing it.

But let us look at "Glory of Darkness," which I prefer to its later version, the much admired "Bavarian Gentians":

. . .
it is dark
and the door is open
to the depths

It is so blue, it is so dark
and the dark doorway
and the way is open
to Hades.

Oh, I know.
Persephone has just gone back
down the thickening thickening gloom
of dark-blue gentians to Pluto
to her bridegroom in the dark
and all the dead
and all the dark great ones of the underworld
down there, down there
down the blue depths of mountain gentian flowers
cold cold
down the dark blue path

What a dark-blue gloom
of gentians here in the sunny room!

And now let us compare the poem with a passage of prose in *The Man Who Died*, with another symbolic flower ritual: "The lotus, as you know, will not answer to all the bright heat of the sun. But she curves her dark, hidden head in the depths, and stirs not. Till, in the night, one of these rare, invisible suns that have been killed and shine no more, rises among the stars in unseen purple, and like the violet, sends its rare, purple rays out into the night. To these the lotus stirs as to a caress, and rises upwards through the

flood, and lifts up her bent head, and opens with an expansion such as no other flower knows, and spreads her sharp rays of bliss, and offers her soft gold depths, such as no other flower possesses, to the penetration of the flooding violet-dark sun that has died and risen and makes no show."

Yes, Lawrence was a poet – in his own medium.

He would have shrugged those lean shoulders of his, lifted those querulous brows and then perhaps sunk the shielding beard a moment, if I had known enough to say to him in the days when I knew him, as I should be moved to say now: You will live among men, Lorenzo, because you have been given an extraordinary voice. Plenty of us know plenty of people who are convinced that plenty of animals are preferable to plenty of people. Animals have no minds. Animals have instincts, intuition. Animals have all the sex in the world, and they do not have to answer for it to God or society. Their eyes are clear. Their fur is beautiful. There is no such beauty in mankind and no such heavenly dumbness. But, even though you are a man, Lorenzo, there is a reed beside you for celebrating Eden, your colony, and its animals, even Adam and Eve. Pluck it, take it up, notch it with your teeth, breathe into it, make music, because for love of Eden, of the natural world, for use of the voice of the reed grown in that world, you were created, even with occasional crying need of mate or of comrade.

"Lawrence is a good writer," says Stephen Spender in his commentary, *The Life of Literature*, "but the enormous debt of gratitude which a whole generation owes to him because he has helped them to make for themselves a more hopeful attitude towards life, does not make him a better writer than those great talents which have devoted their lives to producing an effect of profound spiritual and physical discouragement. One cannot complain that the greatest talents are those which are most bound up with the values of a civilization which is falling to pieces."

Standing by Lawrence, I incline to caution Spender against coming under the spell of an apparently dawnless dusk and therefore exaggerating the music in the voice of Cassandra and passing by poor Pan.

Lawrence wrote Mrs Carswell in 1917: "One can only gather the single flower of one's own intrinsic happiness, apart and separate. It is the only faithful fulfillment."

He was partially right.

Even at dusk a cock can crow, though the barnyard may not like it.

Lawrence and His Demon
Richard Ellmann

(*New Mexico Quarterly*, Winter 1953)

Lawrence wrote his poetry, and much of his prose, as a healer. This description is not pejorative; it ranks him, as Auden has suggested, with Blake; it ranks him with Auden himself, and with the later Pound. It dissociates him from Yeats, Eliot and Dylan Thomas, whose poetry aims first at being visionary rather than therapeutic. Healing has two aspects: the patient must know first that he has a wound which needs to be searched. Here Lawrence's *Pansies* (with his suggestion that he connects the word with *panser*) and *Nettles* establish his diagnostic skill, in the same way that Auden's clinical excoriations of the will's negative inversion and Pound's satirical epigrams do. Then the wound must be dressed, and Lawrence's "coming through" is a medication comparable in efficacy to Auden's "Love" and Pound's "*claritas*" and "unwobbling pivot."

That Lawrence thought of his poetry as curative is suggested by the plan of the two volumes of *Collected Poems* that he published in 1928. "The crisis of Volume I," he wrote, "is the death of the mother, with the long haunting of death in life, which continues to the end, through all the last poems, which comes from *Bay*, and belong to the war." These poems establish the wound, its depth and boundaries. Chronologically some of them, the war poems in particular, belong after some of the poems in the second volume, but the gloom, disappointment, and bitterness which they share make them fit together. The "Argument" of the second volume has another tenor: "After much struggling and loss in love and in the world of man, the protagonist throws in his lot with a woman who is already married. Together they go into another country, she perforce leaving her children behind. The conflict of love and hate goes on between the man and the woman, and between these two and the world around them, till it reaches some sort of conclusion". The vagueness of the last phrase was due more to embarrassed self-deprecation than uncertainty, for originally Lawrence had added, "They transcend into some condition of blessedness." At any rate, much of the second volume records the cure

for the wound of the first. As for the poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* with which the book ends, they diagnose and minister to the ills of the protagonist on a less individual plane, by involving all plant and animal life in the human plight, and they also establish the value of being healed. Then, too late for inclusion in *Collected Poems*, come *Pansies* and *Nettles* as exposures of "death in life" in society, and finally "The Ship of Death" and other poems assembled under the title, *Last Poems*, which seek – without overweening confidence – for life in death. These volumes, too, seem counterparts which require each other for completion.

When he lays bare the foundations of contemporary society Lawrence resembles Blake, whose work he knew well and occasionally echoed. He sees man as imprisoned within his body – his "bowels of steel" – a mechanism grown incapable of passion. He is imprisoned also within his egoism, a "barbed-wire enclosure of Know Thyself." And he is imprisoned within sexual taboos which destroy his ability to feel and think by isolating the two processes from each other. No wonder that the relations of mother and son are perverse, ruined by possessiveness (an excess of feeling), and that the relations of lovers are perverse, ruined by frigidity (an excess of thinking). Jehovah, that provincial and tyrannical deity, has replaced great, pulpy Pan and dark, broody Osiris. The spirit has to break through egoism and become "Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!" To become nothing is to be everything; to die is to be risen, "the same as before, yet unaccountably new". Only then can a man let his buttocks prance, to use Lawrence's homely image. Sex is a means to this end, but the loftiness of its goal makes copulation more grim than pleasurable. The self has to be released by sex – ironically, in Lawrence's last poem it has to be released by death; but the certainty of attaining the release in either way is problematical. Sex may deepen the conflict within the spirit, as it does with Gerald Crich and Gudrun in *Women in Love*, rather than resolve it, as with Birkin and Ursula. Most of this doctrine is good Blake as well as good Lawrence, but Blake is much more systematic and complex in its application. Then too, while Blake manages to remain a Christian by redefining Christ, Lawrence prefers, except in *The Man Who Died*, darker and more numerous gods. For the most part, however, Lawrence stands beside Blake in an iconoclastic tradition in which his point of view does not seem eccentric, but recognized and accepted.

He wrote his poems for the usual literary public as well as for the congregation of the faithful. Consequently, even when they are bad they are readable; and Mr Eliot's remark about Lawrence's prose, that he had to write badly in order to write sometimes well, is applicable to his verse too. The poems, especially the unrhymed ones, in which Lawrence expressed his point of view, sometimes suggest entries in a journal rather than poems. They were often written in a series, as, for instance, the poems on his dying mother, on Frieda and his relations with her, and on his own impending death. Almost all are in the first person. Lawrence himself hesitated as to what name to give to some of them, notably the epigrams in *Pansies*. But on examination the poems are usually more than journal entries; even when not very good, they bear the special Lawrence dye, which is always interesting. They are best when he finds a fairly precise "objective correlative," and least successful when he rambles with a vague pain in a solar plexus, his *soi-disant* nub of thought and feeling.

In some poets, pains of this sort are merely personal and autobiographical. Lawrence intended that his should be symbolic and representative. Describing the revisions of his early work, he wrote: "A young man is afraid of his demon and puts his hand over the demon's mouth sometimes and speaks for him. And the things the young man says are very rarely poetry. So I have tried to let the demon say his say, and to remove the passages where the young man intruded." R. P. Blackmur, understandably impatient with Lawrence, has put a hostile interpretation on these remarks; he takes "the young man in the quotation to be just what Lawrence thought he was not, the poet as craftsman, and the demon . . . exactly that outburst of personal feeling which needs the discipline of craft to become a poem." But surely this was not what Lawrence meant. He was distinguishing the archetypal self, purged of everyday accidents, from the self-consciousness of an inhibited young man bound by a particular space and time. His revisions necessarily improve upon form as well as content.

The early poem, "Lightning," published in 1913 in *Love Poems*, demonstrates Lawrence's poetic character in both its unrevised and revised versions. Mr Blackmur has pointed out how full it is of Hardy; the diction does, in fact, often suggest him: "the lurch and halt of her heart," "the hot blood's blindfold art," and "the clips of my arms." But the situation could hardly be more essentially Lawrence's. Like most of his early love poems, "Lightning" is

scarcely a love poem at all; rather it is an accusation. With the fervor of a Sordello he accuses his lady of coldness, a coldness brought up-to-date by identifying it with frigidity masking itself as virtue: "Almost I hated her, she was so good." The defect of this version of the poem is not that it is like Hardy, a master whom Lawrence might have studied even more carefully, but that it is often like lesser poets: "And the sense of her clinging flesh was sweet" sounds like Dowson; "Pale love lost in a snow of fear" sounds like Swinburne; "And claim her utterly in a kiss" sounds like Rossetti or any poet of little consequence. If we compare three stanzas from each of the two versions, it becomes evident that Lawrence had more linguistic sensitivity than he has usually been credited with:

I leaned me forward to find her lips,
  And claim her utterly in a kiss,
When the lightning flew across her face,
And I saw her for the flaring space
  Of a second, afraid of the clips
Of my arms, inert with dread, wilted
  in fear of my kiss.

A moment, like a wavering spark,
  Her face lay there before my breast,
Pale love lost in a snow of fear,
And guarded by a glittering tear,
  And lips apart with dumb cries;
A moment, and she was taken again
  in the merciful dark.

I heard the thunder, and left the rain,
  And my arms fell loose, and I was dumb.
Almost I hated her, she was so good,
Hated myself, and the place, and my blood,
  Which burned with rage, as I bade her come
Home, away home ere the lightning
  floated forth again.

The final version, completed fifteen years later, is not flawless, but is greatly improved:

I leaned in the darkness to find her lips
  And claim her utterly in a kiss,
When the lightning flew across her face
And I saw her for the flaring space
  Of a second, like snow that slips
From a roof, inert with death, weeping
  "Not this! Not this!".

A moment there, like snow in the dark
  Her face lay pale against my breast,
Pale love lost in a thaw of fear
And melted in an icy tear,
  And open lips, distressed;
A moment; then darkness shut the lid
  Of the sacred ark.

And I heard the thunder, and felt the rain,
  And my arms fell loose, and I was dumb.
Almost I hated her, sacrificed;
Hated myself, and the place, and the iced
  Rain that burnt on my rage; saying: Come
Home, come home, the lightning has
  made it too plain!

Lawrence has made the imagery of the storm, with its rain, snow and ice, more continuous and welded. The language is generally more direct, natural, forceful, and concrete; so "the iced rain that burnt on my rage" replaces a trite with a sharp phrase, and the queerly broken two last lines seem emblematic of the lovers' parting. The power of the poem comes not from the passion of love, but the passion of critical insight.

When Lawrence revised his poems for the 1928 collection he did not touch the poems published after 1916 and generally written after May, 1912. For, from the time when he was twenty-seven and he and Frieda Weekley ran off together, he assumed a firmer control of his material. If stanzaic pattern was never a primary interest with him, diction was; if rhyme did not bother him much, rhythm did. Lawrence rid himself of Victorian diction and rhythm at about the same time as Eliot, Yeats, and Pound; it has even been suggested that, since the imagists published his work in their anthologies, he was under their influence. What evidence there is

available, such as Lawrence's own disavowal of imagist intentions and the individual character of his subject-matter, implies a parallel development rather than a derivation. Lawrence, like Pound, never completely purified his diction, but he made remarkable changes in it. His early poems dwell like "Virgin Youth" upon "the soft ripples below my breasts" and "my beautiful, lovely body." But by *Look! We Have Come Through!* (1917) his body, and his attitude, are tougher and no longer androgynous. So, in his later revisions, Lawrence takes such a stanza from "The Wild Common" as this:

> What if the gorse flowers shrivelled
> and kissing were lost?
> Without the pulsing waters, where were the marigolds
> and the songs of the brook?
> If my veins and my breasts with love embossed
> Withered, my insolent soul would be gone
> like flowers that the hot wind took,

and supplies a new diction:

> What if the gorse-flowers shrivelled,
> and I were gone?
> What if the waters ceased, where were the marigolds
> then, and the gudgeon?
> What is this thing that I look down upon?
> White on the water wimples my shadow,
> strains like a dog on a string, to run on.

The speaker's veins and breasts are no longer embossed with love, for the emphasis must come on his abundant life rather than his amorous contours. Similarly, Lawrence removes the sentimental identification of nature with kissing; by replacing the conventional "songs of the brook" with the arresting "gudgeon," he imparts an energy to nature which was not present in the early version. The substitution of the shadow, an obviously transitory phenomenon, for the "insolent soul," whose mortality was less apparent, makes for a stronger contrast of abundance and nothingness. The change is not only thematic and verbal; it is also rhythmical. He breaks up the mainly anapestic rhythm, particularly in the conversational third line; he cuts short the loose second

line, and interrupts the fourth with separate phrases instead of the breathless extended clause of the previous version. The rhythm is less prettified, the diction less sentimental, the attitude less odd.

Many of Lawrence's alterations are of the kind if not of the quality, that Yeats made. In "Monologue of a Mother," "a strange white bird" becomes "a thin white bird," as if Lawrence had looked more closely at the object, and in "Week-Night Service" "the dim old church" becomes "the droning church." He becomes more sparing in his use of words like "pale" and "beautiful"; "The still, pale floor of the sky" in "Troth with the Dead" is turned to "the low, still floor of the sky," while in "Lotus and Frost" the line, "And sensitive beautiful blossoming of passion," is restrained to "And sensitive, bud-like blossoming of passion." He is also more specific: in "Dreams Old and Nascent: Old," "the great, uplifted blue palace" is later named as "the great blue palace at Sydenham." He is apt to substitute the concrete statement for the abstract even when the abstract is more sensational; in "Malade," he changes "I am choking with creeping, grey confinedness" to "Ah, but I am ill, and it is still raining, coldly raining." Generally his images become bolder and barer. He first compared the church bells in "Week-Night Service' to "spattering showers from a bursten sky-rocket dropping / In splashes of sound, endlessly, never stopping"; his later substitution is less grandiose and facile: "spattering shouts of an orator endlessly dropping / From the tower on the town, but endlessly, never stopping." And in "The Enkindled Spring," he took the last stanza, which originally began:

> And I, what fountain of fire am I among
> This leaping combustion of spring?
> My spirit is tossed. . . .

and wrote instead:

> And I, what sort of fire am I among
> This conflagration of spring?
> the gap in it all –!

The rythm and diction are much more convincingly natural.

These revisions are proof that he knew, almost as well as his critics, the difference between a good line and a bad one. They do not indicate subservience on his part to the theory that content is

all-important and that form will take care of itself. If any theory of composition is implicit, it is that form should not be sought in isolation; form and content arise together in the archetypal self, and their emergence in consort reflects the self's inner order. As he wrote of *Pansies*, "Each little piece is a thought; not a bare idea or an opinion or a didactic statement, but a true thought, which comes as much from the heart and the genitals as from the head. A thought, with its own blood of emotion and instinct running in it like the fire in a fire-opal, if I may be so bold." Mental constructs are not, or should not be, merely mental: "The profoundest of all sensualities," Lawrence said, "is the sense of truth / And the next deepest sensual experience / is the sense of justice." If the head, heart, and genitals in Lawrence's poetry are not often perfectly joined, they sometimes reach a magnificent accord.

The best poems, the best passages are bursts of such unified perception. They have, first of all, a brutal honesty of observation. Lawrence pries open the lid, whatever the box may hold. It is the honesty of a man with a *parti pris*, not of an impartial observer. He disturbs whatever he touches; he goads and is goaded. It is a poetry of exacerbation, in which sometimes anger and sometimes love provides the motive force. "Last Words to Miriam," which deals with the same situation as "Lightning," but more confidently and freshly, is a good example:

> You had the power to explore me,
> Blossom me stalk by stalk;
> You woke my spirit, you bore me
> To consciousness, you gave me the dour
> Awareness – then I suffered a balk.
> . . .
>
> Now who will burn you free
> From your body's deadness and dross?
> Since the fire has failed in me,
> What man will stoop in your flesh to plough
> The shrieking cross?

The mixture of love and hate, both for Miriam and for the sexual act, reaches a climax remarkable for Lawrence, who was not often good at climaxes. The metaphor of the cross is one of his most dramatic and successful images, for it implies the sacredness,

terror, and pain which were for him essential parts of the sexual experience. In a retrospective, particular, and personal pattern Lawrence expresses an unadorned insight that might have come from *Songs of Experience.*

Honesty does not necessarily make for artistic merit. When Lawrence is being merely honest, his diction is sometimes slack – curiously, "slackness" was a favorable term for him – and sometimes insufficiently restrained. Some of the poems about his mother, even the admirable "Piano," find a luxury in sorrow, but his best poem about her, "Hymn to Priapus," is a triumph of self-examination, so harsh that it almost ridicules his sorrow. It begins with the thought of his dead mother, then describes his love-making with a live country-girl, and ends by considering the limits and checks which have been put upon human grief:

> She fares in the stark immortal
> Fields of death;
> I in these goodly, frozen
> Fields beneath.
>
> Something in me remembers
> And will not forget.
> The stream of my life in the darkness
> Deathward set!
>
> And something in me has forgotten,
> Has ceased to care.
> Desire comes up, and contentment
> Is debonair.
>
> I, who am worn and careful,
> How much do I care?
> How is it I grin then, and chuckle
> Over despair?
>
> Grief, grief, I suppose and sufficient
> Grief makes us free
> To be faithless and faithful together
> As we have to be.

The struggle to express a complicated state of mind increases the

interest of this poem; the language, while not especially distinguished, holds tightly together and gathers at the end into an intricate knot.

Surprisingly, perhaps, a second dominant trait of Lawrence's verse is its dignity. Nearly everything in life is important to him; he respects, and demands that we respect, the things and experiences that he revalues. Dignity enables him to write lines which most poets would find too raw; he can begin a section of "New Heaven and Earth" with the words:

> It was the flank of my wife
> I touched with my hand, I clutched with my hand,

and in the context we do not find him ridiculous. His dignity is best maintained when he is presenting an intense image; it is often weakened a little by his desire to preach intensity, just as Birkin was perplexed between his desire to live an intense life, and his proclivity for talking about it. A good example is the first part of "The Ship of Death"; the opening lines have a majestic restraint:

> Now it is autumn and the falling fruit
> and the long journey towards oblivion.
>
> The apples falling like great drops of dew
> to bruise themselves an exit from themselves.

But the next three lines are written by Lawrence's head without the collaboration of his heart and genitals:

> And it is time to go, to bid farewell
> to one's self, and find an exit
> from the fallen self.

Here the dignity sinks from poetic to ministerial.

Beyond honesty and dignity Lawrence's verse has a more dynamic quality, a concentrated apprehension of the inner being of animals and flowers. He is able to catch hold at once of what in their being is most important to man, and he centers his attention upon it until it shines forth. No poet has a more uncanny sense of what it is like to be, for instance, a copulating tortoise. At their best the poems about tortoises, about elephants, about plants reveal

Lawrence's attitudes towards men, but without relinquishing their hold on the actual object. All Lawrence's virtues, even this one, have their complementary defects. His honesty can make for slackness; his dignity can become ministerial; and his understanding of animals and flowers can lead him to lambaste discursively "the voice of his education" which puts him out of tune with them. So in "Snake" the description of the snake is excellent:

> He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom
> And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the edge of the stone trough [. . .]

On the other hand, the speaker in the poem, "in pyjamas for the heat," is bathetic and oppressively moralistic:

> The voice of my education said to me
> He must be killed,
> For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous. [. . .]

He throws a log at the snake and then wishes he hadn't:

> And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords of life.
> And I have something to expiate;
> A pettiness.

He must expiate, also, his overstatement of his theme. Yet the passion with which he writes of the snake almost submerges his moralizing.

"Snake" clarifies the difference between Lawrence and the Georgian poets with whom he is often compared. The Georgian poet, looking at a rural scene, asks himself at once, what principles of order and harmony appear here? Lawrence, however, asks himself first, what is the center of violent feeling here? His second question is like the Georgian question. The first is disruptive and chaotic and overshadows the fact that the second is always asked too. Nature for Lawrence is pullulating; his landscape, his flowers, his animals have radiant nodes of energy within them, and he sets up

an electric circuit between them and himself. They, like him, are always trying by means of agony to get beyond the agony. The series of tortoise poems represent the "grim, gruesome gallantry" to which tortoises are equally doomed:

> Alas, the spear is through the side of his isolation.
> His adolescence saw him crucified into sex,
> Doomed, in the long crucifixion of desire, to seek
> his consummation beyond himself.
> Divided into passionate duality,
> He, so finished and immune, now broken into desirous
> fragmentariness,
> Doomed to make an intolerable fool of himself
> In his effort toward completion again.
> Poor little earthy house-inhabiting Osiris,
> The mysterious bull tore him in adolescence into
> pieces,
> And he must struggle after reconstruction, ignominiously.

What makes a passage like this valuable is not only the vigor of statement, but an element of detached mockery. The ludicrousness of tortoise love-making is almost human:

> Stiff, gallant, irascible, crooked-legged reptile,
> Little gentleman,
> Sorry plight,
> We ought to look the other way.
>
> Save that, having come with you so far,
> We will go on to the end.

Queer partners in the life process, man and tortoise will no doubt continue so. The conclusion of "Tortoise Shout" has much the same theme, but now Lawrence does not mock; in rough, powerful phrases, with skillful pauses, he takes up his old image of the cross of sexuality, which is recalled by the cross on the tortoise shell, and treats it this time without mockery or horror, but with sympathy:

> The cross,

The wheel on which our silence first is broken,
Sex, which breaks up our integrity, our single
inviolability, our deep silence,
Tearing a cry from us.

Sex, which breaks us into voice, sets us calling across
the deeps, calling, calling for the complement,
Singing, and calling, and singing again, being answered,
having found.

Torn, to become whole again, after long seeking for what
is lost,
The same cry from the tortoise as from Christ,
the Osiris-cry of abandonment,
That which is whole, torn asunder,
That which is in part, finding its whole again
throughout the universe.

Here are the harmony and order to which we aspire.

If Lawrence is closest to Blake, he is not far from Whitman. He prides himself in the same fashion on getting beyond pretense, and he is fond of free verse because it is so unconstricting a form in which to do it. His voice is not so loud and imposing as Whitman's; there is little self-dramatisation. Both poets suffer at times from a diffusion of metaphor into discursive rhetoric, but Whitman's oratorical power makes the fault less conspicuous, while Lawrence has no such protective coloration. Ideologically they have much in common. They accept the physical self vigorously and defiantly; they are fascinated by love and death. But Whitman's view of love is less interesting; to him it is all tenderness and unity, while to Lawrence it is a confused mixture of horror and ludicrousness and aspiration towards completion. In his essay on Whitman, Lawrence accused him of being indiscriminate, of accepting everything in the universe as part of himself until he became "an empty Allness." Lawrence discriminates; for him "men are tricksy-tricksy, and they shy all sorts of ways." He has a keener sense of evil, of defect, of difference, of peculiarity. His lovers, at the same time as they seek to merge, search for independence from each other. Lawrence's world is more complicated, though less grand. It shares with Whitman's the same ultimate aim, to achieve a morality which "changes the blood rather than the mind."

Lawrence, although not as important a poet as Whitman, has to be read for the same reason, that so often he trascends his defects. One moment he is all thumbs, and the next he tells us something which we ignore at our peril. Curiously racked by conflicting feelings, his poetry has the strength of a rather narrow subject-matter and technique. He is master of a house where his authority is not always supreme. Only sporadically does he have all his powers, but when he does his verse shines as he wished, like "a fire-opal."

The Figure of Grammar: Whitman and Lawrence

Herbert Read

(From *The True Voice of Feeling*, 1953)

[. . .] I have no desire to deny to Whitman his special virtues, but in so far as they are technical, they belong to the art of rhetoric rather than to the art of poetry. This distinction was recognized by Lawrence, though he gave it a different name. In his preface to the American edition of his *New Poems* (New York, 1920) he distinguishes between the voice of the past and the voice of the future, between the poetry of the beginning and of the end, which is the poetry of perfection; and the poetry of immediacy, of the present moment, which is his notion of free verse. 'In the immediate present', he writes, 'there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon. There is no round consummate moon on the face of the running water, nor on the face of the unfinished tide. There are no gems of the living plasm. The living plasm vibrates unspeakably, it inhales the future, it exhales the past, it is the quick of both, and yet it is neither . . . Life, the ever-present, knows no finality, no finished crystallisation . . . Give me nothing fixed, set, static. Don't give me the infinite or the eternal: nothing of infinity, nothing of eternity. Give me the still, white seething, the incandescence and the coldness of the incarnate moment: the moment, the quick of all change and haste and opposition: the moment, the immediate present, the Now.' As a representative of this 'unrestful, ungraspable poetry of the pure present, poetry whose very permanency lies in its wind-like transit', Lawrence gives Whitman. 'Whitman looked truly before and after. But he did not sigh for what is not. The clue to all his utterance lies in the sheer appreciation of the instant moment, life surging itself into utterance at its very wellhead . . . Because Whitman put this into his poetry, we fear him and respect him so profoundly.'

Lawrence then proceeds to identify this poetry of the instant moment with free verse:

> [. . .] Much has been written about free verse. But all that can be said, first and last, is that free verse is, or should be, direct utterance from the instant, whole man. It is the soul and the mind and body singing at once, nothing left out. They speak all together. There is some confusion, some discord. But the confusion and the discord only belong to the reality, as noise belongs to the plunge of water. It is no use inventing fancy laws for free verse, no use drawing a melodic line which all the feet must toe. Free verse toes no melodic line no matter what drill-sergeant. Whitman pruned away his clichés – perhaps his clichés of rhythm as well as of phrase. [. . .] They do not know that free verse has its own *nature*, that it is neither star nor pearl, but instantaneous like plasm . . . It is the instant; the quick; the very jetting source of all will-be and has-been. The utterance is like a spasm, naked contact with all influences at once. It does not want to get anywhere. It just takes place.

And finally:

> The most superb mystery we have hardly recognized: the immediate, instant self. The quick of all time is the instant. The quick of all the universe, of all creation, is the incarnate, carnal self. Poetry gave us the clue: free verse: Whitman. Now we know.

Now we know that Lawrence identified free verse – the verse he himself wrote in this best poems – with Whitman. We must treat this as an assertion that he never proved. Let us return to the point from which we began this discussion: Coleridge's distinction between form as proceeding and shape as superinduced. There is no doubt that Lawrence (and Whitman) reject the superinduced shape of metrical laws. But Lawrence is asserting that what proceeds, spontaneously, has no recognisable or discoverable form. It is naked utterance, unformed.

I have already shown that what proceeds, in the case of Whitman, has a very positive structure, the figure of grammar, as Hopkins called it. Apart from this basic structure, Whitman's verse is full of rhetorical devices which are anything but spontaneous—deliberate inversions such as:

> Vigil strange I kept on the field one night;

artificial invocations, such as:

> O a strange hand writes for our dear son, O stricken mother's soul!

and, further, all the deliberate antiphonal structure of poems like 'When Lilacs last in the Dooryard bloom'd' and 'Out of the Cradle endlessly rocking'. One could elaborate a treatise on rhetoric from Whitman's practice. As for Lawrence's own verse, we can distinguish at least three types: regular metrical verse, which he gradually abandoned; figures of grammar on the Whitmanesque model; and prose 'pansies', as he called them, of uninspired flatness. Instead of the immediate, instant self we have the conscious, rhetorical self of the volume *Look! we have come through!* (1917), of which 'Song of a Man who has come through' may serve as an example:

> Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!
> A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.
> If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me! [. . .]
>
> Oh for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,
> I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,
> Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression . . .

But at this point I must stop to point out that Lawrence in this and in most of his poems is merely expressing (eloquently enough) a wish for a wonder to happen, a wonder that is never intrinsically present in the verse itself, as it is present in Hopkins's verse, or, looking forward, in the verse of Pound and Eliot. I do not wish to be confused with those who despise or attack Lawrence; on the contrary, for reasons which have nothing to do with the subject under discussion, which is the form of poetry, I regard him as, all things considered, the most original English writer of the post-war period. He has enlarged or intensified our very consciousness of the world in which we are vitally involved. But 'direct utterance from the instant, whole man' is prose, a prose that faithfully projects the man himself; and in so far as he projected himself,

exposed his sensibilities and formulated his ideas, Lawrence made a unique contribution to our literature. But it was, in a technical sense, a prose contribution. Of the technique of free verse, as it was developing under his eyes, he had, as Pound realised from the beginning, no grain of understanding.

The Poet in D. H. Lawrence

Geoffrey Grigson

(From *Poems and Poets*, 1969 [Originally published in *London Magazine*, May 1958])

An 'egghead' has been defined as someone who insisted on calling Marilyn Monroe Mrs Arthur Miller. It is not a bad definition. But I could think of one which is more exact if less witty. For many years an egghead has been the man in our midst who has admired D. H. Lawrence, *as an artist*, for the wrong reasons, not for the art in him, not for the words in him or out of him, if you like, but for his particular attitudes to sex; but not only sex: his particular attitude to sensuality, sensual experience, feeling 'with the blood', or whatever else Lawrence may call it. The egghead is the man who confuses the attitude with the art. And I have observed that he is often a dry man or a woman peculiarly lacking by nature in such sensualities, and aware of such a lack, though he may not confess it to himself; or at least to others. Lawrence too was not above such a confusion of his attitudes, or his convictions, or his hortatory impulses, with *art*.

I should add that I was never fortunate enough to know Lawrence. I came near to meeting him: I saw his back but never his red beard and blue eyes. I can claim (I was then a journalist on the *Yorkshire Post*) to have written the only leading article on his death to appear in any newspaper. I remember that I told the editor that his father had been a coalminer; which was no doubt why the leader was permitted. For the most part my editor read other newspapers and Ruff's *Guide to the Turf*; and was luckily unaware that Lawrence was also, on various grounds, an occasional scandal to the righteous. Let me also add that *The Times*, when Lawrence died, dismissed him in an obituary less than half a column in length.

I was young at the time of Lawrence's death; and I remember, after that leader had gone up the wire from Fleet Street to Leeds, walking home across Lincoln's Inn Fields in a degree of – shall I call it cosmic sorrow as well as personal sorrow over the snuffing out of such a vitality. I knew a number of Lawrence's friends (several of them, I must admit in passing, suffered from the egghead's

debility which I have mentioned), I had read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, decidedly unexpurgated, with the extra delight of being a clergyman's son delivering himself from the last relics of a sense of sin over carnal enjoyments. The flowers at any rate seemed right and wonderful. I was particularly fond of a few poems by Lawrence, even if I found many of his novels turgid. I was delighted, too, by a fine contemptuous assault he had delivered not long before upon all the values of Galsworthy and *The Forsyte Saga*, the respectable master and the respectable masterpiece of the twenties or early thirties. Since then the fact is that Lawrence has never been quite out of my system. I have found myself in places known to Lawrence – for instance, Sturzing or Vitipeno below the Alps, where he stayed with Frieda Weekley, when he ran away with her, and Lago di Garda, where he lived with Frieda Weekley in the first months of combined ecstasy and dismay. I have even found myself in New Mexico, staring at a bust of Lorenzo in a bookshop window at Santa Fè, and contemplating at Taos the thumbed manuscript notebooks of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which as another writer has expressed it, 'fall open with a dreadful submissiveness, in the expected places'.

In other words, for all my life as a writer Lawrence has been a familiar presence, influencing me willy-nilly; and I think I can claim neither to have turned excessively to him or to have turned excessively from him. In what I say about Lawrence, or against Lawrence, there may be detected, I hope, not prejudice, not a judgement before, but a judgement afterwards.

Lawrence now stands, and will appear in the future to stand, upon several shaky legs; partly because he is the imperfect artist, the more than usually imperfect artist, who can be taken in so many roles, the insight man, the feeler, the bleeder, the blood-diviner, the rebel, the envelope of one of the many *zeitgeists* of our time, the preacher, the Adventist and Gospeller, the new century's Thomas Hardy, as well as the novelist, the short-story writer and — last of all, as well as first of all, the poet. And he is shaky because he does not stand level on these legs; he spills the teacup or wine glass, because there is scarcely a role in which he is altogether satisfying.

For dogmatic and emotionally anaemic and shrivelled pedantry (my eggheads) Lawrence is a crumb of God's bread, beyond any but surface criticism. For T. S. Eliot he was a heretic of insights insufficiently grounded, improperly educated. For many readers,

since of course the remarkableness of Lawrence is never in question, he is a man in his many standings exhilarating at times, a man at times with his finger on life, a poseur not at all infrequently, with his finger on something else altogether, or in gentle terms, he is frequently a victim of his own nonsense deserted by his own considerable sense. And too often, as a result, he is bad at writing, he is deserted by style, he appears only to offer long lumps of tedium and, in terms of art, improbability.

I shall just mention, for the confusion in Lawrence of artist and life-force preacher, the opening chapter of *The Rainbow*. Can you accept the dark currents of relationship between Man and Woman? I cannot. And I believe they can be mistaken for the real thing, the deduction artistically, from the authentic observation, only by two classes of reader: the young (who still have to experience a man and woman relationship); and those, the stunted or the starved, who have scarcely the power to experience such a relationship, and so lack a personal means of experiencing it. By either of those two classes it is accepted that Lawrence *knows*, and with a valid interpretation or transmutation, presents, what they do not know. On the whole, I think (and I take *The Rainbow* since those who are fanatic for Lawrence consider it his greatest work), Lawrence's figures are impossible as fictional men and women. Emotional 'meeting' just is not so; and these men and women are also unconvincing symbolically. While the Lawrentian tides of attraction and repulsion swirl, retreat, return, and exasperate the reader, it is as well to remember the peculiarity of Lawrence's own major experience. Himself emerging from a milieu given to crude, curt, and largely covered attitudes about the intercourse of the merest bodies, in his own deep struggles of attraction and repulsion he engaged with a woman, Frieda Weekley, Frieda von Richthofen, from the oddest of the psychic communities of Europe, the German educated class, already an expatriate, already married, and tortured with guilt over her deserted children. No, it became Lawrence's habit to turn idea into feeling and feeling into idea, falsifying both as a consequence. A special case he could elevate into a universal. With lyrical senses this man could borrow actuality; which he then betrayed or smeared with his own peculiar ectoplasm; and if I say that Lawrence was too obsessed after all with 'sex', what I mean (though not as the ghost of his enemy Gosse, or Galsworthy, and not as the vicar's critical churchwarden) is that he involved himself too much in the abstraction, without

resting enough in the real thing, on actual man-woman-relationship, for instance. He involved himself too much in concept, for which (it does not hurt to remember) there was until recently no word, *sex* being a modern transference from descriptive biology.

Then what of the poet in Lawrence, the solid in the marsh? In his poetry (and the three volumes he has left are much for a committed novelist and theorist to have written) let me say that he was from early on too involved in a theory which his own deeper feeling very strikingly contradicted.

Possessive inescapable emotion in the artist, the emotion of love for whatever object, or in whatever form, positively or negatively (negative love explains satire), does beget, or can beget, with hard work, that formal rhythmical release, or ritual and rhythmical satisfaction and celebration, which is a work of art, which is a poem, self-evident and true like a syllogism, or a snake biting its own tail.

Lawrence, though, began writing, early in this century, when particular forms and particular rhythms were shiny with automatic usage and acceptance. Freedom to feel in his own way seemed to him to demand freedom, not merely from that usage and that acceptance, but from all dictates of form; and Walt Whitman (even though enough of feeling had swirled Whitman to roll, rise, carol and creation, in eloquent bursts of form) – Walt Whitman seemed his guarantee. Flecker of the *Golden Journey* irritated Lawrence in 1913, in contrast to Whitman, as a norm of detestable formalism. Now Lawrence's sustenance as a poet began romantically: it began with nightingale and skylark, in a traditional romanticism, with Keats and with Shelley. More indeed with Shelley. Lawrence wrote at this time: 'I think Shelley a million thousand times more beautiful than Milton.' His sustenance began also with Yeats; before shifting on to Whitman – and himself. 'I have always tried to get an emotion out in its own course, without altering it,' he tells Edward Marsh in 1913. 'It needs the finest instinct imaginable, much finer than the skill of the craftsman . . . Remember skilled verse is dead in fifty years.' Nonsense, in an exaggeration of sense. 'A free, essential verse, that cuts to the centre of things', he proclaims three years later. Free verse, he is still proclaiming in 1924, is all that matters, 'direct utterance from the instant, whole man' – which 'toes no melodic line', obeys no drill sergeant, says Lawrence, and contains no rhythm returning on itself, 'no serpent

of eternity with its tail in its own mouth' – 'none of that finality which we find so satisfying because we are so frightened'.

Certainly, this is a last drip of the romantic eighteenth-century formula of the supreme value of the first impression – with its virtue, and with an added virtue or two; but also with the later substitution of a vague *instinct* for skill. Lawrence, all the same, was driven to his better poems in spite of his ideas about poetry, and in spite of his sustainers.

Consider the groups he called *Nettles, Pansies* and *More Pansies* (O that transference, forethought or afterthought, of the French *pensées* into the English pansies! That blowsy element in Lawrence!). With few exceptions these satirical or exclamatory or ejaculatory versicles are simply things which a poet of a more controlled vehemence would have preserved as prose notes in a notebook. *How beastly the bourgeois is!* and so on. Some posthumous day such prose notes, even if not cut up into lines, might have been published, as Coleridge's notebooks are at last being published. But I think the interest of these Lawrentian snippets, good tempered or bad tempered, is badly served by presenting them as poems: the thought that they are *not* poems may always obscure the fact that some of them are worth attending to for what they state, and may also throw doubt on Lawrence's ability as a poet in his better work.

Next consider the group he calls *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*; I suspect the most popular poems he wrote, partly because they make no very great claim on the readers' poetic response. In these an actuality of felt life, of felt being, is offered in a trance of concentration, and is seldom travestied or betrayed. Thus he shapes, rather than describes the bull, in *St Luke*:

> A living forehead with its slow whorl of hair
> And a bull's large, sombre, glancing eye
> And glistening adhesive muzzle,
> With cavernous nostrils where the winds run hot
> Snorting defiance
> Or greedily snuffling behind the cows.

He offers an actuality of turkey, fish, bat, snake, she-goat, of aspen, sage and piñon tree, in his poem *Autumn at Taos*. He offers in these poems, too, an *actuality* of language.

Yet I find I go back to these more or less 'free' poems without

eagerness. Why? Because vividness of perception, unless submitted to pressure, is a poor diet, after all. If I go back to the rest of the poems which Lawrence divided into *Unrhyming Poems* (his division, by the way, is not a strict one) and *Rhymed Poems*, I rediscover with relief that formal element which contradicted him: the stronger the emotion of the poem, the more definite its structure.

In the early derivative wallow of the *Rhymed Poems*, which are nearer Shelley or early Yeats than Whitman, Lawrence in his own phrase does at times tear away his hand from his mouth – suddenly, for example, in *Wedding Morn, Guards, Scent of Irises, Kisses in the Train*, and supremely in a poem altogether divorced from wallow, in his least impeded speech of the *Ballad of Another Ophelia*, that 'good poem', which, said Lawrence, he couldn't do again to save his life. He goes with Frieda Weekley (the break, the splendid drive) to Bavaria, the Tyrol, and Lago di Garda in the autumn of 1912. Union, feud, repulsion, union again. He *knows* – whatever he may do to the knowing later on. Actuality and feeling (he was twenty-seven) push aside both personal theory and traces of accepted manner. Structure, rhyme, rhythm, ritual, assert themselves, in *Giorno dei Morti*, in *Green* —

> She opened her eyes, and green
> They shone, clear like flowers undone
> For the first time, now for the first time seen –

in *Gloire de Dijon* –

> She stoops to the sponge, and her swung breasts
> Sway like full-blown yellow
> Gloire de Dijon roses.

Out of *Pansies* a few poems emerge. One of them is the fine *Leda*. In his *Last Poems*, new ecstasies and concentrations of an extra clear statement, *The Man of Tyre, Maximus, Whales Weep Not*, insist upon attention; and then a few poems related, in his more feminine way, to Whitman, though they deny Lawrence's old betraying theory in as much as they trail, a little loosely like smoke, from the grand elegiac trigger lines. *Bavarian Gentians* is one of the last few,

> Not every man has gentians in his house
> In soft September, at slow, sad Michaelmas.

Lucifer is another one, 'Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell'; and the best – 'Now it is autumn and the falling fruit' – is *The Ship of Death*, of his own death.

The fuller strength and excitement of Lawrence's shaping sensuality swept him, of course, into his fiction; poems are an overplus, which do, with theory's aid, decline to notes preserving, more or less, only a poetic *look*. So this case is the opposite of the case of Hardy, who influenced Lawrence and with whom Lawrence shares a provinciality. Lawrence expected to live in his novels (only novelists, he said in *Phoenix*, are masters of the whole of man alive), Hardy in his poems. The poet Lawrence is inside the novelist, who is inside the prophet; and his potentiality was to have been a more considerable poet (though he never thought enough about the nature of poems) than his fiction – or his prophetic activity – allowed him to be. Yet, like Hardy, I rather think it is by his better poems that Lawrence in the end may keep hold of his readers. Whether that would be the future he deserves is another matter, though by his better poems I do mean the ones unadulterated by much of what is so outside of art in Lawrence's writing. Poems, particularly short ones, leave less room for transposing their occasions into pseudo-philosophy.

Black Flowers: A New Light on the Poetics of D. H. Lawrence

Christopher Hassall

(From *A D. H. Lawrence Miscellany*, ed. Harry T. Moore, 1959)

In March 1927, Lawrence visited the tombs of ancient Etruria, and soon afterwards wrote the fourth and last of his travel books, *Etruscan Places*. An exhaustive work on the subject by George Dennis was already in existence. It contained descriptions of no less than fifty sites which Lawrence never had the opportunity to examine. *Etruscan Places* deals with only four burial sites, and although more than a year after his first visit Lawrence was still contemplating a second journey to the ruins, he never went again. Richard Aldington has explained that by 1928 Lawrence was too sick to sustain the fatigue of another Etruscan tour, and that he considered it idle to compete with Dennis, whose explorations had already covered the field. No doubt these were reasons enough for *Etruscan Places* to remain a fragment, if you regard it solely as a travel book, but I believe there was another reason. On the plane where archeological facts may be found to serve a symbolical purpose, the book was complete. On that plane its theme was no longer the relics of ancient Etruria but something quite different – the principles underlying Lawrence's conception of poetry. In his travels over the globe (and in March 1927 he had just got back from Mexico), he had searched in vain for a community which was managing to remain immune from the evils of industrial civilisation. He never found it on the face of the earth, flourishing in the present. Instead I believe he discovered it at last in the remote past, no more than hinted at in the tombs of Etruria, but it was enough. There were the unmistakable clues. Among the fragmentary relics of death he found the wholeness of life he had been seeking – 'the natural flowering of life' as he called it – and by exercise of the sympathetic imagination he lifted it into the present in the descriptive pages of this book. For this reason alone *Etruscan Places* would be especially important. It is the record of an act of spiritual excavation. Among the treasures he exhumed there was something of his essential being. The Etruscans provided him with a group of symbols. Read in this light, and with the guidance of his one critical essay on the subject, his last travel book becomes his

most revealing statement on the name and nature of poetry, although poetry is never specifically mentioned, and poems themselves are disguised as what he calls 'black flowers.' From among the archeological facts and his deductions there emerges a prose poem on a theme of literary criticism.

Some eight years earlier he had written a short critical essay to which, I suggest, this secondary theme of his travel book should be regarded as sequel. In an introduction to the American edition of *New Poems*, published in 1920, Lawrence said his remarks had best be considered as applying retrospectively to his previous volume *Look! We Have Come Through!*; but for what his views were worth here they were, better late than never. *Look! We Have Come Through!*, it will be remembered, was a poetical journal of the fluctuating relationship with his wife, roughly covering the five years 1912 to 1917. Technically, it showed that he was rejecting the earlier influences on his work – notably the verse of Thomas Hardy – and was feeling his way toward a less formalised, freer style, adapted to his purpose from Whitman. To the first of his writings largely in this Whitmanesque style which Lawrence was in the process of making his own, the *New Poems* essay is in effect the proper introduction, and it may now be taken as a critical prelude to all the verse which he wrote subsequently – his finest single volume *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* of 1923, *Nettles, Pansies,* and of course the posthumous *Last Poems* which are of especial interest in connection with *Etruscan Places.*

In the preface to *New Poems*, Lawrence describes how all traditional verse, as he sees it, is made out of moments of certitude and repose after reflection. It either harks back in contemplation of the past or reaches forward in aspiration to the future. 'It is in the realm of all that is perfect,' he says, and 'the finality and the perfection are conveyed in exquisite form, the perfect symmetry, the rhythm which returns upon itself like a dance where the hands link and loosen and link for the supreme moment of the end.' He pictures the traditional poet seated at a gateway looking east or west, looking, that is, into the past or the future. We hear what the poet has to say and 'our hearts surge with response,' but while we are 'in the midst of life' (within the gateway standing in the present time) either the poet does not choose to speak or we deny him our attention.

And yet here, in the immediate present, there could be poetry of a more urgent kind than that of the past or future. Here is no

certitude, 'no rhythm which returns upon itself, no serpent of eternity with its tail in its mouth.' Rather, it is 'direct utterance from the instant, whole man.' Here is no perfection, no consummation, for the strands are loose and flying. This 'pure present,' he contends, is a realm we have so far never conquered. 'The seething poetry of the incarnate Now is supreme, beyond even the everlasting gems of the before and after.' And he acknowledges Whitman as his great precursor, telling how 'his heart beats with the urgent, insurgent Now '. . . He is near the quick.' And in the course of all this Lawrence tries to convey his meaning by way of a poetic image representing the characteristic poem of the gateway. 'The perfect rose is only a running flame, emerging and flowing off, and never in any sense at rest, static, finished.' Not satisfied he tries again – 'A water-lily heaves herself from the flood, looks round, gleams, and is gone.' It is this lily and that very rose which are united in *Etruscan Places* in the mysterious and potent symbol of 'black flowers.' This is his last and most successful emblem for the poetry 'whose very permanency lies in its wind-like transit.'

On an early page of 'Cerveteri,' the first of his Etruscan localities, Lawrence starts developing his dominating theme that the beauty of the Etruscan things lies in their quality of evanescence. They were expendable. Even the houses and temples were delicately built of wood, so that whole cities 'vanished as completely as flowers. Only the tombs, the bulbs, were underground.' The images of the lily and the rose in the preface to *New Poems* are already as it were entering the sphere of ancient Etruria, and one suspects that, in the writer's subconscious, things archeological and ideas on poetical theory are beginning to fuse. Barely four pages later it is with quite a shock that we stumble upon the seed of what is perhaps the finest of his *Last Poems*:

> Through the inner doorway is the last chamber, small and dark and cumulative. Facing the door goes the stone bed on which was laid, presumably, the Lucumo and the sacred treasures of the dead, the little bronze ship of death that should bear him over to the other world, the vases of jewels for his arraying, the vases of small dishes. The little bronze statuettes and tools, the weapons, the armour: all the amazing impedimenta of the important dead.

The Lucumo was the chief man or prophet of the settlement. As

a latter-day Lucumo Lawrence must have seen himself in his last days, building his own Etruscan ship of death. 'Have you built your ship of death, oh have you?' begins the third draft of the familiar poem, and in the second draft we read:

> But for myself, but for my soul, dear soul
> let me build a little ship with oars and food
> and little dishes, and all accoutrements
> dainty and ready for the departing soul.

From the Etruscans Lawrence learned that attitude of acceptance of death which ennobles these last poems. 'And death, to the Etruscan, was a pleasant continuance of life, with jewels and wine and flutes playing for the dance.' And he goes on to talk yet again of their temples, 'small, dainty, fragile, and evanescent as flowers.' Soon follows the paragraph which, by inference and on the plane of symbolism, concerns what he has called 'the poetry of before and after,' the poetry of solidity and of certitude beyond or behind the gateway:

> Why has mankind had such a craving to be imposed upon? Why this lust for imposing creeds, imposing deeds, imposing buildings, imposing language, imposing works of art? The thing becomes an imposition and a weariness at last. Give us things that are alive and flexible, which won't last too long and become an obstruction and weariness. Even Michelangelo becomes at last a lump and a burden and a bore. It is so hard to see past him.

He next explains how in the end 'that which lives lives by sensitiveness,' and he borrows the symbol peculiar to Whitman in the *Leaves of Grass*: 'It is the grass of the field, most frail of all things, that supports all life all the time. But for the green grass, no empire would rise, no man would eat bread' . . . The Etruscan element is like the grass of the field and the sprouting of corn, in Italy: it will always be so.' The extended passage has about it an air of mounting excitement as the writer's wanderings bring him to the museum of Tarquinia and the collection of pottery: hundreds of imitation green vases, and also the cruder kind, of native Etruscan design, either plain black or decorated with scratches, called black bucchero ware. Finding the two types of vase side by side he comes upon the ideal analogy for the contrast between the poetry

on either side of the gateway, in the past or in the future, and that which lies within the portals. The reference to Keats is particularly apt and illuminating.

> If one looks for the Greek form of elegance and convention, those elegant 'still unravished brides of quietness,' one is disappointed. But get over the strange desire we have for elegant convention, and the vases and dishes of the Etruscans, especially many of the black bucchero ware, begin to open out like strange flowers, black flowers, with all the softness and the rebellion of life against convention, or red-and-black flowers painted with amusing free, bold designs. It is there nearly always in Etruscan things, the naturalness verging on the commonplace, but usually missing it, and often achieving an originality so free and bold, and so fresh, that we, who love convention and things 'reduced to a norm,' call it a bastard art, and commonplace.

The passage is not so much instinct with the excitement of discovery (though that is a part of it) as with the joy and relief of *justification*. The 'naturalness verging on the commonplace, but usually missing it' – he might have been writing directly of his own verse. And from this point on he writes with a welling up of imaginative sympathy, as if he were himself in every respect, except only that of historical time, a citizen of Tarquinia, a latter-day Etruscan. 'You cannot think of art,' he says, looking at the damaged frescoes, 'but only of life itself, as if this were the very life of the Etruscans, dancing in their coloured wraps with massive yet exuberant naked limbs, ruddy from the air and the sea-light, dancing and fluting along through the little olive trees, out in the fresh day.'

Lawrence's form of verse was a natural development out of his view of life itself. What Whitman did for him was to demonstrate how to body forth ideas and feelings in a manner that was strictly true to them and did them the minimum of damage in the process; for the expression of thought in words can be an act of violence which distorts. 'To break the lovely form of metrical verse,' Lawrence wrote in the *New Poems* preface, 'and to dish up the fragments as a new substance, called *vers libre*, this is what most of the free-versifiers accomplish. They do not know that free verse has its own *nature*, that it is neither star nor pearl, but instantaneous like

plasm.' In *Etruscan Places* it is some pages after my last quotation that Lawrence arrives at a definition of the characteristic Etruscan quality – 'the natural flowering of life.' To that ancient people, he says, the whole universe, the whole cosmos, was one, a living thing made up of living parts, 'a single aliveness with a single soul' from which it was man's aim in life to draw more and more vitality. The augur of the temple, at one with the sky, was in peculiarly intimate contact with external nature. 'If the augur could see the birds flying *in his heart*, then he would know which way destiny too was flying for him,' for if you live by the cosmos, then you naturally look in the cosmos for your clue. Lawrence is still talking of augury when he goes on: 'All it depends on is the amount of *true*, sincere, religious concentration you can bring to bear on your object. An act of pure attention, if you are capable of it, will bring its own answer.' The priest of augury has here become the archetypal poet of the gateway whose works are 'neither star nor pearl, but instantaneous like plasm.' And the passage ends, 'The soul stirs, and makes an act of pure attention, and that is a discovery.' Existing in that spontaneous mode of life, which is its own 'natural flowering,' the augur performs an act of divination or the poet makes a 'discovery' – his poem. Pure attention has brought a poem into being just as God created the red geranium and mignonette in the poem of that name among the last things to come from Lawrence's pen. With that free verse which is not arbitrary but of its very nature free, being a part of the natural flowering of life – as it was in the mature work of Lawrence the neo-Etruscan – the soul stirs, and makes an act of pure attention, devoting to the 'object' all it can of 'true, sincere, religious concentration' which brings its own answer, the discovery, the poem. A terrible discipline of sincerity has been substituted for the craftsman's discipline of form. Each poem obeys its own natural law.

A year after his visit to the tombs, Lawrence recalled the passage we have just been considering while writing a preface to a new book called *Chariot of the Sun* by Harry Crosby. 'The essential quality of poetry,' he wrote, 'is that it makes a new effort of attention, and "discovers" a new world within the known world.' About the same time, in the autumn of 1928, he wrote his essay called *Hymns in a Man's Life*. The central passage describes the sense of wonder which he called the *natural* religious sense. 'When all comes to all, the most precious element in life is wonder.' For this too he found the seed in his travel book of a year before. 'The

ancients saw, consciously, as children now see unconsciously, the everlasting wonder in things.'

When in his travel book he turns to Etruscan painting, it is the same quality of 'life' itself rather than what we academically regard as 'art' which attracts his notice. The subtlety in such works lies 'in the wonderfully suggestive *edge* of the figures. It is not outlined. It is not what we call "drawing." It is the flowing contour where the body suddenly leaves off upon the atmosphere'. It is this 'suggestive edge' of his own verse, which at first gives the appearance of a rough sketch, and instead of exhibiting formal shape suggests a state of flux, a flowing contour where the body 'suddenly leaves off upon the atmosphere,' which is characteristic of Lawrence. As against this method there is the classical art which, as Lawrence argues, debased the Etruscan spirit into 'a desire to resist nature, to produce a mental cunning and a mechanical force that would outwit Nature and chain her down completely.' So much for the element of artifice in the traditional poet's craft! In elaborating his conscious craft, and mistrusting or ignoring the evidence of his senses, the modern artist has rendered himself capable only of an act of *impure* attention. 'We haven't exactly plucked our eyes out, but we have plucked out three-fourths of their vision.'

And what, in the last analysis, is the forfeit we post-Etruscans have paid? Lawrence gives his answer in 'Volterra,' the last of his Etruscan places. 'One wearies of the aesthetic quality – a quality which takes the edge off everything, and makes it seem "boiled down." A great deal of Greek beauty has this boiled down effect. '*It is too much cooked in the artistic consciousness*' (italics mine). The bowls of black bucchero ware were shaped into beauty and usefulness by fingers and thumbs alive with the natural flowering of life, and they came and went as evanescent as flowers, black flowers, like the divinations of the augur whose soul had stirred. This is the nature of their beauty, to have come and to have gone. But with a poem there *is* a difference, so Lawrence maintains. 'What lives lives by sensitiveness' and its 'very permanency lies in its wind-like transit.'

He never went back to the tombs of Etruria. He was ill, and Dennis had indeed gone before him, but he had already found far more than ever he had sought. 'The Etruscans are not a theory or a thesis. If they are anything, they are an experience.' There was nothing more they could teach him. He discovered that he was one of them. He had come home. So much that he had thought and felt

beforehand now seemed radiantly justified, even the hitherto somewhat nebulous ideas underlying his practice as a poet. Everything fell into place. He knew and understood himself. Without first accepting Lawrence as a guide among the tombs of the dead we cannot properly experience the life in his later poems, those black flowers which he left behind after building his ship of death and sailing away into the Etruscan past.

New Heaven and Earth: D. H. Lawrence

M. L. Rosenthal

(From *The Modern Poets*, 1960)

The extraordinary influence of D. H. Lawrence is largely based on his evangelistic call for the return by modern men and women to what he called 'phallic consciousness.' 'My great religion,' he wrote, 'is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect.' There is a magnetically, violently hostile side to this 'religion.' In order to break down the false worship of the intellect and 'make a new world,' Lawrence held, one must yield to the subconscious 'urge of life that is within.' One must forget self-consciousness and surrender to the 'stirring half-born impulse to smash up the vast lie of the world.' So Lawrence takes the revolutionary directions of modern thought and gives them a special turn. The suppressed physical life must burst into its own; the mechanized cerebral, overpurposive character of our civilization must be exploded away. Lawrence did not invent this program; Yeats and Pound go a better part of the way with him, and Blake and others foresaw that way long ago. The difference lies mainly in a certain tone, or emphasis, behind Lawrence's subordination of everything, even his art, to the program. Also, it lies in the nearness of his work to common life. However alienated his argument and however exotic his subject matter may at times be, he is at the same time extremely interested in the details of life among the most ordinary men and women. The interest is intimate, gossipy almost – the kind of interest one has in people one knows unusually well. Finally, Lawrence speaks in his own right, and directly to the point. He dares to expose his emotions, to risk seeming sentimental or ludicrous.

> When I am in a great city, I know that I despair.
> I know there is no hope for us, death waits, it is
> useless to care.
> For oh the poor people, that are flesh of my flesh,
> I, that am flesh of their flesh,
> when I see the iron hooked into their faces

their poor, their fearful faces
I scream in my soul. . . . ('City Life')

Lawrence, even more than Williams, takes his own life and the things and people he sees seriously *in themselves*. They are important to him not because they illustrate a thought or a tradition but by virtue of their simple existence. When he was a young teacher, he set down his feelings about his work with absolute directness – not ironically, not aloofly, not in any sense pretentiously:

No longer can I endure the brunt
Of the books that lie out on the desks; a full threescore
Of several insults of blotted pages, and scrawl
Of slovenly work that they have offered me.
I am sick, and what on earth is the good of it all?
What good to them or me, I cannot see!

Not a great poem ['Last Lesson of the Afternoon'], but it expresses a real mood of teachers. (He also wrote happier poems about his classes.) Such a poem assumes the plain necessity of expressing what we really are. Similarly, the pathetic 'Monologue of a Mother' focuses unashamedly on the exact feeling of the woman who speaks. Her son, in his need to be free of her, has sentenced her to death of spiritual loneliness:

Like a thin white bird blown out of the northern seas,
Like a bird from the far north blown with a broken wing
Into our sooty garden, he drags and beats
Along the fence perpetually, seeking release
From me, from the hand of my love which creeps up,
needing
His happiness, whilst he in displeasure retreats.

The later 'mother poems,' occasioned by the final illness and death of Mrs Lawrence, go beyond this 'monologue' in concentrated emotional power. A poem like 'Sorrow' or 'Brooding Grief' goes at once, quite simply, to the heart of something Joyce too dealt with in *Ulysses*, giving us the normal dimensions of that which Joyce makes a unique and complex agony.

In the same forthright way, many of Lawrence's poems of love go straight to the heart of sexual mystery (as James' *The Ambassa-*

dors, in its equally valid way, goes tortuously to it). The early poems show an obvious Hardy influence, and sometimes the lilt and swoon of Meredith, but they also have a quality of empathy and sheer awareness that makes them Lawrence's own. He *knows*, for example, the desire that overwhelms disgust and fear in the girl of 'Love on the Farm.' And he too has been touched by the amazed clarity about himself of the speaker in 'Hymn to Priapus.' In the 'Hymn' the speaker deliberately intermingles references to two kinds of love: his grief-stricken love for his dead mother and his physical passion for the 'ripe, slack country lass' he has just seduced. He sees Orion in the winter sky, witness of his other love-makings and of his last 'faithlessness' to his mother's memory. Orion's indifference is the clue to the speaker's acceptance of his lot. He sees his own sorrow and grief and the 'debonair' satisfying of his lust in the cold light of that ancient constellation, and a half heartbroken objectivity toward himself takes over for the moment:

> Grief, grief, I suppose and sufficient
> Grief makes us free
> To be faithless and faithful together
> As we have to be.

Lawrence has a number of candid, youthful pieces in which the speaker is tortured by a girl's refusal of his love, or at least of the consummation of it. The situation in 'Lightning' is characteristic; they are making love at night in the countryside, moving toward the sexual act itself, when

> the lightning flew across her face
> And I saw her for the flaring space
> Of a second, like snow that slips
> From a roof, inert with death, weeping 'Not this! Not this!'

The woman's fear of the act, her inertness or suffering during it, her self-defeating prudery or frigidity despite her great yearning are repeated themes, growing directly out of the poet's experience. It is a common enough sort of experience but hardly ever treated by others so frankly, keeping so intact all its frustration and mingled sympathy and anger – 'Almost I hated her, sacrificed.' Lawrence does not forget, either, the added complication of the man's fear of dependence through love:

Helen, had I known yesterday
That you could discharge the ache
  Out of the wound. . . .
I should have hated you, Helen. ('Release')

Against these poems stand the marriage-poems, celebrating the new-found lands in which there is a resolving of all that has kept male and female from realizing themselves in each other. We have the almost Provençal revelations of 'Gloire de Dijon,' for instance, in which the woman bathing in the sunlight is seen as a glowing goddess:

She stoops to the sponge, and the swung breasts
Sway like full-blown yellow
Gloire de Dijon roses.

And we have the strangeness of 'River Roses,' one of Lawrence's most satisfying poems despite the Poe-like tintinnabulation of some of the rhymes:

By the Isar, in the twilight
We were wandering and singing,
By the Isar, in the evening
We climbed the huntsman's ladder and sat swinging
In the fir-tree overlooking the marshes,
While river met with river, and the ringing
Of their pale-green glacier water filled the evening.

By the Isar, in the twilight
We found the dark wild roses
Hanging red at the river; and simmering
Frogs were singing, and over the river closes
Was savour of ice and roses; and glimmering
Fear was abroad. We whispered: 'No one knows us.
Let it be as the snake disposes
Here in this simmering marsh.'

'No one knows us,' say the protagonists of Lawrence's poem. We can take on the full burden of the knowledge of good and evil as 'the snake taught us to do in the Garden. We can make our own *vita nuova* without benefit of Christ or the prophets. It is the

'intolerable music' of Yeats's 'News for the Delphic Oracle.' The ringing waters, the chant of the frogs, our own singing are the keys to salvation – not the Paradise of the Church, but the profane, earthly paradise that comes into its own when darkness falls. The theme parallels that of another of Lawrence's great songs of discovery, his 'Song of a Man Who Has Come Through.'

> If only, most lovely of all, I yield myself and am
> borrowed
> By the fine, fine wind that takes its course through the
> chaos of the world
> Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge-blade inserted;
> If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of a
> wedge. [. . .]
> What is the knocking?
> What is the knocking at the door in the night?
> It is somebody wants to do us harm.
> No, no, it is the three strange angels.
> Admit them, admit them.

As with 'River Roses,' this 'song' is the outgrowth of Lawrence's fearless concentration on human experience. The speaker coaching himself to 'yield' to 'the fine, fine wind that takes its course through the chaos of the world' is both a physical lover and a man who wants to be in right relation to the whole of being. The life force will take him up, 'borrow' him, if he is receptive enough. Here the language is feminine, almost passive. But the next lines show that such yielding will prepare him for the purest maleness, will make him 'like a fine, an exquisite chisel,' 'the sheer tip of a wedge.' Literally, of course, the poem speaks neither of femaleness nor of maleness at this point, but rather of a state of responsiveness and readiness, for the penetration of life. Nevertheless, the figurative language does bring sexual connotations into play. It suggests, however ambiguously, the necessary attitudes toward sexual experience of both woman and man. In the second and third quoted stanzas, there is a similar controlled ambiguity. If we read them literally, the voice in the second stanza speaks for the more timid side of the protagonist and the voice in the third stanza for his self-correcting courage. But here again we have the clear suggestion of a man and a woman. She is afraid, while he encourages her to admit the unknown with joy. Waiting outside, he tells

her, is not someone who 'wants to do us harm' but 'three strange angels.' They will reveal to us a new realm of holiness, if only we can forget our fear and self-consciousness.

Lawrence took as his main theme the need for modern man and woman to 'come through' in this way. They must rediscover true communion with one another and with the whole of existence, the instinctive communion possessed by ancient civilization but destroyed by the death drive of latter-day civilization. Death of the old ego-self, resurrection of the bodily self, are needed. The process is described in 'New Heaven and Earth', the eight-part sequence in which Lawrence recounts the entire mystical experience of death and resurrection he advocates and, for symbolic purposes at least, says he has undergone. He describes the modern ego-corruption in which no identity is possible:

> I was so weary of the world,
> I was so sick of it,
> Everything was tainted with myself,
> skies, trees, flowers, birds, water,
> people, houses, streets, vehicles, machines,
> nations, armies, war, peace-talking. . . .

The agony of this condition lay in the self-enmeshing of the mind. Everything was felt as merely an emanation of the ego-self, an emblem and definition of some phase of man. The speaker felt all other beings were merely facets of himself, a feeling which, by definition, violates the integrity and energy of each uniquely alive individual creature.

> I was a lover, I kissed the woman I loved,
> And God of horror, I was kissing also myself.
> I was a father and a begetter of children,
> And oh, oh horror, I was begetting and conceiving in my own body.

The only relief from the horror comes with the absolute deadening of the sensual life. 'I buried my beloved; it was good, I buried myself and was gone.' To this kind of self-betrayal society adds the total annihilation of modern war, with its 'thousands and thousands of gaping, hideous foul dead.' So the false ego, the self inseparable from this bestially mechanized civilization, is at last

'trodden to nought in the sour black earth.' Now the hitherto *unconscious* self can rise into its own:

> risen, not born again, but risen, body the same as before,
> New beyond knowledge of newness, alive beyond life. . . .
> here, in the other world, still terrestrial
> myself, the same as before, yet unaccountably new.

When the false social self has been destroyed, at whatever cost, then each one can feel the separate existence of himself and others. The risen speaker touches his wife as a being apart from himself for the first time:

> I touched her flank and knew I was carried by the current
> in death
> over to the new world, and was climbing out on the
> shore. . . .

The sequence ends with a paean to the 'new world' by the speaker, now 'a madman in rapture.' The landscape of the new world is that of the human body; the energies set free in it are those which suffuse all the physical universe. The woman is an exotic country with 'land that beats with pulse,' and 'valleys that draw close in love,' and 'strange moulded breasts and strange sheer slopes, and white levels.' As in his story *The Man Who Died*, Lawrence here revises the image of Christ by celebrating an earthly instead of a Heavenly Bridegroom. With this secular displacement of values, not only in 'New Heaven and Earth' but also in much of his other poetry and fiction, Lawrence creates a free floating symbol of the private revolution in the modern sensibility. He had a keen sense, in his own life and personality, of the clash between bourgeois and lower-class values, and between both of them and the aristocratic tradition. Rejecting socialism and democracy fairly early, he was attracted to fascism through his belief in great, magnetic individuals but not to the concept of mass-man essential to fascism. His real contribution in this realm was to transpose the perspectives of political and social revolution into private, inward terms.

In this special sense, there is no question he speaks for the times. His stress on the re-emergence of the primal self is but the desire to go behind the doctrinal religious systems and recover the ancient –

even the pre-historic – embodiments of the life-force principle. The chants scattered throughout *The Plumed Serpent*, with their incidental attacks on the degeneracy of modern men and their implication that the time of Christ is over and the time of the old gods come again, are one evidence. The animal poems, especially in *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*, are another. Each of the birds, beasts and flowers Lawrence writes about is an indomitable, sacred embodiment, a totem symbol, of that which man must find in himself also. How Lawrence used conventional religious and mythical associations can be seen in the Cross imagery of 'Tortoise Shell' and 'Tortoise Shout.' 'Why were we crucified into sex?' the latter poem asks. The cry uttered by the tortoise in coition is the same cry as that from the tortured Jesus, 'the Osiris-cry of abandonment': 'Torn, to become whole again, after long seeking for what is lost.' In other poems we see the snake as 'a king in exile . . . due to be crowned again' – archetype of the sexual mystery deep in the bowels of the earth; we are told that archangels and cherubim attend the ecstatic mating of whales; Bavarian gentians are the 'torch-flowers' of hell lighting up the 'marriage of the living dark,' of Pluto and Persephone.

Lawrence specifically rejects the term 'rebirth' for the kind of self-realization he thus celebrates. He visualizes the realization of the 'blood' self as something new, a *first* birth out of the adult state of 'non-being' which has prevented the emergence of the primal self into full growth. The point is that the state of living death or non-being of our civilization is a necessary prelude to a modern man's self-realization. He must not 'go back' to a savage state but 'has still to let go, to know what non-being is, before he can *be*. Till he has gone through the Christian negation of himself, and has known the Christian consummation, he is a mere amorphous heap.' Whether we call this process rebirth or resurrection, then, it is a matter of coming through to a higher stage of personality. The 'irritable cerebral consciousness' ceases to inhibit the vital self, and the once oversophisticated intelligence sinks deep within personality. Intelligence is not lost forever, as it would be if we simply reverted to a literally animal existence. It is absorbed into the life participation of men restored to normal relations with the rest of the universe.

Lawrence's diagnosis of a diseased civilization seeing itself in a mirror of false, antihuman abstractions and needing to recover health through individual rebirth or resurrection is implicit in

almost all major modern poetry. The means of salvation, or of the *possible* salvation – for this is the great realm of the tentative, as Eliot's poetry surprisingly demonstrates – vary from poet to poet. But Lawrence's mystical conception of a state of communion, body-centred, into which we have yet to be born, illuminates a great deal of the poetry written over the past few decades. The impetus he has given to other writers comes not so much from his style – of all modern poets of real standing, he is perhaps the shakiest as a master of his craft – as from his simplifying the issues.

D. H. Lawrence

W. H. Auden

(From *The Dyer's Hand*, 1962)

If men were as much men as lizards are lizards
They'd be worth looking at.

The artist, the man who makes, is less important to mankind, for good or evil, than the apostle, the man with a message. Without a religion, a philosophy, a code of behavior, call it what you will, men can not live at all; what they believe may be absurd or revolting, but they have to believe in something. On the other hand, however much the arts may mean to us, it is possible to imagine our lives without them.

As a human being, every artist holds some set of beliefs or other but, as a rule, these are not of his own invention; his public knows this and judges his work without reference to them. We read Dante for his poetry not for his theology because we have already met the theology elsewhere.

There are a few writers, however, like Blake and D. H. Lawrence, who are both artists and apostles and this makes a just estimation of their work difficult to arrive at. Readers who find something of value in their message will attach unique importance to their writing because they cannot find it anywhere else. But this importance may be shortlived; once I have learned his message, I cease to be interested in the messenger and, should I later come to think his message false or misleading, I shall remember him with resentment and distaste. Even if I try to ignore the message and read him again as if he were only an artist, I shall probably feel disappointed because I cannot recapture the excitement I felt when I first read him.

When I first read Lawrence in the late Twenties, it was his message which made the greatest impression on me, so that it was his "think" books like *Fantasia on* (sic) *the Unconscious* rather than his fiction which I read most avidly. As for his poetry, when I first tried to read it, I did not like it; despite my admiration for him, it offended my notions of what poetry should be. Today my notions of what poetry should be are still, in all essentials, what they were

then and hostile to his, yet there are a number of poems which I have come to admire enormously. When a poet who holds views about the nature of poetry which we believe to be false writes a poem we like, we are apt to think: "This time he has forgotten his theory and is writing according to ours." But what fascinates me about the poems of Lawrence's which I like is that I must admit he could never have written them had he held the kind of views about poetry of which I approve.

Man is a history-making creature who can neither repeat his past nor leave it behind; at every moment he adds to and thereby modifies everything that had previously happened to him. Hence the difficulty of finding a single image which can stand as an adequate symbol for man's kind of existence. If we think of his ever-open future, then the natural image is of a single pilgrim walking along an unending road into hitherto unexplored country; if we think of his never-forgettable past, then the natural image is of a great crowded city, built in every style of architecture in which the dead are as active citizens as the living. The only feature common to both images is that both are purposive; a road goes in a certain direction, a city is built to endure and be a home. The animals, who live in the present, have neither cities nor roads and do not miss them; they are at home in the wilderness and at most, if they are social, set up camps for a single generation. But man requires both; the image of a city with no roads leading away from it suggests a prison, the image of a road that starts nowhere in particular, an animal spoor.

Every man is both a citizen and a pilgrim, but most men are predominantly one or the other and in Lawrence the pilgrim almost obliterated the citizen. It is only natural, therefore, that he should have admired Whitman so much, both for his matter and his manner.

> Whitman's essential message was the Open Road. The leaving of the soul free unto herself, the leaving of his fate to her and to the loom of the open road. . . . The true democracy . . . where all journey down the open road. And where a soul is known at once in its going. Not by its clothes or appearance. Not by its family name. Not even by its reputation. Not by works at all. The soul passing unenhanced, passing on foot, and being no more than itself.

In his introduction to *New Poems*, Lawrence tries to explain the difference between traditional verse and the free verse which Whitman was the first to write.

> The poetry of the beginning and the poetry of the end must have that exquisite finality, perfection which belongs to all that is far off [. . .] But there is another kind of poetry, the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. [. . .]

It would be easy to make fun of this passage, to ask Lawrence, for example, to tell us exactly how long an instant is, or how it would be physically possible for the poet to express it in writing before it had become past. But it is obvious that Lawrence is struggling to say something which he believes to be important. Very few statements which poets make about poetry, even when they appear to be quite lucid, are understandable except in their polemic context. To understand them, we need to know what they are directed against, what the poet who made them considered the principal enemies of genuine poetry.

In Lawrence's case, one enemy was the conventional response, the laziness or fear which makes people prefer second-hand experience to the shock of looking and listening for themselves.

> Man fixes some wonderful erection of his own between himself and the wild chaos, and gradually goes bleached and stifled under his parasol. Then comes a poet, enemy of convention, and makes a slit in the umbrella; and lo! the glimpse of chaos is a vision, a window to the sun. But after a while, getting used to the vision, and not liking the genuine draft from chaos, commonplace man daubs a simulacrum of the window that opens into chaos and patches the umbrella with the painted patch of the simulacrum. That is, he gets used to the vision; it is part of his house decoration.

Lawrence's justified dislike of the conventional response leads him into false identification of the genuine with the novel. The image of the slit in the umbrella is misleading because what you see through it will always be the same. But a genuine work of art is one in which every generation finds something new. A genuine work of art remains an example of what being genuine means, so that it can stimulate later artists to be genuine in their turn. Stimulate, not

compel; if a playwright in the twentieth century chooses to write a pastiche of Shakespearean blank verse, the fault is his, not Shakespeare's. Those who are afraid of firsthand experience would find means of avoiding it if all the art of the past were destroyed.

However, theory aside, Lawrence did care passionately about the genuineness of feeling. He wrote little criticism about other poets who were his contemporaries, but, when he did, he was quick to pounce on any phoniness of emotion. About Ralph Hodgson's lines

> The sky was lit
> The sky was stars all over it,
> I stood, I knew not why

he writes, 'No one should say *I knew not why* any more. It is as meaningless as *Yours truly* at the end of a letter,' and, quoting an American poetess

> Why do I think of stairways
> With a rush of hurt surprise?

he remarks, 'Heaven knows, my dear, unless you once fell down.' Whatever faults his own poetry may have, it never puts on an act. Even when Lawrence talks nonsense, as when he asserts that the moon is made of phosphorous or radium, one is convinced that it is nonsense in which he sincerely believed. This is more than can be said of some poets much greater than he. When Yeats assures me, in a stanza of the utmost magnificence, that after death he wants to become a mechanical bird, I feel that he is telling what my nanny would have called 'A story.'

The second object of Lawrence's polemic was a doctrine which first became popular in France during the second half of the nineteenth century, the belief that Art is the true religion, that life has no value except as material for a beautiful artistic structure and that, therefore, the artist is the only authentic human being – the rest, rich and poor alike, are canaille. Works of art are the only cities; life itself is a jungle. Lawrence's feelings about this creed were so strong that whenever he detects its influence, as he does in Proust and Joyce, he refuses their work any merit whatsoever. A juster and more temperate statement of his objection has been made by Dr Auerbach:

> When we compare Stendhal's or even Balzac's world with the world of Flaubert or the two Goncourts, the latter seems strangely narrow and petty despite its wealth of impressions. Documents of the kind represented by Flaubert's correspondence and the Goncourt diary are indeed admirable in the purity and incorruptability of their artistic ethics, the wealth of impressions elaborated in them, and their refinement of sensory culture. At the same time, however, we sense something narrow, something oppressively close in their books. They are full of reality and intellect, but poor in humor and inner poise. The purely literary, even on the highest level of artistic acumen, limits the power of judgment, reduces the wealth of life, and at times distorts the outlook upon the world of phenomena. And while the writers contemptuously avert their attention from the political and economical, consistently value life only as literary subject matter, and remain arrogantly and bitterly aloof from its great practical problems, in order to achieve aesthetic isolation for their work, often at great and daily expense of effort, the practical world nevertheless besets them in a thousand petty ways.
>
> Sometimes there are financial worries, and almost always there is nervous hypotension and a morbid concern with health. . . . What finally emerges, despite all their intellectual and artistic incorruptability, is a strangely petty impression; that of an upper bourgeois egocentrically concerned over his aesthetic comfort, plagued by a thousand small vexations, nervous, obsessed by a mania — only in this case the mania is called "Literature." (*Mimesis.*)

In rejecting the doctrine that life has no value except as raw material for art, Lawrence fell into another error, that of identifying art with life, making with action.

> I offer a bunch of pansies, not a wreath of immortelles. I don't want everlasting flowers and I don't want to offer them to anybody else. A flower passes, and that perhaps is the best of it. . . . Don't nail the pansy down. You won't keep it any better if you do.

Here Lawrence draws the false analogy between the process of artistic creation and the organic growth of living creatures. "Nature

hath no goal though she hath law." Organic growth is a cyclical process; it is just as true to say that the oak is a potential acorn as it is to say the acorn is a potential oak. But the process of writing a poem, of making any art object, is not cyclical but a motion in one direction towards a definite end. As Socrates says in Valéry's dialogue *Eupalinos*:

> The tree does not construct its branches and leaves; nor the cock his beak and feathers. But the tree and all its parts, or the cock and all his, are constructed by the principles themselves, which do not exist apart from the constructing. . . . But, in the objects made by man, the principles are separate from the construction, and are, as it were, imposed by a tyrant from without upon the material, to which he imparts them by acts. . . . If a man waves his arm, we distinguish this arm from his gesture, and we conceive between gesture and arm a purely possible relation. But from the point of view of nature, this gesture of the arm and the arm itself cannot be separated.

An artist who ignores this difference between natural growth and human construction will produce the exact opposite of what he intends. He hopes to produce something which will seem as natural as a flower, but the qualities of the natural are exactly what his products will lack. A natural object never appears unfinished; if it is an inorganic object like a stone, it is what it has to be, if an organic object like a flower, what it has to be at this moment. But a similar effect – of being what it has to be – can only be achieved in a work of art by much thought, labor and care. The gesture of a ballet dancer, for example, only looks natural when, through long practice, its execution has become 'second nature' to him. That perfect incarnation of life in substance, word in flesh, which in nature is immediate, has in art to be achieved and, in fact, can never be perfectly achieved. In many of Lawrence's poems, the spirit has failed to make itself a fit body to live in, a curious defect in the work of a writer who was so conscious of the value and significance of the body. In his essay on Thomas Hardy, Lawrence made some acute observations about this very problem. Speaking of the antinomy between Law and Love, the Flesh and the Spirit, he says

> The principle of the Law is found strongest in Woman, the

> principle of Love in Man. In every creature, the mobility, the law of change is found exemplified in the male, the stability, the conservatism in the female.
>
> The very adherence of rhyme and regular rhythm is a concession to the Law, a concession to the body, to the being and requirements of the body. They are an admission of the living positive inertia which is the other half of life, other than the pure will to motion.

This division of Lawrence's is a variant on the division between the City and the Open Road. To the mind of the pilgrim, his journey is a succession of ever-new sights and sounds, but to his heart and legs, it is a rhythmical repetition – tic-toc, left-right – even the poetry of the Open Road must pay that much homage to the City. By his own admission and definition Lawrence's defect as an artist was an exaggerated maleness.

Reading Lawrence's early poems, one is continually struck by the originality of the sensibility and the conventionality of the expressive means. For most immature poets, their chief problem is to learn to forget what they have been taught poets are supposed to feel; too often, Lawrence says, the young man is afraid of his demon, puts his hand on the demon's mouth and speaks for him. On the other hand, an immature poet, if he has real talent, usually begins to exhibit quite early a distinctive style of his own; however obvious the influence of some of the older writers may be, there is something original in his manner or, at least, great technical competence. In Lawrence's case, this was not so; he learned quite soon to let his demon speak, but it took him a long time to find the appropriate style for him to speak in. All too often in his early poems, even the best ones, he is content to versify his thoughts; there is no essential relation between what he is saying and the formal structure he imposes upon it.

> Being nothing, I bear the brunt
> Of the nightly heavens overhead, like an immense open eye
> With a cat's distended pupil, that sparkles with little
> stars
> And with thoughts that flash and crackle in far-off
> malignancy
> So distant, they cannot touch me, whom nothing mars.

A mere poetaster with nothing to say, would have done something about *whom nothing mars*.

It is interesting to notice that the early poems in which he seems technically most at ease and the form most natural, are those he wrote in dialect.

> I wish tha hadna done it, Tim,
> I do, an' that I do,
> For whenever I look thee i'th' face, I s'll see
> Her face too. [. . .]

This sounds like a living woman talking, whereas no woman on earth ever talked like this:

> How did you love him, you who only roused
> His mind until it burnt his heart away!
> 'Twas you who killed him, when you both caroused
> In words and things well said. But the other way
> He never loved you, never with desire
> Touched you to fire.

I suspect that Lawrence's difficulties with formal verse had their origin in his linguistic experiences as a child.

> My father was a working man
> and a collier was he,
> At six in the morning they turned him down
> and they turned him up for tea.
>
> My mother was a superior soul
> a superior soul was she,
> cut out to play a superior role
> in the god-damn bourgoisie.
>
> We children were the in-betweens,
> Little non-descripts were we,
> In doors we called each other *you*
> Outside it was *tha* and *thee*.

In formal poetry, the role played by the language itself is so great

that it demands of the poet that he be as intimate with it as with his own flesh and blood and love it with single-minded passion. A child who has associated standard English with Mother and dialect with Father has ambivalent feelings about both which can hardly fail to cause trouble for him in later life if he should try to write formal poetry. Not that it would have been possible for Lawrence to become a dialect poet like Burns or William Barnes, both of whom lived before public education had made dialect quaint. The language of Burns was a national not a parochial speech, and the peculiar charm of Burns' poetry is its combination of the simplest emotions with an extremely sophisticated formal technique: Lawrence could never have limited himself to the thoughts and feelings of a Nottinghamshire mining village, and he had neither the taste nor the talent of Barnes for what he scornfully called word games.

Most of Lawrence's finest poems are to be found in the volume, *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*, begun in Tuscany when he was thirty-five and finished three years later in New Mexico. All of them are written in free verse.

The difference between formal and free verse may be likened to the difference between carving and modelling; the formal poet, that is to say, thinks of the poem he is writing as something already latent in the language which he has to reveal, while the free verse poet thinks of language as a plastic passive medium upon which he imposes his artistic conception. One might also say that, in their attitude towards art, the formal verse writer is a catholic, the free verse writer a protestant. And Lawrence was, in every respect, very protestant indeed. As he himself acknowledged, it was through Whitman that he found himself a poet, found the right idiom of poetic speech for his demon.

On no other English poet, so far as I know, Whitman had a beneficial influence; he could on Lawrence because, despite certain superficial resemblances, their sensibilities were utterly different. Whitman quite consciously set out to be the Epic Bard of America and created a poetic *persona* for the purpose. He keeps using the first person singular and even his own name, but these stand for a *persona*, not an actual human being, even when he appears to be talking about the most intimate experiences. When he sounds ridiculous, it is usually because the image of an individual obtrudes itself comically upon what is meant to be a statement about a collective experience. *I am large. I contain multitudes* is absurd if

one thinks of Whitman himself or any individual; of a corporate person like General Motors it makes perfectly good sense. The more we learn about Whitman the man, the less like his *persona* he looks. On the other hand it is doubtful if a writer ever existed who had less of an artistic *persona* than Lawrence; from his letters and the reminiscences of his friends, it would seem that he wrote for publication in exactly the same way as he spoke in private. (I must confess that I find Lawrence's love poems embarassing because of their lack of reticence; they make me feel a Peeping Tom.) Then, Whitman looks at life extensively rather than intensively. No detail is dwelt upon for long; it is snapshotted and added as one more item to the vast American catalogue. But Lawrence in his best poems is always concerned intensively with a single subject, a bat, a tortoise, a fig tree, which he broods on until he has exhausted its possibilities.

A sufficient number of years have passed for us to have gotten over both the first overwhelming impact of Lawrence's genius and the subsequent violent reaction when we realized that there were silly and nasty sides to his nature. We can be grateful to him for what he can do for us, without claiming that he can do everything or condemning him because he cannot. As an analyst and portrayer of the forces of hatred and aggression which exist in all human beings and, from time to time, manifest themselves in nearly all human relationships, Lawrence is, probably, the greatest master who ever lived. But that was absolutely all that he knew and understood about human beings; about human affection and human charity, for example, he knew absolutely nothing. The truth is that he detested nearly all human beings if he had to be in close contact with them; his ideas about what a human relationship, between man and man or man and woman, ought to be are pure daydreams because they are not based upon any experience of actual relationships which might be improved or corrected. Whenever, in his novels and short stories, he introduces a character whom he expects the reader to admire, he or she is always an unmitigated humorless bore, but the more he dislikes his characters the more interesting he makes them. And, in his heart of hearts, Lawrence knew this himself. There is a sad passage in *An Autobiographical Sketch*:

> Why is there so little contact between myself and the people I know? The answer, so far as I can see, has something to do with

> class. As a man from the working class, I feel that the middle class cut off some of my vital vibration when I am with them. I admit them charming and good people often enough, but they just stop some part of me working.
>
> Then, why don't I live with my own people? Because the vibration is limited in another direction. The working class is narrow in outlook, in prejudice, and narrow in intelligence. This again makes a prison. Yet I find, here in Italy, for example, that I live in a certain contact with the peasants who work the land of this villa. I am not intimate with them, hardly speak to them save to say good-day. And they are not working for me. I am not their padrone. I don't want to live with them in their cottages; that would be sort of prison. I don't idealise them. I don't expect them to make any millenium here on earth, neither now nor in the future. But I want them to be there, about the place, their lives going along with mine.

For the word *peasants*, one might substitute the words *birds, beasts and flowers*. Lawrence possessed a great capacity for affection and charity, but he could only direct it towards non-human life and peasants whose lives were so uninvolved with his that, so far as he was concerned, they might just as well have been nonhuman. Whenever, in his writings, he forgets about men and women with proper names and describes the anonymous life of stones, waters, forests, animals, flowers, chance traveling companions or passers-by, his bad temper and dogmatism immediately vanish and he becomes the most enchanting companion imaginable, tender, intelligent, funny and, above all, happy. But the moment any living thing, even a dog, makes a demands on him, the rage and the preaching return. His poem about 'Bibbles,' 'the walt whitmanesque love-bitch who loved just everybody,' is the best poem about a dog ever written, but it makes it clear that Lawrence was no person to be entrusted with the care of a dog.

> All right, my little bitch.
> You learn loyalty rather than loving,
> And I'll protect you.

To which Bibbles might, surely, with justice retort: 'O for Chrissake, mister, get yourself an Alsatian and leave me alone, can't you.'

The poems in *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* are among Lawrence's longest. He was not a concise writer and he needs room to make his effect. In his poetry he manages to make a virtue out of what in his prose is often a vice, a tendency to verbal repetition. The recurrence of identical or slightly varied phrases helps to give his free verse structure; the phrases themselves are not particularly striking, but this is as it should be, for their function is to act as stitches.

Like the romantics, Lawrence's starting point in these poems is a personal encounter between himself and some animal or flower but, unlike the romantics, he never confuses the feelings they arouse in him with what he sees and hears and knows about them.

Thus, he accuses Keats, very justly, I think, of being so preoccupied with his own feelings that he cannot really listen to the nightingale. *Thy plaintive anthem fades* deserves Lawrence's comment: *It never was a plaintive anthem — it was Caruso at his jauntiest.*

Lawrence never forgets – indeed this is what he likes most about them – that a plant or an animal has its own kind of existence which is unlike and uncomprehending of man's.

> It is no use my saying to him in an emotional voice:
> 'This is your Mother, she laid you when you were an egg.'
> He does not even trouble to answer: 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?'
> he wearily looks the other way,
> And she even more wearily looks another way still.
>
> ('Tortoise Family Connections')

> But watching closer
> That motionless deadly motion,
> That unnatural barrel body, that long ghoul nose . . .
> I left off hailing him.
> I had made a mistake, I didn't know him,
> This grey, monotonous soul in the water,
> This intense individual in shadow,
> Fish-alive.
> I didn't know his God.
>
> ('Fish')

When discussing people or ideas, Lawrence is often turgid and obscure, but when, as in these poems, he is contemplating some

object with love, the lucidity of his language matches the intensity of his vision, and he can make the reader *see* what he is saying as very few writers can.

> Queer, with your thin wings and your streaming legs,
> How you sail like a heron, or a dull clot of air.
> ('The Mosquito')

> Her little loose hands, and sloping Victorian shoulders
> ('Kangaroo')

> There she is, perched on her manger, looking over the boards into the day
> Like a belle at her window. [. . .]
> ('She-Goat')

In passages like these, Lawrence's writing is so transparent that one forgets him entirely and simply sees what he saw.

Birds, Beasts, and Flowers is the peak of Lawrence's achievement as a poet. There are a number of fine things in the later volumes, but a great deal that is tedious, both in subject matter and form. A writer's doctrines are not the business of a literary critic except in so far as they touch upon questions which concern the art of writing; if a writer makes statements about nonliterary matters, it is not for the literary critic to ask whether they are true or false but he may legitimately question the writer's authority to make them.

The Flauberts and Goncourts considered social and political questions beneath them; to his credit, Lawrence knew that there are many questions that are more important than Art with an A, but it is one thing to know this and another to believe one is in a position to answer them.

In the modern world, a man who earns his living by writing novels and poems is a self-employed worker whose customers are not his neighbors, and this makes him a social oddity. He may work extremely hard, but his manner of life is something between that of a *rentier* and a gypsy, he can live where he likes and know only the people he chooses to know. He has no firsthand knowledge of all these involuntary relationships created by social, economic and political necessity. Very few artists can be *engagé* because life does not engage them: for better or worse, they do not quite belong to the City. And Lawrence, who was self-employed after

the age of twenty-six, belonged to it less than most. Some writers have spent their lives in the same place and social milieu; Lawrence kept constantly moving from one place and one country to another. Some have been extroverts who entered fully into whatever society happened to be available; Lawrence's nature made him avoid human contacts as much as possible. Most writers have at least had the experience of parenthood and its responsibilities; this experience was denied Lawrence. It was inevitable, therefore, that when he tried to lay down the law about social and political matters, money, machinery etc., he could only be negative and moralistic because, since his youth, he had had no firsthand experiences upon which concrete and positive suggestions could have been based. Furthermore, if, like Lawrence, the only aspects of human beings which you care for and value are states of being, timeless moments of passionate intensity, then social or political life, which are essentially historical – without a past and a future, human society is inconceivable – must be, for you, the worthless aspect of human life. You cannot honestly say, 'This kind of society is preferable to that,' because, for you, society is wholly given over to Satan.

The other defect in many of the later poems is a formal one. It is noticeable that the best are either of some length or rhymed; the short ones in free verse very rarely come off. A poem which contains a number of ideas and feelings can be organised in many different ways, but a poem which makes a single point and is made up of no more than one or two sentences can only be organised verbally; an epigram or an aphorism must be written either in prose or in some strictly measured verse; written in free verse, it will sound like prose arbitrarily chopped up.

> It has always seemed to me that a real thought, not an argument, can only exist in verse, or in some poetic form. There is a didactic element about prose thoughts which makes them repellent, slightly bullying, 'He who hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune.' There is a point well put: but immediately it irritates by its assertiveness. If it were put into poetry, it would not nag at us so practically. We don't want to be nagged at. (Preface to 'Pansies')

Though I personally love good prose aphorisms, I can see what Lawrence means. If one compares

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

with

> The accursed power that stands on Privilege
> And goes with Women and Champagne and Bridge
> Broke, and Democracy resumed her reign
> That goes with Bridge and Women and Champagne

the first does seem a bit smug and a bit abstract, while, in the second, the language dances and is happy.

> The bourgeois produced the Bolshevist inevitably
> As every half-truth at length produces the contradiction
> of itself
> In the opposite half-truth

has the worst of both worlds; it lacks the conciseness of the prose and the jollity of rhymed verse.

The most interesting verses in the poems of Lawrence belong to a literary genre he had not attempted before, satirical doggerel.

If formal verse can be likened to carving, free verse to modeling, then one might say that doggerel verse is like *objets trouvés* – the piece of driftwood that looks like a witch, the stone that has a profile. The writer of doggerel, as it were, takes any old words, rhythms and rhymes that come into his head, gives them a good shake and then throws them into the page like dice where, lo and behold, contrary to all probability they make sense, not by law but by chance. Since the words appear to have no will of their own, but to be the puppets of chance, so will the things or persons to which they refer; hence the value of doggerel for a certain kind of satire.

It is a different kind of satire from that written by Dryden and Pope. Their kind presupposes a universe, a city, governed by, or owing allegiance to, certain eternal laws of reason and morality; the purpose of their satire is to demonstrate that the individual or institution they are attacking violates these laws. Consequently, stricter in form their verse, the more artful their technique, the more effective it is. Satirical doggerel, on the other hand, presupposes no fixed laws. It is the weapon of the outsider, the anarchist rebel, who refuses to accept conventional laws and pieties as binding or worthy of respect. Hence the childish technique, for the

child represents the naïve and personal, as yet uncorrupted by education and convention. Satire of the Pope kind says: 'The Emperor is wearing a celluloid collar. That simply isn't done.' Satiric doggerel cries: 'The Emperor is naked.'

At this kind of satirical doggerel, Lawrence turned to be a master.

> And Mr Meade, that old old lily,
> Said: 'Gross, coarse, hideous!' and I, like a silly
> Thought he meant the faces of the police court officials
> And how right he was, so I signed my initials.
>
> But Tolstoi was a traitor
> To the Russia that needed him most,
> The great bewildered Russia
> So worried by the Holy Ghost;
> He shifted his job onto the peasants
> And landed them all on toast.

Parnassus has many mansions.

The Modern Necessity

Stephen Spender

(From *The Struggle of the Moderns*, 1963)

[. . .] D. H. Lawrence, writing to Edward Garnett in 1914, justified his novel *The Rainbow* on the grounds that he was not concerned with creating the pattern of the 'old stable ego of character,' but 'another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same radically unchanged element.'

Lawrence was concerned with what he took to be instinctual human nature which has, he thought, been driven under the surface in the life of the individual in modern society. Life could, Lawrence thought, only break forth within new patterns of behavior which must be realized in a different kind of art. He objected to Edward Garnett's idea of the novel as a vehicle 'for creating character': for the very concept of a novelistic 'character' had become a literary convention which he regarded as inhibiting to an imaginative realization of the state of life in modern times. To Lawrence the problem of creating new forms in fiction for the expression of life was inseparable from the problem of life itself in the modern world.

Both Hopkins and Lawrence were religious not just in the ritualistic sense but in the sense of being obsessed with the word – the word made life and truth – with the need to invent a language as direct religious utterance. Both were poets, but outside the literary fashions of their time. Both felt that among the poets of their time was an absorption in literary manners, fashions and techniques which separated the line of the writing from that of religious truth. Both felt that the modern situation imposed on them the necessity to express truth by means of a different kind of poetic writing from that used in past or present. Both found themselves driven into writing in a way which their contemporaries did not understand or respond to yet which was inevitable to each in his pursuit of truth. Here of course there is a difference between Hopkins and Lawrence, because Hopkins in his art was perhaps over-worried, over-conscientious, whereas Lawrence was

an instinctive poet, who, in his concern for truth, understood little of the problems of poetic form, although he held strong views about them. Oddly both stood in a certain relation to Walt Whitman, of whom both disapproved, but for whom each felt an affinity. This scarcely needs illustrating in the case of Lawrence in whose poetry the influence of Whitman is evident. But it is as surprising as it is revealing to find Hopkins writing to Bridges (18 October 1982) when Bridges had charged him with being Whitmanesque:

> But first I may as well say what I should not otherwise have said, that I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living. As he is a very great scoundrel that is not a pleasant confession. And this also makes me the more desirous to read him and the more determined that I will not.

Hopkins' awareness of the divorce between manner and matter among his contemporaries, his suspicion that perhaps the professionally poetic manner of the late Victorians concealed an emptiness, are revealed in his comments on the outstanding poets of his time:

> (to Bridges, 22 April 1879) Lang's . . . is in the Swinburnian kind, is it not? (I do not think that kind goes far: it expresses passion but not feeling, much less character. This I say in general or of Swinburne in particular. Swinburne's genius is astonishing, but it will, I think, only do one thing.)
> (ditto, 22 October 1879) Tennyson ('s) . . . gift of utterance is truly golden, but go further home and you come to thoughts commonplace and wanting in nobility (it seems hard to say it but you know what I mean.)

Perhaps the most important statement of the necessity of a modern idiom is that made to Bridges in a letter of 14 August 1879:

> . . . It seems to me that the poetical language of an age should be the current language heightened, to any degree heightened and unlike itself, but not (I mean normally: passing freaks and graces are another thing) an obsolete one. This is Shakespeare's and

> Milton's practice and the want of it will be fatal to Tennyson's Idylls and plays, to Swinburne, and perhaps to Morris.

The correspondence of Hopkins with Bridges and Dixon is rather painful because, as the reader cannot but feel, Hopkins' friends are, poetically speaking, incapable of salvation, or of understanding at all profoundly Hopkins' point of view. Thus here (26 October 1880) Hopkins' remarks on Browning are a courteously disguised affectionate criticism of Bridges' own failings in his famous poem *On a Dead Child*:

> 'The rhythm (of *London Snow*) . . . is not quite perfect. That of the child-piece is worse, indeed, it is Browningesque. . . .'

Hopkins' attitude to all these contemporaries is summed up in his comments on Swinburne in a letter to Canon R. W. Dixon (1 December 1881):

> The Lake School expires in Keble and Faber and Cardinal Newman. The Brownings may be reckoned to the Romantics. Swinburne is a strange phenomenon: his poetry seems a powerful effort at establishing a new standard of poetical diction, of the rhetoric of poetry; but to waive every other objection, it is essentially archaic, biblical a good deal, and so on: now that is a thing that can never last; a perfect style must be of its age. In virtue of this archaism and on other grounds he must rank with the mediaevalists.

So on the one hand, Hopkins realized that 'a perfect style must be of its age,' on the other hand, that this style must be extremely concentrated, have the quality he called 'inscape,' and be in 'native rhythm.'

Lawrence had, as I have pointed out, far less sense of the problems of art in writing poetry than did Hopkins. A letter to Edward Marsh (19 November 1913) shows that his feeling for metre was instinctive and that he did not really think about it at all until challenged: 'You *are* wrong. It makes me open my eyes. I think I read my poetry more by length than by stress – as a matter of movements in space than footsteps hitting the earth.' But although his justification of his own ear is vague and rather unconsidered, he sees that there is something wrong with the accustomed literary ear of his time:

> If your ear has got stiff and a bit mechanical, *don't* blame my poetry. That's why you like *Golden Journey to Samarkand* – it fits your habituated ear, and your feeling crouches subservient and a bit pathetic. 'It satisfies my ear,' you say. Well, I don't write for your ear. This is the constant war, I reckon, between new expression and the habituated, mechanical transmitters and receivers of the human constitution.

He expresses the other essential which he feels to be necessary to modern poetry in his criticism of the writers for the war number of *Poetry*, in a letter to Harriet Monroe: 'Your people have such little pressure: their safety valve goes off at the high scream when the pressure is still so low.'

So Lawrence, like Hopkins, is not a vocational 'modern.' He does not belong to any school or movement, and he lacks a quality which seems essential to Joyce, Eliot, and Virginia Woolf, that of being preoccupied above all else with problems of inventing new forms. He judges himself and wants to be judged by the feeling for life which is the ebb and flow of writing.

> Primarily I am a passionately religious man, and my novels must be written from the depths of my religious experience. That I must keep to, because I can only work like that. And my cockneyism and commonness are only when the deep feeling doesn't find its way out, and a sort of jeer comes instead, and sentimentality, and purplism.

Essentially, Lawrence thought that a novel or a poem should realize through the form the same kind of wavering but organic existence as a human being. For Lawrence art was the imitation of man and woman as they are with their intensities and their imperfections. For the aesthetic moderns art was the redemption of life-experience through perfection of form. Putting the matter in a more literary way, the great difference between Lawrence and others is that what he regarded as the essential art was the line and rhythm, and if these were moody and irregular, then so also is life; and pattern should not be willed on to them by conceptual form. What they cared about was relating every part of a work to the architectural whole. The difference is that which Lawrence would have described as between the movement of the blood, and the willed act of cerebration. 'But you should see the religious, earnest, suffering man in me first, and then the flippant or common things

after,' he writes to Edward Garnett (22 April 1914). A James, a Flaubert, a Joyce, could never have written this because he would have considered the novel as a work of art separate from the writer, something into which the writer had poured his whole experience and skill but which should then be judged as an object, not as a flow of life blood or subconscious forces. [. . .]

A Haste for Wisdom

D. J. Enright

(*New Statesman*, 30 October 1964)

There are two views of D. H. Lawrence's poetry, and the twain rarely meet in public. The one has it that the poetry is vitiated by formlessness and the absence of 'serious regard for rhythms.' The other maintains that it has 'organic' or 'expressive' form and its rhythms convey (in Lawrence's words) 'the insurgent naked throb of the instant moment.' The former view has been put forward by R. P. Blackmur, by James Reeves (rather oddly, in introducing a selection of the poems) and more recently, in the *Critical Quarterly*, by Henry Gifford. The latter view has been voiced by A. Alvarez and (more guardedly, in answer to Mr Gifford) by Gāmini Salgādo, and is propounded at length by Vivian de Sola Pinto, in the introduction to the new *Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence*.

If it is a question of joining one side or the other, then the choice is not difficult. The argument in favour may fail to account for the poor verse to be found fairly abundantly in this collection, but the argument against simply ignores the unique and not infrequent successes. If these poems are lacking in craftsmanship, then so much the worse for craftsmanship. It might be felt, too, that the conception of poetry and the poetic possibilities implied by the pro-Lawrence argument is considerably more congenial than the aesthetic (the word is wholly appropriate) which seems to underlie the anti-Lawrence view. The former is generous, accords to subject-matter and intelligence the importance they ought to have, and has the courage of its convictions. The latter is narrow-minded, excogitated (lit. crit. in the head) and stern in a comically knuckle-rapping way. The anti-Lawrence party seem to have at the back or perhaps front of their minds the ideal figure of a perfect genteel poet, *sans reproche* and without fear of critics. What matters is not that such a poet never existed, but that this ideal figure, as far as one can make out his features, resembles nothing so much as a deep-refrigerated macaroni pudding. The determined worship of so false a god hints at a strong element of narcissism in the devotees. 'How nice it is to be superior!' Especially to Lawrence.

'Lawrence . . . was so uninterested in the poem as artifact that

he can't properly be regarded as a poet at all,' wrote A. D. S. Fowler in *Essays in Criticism* several years back, while adding in parenthesis, 'Not that his poems are not of great interest and importance.' Well, let that go: it may be that the word 'artifact' does not mean so much after all. 'As for Lawrence's wit, a not unfair specimen is this, from one of his Prefaces: "These poems are called PANSIES because they are rather PENSEES than anything else."' As for this critic's understanding and good will, we must hope that the foregoing is an unfair specimen. 'He felt no devotion to language,' wrote Mr Gifford, echoing Mr Reeves:

> He was not a good poet in the technical sense . . . He might have been a good poet had he been less himself. Impatience with poetic technique was, however, a part of him. He had not the craftsman's sense of words as living things, as an end in themselves; words were too much a means to an end.

It is interesting to have this definition of a craftsman as one who has a sense of words as an end in themselves. And since Mr Reeves goes on to say that 'Lawrence was an exciting and original poet,' and 'a poet of today – especially a young poet – can learn more from the imperfections of Lawrence than from the technical perfection of many better poets,' one can only suppose that 'technical perfection' is a somewhat minor attraction. Certainly one is not left under the impression that by using words as a means to an end Lawrence was committing any mortal sin. The choice might seem to be between those who admire him and say so and those who admire him and make out they don't.

To be fair to Mr Fowler, he has made a good point. 'Revaluation has to be judicious. It would be necessary to distinguish clearly the poems on which the claim is based.' It must be granted that this *Complete Poems* (nearly 900 pages, not counting variants and early drafts) – however grateful many of us will be to have it – makes for oppressive, confusing and blunted reading. There is still room for a critical selection; none of those I have seen conveys a true sense of the fantastic variety and scope of Lawrence's verse. For all its *longueurs*, the *Complete Poems* does make one wonder whether it is not Lawrence's technique or lack of it that is resented so much as his range of subject-matter, the naturalness of his writing ('as the leaves to a tree') and its 'effortlessness.' Today, in an age of labels and syllabuses, we think of poets as possessing their 'special

subjects,' and we don't hold with 'effortlessness,' we believe in paying our way.

Perhaps the best thing the reviewer can do, then, is to anthologize a little. One of Lawrence's avatars is the domestic poet, a gentle writer, concerned about everyday affairs, not with wonders sexual or metaphysical, a homely poet – a type unlikely to find favour with contemporary poetry-fanciers, who hold so elevated a notion of poetry and its purposes. 'Baby running Barefoot' may seem sentimental to those who wear their sentimentality with a difference. 'Corot' indicates how alive Lawrence was to art – ah, but that was the trouble, he failed to distinguish firmly enough between art and life! – to art outside himself; it is scarcely what one would expect from a *naif*, from one who 'tries to beget children upon himself.' It also seems to have what might seem to be technique. 'The subtle steady rush . . . of advancing Time'

> Is heard in the windless whisper of leaves,
> In the silent labours of men in the field,
> In the downward-dropping of flimsy sheaves
> Of cloud the rain-skies yield.
>
> In the tapping haste of a fallen leaf,
> In the flapping of red-roof smoke, and the small
> Footstepping tap of men beneath
> Dim trees so huge and tall . . .

The dialect sequence 'Whether or Not' may be unacceptable solely because it is in dialect: to me it seems a good, legitimate poem, with its distinct and convincing voices, and a fine ending, the outcome incidentally of Edward Garnett's objection to the original ending and so not quite a case of monstrous parthenogenesis.

Another quality which Lawrence displays, trifling though it be, is good practical sense, of a kind not always conspicuous in those who by our loose journalistic categories are allowed kinship with him. Thus, of teaching young people.

> I must not win their souls, no never, I only must win
> The brief material control of the hour, leave them free of me . . .

And 'Thought,' from *More Pansies*, has a wide and, it appears, perennial relevance:

> Thought, I love thought.
> But not the jaggling and twisting of already existent ideas
> I despise that self-important game . . .
> Thought is not a trick, or an exercise, or a set of dodges
> Thought is a man in his wholeness wholly attending.

'It is bad taste to be wise all the time, like being at a perpetual funeral.' And Lawrence's touch could be very light: his humour played lightly over others, and he was able to laugh at himself. 'What ails thee? –' is a nice parody (or Connie getting even with that hateful dialect), and in 'Peach,' a notably neat little poem, he recognizes how and why people sometimes felt like throwing something at him, and offers a peach stone.

Within a few pages of *Rhyming Poems* there is such diversity as between 'She lies at last, the darling, in the shape of her dream' and 'Am I doomed in a long coition of words to mate you?' or between 'What a lovely haste for wisdom is in men!' and

> Sleep-suave limbs of a youth with long, smooth thighs
> Hutched up for warmth . . .

These last lines come from 'Embankment at Night, Before the War', a piece of observation live and undoctrinaire, unsentimental without being either callous or protectively clever. No doubt the poem might have been more compact, concentrated, but no one in his senses could regret that it was written and published. 'The Ship of Death' needs no commendation, it is the great exception which Lawrence's non-admirers commonly admit. But we might remark that it is not a solitary achievement: several of the *Uncollected Poems*, written c.1915, are comparable in the quiet solemnity of the run-on but unscurrying lines:

> And say, what matters any more, what matters,
> Save the cold ghosts that homeless flock about
> Our serried hearts, drifting without a place?
> (in a letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, 2 Nov. 1915)

The much anthologized *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* have perhaps been over-rated; but they do have fine things in them, evidence of

Lawrence's marvellous gift of empathy even with modes of life for which he felt little sympathy, like the bat,

> Dark air-life looping
> Yet missing the pure loop.
>
> ('Bat')

Better still are the goat poems –

> Yet she has such adorable spurty kids, like spurts of
> black ink.
> And in a month again is as if she had never had them.
> And when the billy goat mounts her
> She is brittle as brimstone.
> While his slitted eyes squint back to the roots of his
> ears.
>
> ('She-Goat')

Has any other writer gone so far along the road? The insight is uncanny, a sort of magic, like Adam among the animals:

> I named them as they passed, and understood
> Their nature, with such knowledge God endued
> My sudden apprehension . . .
>
> (*Paradise Lost*, Book 8)

But 'words are not Adamic,' says Mr Gifford, and poetry (as we have been told) is made of words. (What are words made of?)

The weaknesses in Lawrence's poetry are so obvious that it seems unnecessary to dwell on them. In brief, at times he was downright bad in the very matters in which at other times he was superbly good. He could be uniquely sensitive and refreshing: he could also bumble on like a congress of cabbalists. He was gifted with a light touch: he was also cursed with a heavy hand. Thus in much of *Pansies* there is a pathetic straining after rhyme which defeats its own purpose, an ensuing serio-comic effect which fails to be either comic or serious:

> And it's funny, my dear young men, that you in your
> twenties should love the sewer scent
> of obscenity, and lift your nose where the vent is

and run towards it, bent
on smelling it all, before your bit of vitality spent is.
('Beware, O My Dear Young Men')

For Lawrence, as Aldington put it, 'writing was just a part of living. Take it or leave it.' Even Lawrence, though he lived more continuously, more intensely, with fewer rest-periods, than is the case with the mass of us, did not live always on the peaks. And he kept his trivialities for poetry in the way most writers of both reserve them for prose. Some of the poems here have their correspondences, more finely worked out, in the novels: compare 'Children Singing in School' with the famous Tevershall passage in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It isn't that the novel gave him more elbow room, for in the poems one often has the impression that he has treated himself to more space than he can occupy. One obvious advantage of the novel, Lawrence being the man he was, is that the argumentation and preaching are attached to the characters who do other things besides argue and preach. The effect of some of the verse is of a pulpit and a microphone and a booming voice, but no human being in view.

And then you have the declamatory assertions of *Look! We Have Come Through!*, or the deadening reiteration, the rasping sterility of this, from *More Pansies*:

Oh I have loved my fellow-men –
and lived to learn they are neither fellow nor men
but machine-robots . . .
('But I Say Unto You, Love One Another')

It is as if Lawrence sometimes woke up in the morning with a strong and perhaps not groundless distaste for the human race and thereupon wrote out of his irritation not one poem against it but four or five. He didn't inevitably, as he hoped to, exclude a 'repellent, slightly bullying' effect by putting his thoughts into verse: by the end of the outburst the reader finds his sympathy has gone where it wasn't meant to go. The pity of it is that, thus antagonized, the reader risks missing something good, perhaps 'Retort to Whitman', a few pages further on:

And [w]hoever walks a mile full of false sympathy
walks to the funeral of the whole human race

– an utterance in one of Lawrence's characteristic modes, the Blakeian. There is much of Blake, too, which we would prefer Blake not to have written – except for a strong suspicion that in that case we coudn't have any Blake at all. 'What fascinates me about the poems of Lawrence's which I like,' Auden has said, 'is that I must admit he could never have written them had he held the kind of views about poetry of which I approve. . . . Parnassus has many mansions.' Occasional boredom and exasperation is a small price to pay for a sizeable body of major poetry. If enthusiasm for Lawrence the poet is wrong, then it is a generous misdemeanour, a sensible error.

The Candid Revelation: Lawrence's Aesthetics

Joyce Carol Oates

(From *The Hostile Sun*, 1973)

> I am that I am
> from the sun
> and people are not my measure.
>
> — *Aristocracy of the Sun*

Lawrence's poems are blunt, exasperating, imposing upon us his strangely hectic, strangely delicate music, in fragments, in tantalizing broken-off parts of a whole too vast to be envisioned – and then withdrawing again. They are meant to be spontaneous works, spontaneously experienced; they are not meant to give us the sense of grandeur or permanence which other poems attempt, the fallacious sense of immortality that is an extension of the poet's ego. Yet they achieve a kind of immortality precisely in this: that they transcend the temporal, the intellectual. They are ways of experiencing the ineffable 'still point' which Eliot could approach only through abstract language.

It is illuminating to read Lawrence's entire poetic work as a kind of journal, in which not only the finished poems themselves but variants and early drafts and uncollected poems constitute a strange unity – an autobiographical novel, perhaps – that begins with 'The quick sparks' and ends with 'immortal bird.' This massive work is more powerful, more emotionally combative, than even the greatest of his novels. Between first and last line there is literally everything: beauty, waste, 'flocculent ash,' the ego in a state of rapture and in a state of nausea, a diverse streaming of chaos and cunning. We know that Yeats fashioned his 'soul' in the many-volumed *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats* quite consciously, systematically, and Lawrence has unconsciously and unsystematically created a similar work. It is shameless, in part; but there are moments of beauty in it that are as powerful as Yeats's more frequent moments. There are moments of clumsiness, ugliness, and sheer stubborn spite, quite unredeemed by any poetic grace, so much so, in fact, that the number of excellent poems is therefore all the more amazing. Ultimately, Lawrence forces us to stop

judging each individual poem. The experience of reading all the poems – and their earlier forms – becomes a kind of mystical appropriation of Lawrence's life, *or life itself*, in which the essential sacredness of 'high' and 'low,' 'beauty' and 'ugliness,' 'poetry' and 'non-poetry' is celebrated in a magical transcendence of all rationalist dichotomies.

Lawrence is one of our true prophets, not only in his 'madness for the unknown' and in his explicit warning –

> If we do not rapidly open all the doors of consciousness
> and freshen the putrid little space in which we are
> cribbed
> the sky-blue walls of our unventilated heaven
> will be bright red with blood.
>
> ('Nemesis,' from *Pansies*)

– but in his life-long development of a technique, a fictional and poetic *way* in which the prophetic voice can be given formal expression. It is a technique that refuses to study itself closely, that refuses to hint at its position in any vast cultural tradition – how unlike that of Eliot, for instance! – and that refuses, even, most unforgivably to the serious-minded, to take itself seriously. Richard Aldington, writing in 1932, contrasts Lawrence's delight in the imperfect with Joyce's insistence upon perfection, and though Aldington seems overly biased against Joyce, his point about Lawrence is well made. Lawrence was not interested in that academic, adolescent, and rather insane human concept of 'The Perfect,' knowing very well that dichotomies like Perfect/Imperfect are only invented by men according to their cultural or political or emotional dispositions, and then imposed upon others. Everything changes, says Lawrence; most of all, standards of apparently immutable taste, aesthetic standards of perfection that are soon left behind by the spontaneous flow of life.

Therefore he strikes us as very contemporary – moody and unpredictable and unreliable – a brilliant performer when he cares to be, but quite maliciously willing to inform us of the dead spaces, the blanks in his imagination. Not a finer poet than Yeats, Lawrence is often much more sympathetic; he seems to be demonstrating in his very style, in the process of writing his poetry, the revelation that comes at the conclusion of Yeat's 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' (a poem that itself comes near the conclusion

of Yeats's great body of work) — the knowledge that the poet, for all his higher wisdom, must lie down 'where all the ladders start,/In the rag-and-bone shop of the heart.' Yet it has always seemed to me ironic that this revelation comes to us in a poem that is technically perfect – a Platonic essence of what a poem should be. By contrast, Lawrence seems to be writing, always writing, out of the abrupt, ungovernable impulses of his soul, which he refuses to shape into an art as perfected as Yeats's. He would have scorned the idea of hoping for either a perfection of life or of art – he is more like one of us.

But critics, especially 'New Critics' and 'Formalist Critics,' have not understood this: that there are many kinds of art, that there may be a dozen, a hundred ways of writing, and that no single way is the ultimate way. Lawrence was exasperated by, but not deeply influenced by, the stupidity of his critics; but it may be harder for us, in reading an essay like R. P. Blackmur's *'Lawrence and Expressive Form'* (in *Language as Gesture*, 1954) to restrain our impatience. Blackmur states that Lawrence is guilty of writing 'fragmentary biography' instead of 'poetry.' It would have been unthinkable to imagine that the two are not separate . . .? need not be separate . . .? And what does 'poetry,' that elusive, somehow punitive term, mean to Blackmur? If we read farther we see that his definition of 'poetry' is simply his expectation of what poetry *must* be, based on the poets he has evidently read, and judged worthy of the title 'poet.' One needs the 'structures of art,' which are put there by something Blackmur calls a 'rational imagination.' All this suggests that the critic is in control of what is rational, and if one investigates far enough he learns that this critic is unhappy because Lawrence the 'craftsman' did not often silence Lawrence the demon of 'personal outburst.' Lawrence leaves us, therefore, only with 'the ruins of great intentions.' I mention this because it is symptomatic of academic criticism at its most sinister, since its assumptions are so hidden that one can hardly discover them. But when they are brought to light it becomes clear that the critic is punishing the poet for not being a form of the critic himself, a kind of analogue to his ego. It is a method of suppression that passes for rational discourse, 'objective' criticism; a colleague of mine once stated that *Moby Dick* is a 'failure' because it does not 'live up' to the form of the 'novel.'

For Lawrence, of course, art antedates any traditional form. He is fascinated by the protean nature of reality, the various possi-

bilities of the ego. Throughout the entire collection of poems there is a deep, unshakable faith in the transformable quality of all life. Even the elegiac 'The Ship of Death' (written as Lawrence was dying) ends with a renewal, in typically Laurentian words: '. . . and the whole thing starts again.' Like most extraordinary men, Lawrence is concerned with directing the way his writing will be assessed; the ambitious are never content to leave the writing of their biographies to others, who may make mistakes. So he says, in a prefatory note in 1928, 'No poetry, not even the best, should be judged as if it existed in the absolute, in the vacuum of the absolute. Even the best poetry, when it is at all personal, needs the penumbra of its own time and place and circumstance to make it full and whole.' Surely this is correct, and yet it is a point missed by most critics of Lawrence, who assume that their subjects are 'subjects' and not human beings, and that their works of art are somehow crimes, for which they are on perpetual trial.

The critic who expects to take up Lawrence's poems and read T. S. Eliot's poems, for instance, is wasting everyone's time. Lawrence's poems are for people who want to experience the poetic process as well as its product, who want the worst as well as the best, because they are infinitely curious about the man, the human being, D. H. Lawrence himself. If you love someone it is a total engagement; if you wish to be transformed into him, as one is into Lawrence, you must expect rough treatment. That is one of the reasons why Lawrence has maddened so many people – they sense his violent, self-defining magic, which totally excludes them and makes them irrelevant, unless they become Lawrence himself, on his terms and not their own.

He trusted himself, endured and suffered himself, worked his way through himself (sometimes only barely) and came through – 'look! we have come through!' – and he expects no less of his readers. Only a spiritual brother or sister of Lawrence himself can understand his poems, ultimately; this is why we strain upward, puzzled by yearning for an equality with him, if only in flashes. We need a violent distending of our imaginations in order to understand him. It is almost a reversal of Nietzsche's remark, to the effect that one must have the 'permission' of one's envious friends, in order to be acknowledged as great: Lawrence might have felt that one's friends must earn the permission of recognizing that he, Lawrence, *is* a great man.

There is a deadly little poem called 'Blank' in which Lawrence

says coldly: 'At present I am a blank, and I admit it./ . . . So I am just going to go on being blank, till something nudges me from within, /and makes me know I am not blank any longer'. The poems themselves are nudges, some sharp and cruel and memorable indeed, most of them a structured streaming of consciousness, fragments of a total self that could not always keep up the strain of totality. Sometimes Lawrence was anguished over this, but most of the time he believed that in his poetry, as in life itself, what must be valued is the springing-forth of the natural, forcing its own organic shape, not forced into a preordained structure. He is much more fluid and inventive than the Imagists, whose work resembles some of his cooler, shorter poems, in his absolute commitment to the honoring of his own creative processes. Picasso has stated that it is his own dynamism he is painting, because the movement of his thought interests him more than the thought itself, and while Lawrence does not go this far, something of the same is true in his utilization and valuing of spontaneity. He says:

> Ours is the universe of the unfolded rose,
> The explicit,
> The candid revelation.

So Lawrence declares and defines himself, and the impersonal in himself (which he valued, of course, more than the 'personal'), in a word-for-word, line-by-line, poem-by-poem sequence of revelations.

For Lawrence, as for Nietzsche, it is the beauty and mystery of the flux, of 'Becoming,' that enchants us; not permanence, not 'Being.' Permanence exists only in the conscious mind. It is a structure erected to perfection, therefore airless and stultifying. Lawrence says in a letter of 1913, written to Ernest Collings, from Italy:

> I conceive a man's body as a kind of flame, like a candle flame, forever upright and yet flowing: and the intellect is just the light that is shed on to the things around. And I am not so much concerned with the things around – which is really mind – but with the mystery of the flame forever flowing . . . We have got so ridiculously mindful, that we never know that we ourselves are anything – we think there are only the objects we shine upon. And there the poor flame goes on burning ignored, to

> produce this light. And instead of chasing the mystery in the fugitive, half-lighted things outside us, we ought to look at ourselves, and say, 'My God, I am myself!'

This is exactly contemporary with us: except now, at last, men whose training has been scientific and positivisitic and clinical and 'rational' (the most obvious being R. D. Laing, Abraham Maslow, Buckminster Fuller) are beginning to say the same thing. Like Maslow – but unlike Freud – Lawrence would assert that the so-called 'destructive instincts' are really manifestation of intellectual perversion, not healthy instinct. Lawrence's arrogant prophetic stance in 'The Revolutionary' ('see if I don't bring you down, and all your high opinion/ . . . Your particular heavens,/ With a smash.') is becoming justified.

Lawrence loves the true marriage of heaven and hell, illusory opposites, he loves to exalt the apparently unbeautiful. For instance, in the poem 'Medlars and Sorb-Apples' (from his best single volume of poems, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, of 1923), he says:

> I love you, rotten,
> Delicious rottenness.
>
> I love to suck you out of your skins
> So brown and soft and coming suave
> So morbid. . . .

He sees these fruits as 'autumnal excrementa' and they please him very much. Earlier in a poem called 'Craving for Spring,' he has declared that he is sick of the flowers of earliest spring – the snowdrops, the jonquils, the 'chill Lent lillies' because of their 'faint-bloodedness,/slow-blooded, icy-fleshed' purity. He would like to trample them underfoot. (What is remarkable in Lawrence's 'nature' poems is his fierce, combative, occasionally peevish relationship with birds, beasts and flowers – he does them the honor, as the Romantic poets rarely did, of taking them seriously.) So much for the virgins, so much for portentousness! It is totally with a different emotion that he approaches the sorb-apples, a kind of worship, a dread:

> Gods nude as blanched nut-kernels,
> Strangely, half-sinisterly flesh-fragrant

As if with sweat,
and drenched with mystery.

. . .
I say, wonderful are the hellish experiences,
Orphic, delicate
Dionysos of the Underworld.

A kiss, and a spasm of farewell, a moment's orgasm of rupture,
Then along the damp road alone, till the next turning.
And there, a new partner, a new parting, a new unfusing into twain,
A new gasp of further isolation. . . .

These poems are remarkable in that they refuse to state, with the kind of godly arrogance we take for granted in Shakespeare, that they will confer any immortality on their subjects. As Lawrence says in his short essay, 'Poetry of the Present' (1918), he is not attempting the 'treasured, gem-like lyrics of Shelley and Keats,' though he values them. His poetry is like Whitman's, a poetry of the 'pulsating, carnal self,' and therefore Lawrence celebrates the falling-away, the rotting, the transient, even the slightly sinister, and above all his own proud isolation, 'Going down the strange lanes of hell, more and more intensely alone,' until hell itself is somehow made exquisite:

> Each soul departing with its own isolation,
> Strangest of all strange companions,
> And best.

In 1929, Lawrence says in his foreword to *Pansies*: 'A flower passes, and that perhaps is the best of it. If we can take it in its transience, its breath, its maybe mephistophelian, maybe palely ophelian face, the look it gives, the gesture of its full bloom, and the way it turns upon us to depart,' we will have been faithful to it, and not simply to our own projected egos. Immortality, he says, can give us nothing to compare with this. The poems that make up *Pansies* are 'merely the breath of the moment, and one eternal moment easily contradicting the next eternal moment.' The extraordinary word is *eternal*. Lawrence reveals himself as a mystic by

this casual, off-hand critical commentary of his own work, as much as he does in the work itself. He can experience the eternal *in* the temporal, and he realizes, as few people, that the temporal is eternal by its very nature: as if a piece of colored glass were held up to the sun, becoming sacred as it is illuminated by the sun, but also making the sun itself sacred. To Lawrence, the sun is a symbol of the ferocious externality of nature, the uncontrollable, savage Otherness of nature, which must be recognized, honored, but not subdued – as if man could subdue it, except by deceiving himself. The sun is "hostile," yet a mystic recognizes the peculiar dependency of the eternal upon the temporal; the eternal being is made "real" or realized only through the temporal. Someday it may be taken for granted that the "mystical vision" and "common sense" are not opposed, that one is simply an extension of the other, but, because it represents a natural development not actually realized by most people, it is said to be opposed to logical thought.

There is a rhythmic, vital relationship between the Eternal and the Temporal, the one pressing close upon the other, not remote and cold, but mysteriously close. Lawrence says in "Mutilation,"

> I think I could alter the frame of things in my agony
> I think I could break the System with my heart.
> I think, in my convulsion, the skies would break.

Inner and outer reality are confused, rush together, making up a pattern of harmony and discord, which is Lawrence's basic vision of the universe and the controlling aesthetics behind his poetry. It is significant that when Lawrence seems to us at his very worst – in *The Plumed Serpent*, *Kangaroo*, much of *Apocalypse*, nearly all of the poems in *Nettles* and *More Pansies* – he is stridently dogmatic, authoritative, speaking without ambiguity or mystery, stating and not suggesting, as if attempting to usurp the position of the Infinite (and unknowable), putting everything into packaged forms. When he seems to us most himself, he is more fragmentary, more spontaneous, inspired to write because of something he has encountered in the outside world – a "nudge" to his blankness, a stimulus he is startled by, as he is by the hummingbird in the poem of that title, imagining it as a jabbing, prehistorical monster, now seen through the wrong end of the telescope; or as he is by a doe in "A Doe at Evening," when he thinks:

Ah yes, being male, is not my head hard-balanced,
antlered?
Are not my haunches light?
Has she not fled on the same wind with me?
Does not my fear cover her fear?

Questions, and not answers, are Lawrence's real technique, just as the process of thinking is his subject matter, not any formalized structures of "art." Because of this he is one of the most vital of all poets, in his presentation of himself as the man who wonders, who asks questions, who feels emotions of joy or misery or fury, the man who *reacts*, coming up hard against things in a real world, both the creator of poems and the involuntary creation of the stimuli he has encountered – that is, he is so nudged by life that he must react, he must be altered, scorning the protection of any walls of "reason" or "tradition" that might make experience any less painful.

Typically, he is fascinated by "unissued, uncanny America," in the poem "The Evening Land," confessing that he is half in love, half horrified, by the "demon people/lurking among the deeps of your industrial thicket" – in fact, he is allured by these demons, who have somehow survived the America of machines:

Say, in the sound of all your machines
And white words, white-wash American,
Deep pulsing of a strange heart
New throb, like a stirring under the false dawn that
precedes the real.
Nascent American
Demonish, lurking among the undergrowth
Of many-stemmed machines and chimneys that smoke like
pine-trees.

For Lawrence, America itself is a question.

A Doggy Demos: Hardy & Lawrence

Donald Davie

(From *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, 1972)

[. . .] It is generally agreed, however, that Lawrence's verse, where it is memorable and successful, is almost all written in his own version of that *vers libre* which Hardy had declared "would come to nothing in England." In fact, it is hard to see the presence of Hardy behind any of Lawrence's worthwhile poems. And we cannot even be sure that it was Hardy who steered Lawrence, as for good or ill he steered Sassoon and Blunden, away from Eliot's and Pound's poetry of the ironical persona.

What must be our astonishment, however, to find a critic presenting Hardy as a poet who hides behind a *persona*! Yet this is just what Kenneth Rexroth maintains, urging Lawrence's superiority to Hardy on just these grounds – that whereas Hardy needed to shield himself behind an assumed mask, Lawrence didn't:

> Hardy could say to himself: "Today I am going to be a Wiltshire yeoman, sitting on a fallen rock at Sonehenge, writting a poem to my girl on a piece of wrapping paper with the gnawed stub of a pencil," and he could make it very convincing. But Lawrence really was the educated son of a coal miner, sitting under a tree that had once been part of Sherwood Forest, in a village that was rapidly becoming part of a world-wide disembowelled hell, writing hard painful poems, to girls who carefully had been taught the art of unlove. It was all real. Love really was a mystery at the navel of the earth, like Stonehenge. The miner really was in contact with a monstrous, seething mystery, the black sun in the earth.

And again

> Hardy was a major poet. Lawrence was a minor prophet. Like Blake and Yeats, his is the greater tradition. If Hardy had had a girl in the hay, tipsy on cider, on the night of Boxing Day, he kept quiet about it. He may have thought that it had something

> to do with "the stream of his life in the darkness deathward set," but he never let on, except indirectly.

This is outrageous. In part, it is meant to be. It is monstrously unfair to Hardy. But then, fairness is what we never find from any one who at any time speaks up for what Rexroth is speaking for here. Are prophets fair-minded? Can we expect Jeremiah or Amos or Isaiah to be *judicious*? Lawrence was often unfair; so were nineteenth-century prophets like Carlyle and Ruskin; so was William Blake unfair to Reynolds and to Wordsworth. And some of them, some of the time – perhaps all of them, most of the time – know that they are being unfair, as doubtless Rexroth knows it. Fair-mindedness, the prophets seem to say, is not his business; if judiciousness is necessary to society, it is the business of some one in society other than the prophet or the poet. It is Lawrence's lofty disregard for mere fair-mindedness, a loftiness readily adopted by his admirers, which makes it so difficult to be fair to him. (Since I have taken issue with A. Alvarez on other topics, I ought to give credit to his temperate and persuasive and justly influential essay in *The Shaping Spirit* (pp. 140–61). Alvarez goes out of his way to reject Rexroth's sort of enthusiasm: "Lawrence is not a mystic; his poetry has to do with recognitions, not with revelations." It has nothing to do with "the cant of 'dark gods'" or "the stridency of *The Plumed Serpent*.")

Lawrence certainly at times assumed the mantle of a prophet, on the old-fashioned Carlylean model. But if he did, this has nothing to do with the distinction that Rexroth tries to draw between Hardy and Lawrence. The distinction as Rexroth presents it is quite simply that when "I" appears in a poem by Lawrence, the person meant is directly and immediately D. H. Lawrence, the person as historically recorded, born in such and such a place on such and such a date; whereas when "I" appears in a poem by Hardy, the person meant need not be the historically recorded Thomas Hardy, any more than when King Lear in Shakespeare's play says "I," the person meant is William Shakespeare.

When Rexroth introduces the notion of a tradition of *prophecy*, above all when he puts in that tradition the most histrionic of modern poets (W. B. Yeats), he is shifting his ground abruptly and confusingly. What he is saying to start with is simply and bluntly that Lawrence is always sincere, whereas Hardy often isn't: and Lawrence is sincere by virtue of the fact that the "I" in his poems is

always directly and immediately himself. In other words, the poetry we are asked to see as greater than Hardy's kind of poetry, though it is called "prophetic" poetry, is more accurately described as *confessional* poetry. Confessional poetry, of its nature and necessarily, is superior to dramatic or histrionic poetry; a poem in which the "I" stands immediately and unequivocally for the author is essentially and necessarily superior to a poem in which the "I" stands not for the author but for a persona of the author's – this is what Rexroth wants us to believe.

In asking us for this he is asking us, as he well knows, to fly in the face of what seemed, until a few years ago, the solidly achieved consensus about poetry and the criticism of poetry. That consensus seemed to have formed itself on the basis of insights delivered to us by the revolutionary poets of two or three generations ago. It had taken the idea of the persona from Ezra Pound, and the closely related idea of the mask from W. B. Yeats, and it had taken from T. S. Eliot the ideas that the structure of a poem was inherently a *dramatic* structure, and that the effect of poetry was an impersonal effect. It had elaborated on these hints to formulate a rule, the rule that the "I" is *never* immediately and directly the poet; that the-poet-in-his-poem is always distinct from, and must never be confounded with, the-poet-outside-his-poem, the poet as historically recorded between birthdate and date of death. To this rule there was a necessary and invaluable corollary: that the question "Is the poet sincere?" – though it would continue to be asked by naïve readers – was always an impertinent and illegitimate question. This was the view of poetry associated in America with the so-called New Criticism, and (although it has been challenged from directions other than the one we are concerned with) it is still the view of poetry taught in many classrooms.

We must now abandon it – or rather, we may and must hold by it for the sake of the poetry which it illuminates; but we can no longer hold by it as an account which does justice to *all* poetry. It illuminates nearly all the poetry that we want to remember written in English between 1550 and about 1780; but it illuminates little of the poetry in English written since. And the question has been settled already; it is only in the university classrooms that any one any longer supposes that "Is he sincere?" is a question not to be asked of poets. Confessional poetry has come back with a vengeance; for many years now, in 1972, it is the poetry that has been written by the most serious and talented poets, alike in America

and Britain. Consider only the case of Robert Lowell, probably the most influential poet of his generation. It is a very telling case: trained in the very heart of New Criticism by Allen Tate, Lowell made his reputation by poems which were characteristically dramatic monologues, in which the "I" of the poem was hardly ever to be identified with the historical Robert Lowell. Then in the mid–'50s came his collection called *Life Studies* in which the "I" of the poems nearly always asked to be taken, quite unequivocally, as Robert Lowell himself. At about the same time, from under the shadow of Rexroth himself, came Allen Ginsberg's prophetic-confessional poem, *Howl!* And ever since, confessional poems have been the order of the day, with the predictable consequences – the poem has lost all its hard-won autonomy, its independence in its own right, and has once again become the vehicle by which the writer acts out before his public the agony or the discomfort (American poets go for agony, British ones for discomfort) of being a writer, or of being alive in the twentieth century. Now we have once again poems in which the public life of the author as author, and his private life, are messily compounded, so that one needs the adventitious information of the gossip columnist to take the force or even the literal meaning of what, since it is a work of literary art, is supposedly offered as public utterance.

For these reasons, one may regret the passing of that less disheveled world in which the concept of the ironical persona was paramount. But indeed it has passed, as it had to. And yet, what has all this to do with Thomas Hardy? His reputation should have profited by this change of sentiment, as in England indeed it has. For Hardy, as we have noticed, is a thoroughly confessional poet, though his reticence about his private life concealed this to some extent until lately. What poems by Hardy could Rexroth have had in mind when he imagined the poet deciding, "I am going to be a Wiltshire yeoman . . ."? Hardy has indeed some poems which are spoken through the mouth of an imagined character, but in such cases he intimates as much very clearly, usually in his title. And much more frequently the "I" of his poems is as unequivocally the historically recorded Thomas Hardy as the "I" of Lawrence's poems is David Herbert Lawrence.

Hardy, I have contended, writes at his best when he can coerce the painfully jangled nerves of the confessional poem into some sort of "repose." And, little as the notion will appeal to perfervid Lawrencians like Rexroth, the same is true of Lawrence, as he

moves from the rawly confessional poems of his first two collections into his more mature writing of the early 1920s, in which the repose, the saving distance, is achieved in several ways, notably by way of emblematic fables or descriptions out of a personal bestiary or herbal.

However, Lawrence (and Graves also) could turn to profit the confessional mode which Hardy bequeathed to them, only by transcending and distancing it in ways for which Hardy provided no precedent; if Sassoon, moreover, because he found no such way out, thereupon ceased to be a poet of significance – it seems we must conclude, with Sydney Bolt, that in the 1920s the models which Hardy provided were not very useful. Eliot's ironical modes were more fruitful. And so it looks as if the long spell of Eliot's ascendancy as a formative influence on poets, at the centre of an elaborately systematic criticism, was not fortuitous, nor could it have been avoided. It was not an unnecessary aberration from which British poetry could have escaped if it had followed a Hardy or a Lawrence or a Graves, nor could American poetry have been spared the expense if it had attended to William Carlos Williams.

I have spent so much time on Kenneth Rexroth because it is worthwhile asking what animus impelled him to argue a case so inaccurate and tendentious. And I think the answer is fairly clear: Rexroth detects in Hardy a quality of timorousness, a sort of 'cop-out', which he dislikes and derides. Against it, what he admires and responds to in Lawrence is a quality of risk clearly foreseen and fearlessly taken. In Alvarez as well as in Rexroth, in all of us to some degree, it is this in Lawrence which compels our attention, if not always our admiration. And such a way of thinking was very familiar to Lawrence himself throughout his career. Very early in that career, in 1911, he reviewed an anthology of modern German poetry:

> [. . .] And why is sex passion unsuited for handling, if hate passion and revenge passion, and horror passion are suitable, as in Agamemnon, and Oedipus, and Medea. Hate passion, horror passion, revenge passion no longer move us so violently in life. Love passion, pitching along with it beauty and strange hate and suffering, remains the one living volcano of our souls. And we must be passionate, we are told. Why, then, not take this red fire out of the well, equally with the yellow of horror, and the dark of

> hate? Intrinsically, Verhaeren is surely nearer the Greek dramatists than is Swinburne.

On the one hand, this reminds us that in 1911 the Hardy of the 1890s, the author of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, was still to be thought of as an author who had risked a very great deal – as he continued to do, in certain poems. On the other hand, in 1972 can we say with any confidence that "hate passion, horror passion, revenge passion no longer move us so violently in life"? In any case, it gives us a valuable sense of how Lawrence at the start of his literary career saw the challenge presented to him: the one of his masters, Hardy, no less than the other, Whitman, had pioneered a path of risk which it was his duty, historically, to follow beyond the point at which they had lost heart, or had erected a sign saying, "Thus far and not farther."

Among the risks which Lawrence saw as presented to him, as a challenge to his poetic vocation, are certainly some which must be called political. In view of the several sentimental and embarrassing poems which Hardy addressed to dogs or wrote about dogs, it is appropriate to illustrate the political risks which Lawrence took, from his poem about a bitch which he and Frieda owned in New Mexico. The poem is called 'Bibbles,' and it is virulently anti-democratic:

> And even now, Bibbles, little Ma'am, it's you who
> appropriated me, not I you.
> As Benjamin Franklin appropriated Providence to his
> purposes.
>
> Oh Bibbles, black little bitch,
> I'd never have let you appropriate me, had I known.
> I never dreamed, till now, of the awful time the Lord
> must have, "owning" humanity,
> Especially democratic live-by-love humanity.
>
> Oh Bibbles, oh Pips, oh Pipsey,
> You little black love-bird!
> *Don't* you love *everybody!*
> Just everybody.
> You love 'em all.
> Believe in the One Identity, don't you
> You little Walt-Whitmanesque bitch?

Towards the end of the poem (so we may call it, though the merely provisional and rhetorical disposition of line endings can only embarrass Lawrencians who want to defend his *vers libre*), we have:

Me or the Mexican who comes to chop wood
All the same,
All humanity is jam to you.
Everybody so dear, and yourself so ultra-beloved
That you have to run out at last and eat filth,
Gobble up filth, you horror, swallow utter abominations
and fresh-dropped dung.

You stinker.
You worse than a carrion-crow.

Reeking dung-mouth.
You love-bird.
Reject nothing, sings Walt Whitman.
So you, go out at last and eat the unmentionable,
In your appetite for affection.
And then you run in to vomit in my house!
I get my love back.
And I have to clean up after you, filth which even blind
Nature rejects
From the pit of your stomach;
But you, you snout-face, you reject nothing, you merge so
much in love
You must eat even that.

Then when I dust you a bit with a juniper twig
You run straight away to live with somebody else,
Fawn before them, and love them as if they were the ones
you had *really* loved all along.
And they're taken in.
They feel quite tender over you, till you play the same
trick on them, dirty bitch.

Fidelity! Loyalty! Attachment!
Oh, these are abstractions to your nasty little belly.
You must always be a-waggle with LOVE.
Such a waggle of love can hardly distinguish one human
from another.

You love one after another, on one condition, that each
one loves you most.
Democratic little bull-bitch, dirt-eating little swine.

And by the end of the piece the anti-democratic demand for authority becomes quite clear:

So now, what with great Airedale dogs,
And a kick or two,
And a few vomiting bouts,
And a juniper switch,
You look at me for discrimination, don't you?

Look up at me with misgiving in your bulging eyes,
And fear in the smoky whites of your eyes, you nigger;
And you're puzzled.
You think you'd better mind your P's and Q's for a bit,
Your sensitive love-pride being all hurt.

All right, my little bitch.
You learn loyalty rather than loving,
And I'll protect you.

('Bibbles')

It is intriguing to wonder how Lawrence, the author of these sentiments, would have responded to the loyalty of that ideal batman, Tolkien's Sam Samwise. A related but much better poem, from Lawrence's emblematic bestiary, is 'St. Mark':

There was a lion in Judah
Which whelped, and was Mark.

But winged.
A lion with wings.
At least at Venice
Even as late as Daniele Manin. [. . .]

And somewhere there is a lioness.
The she-mate.
Whelps play between the paws of the lion,
The she-mate purrs.

Their castle is impregnable, their cave,
The sun comes in their lair, they are well-off,
A well-to-do family

Then the proud lion stalks abroad alone,
And roars to announce himself to the wolves
And also to encourage the red-cross Lamb
And also to ensure a goodly increase in the world.

Look at him, with his paw on the world
At Venice and elsewhere
Going blind at last.

This is not exclusively nor chiefly an anti-Christian poem. It is an antiphilanthropist poem. It is directed against the do-gooder, whether he exerts himself to do good *de haut en bas* under Christian auspices or some other. In 1972 we well may think first of a militantly or complacently secular philanthropist, a Fabian expert in the behavioral sciences called in as a consultant, a social engineer, by a British or for that matter American government or municipality. What the poem is about is the devious compensation which the lion of aggressiveness can earn when he persuades himself that he is the protective sheepdog, serving the higher purpose of social cohesiveness and amelioration. The poem could be directed indeed against the Thomas Hardy who wrote poems to and for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The distinctive snarling and taunting tone, here informing the disposition of free-verse lines as well as the dexterous shifts from one level of diction to another, still stings and hurts; for Lawrence's target in such a poem is just that form of government and social organization which the British have increasingly, since his death, come to accept as normal. And to set Lawrence against Hardy at this point is to raise immediately the urgent question for the modern Englishman: Do we have to accept the insistent presence of the semi-official busybody, in order to ensure what we regard as a minimal level of social and political justice? Lawrence, it is clear, wants his countrymen to answer that question with a resounding No! But of course the answer since his death has been, sometimes grudgingly and resentfully, Yes. We have given Hardy's answer, not Lawrence's.

R. P. Blackmur, a critic of the Eliotic persuasion who gave a more considered account of Lawrence's poetry than any other from that inevitably hostile point of view, gives three good examples of early poems by Lawrence in which the influence of Hardy is apparent. These are "Lightning," "Turned Down," and the two quatrains called "Gypsy":

> I, the man with the red scarf
> Will give thee what I have, this last week's earnings.
> Take them and buy thee a silver ring.
> And wed me, to ease my yearnings.
>
> For the rest, when thou art wedded
> I'll wet my brow for thee
> With sweat, I'll enter a house for thy sake,
> Thou shalt shut doors on me.
>
> ("Gypsy")

Blackmur remarks, "Hardy would have been ashamed of the uneven, lop-sided metrical architecture and would never have been guilty (whatever faults he had of his own) of the disturbing inner rhyme in the second quatrain." This is true, and it is well said. It is also quite irrelevant. The whole notion of "metrical architecture," all the cluster of metaphors and analogies which lies behind such an expression, was entirely foreign to Lawrence's way of thinking about what it was he did when he wrote poems. It is not just that Lawrence rejected the architectural analogy which was so important to Hardy. He rejected also the findings of analogies for poetry in any of the other arts, including music, and insisted on the contrary, as anyone who has read even a little of him must recognize, on taking as the only reliable analogues for the act of poetic creation various biological processes of copulation, parturition, generation, metamorphosis.

This is what makes the case of Lawrence unique. It is still not pointed out sufficiently often that Lawrence's use of free verse or of "open form" is in no way a paradigm of what has been and is still normal practice in these modes. It should be plain for instance that J. H. Prynne, when he writes free verse in open form, is using a dense and elaborate rhetoric, as are those American writers such as Olson and Dorn whom Prynne is to some degree emulating. In considering these writers we can, and indeed must, talk of skill,

of craftsmanship, even perhaps of "technique." Lawrence on the other hand meant just what he said in 1913 when, in a much-quoted letter, he wrote to Edward Marsh: "I have always tried to get an emotion out in its own course, without altering it. It needs the finest instinct imaginable, much finer than the skill of craftsmen"; and when a line later he exhorted Marsh to "remember skilled verse is dead in fifty years".

If we remember how necessary we found it, when speaking of Hardy's poems, to bear hard upon a distinction between "technique" and "skill," we have to say that Lawrence will tolerate poetic skill as little as poetic technique. "Technique," with its inevitably metallic and mechanical overtones in our age of technology and technocracy, is anathema to Lawrence, as it is to all free-verse poets and perhaps to all poets in our time whatever (though certainly, as I have argued, not at all so unambiguously to Hardy); but also *skill*, bringing with it a quite different range of associations (for instance with worked or incised or sculptured stone), is anathema to Lawrence no less. In Lawrence's poetry we encounter a man who is eager to junk not just industrial civilization, but also the preindustrial civilization which expressed itself in ashlar and marble, even perhaps in brick. One of the most moving of his letters, written in 1917, laments the death of the inherited English culture in images of the stonework of Garsington Manor; but Lawrence seems to have believed in all seriousness that an end had come to that culture of stonework, as it must be made to come to the culture of metal girders. To be sure, when Lawrence wrote his essay "Poetry of the Present," as his introduction to the American edition of his *New Poems*, he contrived a distinction between poetry of the past and the future, and his own poetry of the present, in such a way as to mask very engagingly the enormity of the challenge he was throwing down to his readers. But this is adroitly tactful, rather than convincing; and we have not measured up to the challenge which Lawrence throws down, we have not measured the risk which Lawrence is prepared to take with the inherited cultural goods of our civilization, if we think we can take Lawrence on Lawrence's own terms while still keeping Shakespeare or Donne unshaken in their honored niches. Lawrence would deny to such masters from the past any room at all so spacious as the generations before him had agreed to allow them. Either there are in artistic forms some kinds of fixity and finality which we are right to value as satisfying, instructive, and

invigorating; or else on the contrary, as Lawrence would have us believe, there is no kind of fixity, no finality, which is other than an impediment and an obstruction to the vital apprehension which is always fluid, always in flux.

Thus Lawrence's metaphors from biology are in no way on a par with the metaphors from topography and geology which we find in Auden or in Hardy – as indeed everyone acknowledges; since no one, I think, has ever claimed Lawrence as any sort of scientific humanist. From Lawrence's extreme and exacerbated point of view, the humanistic liberal and the religious authoritarian are condemned alike and without distinction, as are all images of strain and fixity, whether in stone or in metal. The clearest example of this is a poem called 'The Revolutionary':

> Look at them standing there in authority,
> The pale-faces,
> As if it could have any effect any more.
>
> Pale-face authority,
> Caryatids;
> Pillars of white bronze standing rigid, lest the skies
> fall.
>
> What a job they've got to keep it up.
> Their poor, idealist foreheads naked capitals
> To the entablature of clouded heaven.
>
> When the skies are going to fall, fall they will
> In a great chute and rush of débâcle downwards.
> Oh and I wish the high and super-gothic heavens would
> come down now,
> The heavens above, that we yearn to and aspire to.
>
> I do not yearn, nor aspire, for I am a blind Samson
> And what is daylight to me that I should look skyward?
> Only I grope among you, pale-faces, caryatids, as among
> a forest of pillars that hold up the dome of high
> ideal heaven
> Which is my prison,

And all these human pillars of loftiness, going stiff,
  metallic-stunned with the weight of their
    responsibility
I stumble against them.
Stumbling-blocks, painful ones.

To keep on holding up this ideal civilisation
Must be excruciating: unless you stiffen into metal,
when it is easier to stand stock rigid than to move.

This is why I tug at them, individually, with my arm
  round their waist,
The human pillars.
They are not stronger than I am, blind Samson.
The house sways.

I shall be so glad when it comes down.
I am so tired of the limitations of their Infinite.
I am so sick of the pretensions of the Spirit.
I am so weary of pale-face importance.

Am I not blind, at the round-turning mill?
Then why should I fear their pale faces?
Or love the effulgence of their holy light,
The sun of their righteousness?

To me, all faces are dark,
All lips are dusky and valved.

Save your lips, O pale-faces,
Which are lips of metal,
Like slits in an automatic-machine, you columns of
  give-and-take.

To me, the earth rolls ponderously, superbly
Coming my way without forethought or afterthought.
To me, men's footfalls fall with a dull, soft rumble,
  ominous and lovely,
Coming my way.

But not your foot-falls, pale faces,
They are a clicketing of bits of disjointed metal
Working in motion.

To me, men are palpable, invisible nearnesses in the dark
Sending out magnetic vibrations of warning, pitch-dark throbs of invitation.
But you, pale-faces,
You are painful, harsh-surfaced pillars that give off nothing except rigidity,
And I jut against you if I try to move, for you are everywhere, and I am blind
Sightless among all your visuality,
You staring caryatids.

See if I don't bring you down, and all your high opinion
And all your ponderous, roofed-in erection of right and wrong,
Your particular heavens,
With a smash.

See if your skies aren't falling!
And my head at least, is thick enough to stand it, the smash.

See if I don't move under a dark and nude, vast heaven
When your world is in ruins, under your fallen skies.
Caryatids, pale-faces.
See if I am not Lord of the dark and moving hosts
Before I die.

It is quite beside the point that by the end Lawrence had more hopes of a revolution from the Right than from the Left; in the light of a poem such as this, his revulsion was against all forms of instituted authority whatever, and the direction from which the wind should come that would topple them from their pediments is to him almost indifferent – as indeed is acknowledged by his most enthusiastic readers today, who are most often ranged upon the political Left. Even his preference for loyalty over love – an-

nounced in "Bibbles" and developed in a poem in *Pansies* called "Fidelity" (where the rock, fidelity, is preferred to the flower, love) – is nowadays, when the revolutionary ardor of the Left is focused upon charismatic leaders like Mao and Che Guevara, as acceptable and exciting to the Left as to the Right.

But further argument is needless. If we are still a little contemptuous of Hardy's political cop-out, if we respond more vividly to Lawrence's recklessness, if we are eager to join in his condemnation of the bureaucratic philanthropist, he for his part offers us no political standing point short of wholesale and open-ended revolutionary upheaval. More even than he is a revolutionary, Lawrence is an iconoclast. *All* the graven images must be cast down and powdered – the bull of St. Luke no less than the lion of St. Mark, no less than even the biologically graven image on the horny shell of the tortoise. By the time he wrote the poem in *Pansies* called "Give us Gods," Lawrence has gone beyond all these. It is not surprising, and it is certainly not disgraceful, that English poets have refused to take that risk and pay that price.

For it needs to be asserted, now when the air is thick with voices like Rexroth's demanding that all poetry be *prophetic* (like Blake's, like Lawrence's), that prophetic poetry is necessarily an inferior poetry. The reason has emerged already. The prophet is above being fair-minded – judiciousness he leaves to some one else. But the poet will absolve himself from none of the responsibilities of being human, he will leave none of those responsibilities to "someone else." And being human involves the responsibility of being judicious and fair-minded. In this way the poet supports the intellectual venture of humankind, taking his place along with (though *above*, yet along with) the scholar and the statesman and the learned divine. His poetry supports and nourishes and helps to shape *culture*; the prophet, however, is outside culture and (really) at war with it. The prophet exists on sufferance, he is on society's expense account, part of what society can sometimes afford. Not so the poet; he is what society cannot dispense with.

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