

There has been a short delay in the publication of this issue. This was because Oakland, our helpful and efficient printers for the last two issues, have decided to close the printing part of their business. Peartree Printers of Derby (who printed and bound the last two numbers from Oaklands' typesetting) have now taken over the whole job. Contributions for the 1992 issue are invited, to be received by 1 July 1992. The Journal will consider articles on any aspect of Lawrence's life and work and his relationship to his predecessors, contemporaries and successors.

Peter Preston

## Ways of Speaking: The Poetry of D.H. Lawrence R.P. Draper

Lawrence made various comments at various stages in his career on the nature of his own poetry. It is not my purpose here to review all these, but to focus on two which I think are particularly revealing. The first occurs in the oft-quoted letter to Edward Marsh of 18 August 1913: 'I have always tried to get an emotion out in its own course, without altering it. It needs the finest instinct imaginable, much finer than the skill of the craftsmen.'<sup>1</sup> The second comes from his Introduction to the American Edition of *New Poems* (published 1920, but dated from Pangbourne, 1919): '... free verse is, or should be, direct utterance from the instant, whole man. It is the soul and the mind and body surging at once, nothing left out. They speak all together. There is some confusion, some discord. But the confusion and the discord only belong to the reality as noise belongs to the plunge of water' (184)<sup>2</sup>.

The latter comment, it has to be admitted, is a statement about free verse in general and occurs as a subordinate part of a larger claim by Lawrence that his own poetry in *Look! We have Come Through!* is of a 'rare new' kind concerned with the 'immediate present' with its quality of 'the inexhaustible, forever unfolding, creative spark' as opposed to that which is 'fixed, set, static' (182). However, I single out the reference to 'the instant, whole man' because it seems to me to have implications which transcend the context in which it is embedded, and, together with the remark made to Edward Marsh, it seems to point towards an even more innovatory attempt to achieve a new kind of inclusiveness of expression. Poetry of the 'immediate present' is a justification for breaking with that tradition of metre and rhyme which seeks to transform the raw material of experience into the linguistic permanence of literary art; it offers instead something inchoate and transient, less finished, but correspondingly more true to the emergent nature of organic processes. Poetry of the whole man, however, goes still further: it implies both this faithfulness to immediacy, the open-ended quality of 'the instant', and a recognition of the contradictoriness inherent in human experience before it is shaped, constructed and transformed into art-speech. As Lawrence almost apologetically concedes, this involves 'some confusion, some discord', the resolution of which is traditionally seen as being the business of the artist, but which the new poetry will refrain from resolving. The analogy he offers as a form of reassurance is the inseparability of a waterfall and the sound of its falling waters; while the water falls the sound must go on, a soundless fall would be a dried-up one. Similarly, resolution of discord is incompatible with the wholeness of the whole man, and poetry of the whole man must therefore be poetry that foregoes traditional resolution.



I link this statement from the Introduction with the remark in the letter because I take it that 'getting an emotion out in its own course, without altering it' involves a comparable resistance to the harmonising and generalising power traditionally associated with art. Lawrence, it seems, is arguing for a paradoxically anti-art form of art. He also does this, of course, in his defence of the novel in so far, for example, as he claims that the novel is the medium most able to communicate the sense of 'man alive' ('Why the Novel Matters'). And I would agree that in Lawrence's hands the novel is effectively adapted to this purpose. Perhaps even more so it is a quality to be found in his travel writing, especially a book like *Sea and Sardinia*. It is in his poetry, however, that he comes nearest to moulding a form peculiarly suited to coping with this sort of experience – not harnessed to some overarching non-human or extra-human purpose, but experience which is elusively, changeably, sometimes waywardly, yet also positively and affirmatively, human.

I am not, of course, claiming that Lawrence achieves this in all of his poetry all of the time. On the contrary, it is a rare achievement found only in a handful of poems, or even intermittently in parts of poems. Nevertheless, it is, I believe, immanent in the body of his poetry as a whole, the constituent parts of which, though limited and fragmented in themselves, bear witness to diverse and often discordant moods essential to the multiplicity of the whole man.

One way of making an approach to this elusive entity is by examining what seems to go wrong when Lawrence slips into tonal inconsistency. Consider, for example, Jillian de Vries-Mason's comment on 'Middle of the World'. She praises this as one of Lawrence's late mythological poems in which he creates, quoting a phrase from 'Introduction to These Paintings', 'images of magic awareness which we call art'.<sup>3</sup> 'The poem, she says, 'is almost entirely perceptual [i.e. sensuously, and especially visually, fully realized], except for the second stanza which Lawrence would have done better to leave out, pedestrian ("the P & O. and the Orient Line ...") and polemic ("... and all the other stinkers") as it is.'<sup>4</sup> It is true that if Lawrence had had the benefit of this critic's advice (and had chosen to take heed of it) the magic spell of a primitive sophistication, glowingly admired and longed-for as a renewal, would not have been broken, as it is (though Lawrence does his best to re-create it afterwards) by the contemporary flatness of reference and lexis in the second stanza. If this flatness were left out, however, the effect would be to make 'this sea' less specific, and the 'I' of the poem would not be situated, as in the supposedly flawed text he is, so tellingly between the present and a past which is also a hope for the future. In the poem as Lawrence, wisely or unwisely, chose to write it two versions of the whole man co-exist: (a) the slim men of Cnossos, 'smiling the archaic smile', who have easy commerce with the gods, and (b)

the speaker, the 'I', who inhabits the pedestrian twentieth century time and place, but is also the imaginer of (a). Paradoxically, however, if such a comparison is possible, (b) is 'more whole' than (a), and the poem's way of speaking must somehow accommodate that greater wholeness. Furthermore, the seemingly trivial details associated with (a) represented, for example, by the 'kindling of little fires upon the shore', by the casualness with which Dionysos 'leans listening on the gate', and by the choice of the commonplace word 'chatting' for the manner in which the gods speak – suggest a kind of redeemed ordinariness which is properly meaningful for the speaker only in relation to its debased twentieth century context.

Perhaps Lawrence doesn't get it right here, but, if so, his failure is instructive. It remind us that the poems gathered together in Pinto and Roberts' *Complete Poems* are very much a mixed bag, ranging from the dramatic dialect pieces such as 'The Collier's Wife' and 'Whether Or Not' to the rhapsodic 'Bavarian Gentians'; from the touchingly awkward 'Last Words to Miriam' to the sexual wit of the tortoise sequence; from the breast-baring stridencies of 'Manifesto' to the sardonic mimicry of 'The Oxford Voice'; from the Georgian simplicities of 'Baby Running Barefoot' to the quick 'doggerel' (as Auden calls it) of 'Innocent England' and 'Nottingham's New University'. A bit like Larkin on Hardy, I feel compelled to say that I wouldn't give up any one of these poems (and I haven't, of course, made a selection of personal favourites). Each one is itself a way of speaking which gives vent to some necessary part of Lawrence's highly variegated mind, or to one of his constantly changing moods.

Some involve much more intense acts of concentration than others (or, to borrow Sandra Gilbert's phrase, 'acts of attention'); and we tend to value more highly the poems of which this can be said, including, for example, the poems from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* like 'Medlars and Sorb-Apples', 'Sicilian Cyclamens' and 'Almond Blossom' – poems which develop an exotic rhetoric of incremental repetition and heavily stressed compounds:

And the Gethsemane blood at the iron pores  
unfolds, unfolds,  
Pearls itself into tenderness of bud  
And in a great and sacred forthcoming steps forth,  
steps out in one stride  
A naked tree of blossom, like a bridegroom  
bathing in dew, divested of cover,  
Frail-naked, utterly uncovered  
To the green night-baying of the dog-star, Etna's



snow-edged wind  
And January's loud-seeming sun. (306)

In such lines the voice rises to rapturous enchantment drawn on by the syntactically loose accumulation of verb upon verb, phrasal epithet upon phrasal epithet, reinforced by overlapping repetition and assonance and internal rhyme, to a paradoxical climax of winter and sun, sound and sight, which is the culmination of a visual process turning itself into vision. It is a great and spell-binding achievement. But it is not Lawrence. Or if it is Lawrence, it is Lawrence lending himself for the moment to the 'fine wind' which 'is blowing the new direction of Time' (as in 'Song of a Man Who Has Come Through'); and, as in 'St Matthew', if he is willing to be 'lifted up, Saviour', he also reacts and wants to be put 'down again in time, Master' (321).

The opposite of the rapturous voice of 'Almond Blossom' is the prosaically banal, sometimes frankly jeering voice, irritable and disagreeable, that Lawrence adopts in *Pansies* for example, towards that rather too easy target the 'bourgeois'; or, in 'Elephant' towards 'that tired remnant of royalty', that anti-royal royal, the Prince of Wales, whose motto is 'I serve' instead of 'Serve me', and who, at the end of a ramblingly diffuse poem, is dismissed as 'Drudge to the public' (391). This contrast was something that Lawrence was well aware of. In a letter to Garnett of 22 April 1914 he admits: 'I have very often the vulgarity and disagreeableness of the common people'. 'But,' he claims, 'primarily I am a passionately religious man ... And my Cockneyism and commonness are only when the deep feeling doesn't find its way out, and a sort of jeer comes instead, and sentimentality, and purplism.'<sup>5</sup>

The extent of that self-deprecation may, however, have been exaggerated for Garnett's benefit. If we consider either Lawrence's prose (to which he is specifically referring in the letter) or his poetry in his subsequent career it cannot be said that he sought to eradicate the common element. What we find in the best of his verse is not an attempt to suppress the commonness in favour of 'the deep feeling', but rather an attempt to get the two into a more balanced relation with each other. One time-honoured way of doing this is by dialogue, which Lawrence, with a natural flair for drama, handled well from a very early stage not only in his plays, but also in his dialect poems. In poems like 'Snake', 'Peach' and 'Fish' he develops this skill further and turns it into a means for juxtaposing different tones of voice which instead of forwarding a dramatic action help to define a set of complex, interrelated attitudes and hold them in balance. The result is an original and highly satisfying form of expression which is poised on a delicate awareness of the contradictoriness

inherent in the whole man.

'Snake' is usually treated as a kind of self-rebuke: Lawrence's intuitive response to the snake is sympathetic, but the voice of his education tells him to drive it away, with the consequence that he misses his 'chance with one of the lords / of life' and has 'something to expiate: / A pettiness' (351). Evidently, however, the poem itself is a contradiction of its message; it would not be what it is, and in particular the voluptuously sinuous syntax expressing the poet's empathy with the snake would not exist as it so emphatically does if the chance had been so definitively missed. All this justly celebrated part of the poem is eloquent testimony to the extension of imaginative sympathy which the incident provokes; but the more causally prosaic language of, for example, 'I in pyjamas for the heat' and 'Someone was before me at my water-trough', (349) and that which represents the peremptory commands of 'my education' ('If you were a man / You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off') is an equally necessary part of the total experience that is being expressed. Nor is it simply that one is needed to set off the other; there is some degree of inter-penetration as well. Into the evocative lines dealing with the snake come phrases which have the plain casualness of the nominally antithetical language ('looked at me vaguely', 'Seeming to lick his lips'); and, correspondingly, the anaphoric, repetitive language can be used for the questioning of hostile judgements appropriate to the 'educated' attitude so that they are undermined and the voice is brought nearer to that of the snake-narrative:

Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?  
Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?  
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?  
I felt so honoured. (350)

'Peach' (279) is shorter and shifts more abruptly and disconcertingly than 'Snake'. It has a speaker and an unidentified addressee, who is presumably anti-peach in a somewhat similar way to the way in which the educated consciousness in the longer poem is anti-snake. But again the different voices are different reflections of the first-person speaker; and 'you' could be construed as another aspect of 'I'.

The opening question, 'Would you like to throw a stone at me?' suggests a dramatic, *in medias res* presentation of a quarrel. A stone is a serious missile, but it can also be a childish one, and when it's reduced to a peach-stone, especially when seen as a mere remainder ('Here, take all that's left of my peach') there's a rapid shift to bathos, with overtones of teasing.



Blood-red, deep' moves to the earlier state of the peach (picked up provocatively 8 lines later in the deflationary, consciously 'throw-away' remark, 'I am thinking, of course, of the peach before I ate it'). The three stressed syllables and the half-rhyme, peach/deep, have a sensuous, yet contemplative effect, and are followed immediately by a blend of the loosely colloquial and the semi-jocular/semi-serious in the allusively biblical 'Heaven knows how it came to pass'. Which, in turn, leads to the yet more self-consciously literary (Shakespearean) 'Somebody's pound of flesh rendered up'.

Wrinkled with secrets  
And hard with the intention to keep them

would seem, a bit disconcertingly, to be back to the stone again; but the subject of the next three lines ('Why, from silvery peach-bloom ... globule?') is certainly the uneaten peach, and its preceding blossom, evoked in Lawrence's best imagistic/onomatopoeic style. After the colloquial interjection already referred to this concentration on the fleshy fullness of the peach continues with anaphoric questions ('Why ... Why ...') which eventually seem mockingly overdone and at the same time almost provocatively sexual – only to sharpen suddenly into the final question, 'Why was not my peach round and finished like a billiard ball?'

The didactic in Lawrence is now given its head for a couple of lines, and the poem seems to slacken off from the intensity of its earlier, more complex poetic sensuousness. But the decline is quickly arrested by the offhand 'Though I've eaten it now'. The irritation of the interlocutor is both acknowledged, and parried, in the next pair of lines: 'But it wasn't round and finished like a billiard ball' is made slightly ponderous in its repetition as if deliberately provoking the irritated reaction divined in 'And because I say so, you would like to throw something at me.'

The final line returns to the beginning with a bit of pure bathos: 'Here, you can have my peach stone.' One voice is 'placed' by another, and poetic justice is done by providing an appropriately trivial missile which continues to be part of a whimsical tease.

The poem can't be paraphrased; and analysis inevitably falls short of its quicksilver shifting of tone. But perhaps enough has been said to indicate the interplay of voices that is going on. It is Lawrence adjusting himself to different aspects of himself; not nailing a thought, but impressionistically

sketching a process.

To conclude I would like also to attempt some analysis, however inadequate, of the even more elusive 'Fish'. Here, at least initially (and I think the first part is much the best part of the poem), Lawrence seems not to be fencing with himself or an interlocutor, but seeking to empathise with the otherness of the fish. His voice addresses the fish, but in a curious frustration of communication to which the fish's implicit response is a non-response. The alliterative onomatopoeia is again adroit, beautifully capturing the at-ease immersion in the waters which really puts the fish in its own element:

As the waters roll  
Roll you.  
The waters wash,  
You wash in oneness  
And never emerge. (335)

But 'never' is the cue for a slight change of voice –

Never know,  
Never grasp (335)

where emphasis is thrown on to the verbs to make them not only a statement, but also an implicit self-criticism of the inescapable human compulsion to 'emerge' from the immediacy of 'wave-thrilled' and move towards the conceptual level of mental knowing and grasping.

Onomatopoeia again follow – this time, however, not so easy-goingly detached, but rather lushly involved, to the point of overdoing things in the 'Peach' manner, and ultimately overreaching even that in the paradoxical wittiness of 'water wetly on fire', which leads to the preposterous stasis of 'Fixed water eyes'.

One thinks of T.S. Eliot's reaction from his own tour de force in 'East Coker', section II: 'That was a way of putting it – not very satisfactory: / A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion'. Not that Lawrence's is a worn-out style, nor does he comment so explicitly as Eliot. His reaction comes indirectly and laconically in a characteristic change of voice, 'Even snakes lie together'. This again leads to anaphoric negatives 'No fingers, no hands and feet, no lips; / No tender muzzles', and so on (335). The whole of animal/human sexuality is put aside with an ironic use of the repetitive rhetoric so often employed elsewhere in Lawrence's work to lure feeling down the dark, sensuous channels of blood



consciousness. Lawrence's reaction, more subtly than in 'Snake', expresses itself in negatives which are themselves aspects of a wonder-stimulating otherness, not mere dictates of the accursed voice of human education. He flips with startling immediacy from absence to imagistically comical presence: 'Curvetting bits of tin in the evening light'; and a 'silent passion' is consummated in the watery 'womb-element' which turns both animal heterosexuality and the Lawrentian obsession with mother-love into delightful self-parody, clinched by the witty 'What price his bread upon the waters?' (335)

How seriously does Lawrence commit himself to empathy with the instinctual drives of the fish?

Water-eager eyes,  
Mouth-gate open  
And strong spine urging, driving;  
And desirous belly gulping (336)

is a potent image of hunger, but the sly half-glance back to the negatives of 'No wistful bellies, / No loins of desire' (335) at least partly undercuts the seriousness of the exclamatory phrases; and, still more evidently, the final line of the 'fear' stanza ('Then gay fear, that turns the tail sprightly, from a shadow') seems to obliterate the terror momentarily caused by the predatory pike, moving from short heavily-stressed phrases to a more flippantly lively rhythm.

The poem is a remarkable combination of spontaneity and self-consciousness – one moment organic form acting the meaning through the immediacy of onomatopoeia and image, the next moment taking the reader behind the scenes to show how its rhetoric is constructed:

Food, and fear, and joie de vivre,  
Without love.

The other way about:  
Joie de vivre, and fear, and food  
All without love. (336)

The antimetabole is as metafictional as modern theorists could wish (though not quite what Lawrence is usually supposed to represent). Its whimsicality corresponds, of course, with the whimsically seeming unpredictability of the fish, which is nevertheless the fish merely being itself: 'To be a fish!' In other

words the self-consciousness could, at a pinch, be construed as a further extension of organic form. But to explore the fish in this way stretches the range of language the poem has to employ and creates more fluent interconnection between its varied voices. The effect goes beyond what is required for the realisation of the otherness of the fish and becomes a still more fascinating realisation of the possibilities inherent in language for reproducing the alert, unfettered play of mind in the whole man.

Yet it must be admitted that in the second half of the poem (there is almost a deliberate starting again at the line, 'I saw a water-serpent swim across the Anapo', which is tantamount to the opening of a 'Part 2') Lawrence tacitly rejects what I have just suggested. Fish-life, he now insists, is non-human life and cannot be contained within the human consciousness:

I didn't know his God  
I didn't know his God. (338)

The point, no doubt, is a sound one; but why does Lawrence have to harp upon it so insistently? In the process the verse becomes rather more ordinary, the anthropomorphising of the pike – 'A slim young pike with smart fins / And grey-striped suit ...', (338) – more obviously designed to discredit the projection processes of the human consciousness, and the consequent recantation of the poet also becomes that much more predictable. It's as if Lawrence regrets – indeed, won't allow what he himself has just done, on the grounds that it is arrogating too much to man and his man-made language. Almost as if he is afraid of *hubris*.

The answer, perhaps, is to take up Lawrence's own cry: 'Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.'<sup>6</sup> Better still, 'Trust the poem'. For in the poem the voices with which the artist speaks become intensified *as* voices. Both the imaginative effort and the imaginative process are expressed simultaneously. The transcending of human knowingness is incorporated in the language which actually constitutes the earlier part of the poem; and therefore the latter half of 'Fish' is eclipsed by its forerunner. Lawrence has, so to speak, been before himself at his own water-trough to demonstrate what a truly open human mind can do.



## NOTES

1. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*. vol 2. 1913-16 ed George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p 61.
2. Page references in the text refer to *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence*. ed. V. de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (London: Heinemann, 1964).
3. Jillian de Vries-Mason, *Perception in the Poetry of D.H. Lawrence* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1982), p.180.
4. De Vries-Mason, p.179.
5. *Letters*, vol 2, p. 165.
6. 'The Spirit of Place', *Studies in Classic American Literature*, (1923; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 8.

## Lawrence's Fish' Thérèse Vichy

By its title and subject-matter Lawrence's poem, written in 1921, cannot but seem partly reminiscent of Rupert Brooke's 'The Fish'. Lawrence wrote a review of the first volume of *Georgian Poetry*<sup>1</sup> in which Brooke's poem was published, quoting Brooke more abundantly than such poets as Masfield or Abercrombie. He quoted 'Dining-Room Tea' rather than 'The Fish'; but I suggest that this was due to the ambivalence of the latter's appeal to him. There is indeed in the two fish poems the same Heraclitean world of ever-renewed forgetfulness, of total absorption into 'the immediate present'<sup>(182)</sup>,<sup>2</sup> as well as the same bliss of prenatal fusion of self and non-self. However different in temperament, both Brooke and Lawrence suffered from the same Oedipus complex, the same sexual ambivalence,<sup>3</sup> and this accounts for their common fascination with flux and flow, with fish as emblems of prenatal life. There are, however, great differences, as Brooke's manner achieves empathy through sensuous brilliancy, a flamboyant impressionism which at times lapses into Victorian clichés. Remaining univocal it fails to integrate complex levels of meaning, emotional, intellectual, mythical with the texture of the poem. If James Elroy Flecker saluted Brooke as 'Donne Redivivus',<sup>4</sup> my aim is to argue that it is Lawrence's 'Fish' which has the real complexity of Metaphysical poetry, a complexity sometimes cultivated in deliberate contradistinction to Brooke's poem

There is, as I have said, the same bliss of fusion, of absorption into 'the immediate present':

Submerged  
And wave-thrilled.  
As the waters roll  
Roll you.  
The waters wash,  
You wash in oneness  
And never emerge. (334-5)

But Lawrence makes a point of avoiding Brooke's flamboyance. The too obvious word 'ripple' is never used and paradoxically it is the very paucity of the vocabulary which is turned to expressive ends. The alliterations, the repetitions of the same verb with different subjects, merge everything into oneness. Above all, detached observation and sensuous empathy meet and enhance each other as they never do with Brooke: 'Your life a sluice of sensation along your sides' (335). Coupled with the word 'sensation', 'sluice'