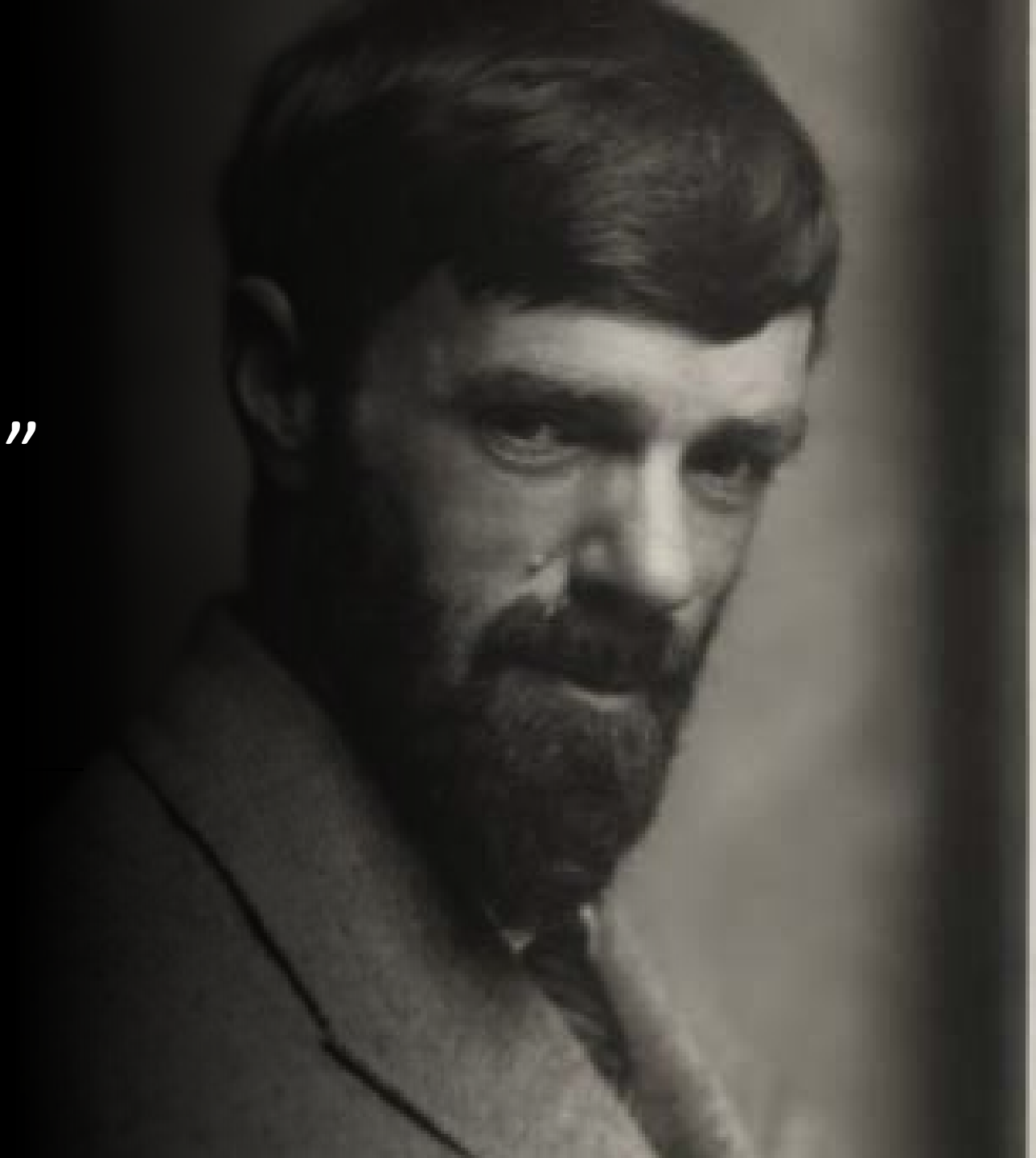




The “Snake”
by D.H.
Lawrence



Brief Biography of D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930).

David Herbert Lawrence was born in 1885 in Eastwood. He won a scholarship to Nottingham High School. In 1906, he took up a teacher-training scholarship at University College, Nottingham. After qualifying in 1908 he took up a teaching post at the Davidson School in Croydon, remaining there until 1912. In early 1912, after a period of serious illness, Lawrence left his teaching post at Croydon to return to Nottingham, shortly afterwards eloping to Germany with Frieda Weekley, the wife of Professor Ernest Weekley. They returned to England in 1914 prior to the outbreak of war and were married at Kensington Register Office on 14 July. Confined to England during the war years, the Lawrences spent much of this time in Cornwall. In 1919 they left England once more, embarking on a period of extensive travelling within Europe and then further afield to Australia, Mexico and New Mexico. His health continued to deteriorate and Lawrence returned to Europe with Frieda in 1925. During his last years, Lawrence spent much of his time in Italy making only brief visits to England, the last in 1926. He died on 2 March 1930 in the south of France.

Lawrence was a prolific writer - of poetry, novels, short stories, plays, essays, and criticism. His works are heavily autobiographical and the experiences of his early years in Nottingham continued to exert a profound influence throughout his life.

Source: The University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections: Brief Biography of D. H. Lawrence. (abridged) Web. 17 Jun 2018. Full Url:
<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/lawrence/biography.aspx>

D.H. Lawrence's prolific and diverse output included novels, short stories, poems, plays, essays, travel books, paintings, translations, and literary criticism. His collected works represent an extended reflection upon the dehumanizing effects of modernity and industrialization. In them, Lawrence confronts issues relating to emotional health and vitality, spontaneity, human sexuality and instinct. His later poems embrace organic attempts to capture emotion through free verse. In his prime he was arguably the foremost writer of fiction in the English speaking world. Quite a feat for the son of a coalminer from the coalfields of Nottingham!

Major Novels:

The White Peacock (1911)

Sons and Lovers (1913)

The Rainbow (1915)

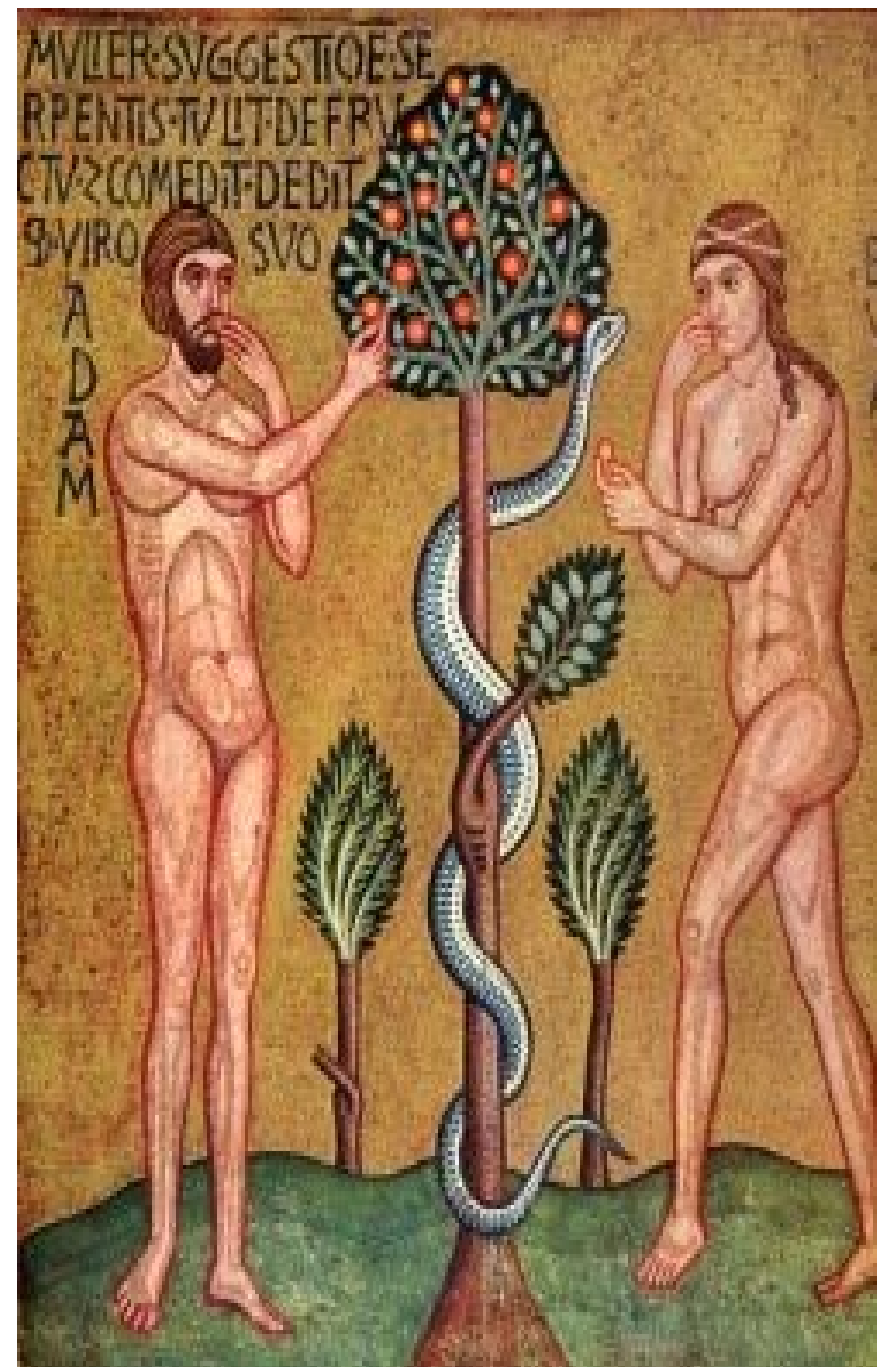
Women in Love (1920)

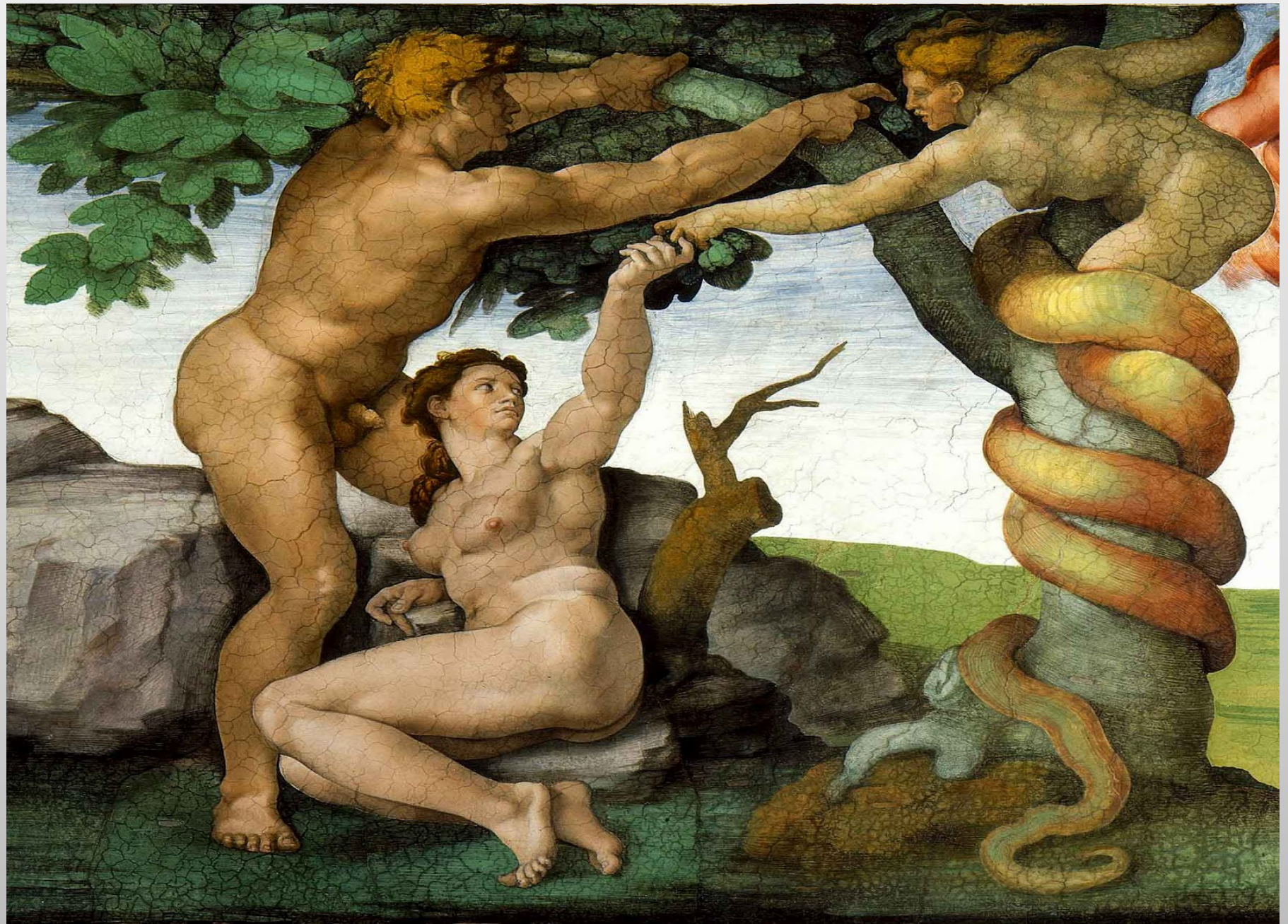
The Boy in the Bush (1924)

The Plumed Serpent (1926)

Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928)

Source: The Poetry Foundation: D. H. Lawrence 1885–1930 (abridged) Web. 17 Jun 2018. Full Url: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/d-h-lawrence>





D. H. LAWRENCE

D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930) brought to English literature the passionate feelings of a rebel. Lawrence was born and educated in Nottingham and taught school for a time in London. But he lived abroad for most of his life. Lawrence's novels emphasize the individual's right to have personal passions and to remain true to these personal desires. Lawrence does not use standard line lengths or rhyme schemes; each poem creates its own shape, as in the undulating lines of "Snake." And the poem asks us to rebel too, against our instinctive fears and learned prejudices.

Snake

A snake came to my water trough
On a hot, hot day, and I in pajamas for the heat,
To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob tree¹
I came down the steps with my pitcher
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough
before me.

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
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness,
He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,
Silently.

Someone was before me at my water trough,
And I, like a second-comer, waiting.

He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a moment,
And stooped and drank a little more,
Being earth-brown, earth golden from the burning bowels of the earth,
On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna² smoking.

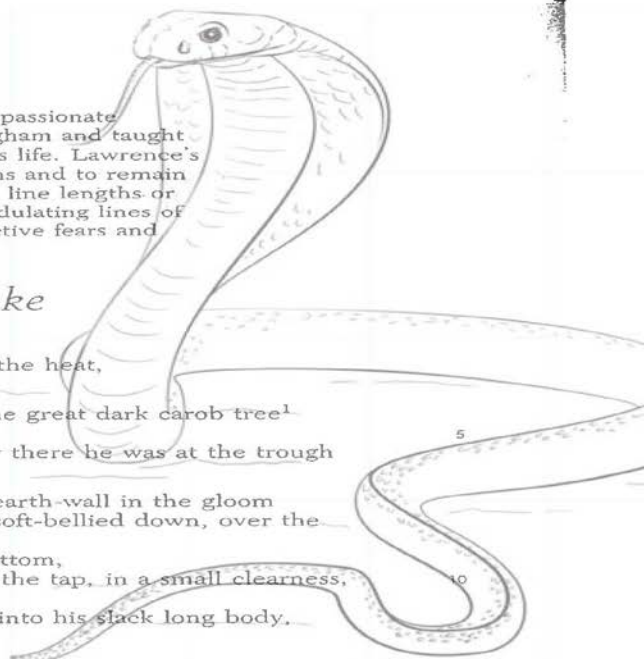
The voice of my education said to me
He must be killed,
For in Sicily the black black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous.

And voices in me said, If you were a man
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.

But must I confess how I liked him,
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my
water trough
And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless
Into the burning bowels of this earth?

1. carob tree, an evergreen of the Mediterranean regions.

2. Etna, volcano on Sicily.



Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?
 Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?
 Was it humility, to feel so honored?
 I felt so honored.

And yet those voices:
If you were not afraid, you would kill him!

And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,
 But even so, honored still more
 That he should seek my hospitality
 From out the dark door of the secret earth.

He drank enough
 And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,
 And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black,
 Seeming to lick his lips,
 And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,
 And slowly turned his head,
 And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream
 Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round
 And climb the broken bank of my wall-face.

And as he put his head into that dreadful hole,
 And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders, and entered further,
 A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing into that
 horrid black hole,
 Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing himself after,
 Overcame me now his back was turned.

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,
 I picked up a clumsy log
 And threw it at the water trough with a clatter.
 I think it did not hit him;
 But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in
 undignified haste,
 Writhed like lightning, and was gone

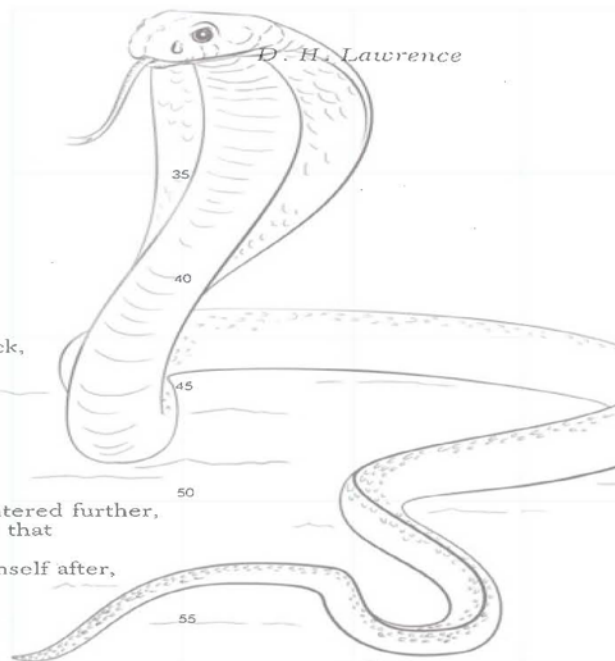
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front
 At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.

And immediately I regretted it.
 I thought how paltry,³ how vulgar, what a mean act!
 I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.

And I thought of the albatross⁴
 And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king,
 Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
 Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
 Of life.
 And I have something to expiate:
 A pettiness.



60 3. paltry (pól' trē),
 almost worthless,
 petty.

45 4. albatross (al'bā
 trōs). The albatross
 was killed by Cole-
 ridge's Ancient Mar-
 iner; the impulsive
 slaying haunted his
 life.

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 C. M. Weekley, Executors
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- A. Stylistics: i) Form

The poem is marked by its varying meter and line length. The selected length of line within a series of free verse lines forces the reader to slow down, builds up tension and rounding corners, and reflects the unusually strong yet flowing movement of the snake. A more formal rhyming scheme would not have really worked. The free verse – vers libre chosen is particularly effective. The sketch that I have drafted presents how the poem itself ultimately comes to resemble the form of a snake recoiling alluding to the snake's very physiology.

A. Stylistics: ii) Style Devices: 1) Alliteration / Assonance

Alliteration is the pairing of identical or similar consonant sounds (repetition of consonants)

Assonance is the pairing of vowel sounds (repetition of vowels).

Example of Alliteration (lines 55-60):

*In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob tree
I came down the stairs with my pitcher
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough
before me.*

*In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob tree
I came down the stairs with my pitcher
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough
before me.*

Alliteration: strange scented shade
(mirrors the slow movement of a slithering, sliding, whistling snake)

A. Stylistics: ii) Style Devices: 2) Enjambment

Enjambment: In poetry, enjambment describes the phenomenon of having incomplete syntax at the end of a line. Thus, the meaning runs over from one poetic line to the next, without terminal punctuation.

Example of Enjambment (lines 55-60):

*I looked round, I put down my pitcher,
I picked up a clumsy log
And threw it at the water trough with a clatter.
I think it did not hit him;
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in,
undignified haste,
Writhed like lightning, and was gone.*

- **B. Content: i) Setting**

By setting we refer to the time and place in which the action of the narrative takes place.

A snake came to my water-trough

On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,

To drink there...

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob tree...

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom...

On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.



- **B. Content: ii) Themes**

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.*

And voices in me said, If you were a man

*You would take a stick and break him now, and finish
him off.*

(Lines 22-26).

Why the change in narrative in these lines?

Main themes of the poem?

- **B. Content: iii) Symbolism / Allusions**

Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities, by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense.

He drank enough

And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,

And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black,

Seeming to lick his lips,

And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,

(Lines 40-45)

And immediately I regretted it.

I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!

I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.

And I thought of the albatross

And I wished he would come back, my snake.

(Lines 63-67).

Figures of Speech

Simile

- 1 “Lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken” (42)
- 2 “For he seemed to me again like a king” (68)

Metaphor

- 1 “The dark door of the secret earth” (40)
- 2 “The voice of my education” (22)

Alliteration- Assonance

- 1 “peaceful, pacified” (29)
2. “burning bowels” (20)

Personification

- 1 “He sipped with his straight mouth” (11)

Repetition / Emphasis

- 1 “On a hot, hot day” (2)
- 2 “Must Wait” (6)

Rhetorical Question

- 1 “Was it perversity, that I long to talk to him?” (32)

Enjambment

- 1 A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing into that horrid black hole, (52-53)