

J·D·H·L·S

Journal of D. H. Lawrence Studies

Citation details

Article: 'Lawrence and Some Romantic Poets'

Author: John Worthen

Source: *Journal of D. H. Lawrence Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2014)

Pages: 11–32

Copyright: individual author and the D. H. Lawrence Society.
Quotations from Lawrence's works © The Estate of Frieda
Lawrence Ravagli. Extracts and poems from various publications
by D. H. Lawrence reprinted by permission of Pollinger Limited
(www.pollingerltd.com) on behalf of the Estate of Frieda Lawrence
Ravagli.

**A Publication of the
D. H. Lawrence Society of Great Britain**

LAWRENCE AND SOME ROMANTIC POETS

JOHN WORTHEN

I shall only note in passing the important relationship between Lawrence and Coleridge; the subject is too big for this brief essay.¹ A single reference, however, shows its importance. When, in October 1914, Amy Lowell told Lawrence about her habit of keeping his poetry manuscripts as safely as the manuscripts of Keats and Shelley she also possessed, Lawrence responded: “don’t talk about putting me in the safe with Keats and Shelley. It scares me out of my life ... But I’d like to know Coleridge, when Chaaron has rowed me over” (2L 223).² He could have chosen any poet, or any Romantic: he selected Coleridge as the person he would most like to know. Wherever one looks in Lawrence, there are reminders of Coleridge; not just in obvious places like his poem ‘Snake’ (its relationship with *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* has often been pointed out) but in smaller matters too. If asked which writers found the song of the nightingale *not* melancholy, one answer would be: Coleridge, nightingales being, he said in Göttingen in 1799, “the reverse of melancholy”, and Lawrence, who wrote in 1926: “How anyone who didn’t have his ears on upside down ever heard the nightingale ‘sobbing’, I don’t know” (SEP 211–2).³ And what of the fact that Coleridge and Lawrence could both distinguish Homoousians and Homoiousians? The Greek terms go back to the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.: the Homoousians believing that Christ was consubstantial with God the Father (so making up two-thirds of the Trinity), the Homoiousians believing that Christ had been created *by* God (so that there was only one God, the Father). The Homoousians won the argument, and many people at some point in their lives will have repeated the words of the Nicene Creed that Christ is “of one substance with the father”, without realising that they were Homoousians.

But Lawrence knew, of course. I was not surprised that Coleridge was aware of it; he was steeped in Christian history. Lawrence, however, could refer casually to Homooousians in passing, while working on *Studies in Classic American Literature* in Cornwall in 1917, without any reference books to hand (SCAL 206). That impressed me deeply when I discovered it. Like Coleridge, Lawrence was very well read, and his range of knowledge – and power of recollection – extraordinary.

Let me offer a final link which broadens the subject into the lives of other Romantic poets. Three English writers before Lawrence, in wartime, living near the coast on the south-western peninsula of England, were investigated and spied on by the authorities, who suspected them of collaborating with the enemy. Best known, perhaps, is Lawrence. He and Frieda had their cottage at Higher Tregerthen searched (unofficially) on the afternoon of Thursday 11 October 1917, again (officially) on the morning of Friday 12th, and were then and there given notice to leave the area of Cornwall within three days: they left perforce on Monday 15th.

But Wordsworth and Coleridge, 120 years earlier, had also been investigated. England was of course at war with France, the war that continued in one form or another until the battle of Waterloo in 1815. In July 1797, Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy had rented Alfoxton House, near the north Somerset coast, to be near Nether Stowey, where Coleridge was living with his wife Sarah and son Hartley. Wordsworth, Dorothy and Coleridge (Sarah Coleridge did not approve of the Wordsworths) regularly went walking; Coleridge was planning a poem to be called 'The Brook', which would follow the course of a stream from its start to its final entry into the sea, going through many different landscapes and townscapes along the way. He never wrote it (which became the fate of many Coleridgean projects). But walking the hills and coombs, streams and cliffs became a constant habit for the group, or Gang.⁴

And it was this behaviour that, in 1797, brought all three of them to the very serious attention of the English secret service. The government of the day was anxious about a French invasion; in

February, French ships had actually landed troops in south Wales, just across from Somerset. Wordsworth and Dorothy would certainly have been viewed as French sympathisers because of the letters sent them by Annette Vallon (Wordsworth's one-time lover and the mother of his daughter Caroline): it looks as if some at least of those letters had been seized and opened. And Dorothy, at any rate, was writing replies to the letters from Annette which got through,⁵ while – unlike Coleridge – Wordsworth had neither abandoned his republicanism nor his French sympathies, both of them confirmed by his time in France in the early 1790s. For his part, Coleridge would have been on any list of people to be watched since his activities in Bristol in the mid-1790s (lectures and journalism); and in July 1797 he compounded his crimes by inviting to Stowey John Thelwall, who had survived the London treason trials of 1794 and had been one of the targets of the infamous so-called Gagging Acts of 1795. And while visiting, Thelwall had attended a dinner party thrown by the Wordsworths.

A local doctor sent a letter to London denouncing the Wordsworths as the “Rascalls from Alfoxton” and calling them “a Sett of violent Democrats” (at that date, a word as evocative as “terrorists” today). A senior government agent, James Walsh, was sent down from London to make enquiries. Thomas Jones, who lived at the Farm House nearby, believed that “some French people had got possession of the Mansion House” (Dorothy and Wordsworth were both deeply tanned) and (horrors) “were washing and Mending their Cloaths all Sunday”. How terribly un-English. Other people passed on reports that the inhabitants of Alfoxton roamed the countryside at all hours of the day and night, making notes and drawings (Dorothy and Coleridge were both habitual notebook users).⁶

The seriousness of the situation was demonstrated by the investigation. Walsh talked to local people and reported back. He learned that the group was *not* French (though the landlord of the Globe Inn thought them “people that will do as much harm, as All the French can do”). Walsh's report summed them up as “a

mischievous gang of disaffected Englishmen”; “mischievous” [mischievous] being less damning than the doctor’s “violent”, but still dangerous. Looking back from 1817, Coleridge made great fun of the episode, but arrest on suspicion was a scare tactic which the government adopted more than once in the mid-1790s, and Walsh’s report to London declared the name Wordsworth already “known” to the Bow Street magistrate Richard Ford; Wordsworth presumably on the books as a man with French contacts and dangerous friends.⁷ His letters tell their own story, with remarks not just that he was a democrat but “of that class I shall for ever continue”.⁸ He even disapproved of all forms of censorship: “rather than restrain the liberty of the press I would suffer the most atrocious doctrines to be recommended”.⁹ In the 1790s that was extraordinary; even Lawrence, 130 years later, would not go that far. Wordsworth might easily have been arrested, tried and imprisoned, if only to set an example to others.¹⁰ At this date he was a great deal more revolutionary than Coleridge or Lawrence – and more at risk, too, because of the state of the law in 1797.

I

Percy Bysshe Shelley did more than attract the authorities by his behaviour in North Devon in 1812. He stirred up things politically so badly that he and his wife Harriet were forced to get out as quickly as they could before he got arrested. His poor servant Dan Healey was left behind in Barnstaple jail, serving six months for nailing up, on to trees and the walls of barns, great sheets of anti-government propaganda (written by his employer, of course), copies also being dispatched in well-corked wine bottles launched into the Bristol Channel and sent up in the occasional small hot-air balloon.

The pieces nailed up, sealed in bottles and sent aloft in balloons were a ‘Declaration of Rights’¹¹ and a satirical poem ‘The Devil’s Walk’, containing lines about the “brainless King” (George III, of course) and the hugely fat Prince Regent, whose “waistcoat gay / ...

/ Scarce meets across his princely paunch, / And pantaloons are like half moons, / Upon each brawny haunch".¹² The only surviving copy of this text of the poem is an original sheet sent up to the Home Office by the outraged Town Clerk of Barnstaple, to prove how dangerous Shelley was: it still survives in the public record office. Such material could not be published in the usual way, at that date, without the printer or publisher being arrested and tried for libel or even treason: hence Shelley's adoption of innovative ways of distributing materials without a printer's name on them (another criminal offence, of course).

Of the four writers I am discussing, Shelley was by far the most violently political in an active sense, and at the youngest age: Lawrence was thirty-two, Wordsworth twenty-seven, Coleridge twenty-five, Shelley only twenty. But the opposition of the three Romantic poets to the 'Existing State of Things' (as Shelley called it in the title of a poem in 1811) in wartime – and out of it – was unmistakable.¹³ And while Lawrence was mostly law-abiding (just one source suggests his desire to get industrial workers to stop supporting the war effort),¹⁴ yet he never lost what, in Australia in 1922, he called "a fighting conscience" (4L 275): his fights with English law in the late 1920s became legendary.¹⁵

II

Because of his reputation as Victorian Sage and Great Man, Wordsworth is not often thought of as politically active: he eventually became as radically conservative as he had once been radical (and that is the Wordsworth whom Lawrence grew up knowing).¹⁶

Lawrence occasionally quotes Wordsworth in his early letters and essays. More exciting, however, is his flagrant attack on Wordsworth in his essay ' Love was Once a Little Boy', written at the ranch in New Mexico in the summer of 1925 and published in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*. This essay is startling in the way it targets Wordsworth. It turns him into a

variety of Walt Whitman, asserting that, in Wordsworth's poem 'Peter Bell', the lines 'A Primrose by a river's brim / A yellow primrose was to him, / And it was nothing more' show Wordsworth (Lawrence says) not letting the primrose live its own life: he is gathering the primrose "into his own bosom" and making it "part of his own nature": he is in fact ousting the primrose "from its own individuality" (*RDP* 334–5). To me, I confess, the poem contains no trace of any such identification. Wordsworth is simply pointing out that to a person like his character the potter Peter Bell, who ignores the natural world as much as he ignores other human beings, a flower is just a flower "and nothing more". Lawrence's distance from Wordsworth by 1925 may be judged by the way he also refers to Peter not as the potter he is, but as "a yokel". Peter is no yokel and no fool; he is a cunning serial bigamist.

But Lawrence has great fun with his idea, and writes some lines of Wordsworthian verse with great aplomb:

"A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him
And nothing more—"

A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him
And a great deal more—

A primrose by the river's brim
Lit up its pallid yellow glim
Upon the floor—

And watched old Father William trim
His course beside the river's brim
And trembled sore—

The yokel, going for a swim
Had very nearly trod on him

An hour before.
And now the poet's fingers slim
Were reaching out to pluck at him
And hurt him more. (*RDP* 335)

This is especially unfair to a poet who had written, the same year as 'Peter Bell', how if, by chance, he ever

... snapp'd the stem
Of foxglove bending o'er his native rill,
I should be loth to pass along my way
With unprov'd indifference, –I would stop
Self-question'd, asking wherefore that was done.¹⁷

Wordsworth was neither a fingerer nor a plucker of flowers: Lawrence's vision of him reaching out for the primrose is quite unfair. But Lawrence wants to make a point, and Wordsworth comes to hand; and that's that. Though it is worth adding that, in 1928, he described how – before the time of Wordsworth – people only saw primroses dimly, but that Wordsworth *really* made people see them (*IR* 110).

III

Most of this confirms my instinctive feeling that although Lawrence knows his Wordsworth, and recognises his historical importance, he has little interest in him.¹⁸ Living in Bavaria in 1927, for example, he tells friends how "We lead an uneventful life – the mountains come and go and lovely is the show – sort of thing" (*6L* 158): a limp parody of "The rainbow comes and goes, / And lovely is the rose" from Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'.

But, for Lawrence, I think Shelley was different. There are no parodies of him in Lawrence's letters or essays, for example, but lots of links. Birkin's famous definition in *Women in Love* of the

kind of person he really wants to be, "an isolated me, that does *not* meet and mingle, and never can" (WL 145, original emphasis), is taken direct from Shelley's not so very well-known poem 'Love's Philosophy': "In one spirit meet and mingle".¹⁹ I have only recently discovered the quotation: it is not in the annotation to the Cambridge Edition of *Women in Love*. But Lawrence had been interested in Shelley for years. Probably in December 1908, he had sent Jessie Chambers "in swift enthusiasm ... Francis Thompson's essay on Shelley" (IL 95 n.4); he had referred to Shelley's poem 'The Sensitive Plant' in April 1908 (IL 43), in July to the poem 'To Night' (IL 64)²⁰ and to 'Music, when Soft Voices die' in April 1911 (IL 248).²¹ And he had told Blanche Jennings, in one of those long self-indulgences of letters sent to her in 1908, that – if Alice Dax would only call her new baby "Phyllis Maud" – the name "Maud" would have a "sonorous dignity ... which tells the girl will have a soul – she will not be a frippet – I could read Shelley to her, and she would look at me with grand understanding eyes" (IL 52).²² Only a *little* irony there, I think.

But the real difference from his interest in Wordsworth was that Lawrence went on quoting Shelley and discussing him, especially in the period 1913–16. Something that would have helped this was the fact that, in October 1913, when Lawrence and Frieda decided to go to that stretch of the Italian coast where Frieda's brother-in-law Edgar Jaffe was holidaying, Lawrence writes that "we think of Lerici, somewhere near Leghorn – Shelley and Byron tradition. It might be good for my rhythms" (2L 63; Edward Marsh had recently been savaging the rhythms of Lawrence's poetry). In Lerici, Lawrence and Frieda found themselves just a couple of miles from where Shelley had lived in 1822, and Lawrence wrote: "one can see his house across the bay" (2L 86). Lawrence mentioned Shelley again when they had moved a couple of miles further away, to Fiascherino, "an hours walk from ... Shelley's place" (2L 84), which suggests that they may indeed have gone there. And this is Lawrence on 14 October 1913:

The full moon shines on the sea, which moves about all glittering among black rocks. I go down and bathe and enjoy myself. You never saw such clear, buoyant water. Also I don't swim more than a dozen yards, so am always trying to follow the starry Shelley, and set amid the waves. (2L 85)

That phrase "the starry Shelley" tells you something about how Lawrence saw Shelley; as a brilliant star, but perhaps also as "starry" in the modern, Hollywood sense (first used in 1907). And, of course, Shelley had drowned just down the coast from Fiascherino, not having found the water at all buoyant, and – like the stars in the sky – "set amid the waves". Well, unlike Shelley – who incidentally could not swim at all – Lawrence did not drown in Fiascherino, for all the danger he felt of following the super-starry Shelley.

It is clear, however, that Lawrence was taking an interest in Shelley. Writing to Marsh in November 1913 – Marsh seems to have recommended him a course of Milton – Lawrence commented: "About metres, I shall have to pray for grace from god. But (scissors?) I think Shelley a million thousand times more beautiful than Milton" (2L 120).²³ And a month later, writing to Henry Savage, he embarked on a definition of the "purely lyric poet" – like Shelley – who:

gives himself ... to his mood, utterly and abandonedly ... till he spontaneously combusts into verse.²⁴ He has nothing that goes on, no passion, only a few intense moods, separate like odd stars, and when each has burned away, he must die. It is no accident that Shelley got drowned – he was always trying to drown himself – it was his last mood. (2L 115)

The "odd stars" make an interesting link with the "starry Shelley". The remarks are also fascinating for Lawrence's understanding of how frequently Shelley drowned himself in the language of his poetry, and of how desperate he was growing

during 1822, the year of his death. It is also worth recording the influence of Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' on Lawrence's poems 'Song of a Man who has Come Through', 'Street Lamps' and 'Craving for Spring'.²⁵

Lawrence's fascination with Shelley is still clearer in his *Study of Thomas Hardy*, written just a year later, in the autumn of 1914, in which he works out at great length systems of opposition between the "male" and the "female" (which have nothing to do with human gender: as he confesses, "the division into male and female is arbitrary, for the purpose of thought", *STH* 60). He is fascinated by conflict and necessary opposition and at times he names his oppositions Male and Female, at times the Will to Motion and the Will to Stasis, at times Spirit and Flesh, at times Law and Love.

And Lawrence makes Shelley the supreme exponent of one side of his division: the Law, the Male, the Spirit, the Will to Motion: "The pure male is himself almost an abstraction, almost bodiless, like Shelley ... I can think of no being in the world so transcendently male as Shelley. He is phenomenal" (*STH* 71). This does not mean that Shelley went around seducing women like some Über-Don-Juan. Just the opposite. For Lawrence, Shelley is entirely committed to the bodiless and the spirit, and utterly opposed to the flesh, the body. As Lawrence puts it, "The rest of us have bodies which contain the male and the female. If we were so singled out as Shelley, we should not belong to life, as he did not belong to life" (*STH* 71). That is quite a challenge to anyone's understanding of Shelley: that he did not belong to life. But Lawrence had been developing the insight since 1913, when – writing to Savage – he had tried out the idea that although poets like Shelley had "terrific vital power", "They've all ... got about them, the feeling that their own flesh is unclean – corrupt". And, says Lawrence, "I cant understand it myself, not a bit" (2*L* 101). In 1914, he listed those whom he thinks quintessentially "male" writers and artists who deny the body: "In the degree of pure maleness below Shelley are Plato and Raphael and Wordsworth, then Goethe and Milton and

Dante” (*STH* 71). To them, Lawrence’s response is that “So long as mankind exists it must exist in the body, and so long must each body pertain both to the male and the female”. So, says Lawrence, “In the ordinary sense, Shelley never lived. He transcended life”. And, Lawrence protests, “Why should he [Shelley] insist on the bodylessness of beauty, when we cannot know of any save embodied beauty”.

IV

What is Lawrence talking about? How can Shelley be seen like this? All that Lawrence offers us at this stage of his *Study of Thomas Hardy* are the two short lines of Shelley starting his poem ‘To a Sky-Lark’: “Hail to thee, blithe spirit, / bird thou never wert”. That is all that Lawrence quotes to under-prop his assertions about Shelley’s “bodylessness”. He asks: “Who would wish that the skylark were not a bird, but a spirit?” (*STH* 71). Again it becomes clear that here Lawrence is not interested in understanding Shelley as poet or thinker. Calling Shelley “male”, and using that quotation to help him do it, is like using “male” and “female” as convenient but arbitrary symbols – “for the purpose of thought”. Lawrence’s “Shelley”, too, is an abstraction for the purpose of thought. It is not a comment on Shelley as a bad writer.

To confirm this, just twenty pages later in the *Hardy* essay comes another discussion of Shelley, in which Lawrence quotes not just the first two lines of the ‘Sky-lark’ poem but the rest of the stanza: and this time he reaches exactly the opposite conclusion. He now presents the poem as what he calls a “wonderful” example of “conflict contained within a reconciliation”:

“Hail to thee, blithe spirit,
Bird thou never wert
That from heaven, or near it,
Pourest forth thy heart
In profusest strains of unpremeditated lay.” (*STH* 90)²⁶

And Lawrence gives us a paragraph of critical analysis:

Shelley wishes to say, the skylark is a pure, untrammelled spirit, a pure motion. But the very "Bird thou never wert", admits that the skylark *is* in very fact a bird, a concrete, momentary thing. If the line ran, "Bird thou never art", that would spoil it all. Shelley wishes to say, the song is poured out of heaven: but "or near it", he admits. There is the perfect relation between heaven and earth. And the last line is the tumbling sound of a lark's singing, the real Two-in-one. (*STH* 91)

In turning Shelley's rhyming "unpremeditated art" into the non-rhyming "unpremeditated lay", Lawrence's memory had not only been undermined by the lines in Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* ("No longer, courted and caressed, / High placed in hall, a welcome guest, / He poured, to lord and lady gay, / The unpremeditated lay").²⁷ He can, he says, hear the birdsong and he reckons that "lay" is more like a skylark's than "art".

Lawrence is observing in the stanza's very insidencies the conflicts and contradictions it is attempting to disguise. He thinks the poetry reconciles the conflicts: it balances the "relation between heaven and earth", even if "Shelley" himself is violently one-sided. Lawrence is, as ever, showing how one should never trust the writer, only the writing.

He went on referring to Shelley over the next couple of years.²⁸ For Christmas 1915 Ottoline Morrell sent him a book of Shelley's 1820 poetry, containing the drama *Prometheus Unbound* (2L 488) and Lawrence clearly immersed himself in it:²⁹ he quoted the drama twice in his essay 'Education of the People' in 1920 and again elsewhere.³⁰ In July 1916, describing foxgloves in Cornwall, he noted in passing: "I believe they are Shelley's 'That tall flower that wets its mother's face'" (2L 624). That is a direct quotation from another little-known poem, 'The Question', which was not in the selection Ottoline Morrell had sent him. And also in July he asked a London friend planning to visit, "Have you got that little book of

Trelawneys, on Byron and Shelley? Do bring it, if you have" (2L 624). Around the same time, too, he gave Birkin that phrase of Shelley's, "meet and mingle", and showed the Pussum stabbing Julius Halliday in the hand with a knife – Thomas Love Peacock remembered Shelley recalling those who had tormented him at Eton, and describing how he had, once, been "provoked into striking a penknife into the hand of one of his young tyrants".³¹

And when Barbara Low sent Lawrence a copy of poems by Swinburne for his birthday in September 1916, his reaction suggested how his old loyalty to Swinburne had by now moved on: "I put him with Shelley as our greatest poet". And it is Shelley I am sure who provokes his comment: "There was more powerful rushing flame of life in him than in all the heroes rolled together" (2L 653–4).³²

Thus Lawrence demonstrates something we might think of as a special interest in Shelley; and so it is that we can, as Mark Kinkead-Weekes suggested, start to understand the terrible row between Lawrence and Frieda in Cornwall in 1916 which was recounted at length in a letter written by Katherine Mansfield (she and Murry then living in the cottage next to the Lawrences). I should stress that Mansfield is, as ever, as much interested in creating a marvellous piece of writing as she is in being biographically accurate. But something like this certainly occurred.

Let me tell you what happened on Friday. I went across to them for tea. Frieda said Shelley's Ode to a Skylark was false. Lawrence said: "You are showing off; you don't know anything about it." Then she began "Now I have had enough. Out of my house – you little God Almighty you. I've had enough of you. Are you going to keep your mouth shut or aren't you." Said Lawrence: "I'll give you a dab on the cheek to quiet you, you dirty hussy". Etc. Etc. So I left the house.³³

But that was the start of one the worst quarrels the Lawrences seem ever to have had; it went on for hours, and ended up with Lawrence

thumping Frieda; you can read the whole episode in Mansfield's letters or in Kinkead-Weekes' biography.

So what exactly were Lawrence and Frieda quarrelling about? Kinkead-Weekes argued that Shelley's 'Sky-lark' poem, for Lawrence, "represented ... the extreme of mental and spiritual consciousness as opposed to the life of the body and blood",³⁴ and for Lawrence to hear such sentiments repeated by Frieda (with implicit in them the accusation that Lawrence was betraying himself to intellectuals like Murry and Morrell) made him intensely uneasy. I am not so sure. For Lawrence the poem was one which also created "the perfect relation between heaven and earth": it was a balanced poem even if the artist Shelley was superlatively imbalanced. And to hear Frieda being so stupid about it drove him wild: as I am sure she intended (this is a point Kinkead-Weekes makes very well). She was deliberately mounting an attack on something she knew Lawrence valued intensely. She wanted a row. She certainly got one.

Lawrence had never said that Shelley or the poem was false; not only was his admiration for Shelley intense, he knew that his *own* tendency was towards exactly the kind of abstraction and extremity that he saw in Shelley. That was why Lawrence analysed that whole stanza of 'To a Sky-Lark' so keenly. He could argue that, when he was writing as a great artist, Shelley also wrote poetry demonstrating a balance between the two aspirations: towards the ideal *and* towards the actual, towards the spirit *and* towards the body. Lawrence wanted exactly the same for his own writing.

When three years later he attempted to distinguish between his excitement with Shelley and his distrust of Keats, he employed Shelley's skylark and Keats's nightingale:

It seems when we hear a skylark singing as if sound were running forward into the future, running so fast and utterly without consideration, straight on into futurity. And when we hear a nightingale, we hear the pause and the rich, piercing

rhythm of recollection, the perfected past ... The nightingale's triumph is a paean, but a death-paean. (*Poems I* 645)

And three times more in that Preface to *New Poems* he goes back to Shelley, first referring to "measured gem-like lyrics of Shelley and Keats", then insisting that "Whitman truly looked before and after. But he did not sigh for what is not" (Shelley had written in 'To a Sky-Lark' how "We look before and after / And pine for what is not").³⁵ And then again at the end of the piece, again stressing the sky-lark, Lawrence insists that:

The bird is on the wing in the winds, flexible to every breath, a living spark in the storm ... Whence such a bird came: whither it goes: from what solid earth it rose up, and upon what solid earth it will close its wings and settle, this is not the question. That is a question of before and after. Now, *now*, the bird is on the wing in the winds. (*Poems I* 648–9)

E. M. Forster, meeting Lawrence in 1915, thought that "Shelley must have been a little like that",³⁶ while Lawrence's fascination with Shelley as some kind of kindred writer would have been among the reasons why in 1920 he used Shelley as an example of the supreme poet.³⁷ Five years later, he was still listing Shelley – along with Wordsworth – among the five writers who, for him, had "established a new connection between mankind and the universe, and the result was a vast release of energy" (*RDP* 370). And he names them: Voltaire, Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron, Rousseau; the writers who, for Lawrence, created the revolutionary Enlightenment.

V

A final link between Lawrence and Shelley is slight but I think revealing: and it also involves Frieda, though in a very different way. Shelley and Lawrence were both men and writers capable of extraordinary concentration, and both were fundamentally serious,

writing (in Lawrence's words) because they wanted "folk – English folk – to alter, and have more sense" (*IL* 544); but they also both loved games and play. I think of all those accounts of Lawrence's mimicry and love of charades and dressing up and performing, even in the 1920s, when he was feeling grimmer and grimmer about things; and I think of Shelley not just participating in the telling of ghost stories with Byron and Mary and Claire Clairmont in Geneva, but happily playing ducks and drakes in Oxford and on the Serpentine.

And I doubt if you could name a third well-known serious English writer who knew how to make excellent paper boats. It is natural for writers, of course, to have paper about their person; both Shelley in 1812 and Lawrence a hundred years later, in 1912, not only carried notebooks but also letters and envelopes in their pockets. Shelley had, of course, a life-long fascination with sailing, and – long before he bought and had modified his own boat, in Italy in 1822 (with, of course, fatal consequences) – he made numerous sketches in his notebooks of boats and their rigging. As a young man all he could do was sail paper boats on ponds and lakes. Thomas Medwin describes him at Highgate ponds when he was nineteen or twenty,

delighted with floating down the wind, paper boats, in the constructing of which, habit had given him a wonderful skill ... when one escaped the dangers of the winds and waves, and reached in safety the opposite shore, he would run round to hail the safe termination of its voyage.³⁸

But that reminiscence of Shelley takes me back to an episode from Frieda Lawrence's memoir of Lawrence, "*Not I, But the Wind...*". She and Lawrence, back in the spring of 1912, had gone out into the country together with Frieda's two small daughters: Lawrence had fallen in love with Frieda but she was still married to Weekley, and not at all sure she wanted Lawrence. But, she says, "We came to a small brook, a little stone bridge crossed it.

Lawrence made the children some paper boats ... Crouched by the brook, playing there with the children, Lawrence forgot about me completely".³⁹ A "man in his wholeness wholly attending", as Lawrence's poem 'Thought' puts it (*Poems I* 581).

And it was that episode which came back to Frieda when Lawrence was dying in the Ad Astra sanatorium in Vence in February 1930. She found herself thinking, she recalled, "of the occasion long ago ... when a tenderness for him rose in me that I had not known before": she was recalling that old episode when he had made the paper boats.⁴⁰ In 1912 he was an occasional smoker, of course, so had matches in his pockets: and Frieda still remembered, in Vence in 1930, how he equipped his boats with burning matches before they set sail. But he was, as ever, a provoking playmate, telling the girls: "this is the Spanish Armada and you don't know what that was". "Yes we do," the older girl said promptly. And, Frieda goes on, "I can see him now, crouching down, so intent on the game so young and quick".⁴¹

For Frieda, that had been the start of her life with Lawrence and she recalled it at the very end of their time together, when he was dying. Typical of both Lawrence and Shelley to have found such fun and happiness in such simple things: Shelley and Lawrence, both dead so young, are to me perfect examples of what T. S. Eliot would later describe as "a lifetime burning in every moment".⁴² I love the thought of Lawrence's little Armada of paper boats going flaming down the brook, while Frieda's feelings, as she watches him, also catch fire: "There was more powerful rushing flame of life in him than in all the heroes rolled together" (2*L* 653-4).

¹ This paper was given as a talk to the D. H. Lawrence Society in March 2014; I have kept some of the informality of the delivery text, but there is supplementary scholarly material in the notes.

² Amy Lowell owned not only the rough first draft of Keats's 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and the manuscripts of 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' and 'To Autumn', but the letter from Shelley (hereafter PBS) inviting Keats to visit him in Italy and the manuscript of PBS's 'A

Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote' (all now in the Houghton Library, Harvard University).

³ Clement Carlyon, *Early Years and Late Reflections*, 4 vols (London: Whittaker & Co., 1836–58), vol. 1, 90.

⁴ See John Worthen, *The Gang: Coleridge, the Wordsworths and the Hutchinsons in 1802* (London: Yale UP, 2001).

⁵ For example, William Knight, in his 1897 edition of Dorothy Wordsworth's journal, included in the entry for 16 March 1798 "I wrote to —"; see Pamela Woof, ed., *Grasmere and Alfoxden Journal* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 149. It is hard to imagine any other name needing to be suppressed in 1897 (the page has since been destroyed).

⁶ Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 260, 249–50.

⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, eds James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (London and Princeton: Bollingen Edition, 1983), vol. 1, 193–7; Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge*, 258.

⁸ Ernest de Selincourt, ed., *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2nd ed., rev. Chester L. Shaver, vol. I: *The Early Years, 1785–1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 119.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁰ If the authorities had searched the papers of William Wordsworth (hereafter WW) and had managed to get hold of his 1793 'Letter' – explicitly by 'A Republican' and addressed to the Bishop of Llandaff, unpublished because it would have been far too dangerous for both author and publisher – then they would have found solid grounds for arguing that (in the legal sense) WW, so staunchly republican, had "imagined the king's death", in the sense of intending or designing his death. If the person charged with the offence were convicted, they faced the death penalty, though those convicted were generally imprisoned or transported, as WW knew: "the doctrines ... now enforced by banishment, imprisonment, &c, &c", *ibid.*, 119. For many, transportation was anyway the equivalent of a death sentence, the voyage to Australia and conditions on arrival meaning that many did not survive.

¹¹ Characteristically witty and direct, see for example no. 26: "Those who believe that Heaven is, what earth has been, a monopoly in the hands of a favored few, would do well to reconsider their opinion: if they find that it came from their priest or their grandmother, they could not do better than

reject it”, in E. B. Murray, ed., *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), vol. I, 59.

¹² Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, eds, *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1999), vol. 1, 124, 125.

¹³ Compare with PBS’s ‘Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things’, a pamphlet now in private hands: <http://shelleysghost.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/a-poetical-essay-on-the-existing-state-of-things>.

¹⁴ See Cecil Gray’s probably not altogether reliable account: “he more than once expressed to me – and to others, no doubt – his intention of initiating a disruptive, pacifist and nihilist campaign in the industrial North, with a view to bringing about a speedy end to the War”, in Edward Nehls, *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1957), vol. I, 430.

¹⁵ See for example David Ellis, *D. H. Lawrence: Dying Game 1922–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 426–7, 467–8.

¹⁶ Lawrence almost certainly, however, would not have known Wordsworth’s link with his own area. Wordsworth, his wife Mary and his sister Dorothy stayed at the farmhouse belonging to Coleorton Hall, near Ashby de la Zouche for five months in the winter 1806–7, some of the time with Coleridge as well; with the owner’s permission Wordsworth also took it on himself to help improve the gardens at the Hall (I am grateful to Brenda Sumner for getting me permission to visit the Hall and gardens). At the end of February 1807, Wordsworth travelled to Nottingham to buy plants, and afterwards described what he had seen there: “an interesting town and neighbourhood ... a Castle (but unfortunately the old one is demolished and a new modern edifice, with Corinthian pillars built upon its site) perched upon a Rock, a lofty bare rock, with the town sloping down from it on the same ridge, and below a vast extent of fertile meadow at this time ‘green as an emerald’”: Ernest Selincourt, ed., *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2nd ed., rev. Mary Moorman, vol. II: *The Middle Years*, Part I, 1806–1811 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 139–40.

¹⁷ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems*, 1797–1800, eds James A. Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992), 312.

¹⁸ In 1924, he had again been happy to be utterly unfair, and make a joke out of the Wordsworthian child of nature who can (of course) never exist:

"If there be an occasional violet by a mossy stone, in the human sense, a Wordsworthian Lucy, it is because her vitality is rather low" (D. H. Lawrence, 'On Human Destiny', *RDP* 204). Feed her a roast-beef sandwich and she will vanish: that is Lawrence's solution. See too his punning comment to John Middleton Murry in October 1924, shortly after Murry had married Violet le Maistre: "Dear Jack, We had your letter. I am glad you had a good time on the Dorset Coast, with Violet. But don't you become the 'mossy stone' – unless, of course, you want to" (5L 142). Lawrence is thinking of WW's "A Violet by a mossy Stone / Half-hidden from the Eye!" in 'She dwelt among th'untrodden ways' (Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems*, 163).

¹⁹ Jack Donovan, Cian Duffy, Kelvin Everest and Michael Rossington, eds, with Laura Barlow, *The Poems of Shelley* (London: Longmans, 2011), vol. III, 226.

²⁰ In which 'Daughter' should be 'Spirit': *ibid.*, 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, vol. IV (2013), 80.

²² According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), a "frippet" is "A frivolous or showy young woman", Lawrence being the first recorded user of the word.

²³ "Scissors" had been, from the 1840s, "An exclamation of disgust or impatience" (*OED* 4.4).

²⁴ Perhaps a version of PBS's "the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness" (in 'A Defence of Poetry', paragraph 39).

²⁵ See Donovan et al., eds, *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. II, 967, 969.

²⁶ Again, Lawrence quotes from memory: his "Pourest forth thy heart" should read "Pourest thy full heart", for "profusest" read "profuse", for "lay" read "art" (see Donovan et al., eds, *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. III, 470).

²⁷ Walter Scott, 'Introduction', *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (London: John Sharpe, 1805), 12.

²⁸ In the summer of 1915, for example, having been reading H. N. Brailsford's book *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913), Lawrence has nothing but praise for Shelley as someone who "believed in the principle of Evil, coeval with the Principle of Good. That is right" (2L 315). Brailsford had noted: "What we do trace in his poetry is a tendency, half conscious, uttering itself only in figures

and parables, to read the riddle of the universe as a struggle between two hostile principles" (ibid., 225).

²⁹ The volume contained *Prometheus Unbound*, 'The Sensitive Plant', 'A Vision of the Sea', 'Ode to Heaven', 'An Exhortation', 'Ode to the West Wind', 'An Ode, [Written, October, 1819, before the Spaniards had recovered their Liberty]', 'The Cloud', 'To a Skylark', 'Ode to Liberty'.

³⁰ See RDP 108, 111. Corresponding with Trigant Burrow in 1925, Lawrence effortlessly slipped in a reference to *Prometheus Unbound*, which he had probably not then looked at for nine or ten years: "*Man is the measure of the universe*" (5L 262), recalling Shelley's "He gave man speech, and speech created thought / Which is the measure of the universe" (*The Poems of Shelley*, vol. II, 561). James T. Boulton suggests that the remark may be a conflation of PBS and Protagoras's "Man is the measure of all things" from Plato's *Theaetetus* (5L 262).

³¹ Thomas Love Peacock, 'Memoirs of Shelley' in *The Life of Shelley*, ed. Humbert Wolfe, 2 vols (London: J. M. Dent, 1933), vol. II, 313.

³² It was probably in September 1916, too, that yet another couple of passing references to the 'Sky-Lark' poem appeared in Lawrence's poem 'Manifesto' (*Poems II*, 973, 976).

³³ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile 1912–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 319.

³⁴ Ibid., 322.

³⁵ Donovan et al., eds, *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. III, 476.

³⁶ E. M. Forster, 'D. H. Lawrence', *The Listener*, 3 (30 April 1930), 753–4; Forster had given his talk on the BBC National Programme, 16 April 1930, 7.25 p.m.

³⁷ 'Education of the People', RDP 109. It was, however, perhaps significant that Chapters VII and IX of *Study of Thomas Hardy* (containing his comments on PBS) were first published in 1936, in the volume *Phoenix*, and exactly coincided with F. R. Leavis's famous attack on PBS, when he argued that PBS's poetry was profoundly damaged by what Leavis called "his weak grasp upon the actual" (*Revaluation*, 1936, 206). Unlike Leavis, however, who thought that PBS was in consequence mostly a rather bad poet, Lawrence went on thinking that he was a great writer.

³⁸ Thomas Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847), vol. 1, 152. There is a tale about PBS – sadly almost certainly apocryphal – finding an excellent pond and also

discovering that, for once, he had not a single piece of rough paper about him – all he had in his pocket was a fifty pound note. So he hesitated and hesitated, but in the end could not resist, and folded it with more than usual care, and set it gingerly on the water ... and then ran round and waited a very long time for it to make landfall, on the other side. It came ashore, and he got his money back. A shame that the story probably is not true.

³⁹ Frieda Lawrence, *"Not I, But the Wind..."* (Santa Fe: Rydal Press, 1934), 23.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23, 307.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 307–8.

⁴² T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker', *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1944), 22.