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THE POETRY OF D. H. LAWRENCE

Charles I. Glicksberg

THERE IS NO CONTRADICTION in the fact that Lawrence's ideas on human nature and society are muddled while his poetry is flame-like, instinct with beauty organically felt and sensuously communicated. When he trusted his feelings he was on firm ground; when his powerful sensibility ruled him he could not go wrong. Each impression leaped forth like a radiant beam of sunlight; form and substance fused in a lyrical moment of incandescent, imaginative perception. His poems are vascular, charged with a living bloodstream. They could no more be composed according to rule than a flower can be prepared synthetically in a crucible. The art seems as instinctive as breathing, as natural as the beating of the heart.

Unfortunately, there was a raging conflict within him between heart and head, mind and body, thalamus and cortex, instinct and intelligence. In an intensely personal writer like Lawrence, this conflict was bound to make itself felt and inhibit the disciplined mastery of his material. His great strength was also his weakness. In his tirades against the desiccated intellect and the Dead Sea fruits of consciousness, in his embittered, chuckle-headed fight against science and industrialism, he was guilty of childish petulance — the eccentric individualism of one who found it hard to remain a poet in an uncongenial and oppressive environment. The world of the twentieth century did not suit him in the least: the regimentation of life, the hideously ugly, prison-like factories, the terrible gregariousness and mechanization of people in large cities, the crippling loss of spontaneity; therefore he vented his rage and spleen. He would throw this rotten civilization on the rubbish heap and start anew. Salvation lay in returning to the innocence and instinctive joyousness of primitive man who felt an organic connection with

earth and sun. Science was the great enemy to be destroyed, since it prevented the flowering of this organic consciousness.

Lawrence's individuality is unmistakably present in his first four volumes of poetry, *Love Poems and Others*, *Amores*, *New Poems*, and *Bays*, though as he matures, his poetic work betrays a steady growth in expressive power and in command of imagery and rhythm. These early poems, like his later productions, are intensely personal, revelatory of the conflicts through which Lawrence was passing at the time. He strips himself naked as he reveals the tumult of his passion, his fierce struggle for independence, but the conflict is not resolved. The lyric, "Monologue of a Mother," which thematically is not unlike the problem elaborated in *Sons and Lovers*, is nakedly subjective in tone and content. Lawrence understands imaginatively what a mother must feel whose son has grown a stranger to her, now that he has broken out of the maternal cage, and he records with painful honesty what must have gone on in the mind and heart of his mother:

I must look away from him, for my faded eyes
Like a cringing dog at his heels offend him now,
Like a toothless hound pursuing him with my will;
Till he chafes at my crouching persistence, and a sharp spark flies

In my soul from under sudden frown of his brow
As he blenches and turns away, and my heart stands still.

Here an emotional involvement, though poignantly rendered, has not been transmuted into the universal. As Lawrence admits in a note, many of his poems are so personal that despite their fragmentariness they constitute the story of his inner life, though a number of them are obviously imaginative in content and therefore timeless. Through the itinerary of his lyrics we are enabled to follow Lawrence as he leaves Nottingham and goes off to teach school in the fringes of South London—his feeling of loneliness and distress, his attachment to Helen, his experiences while in London, the death of his mother, his reactions to World War I, his leaving England, his aspirations and loves. Some of these poems had to be rewritten a good deal, since at the time he was still afraid of his demon. "A young man," he says, "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."

Even in the early poems there is the same sensuous awareness, the same amazing descriptive power as in his later work, but not yet fully

mastered, integrated with the whole man. He is still experimenting, searching within for his real self, groping for poignant directness and inevitability of expression. But the lyrical gift, plangent and earth-nurtured, is abundantly present. Though there is a lingering trace of youthful sentimentality and uncurbed wonder, the freedom with which the verse forms are handled shows that the creative demon is breaking out of harness. Lawrence recalls with anguish memories of violent quarrels between his parents, as in "Discord in Childhood," with its sustained mood and image serving as objective correlative of the emotion communicated:

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 has drowned
The other voice in silence of blood, 'neath the noise of the ash.

In addition to these recollections of cruelty and pain, there are lyrics dealing with lovers' quarrels, misunderstandings, the wisdom that the body of woman communicates. There is, above all, the internal conflict between virginity and animal passion, the passion insurgent, not to be resisted, flaring up from the abysmal depths. Also of interest are his vibrant lyrics about his experiences as a teacher and his poems grappling with the baffling mystery of death, the end of consciousness as well as the bewilderment and pain of life. "The Best of School" gives us this vivid picture:

The blinds are drawn because of the sun,
And the boys and the room in a colourless gloom
Of underwater float: bright ripples run
Across the walls as the blinds are blown
To let the sunlight in; and I,
As I sit on the shores of the class, alone,
Watch the boys in their summer blouses
As they write, their round heads busily bowed:
And one after another rouses
Its face to look at me,
To ponder very quietly,
As seeing, he does not see.

And in "Piccadilly Circus at Night," a poem concerned with street-walkers, we get this quatrain:

All the birds are folded in a silent ball of sleep,
 All the flowers are faded from the asphalt isle in the sea.
 Only we hard-faced creatures go round and round, and keep
 The shores of this innermost ocean alive and illusory.

Chiefly, these are lyrics of awareness and awakening, without intellectual conclusions—the quick of experience transmuted into singing words and shining images.

What is striking even in his early poetry is the impress of a powerful personality, eager for freedom, for the challenge of a larger life, for fulfillment. It is still groping for a sense of direction, waiting to be born in its own image, but the power and passion is there. The love poems are filled with the lacerating complexity of passion which Lawrence described in *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, and *Aaron's Rod*—the barbed hatred, the fierce anger, the dialectical play of attraction and repulsion. Each lyric is a kindling spark, the lines flowing with compelling naturalness, born as they are of the fire and heat of the moment. Lawrence knows that "The world within worlds is a womb," from which everything issues, the creative flame suffusing mortal flesh, giving and taking the incarnate seed of life—life which is eternal creation. The truth of love cannot be faked. In the root of his being, in the nether darkness of his soul, he can tell when he is not meant for a woman nor she for him. All this cannot be analyzed or known; it simply *is*. In "These Clever Women," he strikes the note that was later to become so obsessive: his distrust and detestation of those women who reason and dissect, ask probing questions, talk without end, when the true answer lies in intuitive surrender of body, the sensual response to the elemental mating call.

In "Look! We Have Come Through!" (the story of his love for Frieda, the woman who helped to free him from his mother, and his struggle to hold her love), Lawrence at last finds himself, hailing his deliverance from the cell of the old isolated self. Love is fruition and fulfillment. No more is needed, and yet—a characteristic Laurentian theme—how they suffer in spite of this! The fundamental conflict springs from Frieda's attachment to her children by a former marriage; motherhood is a spear of separation. In "Both Sides of the Medal," Lawrence gives expression to the cruel, inescapable polarity of love.

Finally they come through, achieve communion of body and spirit, the sacramental oneness. Hate and love are fused in a new consummating synthesis. There is the intimately revealing "Song of a Man Who Has Come Through," with its jubilant first lines:

Not I, but the wind that blows through me!
A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.

Touching the body of the woman he loves, he touches the unknown, that which is not the eternal, oppressive I, and this is a "mystery beyond knowledge or endurance." This is the heaven that men seek—to cease to know, to surpass the self.

Few poets have stated with such piercing insight and vehemence the sickness that preoccupation with subjectivity breeds, the taint and blight of a self that pervades all and identifies itself with all: fields, flowers, government, nations, war, destructiveness, death. This hypertrophied ego was a horror, and Lawrence could not bear it. Then came the resurrection: out of his own ashes consumed in the fire of love rose the new and splendid phoenix. Now he can experience a new incarnation, transcend the sickly, fearful self. It was the flesh of his wife that carried him over to the new world of freedom. It is woman who has given him courage, strength, life, peace.

Freedom for man is bound up with freedom from the ego-bound soul rooted in mental consciousness. Men must sink their roots into the earth again. Beneath the superficial layers of the self slumbers a great desire for elemental passions, for all of life and experience. Over and over again Lawrence preaches the same impassioned theme: the need for transcending the limitations of the ego, for escaping from the cage of the self and experiencing the freshets of a new life. This repudiation of a restrictive, life-denying individualism (which he personally never achieved) is bound up with his attack on our artificial, commercialized civilization. The root of our present evil, as he sees it, is that we buy and sell, that we assume everything—including human beings—can be bought and sold on the market. What we want, he cries out, is a communion based not on wages or profits but on a religion of life.

This is the leitmotif that runs through his poetry. In "Money Madness" he charges that money is our collective madness, our doom. Therefore he would excise this perverted instinct from the brain and the blood. Society, he insists, must be established upon a different principle: "the courage of mutual trust," "the modesty of simple living,"

with house and food and animal comfort free to all. The only thing worth fighting for is the oneness of the self, inward peace, and that battie never ends.

Lawrence derives his patent of nobility, his true golden income, from the sun, from the core of the atom. His intuitive perceptions reach beyond conceptual limits. This earth-nurtured consciousness is poles removed from the sickly cerebral emotions people pretend to have in their minds. It is because people accept lies that they become emotionally stunted, incapable of distilling the precious essence of experience. Even if one feels nothing but frankly acknowledges his nothingness, there is still hope for him if he allows the potentialities to grow within him. These periods of lying fallow are creative pauses in which immense evolutionary changes are taking place. Like a modern Jeremiah, Lawrence warns us of the impending doom: how the house of civilization will come toppling down.

At the core of space the final knell
of our era has struck, and it chimes
in terrible rippling circles between the stars.

There is no averting this cataclysmic doom. The flesh must be resurrected in the new day which will mark the passing of the flesh-trammeled, ego-enslaved selves. The poem, "Nemesis," sums up his philosophy and his faith:

The Nemesis that awaits our civilization
is social insanity
which in the end is always homicidal.

Sanity means the wholeness of the consciousness.
And our society is only part conscious, like an idiot.

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.

Lawrence sees the hopelessness of the situation, the slavery of the industrialized masses, millions of his fellowmen crushed by the iron of the machine. Modern man is the machine incarnate. But Lawrence hopes for amelioration once men are filled with disillusion and abandon the drugged dream of brotherhood and humanitarian progress. Then

the individual, alone with himself, no longer acknowledges the power of masses and classes, which are spawned by the machine. This enslavement to the machine breeds not the greatness of love but a grinding, nihilistic hate, a democracy of festering hate. Only the pristine men, looking straight into the eyes of the unknown gods, can save these twentieth-century robots from disintegrating.

"Democracy Is Service" sets forth Lawrence's conception of democracy; it is not the service of the mob, but the mob worshiping those few whose faces gleam with godliness. That is, man must not look to man for inspiration and guidance, only to the gods.

Democracy is service, but not the service of demos.
 Democracy is demos serving life
 and demos serves life as it gleams on the face of the few,
 and the few look into the eyes of the gods, and serve the sheer gods.

Though the gods are nameless they are everywhere, and the experience of them is real. If one worships these gods—the born leaders of the earth, the natural aristocrats of the spirit—he does away with false Whitmanesque sympathy and false, indiscriminate humanitarian love. Truth is to be felt in all the senses, otherwise it does not exist. The injunction to love our neighbors is a great lie. Love cannot be coerced. It is when the blood is kindled that one is most alive; then the god flows through the veins; one acts instinctively, in tune with the primal energy of the cosmos.

Hence, a plague on both the revolutionary and the bourgeoisie. The only way to settle the question of property is to ignore it. The lovers of life, united by their indifference to property and money, must band together and open their consciousness to the deep, mysterious tides of life from which they are now cut off. Lawrence asserts that man must cease to know himself mentally, must give up knowledge and surrender to touch, the mystery of wonder. Thought is not a dialectical play of ideas but "the welling up of unknown life into consciousness." As he declares in "Terra Incognita,"

There are vast realms of consciousness still undreamed of
 vast ranges of experience, like the humming of unseen harps,
 we know nothing of, within us.

Oh when man escaped from the barbed-wire entanglement
 of his own ideas and his own mechanical devices
 there is a marvellous rich world of contact and sheer fluid beauty
 and fearless face-to-face awareness of now-naked life.

The volume *Pansies* expresses intense disgust as well as a throbbing sensibility. If he hates the mercenary human animal, he has a plasmic awareness of the instinctive rightness of animals who trust their native impulses. Each of these poems is not only a pulse of thought but a vivid, self-sustaining image. Subject and object are brought together in flame-like oneness. In "Wealth" he declares:

Peace I have from the core of the atom, from the core of space,
and grace, if I don't lose it, from the same place.
and I look shabby, yet my roots go beyond my knowing,
deep beyond the world of man,
And where my little leaves flutter highest
there are no people, nor will ever be.

Beholding the new moon, a wave bursting on a rock, Lawrence becomes that white sibilant spray, quivers with its orgiastic rage, its beauty of violent frustration, and is diffused with the pearl-like pallor of moonlight. The secret of life is still touch, and it is the measure of our decadence today that we cannot bear touch, that we have become cerebrated, cut off from the primal sources of life. Touch comes slowly, especially when the mind is asleep and the blood can express its instinctive sympathy and longing. Touch is of the blood. It is best to leave sex strictly alone so that it may function spontaneously. "For while we have sex in our mind, we truly have none in our body."

There is a striking pattern of consistency in this preachment: an emergent philosophy of the unconscious, a religion of the instincts. Lawrence's feelings about sex are closely tied up with his views on consciousness, his opposition to the domination of the tainted, egocentric, possessive mind. The absolutism of human consciousness, the triumph of the cerebrated ego, must be ended once for all. Passionately Lawrence exalts intuitive knowing, the knowledge of the self and its mortality that the mind can never fathom, for it has only one mode of knowing. It sees in daylight but it is blind in the infinite dark; whereas the blood, forever dark, is at home in darkness. It knows "religiously," instinctively. "Only that exists which exists dynamically and unmentalised in my blood." Lawrence revises the philosophical epigram of Descartes to read: Man is; he does not think he is. What man needs is to re-establish communion with the dark gods, to yield to the influence of the moon, to release the dark ocean within him and its sea-beats of

brightness and anger. Man must dive down and be lost—and thus be saved—in the fathomlessly deep currents of the creative unconscious.

When Lawrence, in *Apocalypse*, as in his poetry, writes of establishing communion with the primitive gods, getting in vital touch with the cosmos, letting the sun and moon have their way with him, the reader who depends primarily on conceptual understanding must think him utterly mad. This is precious mystical nonsense parading as lyrical inspiration, but not so! The lyrical genius of the man confounds us, overcomes temporarily the resistance of our discursive skeptical intelligence. His poetry, in "Birds, Beasts and Flowers," betrays a quivering, clairvoyant sensibility able sensuously to project itself into the life of bird and beast and flower. It is even more passionately sensuous than the God-haunted, sense-intoxicated lyrics of Gerard Manley Hopkins. For Lawrence's poetry expresses more than an act of imaginative insight or mystical intuition. It is literal identification so that one catches the terrifying, non-rational sense of participating in the persistent sensual hunger of the male tortoise and his act of screaming coition; one flashes with the hummingbird and mocks with the blue jay. Like a Van Gogh, he is able to evoke the iridescent, palpable reality of fruits and flowers; he communicates not only their surface contours and brilliant colors but also their interior dynamism, the universal plasmic life that throbs in them. With a few sharp strokes he etches an object and then goes further to suggest its mysterious essence: pomegranates "like bright green stone," "barbed with a crown," actually growing; the heart of a peach: velvety, voluptuous, heavy, indented, "the lovely, bivalve roundness," "the ripple down the sphere." Or his rhapsodic evocation in "Medlars and Sorb-Apples":

Wineskins of brown morbidity
Animal excrementa:
What is it that reminds us of white gods?

This is the extraordinary power he possesses of bringing to pass before us the mystery of transubstantiation in nature, the sensuous particularity of an experience, the felt reality of the fruit-world in all its exquisite tactile and visual actuality. Each fruit is there before us, seemingly more real than any painting, more tempting to the imagination than the fruit itself. Figs and grapes and apples are dangled dazzlingly, appetizing, before our vision. As he beholds the cluster of grapes, Lawrence's imagination slips across the frontier of time, returns to the primordial begin-

ning of things when communion was naked and palpable and inexpressible. Though we have grown more democratic and more enlightened, we have lost, according to Lawrence, what is infinitely more precious: the ecstasy of immediate vision, the innocence of primitive perception. Lawrence sinks himself down into the earth where trees have their roots, feels the sap striving upward, the miracle of creation and renewal. He becomes the cypress or purple anemone or almond blossom he describes. With what sensuous intensity he paints this picture:

Dawn-rose
 Sub-delighted, stone-engendered
 Cyclamens, young cyclamens
 Arching
 Walking, pricking their ears
 Like delicate very-young greyhound bitches
 Half-yawning at the open, inexperienced
 Vista of day,
 Folding back their soundless petalled ears.

In "Birds, Beasts and Flowers" the senses quiveringly respond to something other than human life, yet powerfully alive. He tells how he once caught "a gold-and-greenish, lucent fish" and unhooked its "groping, watery-horny mouth," looked into its "red-gold, water-precious, mirror-flat bright eyes," and felt the beat of its "mucous, leaping life-throb." We are amazed at his gift of projecting himself into the skin of a fish whose life is "a sluice of sensation along your sides." He partakes of its watery life, its goggling gaze, its sensations, its mindless fear.

Lawrence's poetry represents the triumph of the mythical, intuitive thinking that he makes so much of in practically all of his writing, and it is clear that he spoke from deep, vital sources of experience within him. Certainly he gave expression to a lyrical strain which is not to be found in contemporary poetry with its post-Eliotic "dissociation" of ideas, its allusiveness, its deliberate richness of ambiguity, its pastiche of erudition, its intellectual toughness and sophisticated complexity. Lawrence scorned all that. He was not defining and formulating conceptual categories, fitting the contents of sensory experience within some antecedent order of cognition. He is thinking mythically, reveling in the immediate data of sensation and feeling, without seeking to impose uniformities: the kind of primitivistic, pre-logical thinking Cassirer describes in *Language and Myth*.

In *Last Poems*, Lawrence comes to grips with ultimate problems, the mystery of death, the meaning of the gods. Refusing to believe in the philosophy of pure spirit, he declares that first comes the sensual body, the body of the flesh and its instincts. The divine urge of creation is not to be identified with a Mind. It is the body that shapes beauty. Even God is but a great urge seeking incarnation in the body, whether it be the body of a woman or flower or animal. There is no god, Lawrence calls out in an ecstasy of discovery,

apart from poppies and the flying fish,
men singing songs, and women brushing their hair in the sun

Hence man should be at one with the living God, instead of prostituting himself to knowledge and suffering the endless torture of unattainable self-analysis. In "Mystic," Lawrence formulates his credo and in "Anaxagoras" he takes his fling at the stupidity of the scientists with their principles and laws and their apprehension of a dead reality. Such science is the product of mental conceit, a species of mystification. Snow is white, pure white, and not what science says it is. The self-centered will is the root of all evil. Lawrence has a perfect horror of mechanical men, soulless automatons. Science and mechanics and education and all abstractions, these constitute the essence of the evil he abhorred and repudiated.

Pansies is the anguished cry of Samson among the Philistines, only he is not blinded nor yet shorn of his strength. The whole man is implicit in this volume. The hate cuts clean like a knife. Lawrence is determined not to be deceived nor to deceive others. A recurrent theme in his poetry is the perception that death has overtaken Western civilization. The wealthy, the self-absorbed, the robots are slated for extinction; nothing can save them, but after them will rise a cleaner life. Mankind must now pay the price for having lost touch with the cosmos, the primitive gods, the primal realities. The long night of time is upon us. Coupled with this is his remarkable awareness of the primordial influence of sun and moon, sky and earth, on the tides of the soul. Lawrence maintains creative touch with the earth and its creatures and its subterranean fountains of energy.

In one sense, *Pansies* constitutes a unique experiment in poetic composition, since it brings to a head one of the important issues in contemporary criticism: the relation between thought and feeling. Though Lawrence repudiates the sterile, mechanical intellect, in these

poems he is plainly the man thinking as well as feeling, even though his thoughts are directed to the task of annihilating thought. Yet there is a distinctive difference. What these poems aim to do is to fuse thought and feeling, to incarnate a pulse of real thought, brief, compact, poignant. There is no attempt at formal elaboration, no offer of convincing proof. "That," Lawrence seems to say, "is how I think and feel, what I believe at this moment of time." *Pansies* is therefore not so much an intellectual autobiography as a confession of intense moments and moods, visions and perceptions, aversions and ecstasies, which are unified not by a strategy of conceptual coherence but by the lambent personality of the poet. In his Foreword, Lawrence tells us that he wishes them to be taken as "casual thoughts that are true while they are true and irrelevant when the mood and circumstances change." In short, the principle of consistency does not apply. There can be no objections to contradictions that emerge in Lawrence's lyrics, because change and contradictions are the very heart of the process of growth.

Though there are instances of intellectual contradiction, fundamentally these "pansies" articulate a fairly coherent *Weltanschauung*. To appreciate them at their full value, one must know Lawrence's letters and fiction and essays. He has not changed. He is giving an almost word for word restatement of his basic beliefs, his antipathies and attachments. The list of what he hates is long indeed. He hates the bourgeoisie and the Bolsheviks, industrialism, our mechanized civilization, the worship of money and the bitch goddess Success, the infernal desire for superiority and self-assertion, the blather about masses and classes, the empty talk about economic revolutions, the futility of the life of the poor and the deadness of the elite, the ennui that proliferates like cancer cells through the body of modern society, the ridiculous twaddle about equality and democracy. About these things he writes with inflamed earnestness, crying out hoarsely against the indecency and tragic waste of such a life.

But when he seeks to convey his own personal religion he becomes mystical, inspired but rhapsodically vague. He adumbrates a philosophy of touch, the need for vital contacts, and he has much to say about recovering the energy of the sun, each man being the focal source of solar energy. Each man must emancipate the god within him and worship no other gods, but those who have caught no such gleam must live by the gleam reflected in the faces of those who have experienced this vision in all its radiant fullness. That is "true democracy": the leader-

ship of those who are called and chosen and the service of those who are born to serve. That is the "revolution" he would inaugurate, the freedom he would establish in England and throughout the world. What we need is to be much alone. Those who are gods discover that loneliness is a creative experience, a period of renewal.

Lawrence is not only a man of intense feeling, he is also a man of shifting moods. He is carried away by what he happens to feel at the moment. Precisely for that reason is he not to be taken too seriously as a thinker? It is curious that one who raves so furiously against mental consciousness and the diseased tendency to indulge in intellectual analysis, should expend so much energy in emotionalized arguments. True, the debate is not conducted according to rules of logic and evidence. What we get is a magnesium flare of temper, a flaming negation, affirmation by contrariety. As soon as something irritates him, he is off on a crusade. A preacher in verse, he is almost fanatical in his hatred of fanaticism; he is frenzied in his condemnation of puritanism, money, ideal women, machinery, and America. This is the one tune he knows, and he plays it with virtuosity and passion.

For example, Lawrence wages guerilla warfare against science, the analytical and the mechanical. Though the chemist breaks up water into hydrogen and oxygen, he fails to know the force which binds the two energies; he is blind to the third thing that makes it water. This is obviously neither profound nor particularly original, but the lyrical energy of conviction with which it is enunciated helps to fix it in our memory. In the heart of the atom—in space and earth and water—there is sanity to be found. Contrasted with this is the irrationality and evil of contemporary society, the horribly abnormal life of contemporary civilization. The mania of owning things together with the fearful blight of poverty is threatening to destroy the world. Hence if a revolution is to be carried out, it should not be under the auspices of the priests of Communism with their talk of equality and fraternity, nor in the name of money and materialism. In the name of life and for the sake of life should the revolution be consummated. That is the banner under which he would gladly fight.

In actual life, however, Lawrence's beliefs cannot be applied, cannot be lived. It is not possible to scrap machinery altogether and revert to a stage of Arcadian simplicity and Adamic innocence. No one in his right senses would actually carry the Laurentian opposition to science to a point where he would forego the use of all medical aid. Yet Law-

rence is not in the least put out by such contradictions as he fulminates against the plague of science. For by fighting it he succeeds in preserving his integrity as an artist, his creative health and wholeness. And it is this which makes him so significant and representative a figure for our age. His lyrical protests bring to a head the dominant conflicts of our culture. He forces us to re-examine our implicit assumptions, our whole system of traditional values. He smashes the scientific philosophy of survival and adaptations to bits in order to make possible a more creative affirmation of life.

That is the whole of Lawrence: the alternation between absolute loneliness and the need for companionship, alienation and the fulfillment of his societal instincts, the polarity of love and hate. The truth was that most people with their Narcissus-like glorification of life, each one absorbed in ego-idolatry, repelled him. He tried to escape from it all into the fastness of the heart, the nameless, the unknown. The kind of democracy he looked forward to is not a democracy of ideas or ideals but a democracy of touch, the mystery of touch that transcends mind and spirit. This is the sovereign remedy against the cruelty and impersonality of the machine, the curse of cosmopolis, the centralizing drift of industrialism. Each one will then recoil into separateness, intensely alive and individual. When we have surrendered the possessive ego and the assertive will, we shall not need to be saved for we shall no longer feel lost. Once we realize that the Holy Ghost is the deepest part of consciousness, the understanding is born that we are dependent for the tides of our life on the creative beyond.

With such a mystical creed as his touchstone of value, it is not surprising that Lawrence held originality to be the sacred and supreme principle of poetic composition. He divided poetry into two categories: the poetry of the past, formalized, known, completed, dead; and the poetry of the future, throbbing with undiscovered potentialities. The poetry of the immediate present, Lawrence contended, must lack exquisite finish, consummate grace, classic perfection of form. It must be quick with the pulsations of immediacy, alive with the essence of creative change, emergent, Adamic, new. He wished to explore the quality of experience in all its concrete actual radiance, the incandescence of the mystical Now. Such poetry, he maintained in the preface to the American edition of *New Poems*, manages to suggest the protean, fluid, mobile, incalculable quality of life itself. Only thus can the strait-

jacket of habit and precedent be thrown off, inspiration pouring out spontaneously like flame, without artificial elegance or prescribed form. In his terror of chaos man builds walls and roofs and shuts himself within a formula until he begins to stifle for want of air and space and can no longer break through to the light of the sun. The poets can help us in this essential work of liberation by throwing off the fetters of convention and reaching back to chaos. Better than the starvation-diet of outworn thought-forms is the imaginative experience, taking the whole soul and body captive, even if this means the repudiation of reason.

"The quick of the universe is the *pulsating, carnal self*, mysterious and palpable," Lawrence declared. But his jeremiads against modern mechanical civilization are rendered absurd and ineffectual by his inner knowledge that he can make no headway against it. He is shouting furiously against the wind, and his mad, impassioned words are hurled back with terrific force in his teeth. Since he cannot make his peace with the insane present, he begins to idealize the mythical past and reconstructs a primitive utopia, a golden age of the remote past. He has thrown up the sponge; he reveals our evils, our follies and waste and tragic conflicts, but he has no solution—none except a precipitate retreat to solar-plexus feelings, instinctive savagery. He is waging a losing battle all the time and that adds a touch of feverish futility to his utterances. Modern man cannot hope to recapture the virtues of primitivism, he cannot again worship the primal mysteries of sex and blood, not even if psychologists like Jung recommend such reversions to archetypal patterns of experience. If we read Lawrence's pulse-like lyrics with suspended judgment, without intruding serious matters of belief, he is irresistible, overwhelming, but as soon as we begin to reflect, his power over us wanes and the defeatism of his cause becomes apparent.

Fortunately, the value of poetry is not judged by the validity of the logic or philosophy that can be abstracted from it. The lyrical heritage Lawrence left behind him has many precious qualities which can invigorate and fructify modern poetry. It is vital, passionate, intensely alive and affirmative. It expresses a self-contained, integrated personality. It is not afraid to be poignantly sensual, naked in its confession of man's response to earth and moon and sun. It gives voice to man feeling, man experiencing, man joyous, man liberated from the prison of selfhood, resurrected, quick to enjoy the beauty and miracle of life on earth. Experimental in form and original in content, it has, despite its aberrations, much to give that modern poetry, intellectualized and introverted, is urgently in need of.