

REVIEW ESSAY

SELECTED POEMS, COMPLETE WITH WARTS

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D. H. Lawrence, *Poems Selected by Tom Paulin*.

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Earlier in 2008, I searched through four bookshops, in the centre of Cambridge, for the new *Selected Stories*, the 2007 Penguin volume edited by Sue Wilson with an introduction by Louise Welsh. One of the shops had not a single Lawrence title. Eventually, I asked the most academic of the four, the one opposite Trinity College, to order in a copy. It was a reality check about how low Lawrence's stocks have sunk in a university which had, probably more than any other, fostered his critical reception in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet the appearance in the past two years of two new selections of his verse might signal that Lawrence's poetry has not suffered the same eclipse as his fiction, perhaps that the dark sun of his influence is still active among certain poets and critics. Tom Paulin and James Fenton have had careers in both capacities, a combination that augurs well for their selections. Fenton's is the more substantial book and replaces Keith Sagar's Penguin, not an easy act to follow. Because of the series in which it appears, Paulin's is the slighter and professedly more idiosyncratic. In the past Faber has brought out a first edition of a volume (or rather,

pamphlet) of Lawrence's verse, *Nettles* (1930), but this may be a less auspicious precedent, given that Paulin selects only one poem from *Nettles*, and Fenton none.

A selection provides readers who have found poems in anthologies, periodicals or lecture handouts with a convenient means of reading more widely in a poet's work. Sometimes, as was the case with Keith Sagar's selection, it can also make a substantial contribution to the reception and critical understanding of the poet, but to ask for such caviar of selections in general is to expect too much. It is reasonable to expect an introduction that is accurate and in touch with current scholarship without necessarily contributing to it. If there have been earlier selections, the new choice should justify itself by pointing in a new direction, by indicating where the poet's reception is headed; but the selector should nevertheless refrain from omitting well established poems in order to push this new barrow. A reviewer of a selection is a test reader and also, more or less explicitly, a rival selector. In this second role a reviewer, too, should exercise restraint. When tastes coincide, the reviewer is entitled to praise the exquisite taste of a selector, but when they do not, should be chary of chastising the selector for the few stray dogs of poems that have been permitted to wander in, the more so if the introduction has set out a rationale for their admission. Tastes differ, and a future generation can be left to decide whether the selection represents their tastes.

Fenton and Paulin include the classics, 'Piano' and 'Snake', 'Bavarian Gentians' and 'The Ship of Death'. Both show exquisite taste in choosing Lawrence's most perfectly Imagist *and* Georgian poem, 'Sorrow', from *Amores*, and deplorable taste in not including 'Shadows', from *Last Poems*. What Fenton and Paulin do with *Last Poems* warrants some scrutiny and a bibliographical digression. *Last Poems* derives from two poetry notebooks (Roberts E192a and E192b),¹ the bulk of the poems from which were left unpublished at Lawrence's death. When preparing the 1932 Florence edition of *Last Poems*, Richard Aldington divided the volume into two notebook-based sections, 'Last Poems' (E192a) and 'More Pansies'

(E192b, minus some “pansies” at the head of the notebook, and minus the “nettles” Lawrence had himself extracted for the Faber *Nettles*). The English and American editions (1933) followed the Florence *Last Poems* in this division into sections. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts switched the order of the sections in the Heinemann *Complete Poems*, ‘More Pansies’ preceding ‘Last Poems’; then Keith Sagar, in a ground-breaking article, proved that they *should* be ordered in this sequence.² Fenton and Paulin, for whom Aldington remains the authority on Lawrence’s later poetry, also reverse the order of the sections, but because they follow De Sola Pinto and Roberts, not Sagar. Unquestioningly to accept the authority of either Aldington’s *Last Poems* or De Sola Pinto and Roberts’s *Complete Poems* can lead a selector into difficulties, as will be seen. It is, however, in the ratio of the poems selected from each notebook, rather than in the order in which ‘More Pansies’ and ‘Last Poems’ are sequenced, that a swerve in taste is plotted out in these selections.

The ratio of poems available in the two notebooks is two-hundred-and-two to sixty-seven – three ‘More Pansies’ to one ‘Last Poem’. The twentieth-century consensus was that three ‘More Pansies’ were worth somewhat less than one ‘Last Poem’. Sagar chose twenty-two ‘More Pansies’ to twenty-six ‘Last Poems’. Mara Kalnins, in her excellent Everyman selection, published sixty-five ‘More Pansies’ to forty-two ‘Last Poems’, but in doing so printed almost two-thirds of ‘Last Poems’. By contrast, Fenton selects nine ‘More Pansies’ to seven ‘Last Poems’; Paulin chooses seven to three, a mere ten poems in all from *Last Poems*. The shift in taste projected by both the new selections is away from those ‘Last Poems’ with symbolism based on astrology and alchemy, the Mediterranean Bronze Age and Socratic or pre-Socratic philosophy.

What the contents table in Paulin’s selection shows of ‘Last Poems’ might further confuse the uninitiated reader: ‘Eagle in New Mexico’ appears directly after ‘The Ship of Death’. The version of ‘Eagle in New Mexico’ which Paulin has chosen was unpublished in Lawrence’s lifetime, but was included by De Sola Pinto and

Roberts in the 'Uncollected Poems' section of their *Complete Poems*. Paulin's selection has no notes and, since nothing in his introduction or preliminaries mentions anything to the contrary, readers with no access to other editions are left to presume that this uncollected draft of a *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* poem was composed after 'The Ship of Death', indeed was among the last of Lawrence's 'Last Poems'. Paulin should have included the collected version of 'Eagle in New Mexico' in his choice from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* and removed the uncollected version to an appendix.

Fenton's selection is fifty pages longer than Paulin's, and he uses the additional pages to good effect by printing the dialect ballads from *Love Poems and Others* and the whole of *Tortoises*. Fenton's dogs of poems have mostly strayed out of *Amores*, 'At the Window' and 'Malade', but also 'Letter from Town: The Almond-Tree' and 'Piccadilly Circus at Night: Street-Walkers'. The justification for these dubious choices is that Fenton is illustrating the variety of that early verse which Lawrence collected in *Rhyming Poems*, the first volume of his *Collected Poems*. Among Paulin's dogs are 'Champions' and 'Guelder Roses', "The first poems I ever wrote", Lawrence recalled in the 'Note' to *Collected Poems*. He then went on to dismiss them as verse "Any young lady might have written ... and been pleased with"; there was no murmur in them of his "real demon" that "would now and then get hold of me and shake more real poems out of me, making me uneasy".³ It might be surmised that Paulin included 'Champions' and 'Guelder Roses' to illustrate what Lawrence meant by this distinction between poems with the demon in them and poems where "the young man interfered with his demon", but the 'Note', the distinction and the poems are not mentioned by Paulin in his introduction. Including these two juvenilia in the Faber volume, when the 'Note' is not included with the other prose chosen, is unexplained and inexplicable. Whereas Fenton finds room in the Penguin volume for three essays – 'Poetry of the Present' (more correctly referred to as the 'Preface to *New Poems*'), the final version of the 'Whitman'

essay, and what he retitles the ‘Foreword’ (rather than the ‘Note’) to *Collected Poems* – the one essay or preface Paulin *does* publish is what he titles the ‘Introduction to *New Poems* (1918)’. The ‘Preface’ Lawrence wrote for *New Poems* appeared, not in the English edition of 1918, but in the American edition of 1920. The ‘Preface’ was dated “Pangbourne, 1919”, a dating which appears both in *New Poems*, the *Complete Poems* and the Penguin *Selected Poems*. In the *Complete Poems*, however, De Sola Pinto and Roberts titled the preface ‘Poetry of the Present’ and erroneously subtitled it ‘Introduction to the American Edition of *New Poems* [1918]’. The dating error does not originate with Paulin, but he does originate errors of his own in the Faber selection.

Among the many quotations in Paulin’s introduction, one has a disfiguring misprint: “the hawk of Horus” in ‘Autumn at Taos’ metamorphoses into an avatar unknown to ancient Egypt, “the horse of Horus” (x). There are also two puzzling references to Lawrence’s *Collected Poems*, the second of which devalues “the last four hundred pages of the *Collected Poems*” as largely failures (xv). Secker’s 1928 edition of *Collected Poems* was printed in two volumes with discrete pagination. The second volume, *Unrhyming Poems*, was made up of *Look! We Have Come Through!* and *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, and ran to little more than three hundred pages. In Secker’s single-volume 1932 edition, “the last four hundred pages” would include half of *Rhyming Poems* and the whole of *Unrhyming Poems*. Rather than disparaging three-quarters of Lawrence’s verse output, up to 1928, Paulin is inadvertently mistitling De Sola Pinto and Roberts’s *Complete Poems*, even though this seems to have been the only edition he has consulted in making his selection. The four hundred pages deemed by Paulin as not repaying close attention include ‘More Pansies’, ‘Last Poems’, ‘Uncollected Poems’, ‘Juvenilia’ (though Paulin does select the two earliest juvenilia) and ‘Variants and Early Drafts’, as well as the editorial and explanatory notes.

Paulin’s using the *Complete Poems* as his single source explains two of his odd choices, ‘Disagreeable Advice’ and ‘Restlessness’.

These poems were first published in *Amores* (1916). When, in 1927-8, Lawrence prepared his *Collected Poems*, he was indulgent towards his early verse, a lapse in critical judgement for which his reputation as a poet has long suffered. Out of the six volumes Lawrence was revising, he discarded only three poems, two of which were 'Disagreeable Advice' and 'Restlessness'. Does Paulin think more highly of the trio than Lawrence did? Of the first five lines of 'Disagreeable Advice' –

Always, sweetheart,
 Carry into your room the blossoming boughs of cherry,
 Almond and apple and pear diffuse with light, that very
 Soon strews itself on the floor; and keep the radiance of spring
 Fresh quivering ...

– Paulin writes: “With its short opening line – direct and spoken – and the enjambement of the third line this is more like free verse. Then we find a triumphant announcement in prose of the new, free style” in the “introduction to the 1918 American edition of his poems”, that is to say, in the 1920 American edition of *New Poems* (xiii). One wonders how many readers would find an intimation of the free verse of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* in these lines if they looked up the notes to the *Complete Poems*. In the notes De Sola Pinto and Roberts admit to altering the conclusion to which Lawrence brought his *Rhyming Poems*,⁴ a conclusion made up of ‘Dreams Old and Nascent: Nascent’, ‘On That Day’ and ‘Autumn Sunshine’. As if forming a new conclusion to *Rhyming Poems*, or a new transition to the *Unrhyming Poems*, De Sola Pinto and Roberts added, after ‘Autumn Sunshine’, the three poems which Lawrence had excluded from *Rhyming Poems*, ‘Song-Day in Autumn’, ‘Disagreeable Advice’ and ‘Restlessness’. No editor who has read Holly Laird’s *Self and Sequence: The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence* (1988) would venture to tamper in this fashion with Lawrence’s sequencing of his own volumes of verse. The editors of the *Complete Poems* (1964) clearly did not foresee what miscon-

ceptions, or what a concatenation of misconceptions, might result from their altering the authorial ordering of the *Collected Poems*. The Faber selection will further mislead those who base their deductions upon Paulin's ill-researched introduction and re-ordering of the poems.

In a better researched and more scholarly selection, Fenton seeks to restore sequences of Lawrence's work and to offer a sampling of the poetry published in the 1910s:

What a poet does with his work as he goes along, what he publishes, what he holds back or fails to publish, the way he shapes an individual collection – all this can contribute to our sense of his development. And so it is that most of the poems here are selected from the individual collections made during Lawrence's lifetime, and they are printed in the order in which they occur in these collections. (xiii)

As you read these sentences, dear reader, you might detect the reviewer's cheers echoing around his study. Fenton continues, alas, that "the *texts* of all the poems" in his selection "are as established by the *Complete Poems* ... (London: Heinemann, 1964, corr. 1971)" (xiii). De Sola Pinto and Roberts's *Complete Poems* first appeared in 1964 and was "reprinted with minor revisions" in 1967 and 1972. The editors did not claim to have critically edited Lawrence's poems or "established" a text, and, as has been seen, they could not be relied on to preserve authorial sequencing. Fenton falls foul of this second deficiency when he includes 'Meeting among the Mountains' in his choice from *Look! We Have Come Through!* The poem was expurgated from the 1917 Chatto and Windus edition at the publisher's insistence, as was 'Song of a Man Who Is Loved'. In his letters Lawrence reiterated more than once a preference for having the two poems reinserted in any future publication of the sequence, but no copy of the version he wished to include in the 1917 *Look! We Have Come Through!* is extant. In 1927-8, when Lawrence restored 'Song of a Man Who Is Loved' to

the *Look!* section of *Collected Poems*, he evidently revised the 'Song' from the *Look! We Have Come Through!* notebook, but chose (so a pattern of bibliographical evidence suggests) not to restore 'Meeting among the Mountains'.⁵ While Fenton might justify his choice of 'Meeting among the Mountains' by arguing that, when he includes the poem in *Look!*, he is adhering to Lawrence's 1917 preference, in textual fact he is ignoring authorial last intentions and in so doing is following the same procedure as De Sola Pinto and Roberts: he is inserting a questionable version of the poem at a questionable point in the autobiographical sequence. As with Paulin's choice of an uncollected text of 'Eagle in New Mexico', 'Meeting among the Mountains', fine poem that it is, should have been relegated to an appendix or quarantined with a note.

For the first time since *Love Poems and Others* (1913), Fenton publishes the four dialect ballads as a unit – a boon for any reader of Lawrence – yet what he publishes is, as stated in the introduction, not the texts of these ballads as they appeared in *Love Poems and Others* in 1913, but the texts Lawrence revised in 1927–8. The two ballads most revised were 'The Drained Cup' and 'Whether or Not', to the second of which Lawrence added an entirely new ending. In *Dying Game*, David Ellis remarked of the section added to 'Whether or Not', that it may have been "what Lawrence felt he *should* have written as a young man but it is not what he ever *could* have written, demon or not".⁶ By reversing Keith Sagar's procedure of reprinting Lawrence's early poems as published in the early volumes, Fenton forfeits any possibility of demonstrating how the poet of *Love Poems and Others* and *Amores* developed in the 1920s.

Fenton offers a more accurate and therefore more complicated account than does Paulin of Lawrence's development as a poet. Dipping into Mark Kinkead-Weekes's *Triumph to Exile* would have given him a clearer idea of how, when and where Lawrence began writing *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* – not with 'Tortoises', though that was among the early sequences, but with 'Fruits'.⁷ Fenton

makes some worthwhile points about Lawrence's poetry as a whole, that it adheres to an anti-modernist clarity of syntax and representation, and hence that it might offend modernist sensibilities – indeed, a whole range of sensibilities. Jarring the modernist sensibility of T. S. Eliot and his American backers damaged Lawrence's reception between the wars and shortly after, although Fenton observes that Auden and Michael Roberts, with his *Faber Book of Modern Verse*, helped sustain awareness of Lawrence's poetry. A full picture of Lawrence's early critical reception as a poet would need to include sketches of the British critical establishment, J. C. Squire and others, as well as, on the American and European margins, Conrad Aiken, Ezra Pound and Pound's backers. Yet what is most unsatisfying about Fenton's tracking of Lawrence's critical reputation is that the trail fades out by the early 1960s. After Fenton's 'Introduction', one turns to 'Further Reading', to find under 'Critical Studies' a list identical to that for the *Selected Stories*. It includes not a single critical monograph on Lawrence's poetry. Readers interested in scholarship or criticism of Lawrence's poems more recent than Keith Sagar's 1972 introduction to his Penguin selection will find nothing to direct them in Fenton's *Selected Poems*. By contrast, David Ellis, in the Wordsworth Editions *Complete Poems* offers an informative listing of monographs, articles and book chapters from 1970 to 2001,⁸ a list concluding with the lecture on Lawrence's poems that Fenton himself delivered, as Professor of Poetry at Oxford.⁹

The Cambridge University Press Edition of Lawrence's *Letters and Works* has been appearing since 1979. Roughly over the same period as the graph of Lawrence's critical reputation has been descending, the line of Lawrence scholarship has been ascending: it has been growing more detailed, more precise and more voluminous. While Lawrence's reputation languishes, scholarly understanding of his work speeds ahead regardless. And the line of Lawrence's consumption by a non-critical, non-scholarly audience? Readers of his poems, it may be, are not deserting him in such droves as readers of his longer fiction.

In editing the *Selected Stories*, Sue Wilson was able to turn to Paul Poplawski as a senior adviser, a Cambridge University Press editor and a Lawrence bibliographer. It appears that neither Fenton nor Penguin have felt the need for an adviser in preparing the *Selected Poems*, yet the scholarly anomalies and misjudgements in the selection might have been avoided, had a Lawrence scholar like Ellis, Kinkead-Weekes or John Worthen been consulted. Ellis has remarked of collections and selections of Lawrence: "The undoubted unevenness of Lawrence's work is a strong argument in favour of selections of his poetry, yet it is important that once in a while he should be seen as he is, warts an' all".¹⁰ Where Fenton's selection misleads in its presumption that Lawrence's earlier poems can be adequately represented by their later versions, Paulin's misleads in its introduction and selection and the ordering of the poems. As a consequence of these misjudgements and misunderstandings, the two selections have each turned out more warty than was necessary.

¹ Warren Roberts and Paul Poplawski, *A Bibliography of D. H. Lawrence*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 614-18.

² Keith Sagar, 'The Genesis of "Bavarian Gentians"', *DHLR*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1975), 47-53.

³ D. H. Lawrence, 'Note', in *Collected Poems* (London: Martin Secker, 1928), 5.

⁴ *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, Revised edn., ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (London: Heinemann, 1972), 1007.

⁵ Christopher Pollnitz, 'Watermarks in a Cigar Box: Recent Findings in D. H. Lawrence's Manuscript Verse', *DHLR*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2003), 17-19.

⁶ David Ellis, *D. H. Lawrence: Dying Game, 1922-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 385.

⁷ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1912-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 601-6.

⁸ 'Suggestions for Further Reading', *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. David Ellis (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), xix.

⁹ James Fenton, 'Men, Women and Beasts', in *The Strength of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 165-86.

¹⁰ 'Introduction', *Complete Poems*, ed. Ellis, xviii.