THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

D. H. LAWRENCE

Edited by
Anne Fernihough

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CHRONOLOGY

1885	David Herbert Richards Lawrence born in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, the fourth child of a collier, Arthur John Lawrence, and Lydia, *née* Beardsall.
1891–98	Attends Beauvale Board School.
1898–1901	Attends Nottingham High School, having won a County Council scholarship.
1901	Works briefly as a clerk at a surgical appliances factory in Nottingham, then becomes seriously ill with pneumonia.
1902	Starts friendship with Jessie Chambers of Haggs Farm, Underwood.
1902–5	Works as a pupil-teacher at the British School, Eastwood. Placed in the first division of the first class in the King's Scholarship exam in December 1904.
1905–6	Works as uncertificated teacher at the British School. Writes his first poems and starts his first novel, 'Laetitia' (later *The White Peacock*, 1911).
1906–8	Studies for teacher's certificate at Nottingham University College, qualifying in 1908. In 1907 wins *Nottinghamshire Guardian* Christmas short-story competition with 'A Prelude', submitted under name of Jessie Chambers.
1908–11	Works as elementary teacher at Davidson Road School, Croydon.
1909	Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) starts to publish DHL's poems and stories in the *English Review* and recommends *The White Peacock* to Heinemann. DHL writes *A Collier's Friday Night* and first version of 'Odour of Chrysanthemums'.
1910	Writes 'The Saga of Siegmund' (later *The Trespasser*, 1912), based on the experiences of Helen Corke, a friend and fellow teacher in Croydon. Writes the first version of *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* (1914). Starts to write 'Paul Morel' (later *Sons*

and Lovers, 1913). DHL's mother dies in December. Becomes engaged to Louie Burrows.

1911 A severe attack of pneumonia forces DHL to give up teaching. 'The Saga of Siegmund' accepted by Duckworth; DHL revises it as *The Trespasser*.

1912 Breaks off engagement to Louie. Returns to Eastwood and meets Frieda (*née* von Richthofen), the wife of Ernest Weekley, Professor at University College, Nottingham. Travels in Germany and Italy with Frieda. Frieda gives up her husband and children for DHL. DHL writes the final version of *Sons and Lovers* in Gargagno, Italy.

1913 *Love Poems* published. Writing includes *The Daughter-in-Law* (1965), 200 pages of 'The Insurrection of Miss Houghton' (abandoned), and 'The Sisters' (later to split into *The Rainbow*, 1915, and *Women in Love*, 1920). Also writes the first versions of 'The Prussian Officer' and 'The Thorn in the Flesh' (1914). *Sons and Lovers* published in May, establishing Lawrence's literary reputation. DHL and Frieda spend the summer in England and befriend Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry. They return to Italy in September.

1914 Rewrites 'The Sisters' (now called 'The Wedding Ring') and arranges for Methuen to publish it. Returns to England and marries Frieda in July. Outbreak of war confines them to England. Writes *Study of Thomas Hardy* and starts *The Rainbow*. Friendships with Ottoline Morel, Cynthia Asquith, Bertrand Russell and E. M. Forster.

1915 Finishes *The Rainbow*. Quarrels with Russell. *The Rainbow* published in September, suppressed in October, prosecuted and banned for obscenity in November. DHL and Frieda move to Cornwall.

1916 Writes *Women in Love*. Publishes *Twilight in Italy* and *Amores*.

1917 *Women in Love* rejected by publishers. Begins *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923) and publishes *Look! We Have Come Through!* DHL and Frieda evicted from Cornwall on suspicion of spying. Starts *Aaron's Rod* (1922).

1918 Publishes *New Poems*. Writes *Touch and Go* (1920) and the first version of 'The Fox' (1920).

1919 Falls seriously ill with flu. Travels in Italy with Frieda, settling in Capri.

1920 Writes *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921). Settles in Taormina, Sicily. Writes *The Lost Girl* (1920), *Mr Noon* (1984)

and many of the poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923). *Women in Love* published.

1921 Visits Sardinia and writes *Sea and Sardinia* (1921). Finishes *Aaron's Rod* and writes *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922).

1922 Stays in Ceylon, then travels to Australia. Writes *Kangaroo* (1923). Settles in Taos, New Mexico, moving to the Del Monte Ranch in December. Rewrites *Studies in Classic American Literature*.

1923 Spends summer in Chapala, Mexico, and writes 'Quetzalcoatl', the first version of *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). Quarrels with Frieda who returns to Europe. Travels in USA and Mexico, rewriting Mollie Skinner's *The House of Ellis* as *The Boy in the Bush* (1924). Returns to England in December.

1924 DHL and Frieda return to New Mexico in March accompanied by Dorothy Brett. During summer on the Kiowa Ranch, DHL writes *St. Mawr* (1925), *The Woman Who Rode Away* (1925) and 'The Princess' (1925). In August suffers a bronchial haemorrhage. His father dies in September. In October, moves to Oaxaca, Mexico, starts *The Plumed Serpent* and writes most of *Mornings in Mexico* (1927).

1925 Finishes *The Plumed Serpent*. Nearly dies of typhoid and pneumonia in February. Diagnosed with tuberculosis in March. Returns to Europe in September, spending a month in England, then settling in Italy.

1926 Writes *The Virgin and the Gipsy* (1930). Visits England for the last time in late summer. Returning to Italy, writes the first version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Befriends Aldous and Maria Huxley. Starts to paint.

1927 Finishes second version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Writes *Sketches of Etruscan Places* (1932) and the first part of *The Escaped Cock* (1928). Starts final version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928).

1928 Finishes *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and arranges for its publication in Florence. Writes the second part of *The Escaped Cock* (1929). Travels with Frieda to Switzerland, then settles in the south of France. Writes many of the poems in *Pansies* (1929).

1929 Unexpurgated typescripts of *Pansies* seized by police; exhibition of paintings in London raided by police. Writes *Nettles* (1930), *Apocalypse* (1931) and *Last Poems* (1932).

1930 Admitted to Ad Astra Sanatorium in Vence at start of February;

discharges himself on 1 March; dies at Villa Robermond, Vence, on 2 March.

1935 Frieda sends Angelo Ravagli (whom she later marries) from the Kiowa Ranch to Vence to have DHL exhumed and cremated. His ashes are brought back to the ranch.

1956 Frieda dies and is buried at the ranch.

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HELEN SWORD

Lawrence's poetry

Although he is remembered and celebrated today primarily as a novelist and short-story writer, Lawrence first saw publication as a poet, wrote poetry throughout most of his life, and granted a privileged status to poetic language and vision: 'The essential quality of poetry', he declared in a 1928 essay, 'is that it makes a new effort of attention, and "discovers" a new world within the known world.'[1] That he was far too prolific and undiscriminating a poet, few readers would dispute: the posthumously published *Complete Poems*, at more than 1,000 pages long, functions better as a doorstop than as light bedtime reading. That a great many of his poems are didactic, prosy, irrational, undisciplined, sentimental, obscene, ranting, whiny or otherwise virtually unreadable, critics have agreed at least since 1919, when the rawly emotional marriage poems of *Look! We Have Come Through!* prompted Lawrence's sometime friend Bertrand Russell to snort, 'They may have come through, but I don't see why I should look.'[2] Lawrence's less fortunate poetic efforts do occasionally have value, if not as aesthetic masterpieces, then at least as historical documents of artistic struggle. His most memorable poems, however, stand alongside the finest poetic efforts of the twentieth century and are still widely anthologised and admired by readers today.

Lawrence's evolution as poet – from Imagist to confessionalist to nature poet to satirist to death-affirming mystic – enacts in microcosm much of the history of literary modernism. In 1909, Lawrence's girlfriend Jessie Chambers sent three of his poems to Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford), who printed them in the *English Review* and later helped arrange for the publication of Lawrence's first novel, *The White Peacock* (1911). In an era of poetic 'isms', Lawrence was labelled first in temporal terms, as a 'Georgian poet', then in formal terms, as an 'Imagist' (a number of his early poems appeared in *Georgian Poetry* anthologies and in Amy Lowell's 'Some Imagist Poets' series). Characteristically, however, his work refused to fit into either of those categories very precisely, and it would continue to elude easy classification

through most of his poetic career. Like many of his modernist contemporaries – among them T. S. Eliot, H.D., Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and the Italian Futurists, with whose work he undertook a brief flirtation – Lawrence soon cast off what he called the 'shackles' of rhyme and metre[3] and became a fervent proponent of free verse instead; formally, then, he was very much a modernist, an iconoclastic practitioner of Pound's famous dictum, 'Make it new.' At the same time, however, Lawrence's oracular tone, visionary pretensions, lyrical cadences, overt sentimentality, highly personal subject-matter, and lack of irony (except in its most primitive form, sarcasm) earned him the antipathy of many members of his modernist cohort, including even those who claimed to admire his novels. 'Too much body and emotions', declared H.D. of his erotic love poetry; Virginia Woolf likened his aphoristic *Pansies* to 'the sayings that small boys scribble upon stiles to make housemaids jump and titter'; Richard Aldington compared the Lawrence of *Pansies* and *Nettles* to 'a little Blake raving, but without the fiery vision'; and T. S. Eliot might just as well have been writing of *Look! We Have Come Through!* or *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* when he excoriated Lawrence's 'distinct sexual morbidity' and his 'extraordinarily keen sensibility and capacity of profound intuition – intuition from which he commonly drew the wrong conclusions'.[4]

Lawrence, then, was a modernist poet who cultivated what at times seems to have been a distinctly anti-modernist stance. In his experimentation with free verse and his attention to the poetic image as a concrete vehicle for abstract emotion, he resembles modernist contemporaries such as Pound, Williams, H.D. and even Eliot. As an unabashed visionary, he fits into a Romantic lyrical tradition stretching from Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley through Whitman, Hopkins and Yeats. As a confessional poet, he forms a link in an unbroken chain that reaches from Whitman, Meredith, Hardy and Yeats through Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. And as a careful observer and awed explicator of nature, he finds common ground not only with twentieth-century 'thing-poets' such as Williams, Marianne Moore, Rainer Maria Rilke and Francis Ponge, but also with more recent writers such as Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, the latter of whom shares with Lawrence, as Edward Lucie-Smith notes, an 'insistence on the mystery and darkness to be found at the heart of the experience which is being described'.[5] Lawrence's poetry occupies, in other words, a central and enduring position in the history of twentieth-century literature.

Rhyming Poems

The poems from Lawrence's first four published volumes – *Love Poems and Others* (1913), *Amores* (1916), *New Poems* (1918) and *Bay* (1919), later

collected as 'Rhyming Poems'– are far more conventional in their language, form, and subject-matter than most of his later verse. Already in these early works, however, we can see traces of a distinctively Lawrencean diction, ideology and imagery. In the preface to his 1928 *Collected Poems*, Lawrence recalls the Sunday afternoon on which, aged nineteen, he 'perpetrated' his first two poems:

> 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 . . . 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. So that, in the first volume, many poems are changed, some entirely rewritten, recast. But usually this is only because the poem started out to be something which it didn't quite achieve, because the young man interfered with his demon.
>
> (*Poems*, 27–28)

R. P. Blackmur, in a famous 1935 critique, pounced upon this passage when he denounced Lawrence's poetry as 'hysterical', declaring Lawrence's 'young man' to be 'the poet as craftsman', while the demon is 'exactly that outburst of personal feeling which needed the discipline of craft to become a poem'.[6] Lawrence, however, clearly intended to invoke something far more complicated than mere 'personal feeling' when he described the demon – or, in an earlier draft, the 'ghost' or 'apparition' (*Poems*, 849) – that haunts his most effective work. For him, the demon is what liberates the poet from conventions of form and expression and prods him to explore his own darker side, bringing about what Lawrence, in a 1913 letter to Henry Savage, describes as a veritable explosion of visionary energies: 'It seems to me a purely lyric poet gives himself, right down to his sex, to his mood, utterly and abandonedly, whirls himself round . . . till he spontaneously combusts into verse' (ii. 115).

Few of the early 'rhyming poems', to be sure, have the spontaneous, combustive quality that Lawrence would strive to achieve a few years later in the rolling cadences of his Whitmanesque free verse. Most, instead, are carefully crafted – Lawrence was a supple prosodist when he chose to be – and filled with the metaphoric precision, exquisite detail, and sensitivity to form, colour and emotional nuance that one might expect from an Imagist poem of the same period. In 'Baby Running Barefoot', for instance, the poet employs evocative flower metaphors to describe the tiny, tender feet of a friend's baby daughter: 'Cool as syringa buds in morning hours, / Or firm and silken as young peony flowers' *(Poems*, 65). And in 'Piano', a frequently

anthologised piece about the 'insidious mastery' of memory over emotion, he compactly telescopes present and past, sound and image, into a single, wrenching moment of nostalgia:

> 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 the tingling strings
> And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.
> (148)

Other early poems, however, move beyond such delicate sentimentality to offer a more troubling view of both nature and human nature. In 'Cherry Robbers', Lawrence's depiction of a cherry-picking expedition (similar scenes can be found in *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers*) conveys an unmistakable hint of sexual violence, as images of natural beauty – the trees, the cherries – are exoticised and eroticised. Green branches become 'long dark boughs', cherries first become jewels and then blood drops, and a laughing girl with 'cherries hung round her ears' is implicitly compared, like the tree itself, to an oriental seductress:

> Under the long, dark boughs, like jewels red
> In the hair of an Eastern girl
> Hang strings of crimson cherries, as if had bled
> Blood-drops beneath each curl. (36)

In 'Snap-Dragon', similarly, a stroll through the 'mellow sunlight' of an Edenic garden becomes charged with libidinous energy, as a young woman's sadistic manipulation of a flower – '"I like to see"', she says, '"The snap-dragon put out his tongue at me"' – becomes a vivid metaphor for the sexual power she wields over the fascinated young suitor who accompanies her:

> She laughed, she reached her hand out to the flower,
> Closing its crimson throat. My own throat in her power
> Strangled, my heart swelled up so full
> As if it would burst its wine-skin in my throat,
> Choke me in my own crimson. (123)

'Cherry Robbers' and 'Snap-Dragon' are only two among a number of the 'Rhyming Poems' which, despite their seeming sedateness of form, give voice to the demon of erotic violence lurking within so much of Lawrence's most powerful writing. Another such work is 'Love on the Farm', a gripping 1913 poem whose original title was, more accurately, 'Cruelty and Love'. From the poem's opening lines onward, we can hardly help observing that the narrator, a young farmer's wife, sees virtually everything around her in nature

as brutal and threatening: 'What large, dark hands are those at the window / Grasping in the golden light . . . ? Ah, only the leaves!' Her morbid outlook is explained when she describes her husband, whose 'calm and kindly' eyes belie the terrifying force of his 'large, hard hands': upon finding a frightened rabbit in a trap ('Piteous brown ball of quivering fears!'), the handsome farmer matter-of-factly strangles it, then returns home to caress his wife with fingers that 'still smell grim / Of the rabbit's fur!' By this point in the poem, we are primed for the wife's revulsion and revolt; but her response instead is one of fascinated submission, as she confesses to the fatal attraction of her husband's power over her:

> God, I am caught in a snare!
> I know not what fine wire is round my throat;
> I only know I let him finger there
> My pulse of life, and let 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 bright dark eyes come over me, like a hood
> Upon my mind! his lips meet mine, and a flood
> Of sweet fire sweeps across me, so I drown
> Against him, die, and find death good. (42–43)

'Love on the Farm' is, for some readers, a wonderfully romantic poem about love, desire and the primacy of sexual passion over rational thought. For others, however, it is a highly disturbing work, not only because of the gender ideology it espouses but also because of the narrative tactics it deploys in espousing them: much as he does in later novels such as *The Plumed Serpent* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence uses a woman's voice and consciousness to convey the message that women should submit physically and emotionally to men. Numerous readers, both male and female, have praised Lawrence's insights into the female psyche: Anaïs Nin extolled his 'complete realization of the feelings of women', arguing that 'he wrote *as a woman* would write'; Henry Miller claimed that women 'adored' and 'worshipped' him 'because he revealed them to themselves in their nakedness'; Norman Mailer declared that 'Lawrence understood women as they had never been understood before'; and Mabel Dodge Luhan, in her adulatory biography of Lawrence, even offered a little free-verse ditty on the subject:

> Why do women like Lorenzo?
> They *do*.
> Maybe because no one, so well as he, knows
> How to stick in his thumb and pull out the plum
> Of their available, invisible Being.

Other commentators, however, have taken precisely the opposite position, acknowledging Lawrence's effectiveness in appropriating women's voices but criticising his hidden motives: Kate Millett calls him not only 'the most talented and fervid of sexual politicians', but 'the most subtle as well, for it is through a feminine consciousness that his masculine message is conveyed'; Simone de Beauvoir acidly observes that he spent his life writing 'guidebooks for women'; and H.D., in her thinly fictionalised novel *Bid Me To Live,* admits that Lawrence 'could write elaborately on the woman mood, describe women to their marrow in his writing' but calls his ability to do so 'diabolical'.[7] Lawrence's famous 'demon', then, at least for some readers, is a creature more devious than deviant, more wily than wild, an agent of and spokesman for the theme of sexual conflict that was soon to become one of Lawrence's major poetic preoccupations.

Look! We Have Come Through!

When Lawrence went off to Germany in 1912 with Frieda von Richthofen Weekley, the wife of his former modern languages tutor, he ushered in not only a new stage in his romantic life but also what he would call a 'new cycle' in his poetry (*Poems*, 28). The very title of his 1917 collection *Look! We Have Come Through!*, with its ringing injunction to attention and its adamant exclamation points, gives some indication of the visionary tone and emotion-laden content of these rhythmically free but often loosely rhymed poems – some rapturous, some anguished, but all deeply personal – in which he chronicles the early years of his tumultuous relationship with Frieda. Originally entitled *Man and Woman* or *Poems of a Married Man*, the volume takes as its major theme the emotional ambivalence of a man who is deeply in love with his wife but fears a 'mixing, merging' of identities, an annihilation of his autonomous self by what he calls 'the terrible *other*' ('Manifesto', *Poems*, 267).

While contemporaneous prose works such as *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* explore the themes of love, marriage and sexual conflict through fictional characters and situations, Lawrence's poetry from the years 1912 to 1917 is for the most part deeply personal, comprising what the poet himself called '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' (*Poems*, 191). In keeping with his own later assertion 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' (28), Lawrence introduces the poems of *Look! We Have Come Through!* with a brief autobiographical gloss:

> 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. (191)

Reprinting this opening 'Argument' a decade later, Lawrence would excise its final phrase – 'they transcend into some condition of blessedness' – perhaps because he had by then come to recognise that his continually escalating 'conflict of love and hate' with Frieda would lead, in the long run, neither to transcendence nor to blessedness. Nevertheless, *Look! We Have Come Through!* stands as a lasting document of Lawrence's short-lived sexual optimism during the early years of his marriage, his new-found belief, as he put it in several letters from 1913 to 1914, that 'sex is the fountain-head, where life bubbles up into the person from the unknown' (ii. 102):

> I think the only re-sourcing of art, re-vivifying it, is to make it more the joint work of man and woman. I think *the* one thing to do, is for men to have courage to draw nearer to women, expose themselves to them, and be altered by them: and for women to accept and admit men . . . Because the source of all life and knowledge is in man and woman, and the source of all living is in the interchange and the meeting and mingling of these two: man-life and woman-life, man knowledge and woman-knowledge, man-being and woman-being. (ii. 181)

Some of *Look!*'s most impassioned poems enact the pure romantic ardour of a man determined, as Lawrence puts it, to 'draw nearer' to his wife, to 'expose' himself to her and 'be altered' by her. In 'Gloire de Dijon', for instance, his affectionate description of Frieda bathing – 'She stoops to the sponge, and her swung breasts / Sway like full-blown yellow / Gloire de Dijon roses' – becomes suffused, towards the end, with a visionary gleam, as woman, sunlight and roses all become one:

> She drips herself with water, and her shoulders
> Glisten as silver, they crumple up
> Like wet and falling roses, and I listen
> For the sluicing of their rain-dishevelled petals.
> In the window full of sunlight
> Concentrates her golden shadow
> Fold on fold, until it glows as
> Mellow as the glory roses. (217)

Other poems, however, employ similar imagery to a much more ominous effect, as in 'River Roses':

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.' (217)

Here, the domesticated yellow roses of 'Gloire de Dijon' have become dark, wild and blood-red, as bright morning sunshine gives way to the eerie atmospherics of twilight. The song of the frogs, 'simmering' rather than melodious, and the concealed presence of the snake hint that this wild, marshy landscape contains danger as well as beauty. Thus Lawrence's poetic demon rears its sinister head once more, introducing a note of 'glimmering fear' into the poet's Eden of sexual bliss.

Again and again, in fact, the poems of *Look! We Have Come Through!* focus not just on the ecstasy of married love – 'Between her breasts is my home, between her breasts' ('Song of a Man Who Is Loved', 249) – but also on love's ambivalences and anguish: 'The pain of loving you / Is almost more than I can bear' ('A Young Wife', 215). In 'Bei Hennef', the 1912 poem that opens the long poetic sequence about his married life, Lawrence's proclamations of sexual happiness and eternal love are tempered, towards the end, by a note of uncertainty and pain:

You are the call and I am the answer,
You are the wish, and I the fulfilment,
You are the night, and I the day.
What else? it is perfect enough.
It is perfectly complete,
You and I,
What more –?
Strange, how we suffer in spite of this! (203)

In poems such as 'Mutilation' and 'Both Sides of the Medal', Lawrence dwells even more explicitly and unflinchingly on the dark side of desire – 'And because you love me, / think you you do not hate me?' (235) – while in 'Song of a Man Who Is Not Loved' he contemplates the emptiness and horror of a world without love: 'I hold myself up, and feel a big wind blowing / Me like a gadfly into the dusk' (223). And even in seemingly celebratory poems such as 'Song of a Man Who Has Come Through', in which the poet promises to 'be a good fountain, a good well-head' for 'the wonder that bubbles into my soul', he introduces, inevitably, a sudden note of anxiety at the end:

> 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. (250)

The 'three strange angels', implicitly likened to the three messengers who appear to Abraham in the Old Testament with news of Sarah's fertility (*Poems*, 994), can be seen as yet another manifestation of Lawrence's poetic demon, the force of mystery that he fears but also desires to admit into his poetry.

'I know I am compound of two waves', confesses Lawrence in his 1915 essay 'The Crown'; 'I am framed in the struggle and embrace of the two opposite waves of darkness and of light.'[8] At their best, the poems of *Look! We Have Come Through!* illuminate and celebrate this eternal struggle between antithetical forces: darkness and light, man and woman, desire and fear, love and hate. In his 1914 'Study of Thomas Hardy', Lawrence even suggests that poetry itself partakes of such an oppositional embrace, a fruitful marriage between emotional energy (the 'will-to-motion') and formal structure (the 'will-to-inertia'):

> The very adherence to 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. In this consummation, they are the resistance and response of the Bride in the arms of the Bridegroom. (*Hardy*, 91)

With his next volume of poems, however, Lawrence would advocate a new verse form liberated from all such finality, fixity and consummation. As he explains in his 1919 essay 'Poetry of the Present', which heralds the radical new direction that his poetry is about to take:

> This is the unrestful, ungraspable poetry of the sheer present, poetry whose very 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. (*Poems*, 183)

Rejecting rhyme and regular metre altogether, Lawrence would abandon almost entirely his earlier conception of poetry as a balance of universal forces, 'the resistance and response of the Bride in the arms of the Bridegroom'. At the same time, he would shift his thematic attention as well, turning from 'the conflict of love and hate' between a man and a woman to the relationship between mankind and the natural world.

Birds, Beasts and Flowers

Although *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, published in 1923 and composed in locations as diverse as Italy, Ceylon, Australia and New Mexico, ostensibly focuses not on men and women but rather on birds, beasts, trees, fruit and flowers, many of Lawrence's meditations on nature turn out to offer thinly disguised commentaries on human nature as well, and particularly on human sexual conflict. Significantly, however, the oppositional structure that characterised *Look! We Have Come Through!* – man and woman 'balanced . . . in strange conjunction' (*Poems*, 236), love and hate poised in eternal conflict, emotional energy steadied by formal constraints – is largely absent from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. Instead, like the three 'leadership' novels from the same period (*Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent*), many of these poems, and particularly those concerned with sexual politics, are dogmatic and one-sided, urging mindless subservience – of female to male, of nature to mankind – rather than a balanced equilibrium of opposites.

Other poems in the volume, to be sure, offer such vivid and poignant descriptions of the natural world that *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* remains, on the whole, Lawrence's most memorable and influential book of poetry. In his most successful poems, rather than using plants and animals to illustrate the ills of humanity, Lawrence makes a concerted effort to submit instead to the power of nature, admitting to the sometimes disconcerting otherness of the creatures he observes rather than attempting to describe and subdue them via brute poetic force. In 'Fish', for instance, the poet humbly confesses his inability to depict a fish in human language or to comprehend it according to human categories of judgement: *'I am not the measure of creation. / This is beyond me, this fish'* (339). In 'Mountain Lion', the killing of a wild creature by two 'foolish' Mexicans causes him to reflect, in full sympathy with nature rather than with human culture, that 'we might spare a million or two of humans / And never miss them. / Yet what a gap in the world, the missing white frost-face of that slim yellow mountain lion!' (402). And in poems such as 'The Mosquito' ('Queer, with your thin wings and your streaming legs, / How you sail like a heron, or a dull clot of air', 332) and 'Kangaroo' ('Her little loose hands, and drooping Victorian shoulders', 393) he offers visual descriptions so precise and accurate that even W. H. Auden, who admitted to disliking most of Lawrence's poetry, calls *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* 'the peak of Lawrence's achievement', a volume in which Lawrence's often 'turgid and obscure' writing becomes 'so transparent that one forgets him entirely and simply sees what he saw'.[9]

One of the best-known and most widely anthologised poems from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* is 'Snake', in which Lawrence sensitively describes his

encounter in Sicily with a golden serpent, which he frightens with a log – 'The voice of my education said to me / He must be killed' – but later regrets having chased away: 'I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act! / I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education' (349–51). The poem's seemingly simple narrative incorporates rich allusions to classical mythology (the snake is 'like a god' and 'Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld'), Romantic poetry (the poet compares himself to Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, who killed an albatross for no reason) and the Old Testament (the snake recalls the serpent that tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden; in trying to slay it, the poet listens to his 'accursed human education', the voice of Christian orthodoxy, rather than trusting his initial, pagan instinct to welcome the snake). 'Snake' contains, moreover, a strong undercurrent of sexuality: the phallic snake disappears into a 'dreadful hole', causing the poet to be overcome with 'a sort of horror' reminiscent of Lawrence's fear, in *Look! We Have Come Through!*, of 'mixing, merging' with 'the terrible *other*' ('Manifesto', 267). Only afterwards does he apparently acknowledge that the 'horrid black hole', the 'dark door of the secret earth' could be a place of mystery, beauty and otherworldly power to which the snake, had he welcomed it, might have granted him access. Although the poem ostensibly focuses on man's relationship to the natural world, then, it also explores, subtly and without didacticism, such issues as religious prejudice, the limitations of formal education, the lure of the forbidden, and the temptations of sexual knowledge.

Other poems in the volume, however, are not so balanced and complex in their approach either to nature or to human relationships. In his prose introduction to the 'Reptiles' section of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, Lawrence asserts (quoting from John Burnet's 1920 *Early Greek Philosophy*) that 'in the tension of opposites all things have their being' (348), a statement seemingly reflecting his gender ideology in *Look! We Have Come Through!*, where he focused on the fruitful 'conflict of love and hate' between a man and a woman. But in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, despite his oppositional rhetoric, Lawrence more frequently engages in a poetics of tyranny than in one of generative tension. In the 'Fruits' section that opens the volume, for instance, he declares that 'fruits are all of them female, in them lies the seed. And so when they break and show the seed, then we look into the womb and see its secrets' (277). Rather than positing a 'tension of opposites' – a balanced equilibrium either of man and woman or of mankind and nature – he suggests instead that physical penetration is the key to discovering the 'secrets' of both fruit and female. Thus, in 'Pomegranate', he praises the gaping 'fissure' through which one can glimpse the 'glittering, compact drops of dawn' inside the otherwise impenetrable fruit: 'It is so lovely, dawn-kaleidoscopic within the crack' (278–79). And in 'Purple Anemones',

shifting his focus from fruits to flowers, he portrays Persephone's cyclical return from the underworld as a domestic drama of pursuit and capture; Pluto, 'Proserpine's master', allows his 'enfranchised' wife to escape from hell once a year only so that he might have the pleasure of hunting his 'white victim' down again: 'Poor Persephone and her rights for women' (307–9).

In 'Figs', noting that the Italians associate figs with the female genitalia, Lawrence condemns modern women for desiring to take control of their own secrets, to 'burst into affirmation' like ripe fruit:

> Ripe figs won't keep, won't keep in any clime.
> What then, when women the world over have all bursten into self-assertion?
> And bursten figs won't keep? (282–84)

One could easily argue, however, that what Lawrence decries here politically he enacts poetically, bursting into ideological self-assertion rather than maintaining a sense of mystery, exposing his own secrets like an over-ripe fig (or an emancipated modern woman) rather than allowing the poem to reveal them gradually and delicately. Indeed, he follows all too closely his own advice in 'Poetry of the Present', where he advocates 'the incarnate disclosure of the flux, mutation in blossom, laughter and decay perfectly open in their transit, nude in their movement before us' (*Poems*, 182). Such 'incarnate disclosure' is meant to convey, no doubt, expressive energy and emotional candour; yet public nakedness – whether of bodies, emotions or political sentiment – is not necessarily a sight that every reader welcomes.

Lawrence himself asserted in a 1923 letter that he considered *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* to be his 'best book of poems' (iv. 380), and most critics, despite its failures and excesses, have concurred with that assessment. On the whole, the volume successfully captures the spontaneity, vigour and mantic energy that Lawrence calls for in 'Poetry of the Present': 'In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon' (182). Certainly Lawrence provides here enough moments of beauty, humour and even visionary insight – from his otherworldly self-absorption in 'Medlars and Sorb-Apples' to his all too down-to-earth observations about the sex life of tortoises in his 'Reptiles' series – to make up for infelicities elsewhere. He offers with this volume, moreover, a model for writing poetry that has proven enormously influential throughout the twentieth century. Although few proponents of free verse would claim that their poetry operates entirely without principles of sound, metre or structure – 'no *vers* is *libre* for the man who wants to do a good job', as T. S. Eliot reportedly told Ezra Pound[10] – Lawrence is one modern poet who really does seem to have embraced with gusto, at least for

a time, Wordsworth's famous axiom that 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling'.[11] (Like Wordsworth, to be sure, Lawrence subjected most of his poems to elaborate revision; what he really valued was the illusion of spontaneous expression rather than spontaneity itself.) Subsequently, for better or for worse, the poems of *Look! We Have Come Through!* and *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* have inspired and validated the efforts of the millions of amateur poets throughout the English-speaking world for whom writing and emoting are a single, simultaneous gesture, for whom freedom of form equals sincerity of expression, and for whom virtually anything, from the ache of love to the sting of a mosquito, can be an appropriate subject for poetry.

Lawrence's late poetry

Following the appearance of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* in 1923 and until his death in 1930, Lawrence continued to write poetry as prolifically as ever (although, inevitably, in fits and starts), eventually producing *Pansies* (1929), *Nettles* (1930) and the posthumously published *Last Poems* and *More Pansies* (1932). Lawrence himself noted that his 'Pansies', or *pensées*, stemmed 'as much from the heart and the genitals as from the head' (*Poems*, 417). Richard Aldington, however, attributed their origins to an even less cerebral source: 'It seems to me that nearly all these Pansies and Nettles came out of Lawrence's nerves, and not out of his real self' (*Poems*, 595). Although many of Lawrence's gripes about the ills of the modern world are accurate and justifiable – he complains, for instance, that 'sex in the head' has replaced physical eroticism and that mankind's worship of the machine has replaced our appreciation of nature – Lawrence's 'demon' manifests itself here more often as an impish gadfly or petulant scold than as a force of universal mystery.

There are, to be sure, many notable exceptions among the hundreds of verses that make up these four volumes: poems that explore contradictions, cast doubts, set up paradoxes or simply evoke appreciative laughter. In some, disturbing images of violence, blood and male leadership are undercut by admissions of anxiety towards such potentially deadly forces, which appear in the forms of powerful heroes and gods ('The Argonauts', 'For the Heroes Are Dipped in Scarlet'), threatening swans ('Swan', 'Leda', 'Won't It Be Strange –?') and even new scientific theories ('Relativity'). In others, especially throughout *Last Poems,* Lawrence tempers his sometime misogyny with a renewed emphasis on female beauty ('The Man of Tyre'), female mystery ('Invocation to the Moon') and the pleasures of sexuality ('They Say the Sea Is Loveless', 'Whales Weep Not!'). And although Lawrence is gener-

ally too heavy-handed in his social criticisms to be a successful satirist, his dialect poems attacking bourgeois hypocrisy, middle-class values and the evils of censorship are often quite hilarious, as in 'Red-Herring', where he speaks as the morally conflicted son of a down-to-earth collier father and a socially 'superior' mother:

> O I am a member of the bourgeoisie
> and a servant-maid brings me my tea —
> But I'm always longing for someone to say:
> 'ark 'ere, lad! atween thee an' me
>
> they're a' a b—d— lot o' —s,
> an' I reckon it's nowt but right
> we should start an' kick their —ses for 'em
> an' tell 'em to — (490–91)

Perhaps the most memorable of Lawrence's late poems, however, and certainly the best-known, are the ones that he wrote in the final months of his life, as his failing health forced him to confront head on the spectre of his own mortality. Whereas Dylan Thomas, several decades later, would famously beseech his dying father to 'Rage, rage, against the dying of the light', Lawrence admonishes us in 'The Ship of Death' to prepare ourselves quietly for the 'last journey' that we all must someday take:

> Oh build your ship of death, your little ark
> and furnish it with food, with little cakes, and wine
> for the dark flight down oblivion. (718)

In several lengthy drafts of the poem, he emphasises the physical agony, spiritual pain and paralysing uncertainty of that voyage:

> There is no port, there is nowhere to go
> only the deepening black darkening still
> blacker upon the soundless, ungurgling flood
> darkness at one with darkness, up and down
> and sideways utterly dark, so there is no direction any more.
> (719)

Eventually, however, in the much shorter and more coherent version that may well represent his last (though not necessarily final) draft, he excises virtually every negative image from the poem, replacing existential doubt with a serene sureness of purpose:

> Oh build your ship of death, be building it now
> With dim, calm thoughts and quiet hands
> Putting its timbers together in the dusk,

Rigging its mast with the silent, invisible sail
That will spread in death to the breeze
Of the kindness of the cosmos, that will waft
The little ship with its soul to the wonder-goal.

Ah, if you want to live in peace on the face of the earth
Then build your ship of death, in readiness
For the longest journey, over the last of seas. (965)

What is surprising here is not so much Lawrence's resignation in the face of death – this is a poet, after all, who always welcomed even the most disconcerting of personal demons into his poetry – but rather his new tone of almost euphoric calm, so unlike anything since his rapturous love poetry nearly two decades earlier in *Look! We Have Come Through!* The sprawling free-verse cadences of the poem's earlier drafts are now perfectly paced, lyrical but controlled, as the 'insurgent naked throb of the instant moment' ('Poetry of the Present', 185) gives way instead to a measured composure of style and sentiment.

A similar sense of joyous acceptance pervades 'Bavarian Gentians', another late poem that describes death as an exhilarating journey into the unknown, not outward across invisible oceans but downward into the murky underworld of Greek and Roman mythology:

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!
let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of this flower
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness
even where Persephone goes, just now, from the frosted September
to the sightless realm where darkness is awake upon the dark. (697)

Throughout his poetic career, as we have seen, Lawrence invoked flowers for a variety of imagistic purposes: in his early 'Snap-Dragon', they illustrate the thralldom of youth to the lure of sexuality; in 'Gloire de Dijon', they evoke ripe, voluptuous womanhood; and in 'Purple Anemones', in a new and surprising twist, they become emblems not of femininity but rather of male domination, symbolising the power of Pluto over Persephone and, more broadly, the dominion of Death even in the realm of the living:

When [Persephone] broke forth from below,
Flowers came, hell-hounds on her heels.
Dis, the dark, the jealous god, the husband,
Flower-sumptuous-blooded. (308)

Now, in 'Bavarian Gentians', Lawrence revisits the Persephone myth once again; but this time he has transformed Pluto's rape of Persephone from a jealous act of possession into a mystical act of passion:

> and Persephone herself is but a voice
> or a darkness invisible enfolded in the deeper dark
> of the arms Plutonic, and pierced with the passion of dense gloom,
> among the splendour of torches of darkness, shedding darkness on
> the lost bride and her groom. (697)

The blue gentians of the poem's title function at once as female and male symbols: having been borne, like Persephone, from the world of the living to the world of the dead, they pierce Pluto's gloomy underworld with phallic splendour. Thus, far from merely positing a glib union of opposites, Lawrence's flower imagery acknowledges the intricacies and nuances of all metaphoric language: in contrast to the 'two opposite waves of darkness and light' that Lawrence invoked, in 1915, to describe his own conflicted nature, here he gives us only degrees and layers of shade, 'blue darkened on blueness', 'darkness invisible enfolded in the deeper dark'. Ideologically, too, the poem is far more vexed and complex than many of Lawrence's earlier works. Feminist readers might well balk at Lawrence's portrayal of Persephone's rape as a conjugal consummation voyeuristically enjoyed by the male poet: 'I will go to the wedding, and be wedding-guest / at the marriage of the living dark', he writes in an alternate version of the poem (960). It is worth noting, however, that the poet takes on Persephone's role rather than Pluto's when he follows her 'down the darker and darker stairs' to the underworld and allows himself, in a sense, to be ravished by the mystery of death.

André Maurois has noted that, whereas the German poet Goethe is said to have asked on his deathbed for 'More Light', Lawrence might well have asked for 'More Darkness' instead.[12] Much of his work, after all, concerns the difficulty of admitting darkness into one's life, of achieving access to the forces of universal mystery (in nature, in sexuality, in the self), of welcoming one's poetic demons without succumbing also to passion, anger, fears and other overwrought emotions. In many cases, Lawrence falls short of the mark, clapping his hand quickly and firmly over his demon's mouth. In others, he mistakes intensity of feeling for mystical revelation, smothering the demon in a mire of rhetorical excess. An impressive number of his poems, however, composed in a range of poetic styles and on an astonishing variety of subjects, do successfully incorporate demonic energies and emotions even while maintaining a sense of expressive control. Like the torchlike flowers of 'Bavarian Gentians' – 'black lamps from the halls of Dis, burning dark blue, / giving off darkness, blue darkness' (697) – these are poems that illuminate by casting shadows, by 'shedding darkness' on the world in which we live.

NOTES

1 '*Chariot of the Sun*, by Harry Crosby', in *P*, 255.
2 Quoted in Harry T. Moore, *The Priest of Love: A Life of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 369.
3 'Poetry of the Present', in *Poems*, 185.
4 H.D. (Hilda Doolittle Aldington), quoted by Lawrence in a letter to Catherine Carswell, iii. 102; Virginia Woolf, 'Notes on D. H. Lawrence', in *The Moment and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth, 1981), p. 79; Richard Aldington, 'Introduction to *Last Poems* and *More Pansies*' (1932), in *Poems*, 595; T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), p. 58.
5 Edward Lucie-Smith, 'The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence – With a Glance at Shelley', in *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist, Poet, Prophet*, ed. Stephen Spender (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), p. 227. For further commentary on Lawrence's relationship to earlier poetic traditions, see especially Sandra M. Gilbert, *Acts of Attention: The Poems of D. H. Lawrence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), and Ross Murfin, *The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence: Texts and Contexts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).
6 R. P. Blackmur, 'D. H. Lawrence and Expressive Form', in *Form and Value in Modern Poetry* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), p. 255.
7 Anais Nin, quoted in Hilary Simpson, *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 13; Henry Miller, *The World of Lawrence: A Passionate Appreciation* (London: John Calder, 1985), p. 133; Norman Mailer, *The Prisoner of Sex* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), p. 131; Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos* (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969), p. 245; Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), p. 239; Simone de Beauvoir, quoted in Millett, *Sexual Politics*, p. 239; H.D., *Bid Me To Live (A Madrigal)* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 62.
8 Lawrence, 'The Crown', in *RDP*, 265.
9 W. H. Auden, 'D. H. Lawrence', in *D. H. Lawrence's Poetry: Demon Liberated. A Collection of Primary and Secondary Material*, ed. A. Banjeree (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 239–40.
10 Entry on 'Free Verse', in *A Handbook to Literature*, 7th edn, ed. William Hannon and C. Hugh Holman (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996), p. 225.
11 William Wordsworth, 'Preface to the Lyrical Ballads' (2nd edn), in *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), p. 321.
12 André Maurois, *Prophets and Poets*, trans. Hamish Miles (New York, London: Harper Brothers, 1935), p. 271.