CHAPTER FOUR

Naturism in Poetry: Birds, Beasts and Flowers
In November 1918 Lawrence formulates the 'law' called 'the spirit of place' and observes: "Every great locality expresses itself perfectly in its own flowers, its own birds and beasts and lastly its own men." Two years later he starts in Italy his most 'original book of poems', Birds, Beasts and Flowers, which, like Look! marks the end of his English world experience and records the 'spirit of place'. The poems in BBF cover the poet's travel years of 1920-23. As Lawrence puts it, they "were begun in Tuscany, in the autumn of 1920 and finished in New Mexico in 1923 in my thirty-eighth year." The period thus includes Lawrence's travel through Italy, Ceylon and Australia up to his sojourn in America and covers some highly creative years. Keith Sagar describes how Lawrence convalesced spiritually, how he survived the bleak winter of penury and human cruelty and recovered by the tour his "pristine self, the 'instant whole man' whose newly clarified vision found its natural utterance in the poems of Birds, Beasts and Flowers." 

Lawrence started writing BBF during his solitary

1 The Symbolic Meaning. 30.
2 Richard Aldington, Portrait of a Genius But....213.
3 Complete Poems 28-29.
4 Life Into Art. 207-8.
sojourn at the Villa Canovaia in the hills above Florence in September 1920. Frieda had then been to Germany to visit her family and Lawrence, alone and wonder-struck by the variety and abundance of life in nature, started the 'new little volume of vers libre'. Interestingly, up to 1920 the volume comprised only poems about 'Fruits' and 'Trees', and "Turkey Cock", "The Evangelistic Beasts" and the "Tortoise" series were the only poems of the title. But Lawrence had, by that time, conceived of the full scheme. It is manifest in his letter to Robert Mountsier, 18 October 1920: "I sent you some vers libre called 'Fruits', I shall send you a complete. Ms Birds, Beasts and Flowers, of these and such like poems". The Ms took some three more years to be 'complete', and when in 1923 it was ready Lawrence felt drawn to the collection as something distinctively new. He wrote to Curtis Brown, his English agent: "**Birds, Beasts and Flowers** and **Look!** are separate integral books. I never want them mixed or confused with anything else". Till 1917 **Look!** impressed him as 'the best of my poetry'. Six years later the same appreciation is seen about **B»F** as he writes to Thomas Seltzer, his publisher, 7 February 1923: "It is a remarkable collection ... I feel rather strongly about this book of verse:

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7 Letters.IV,429.
8 Letters.III,37.
feel it is really my best"\(^9\)

Lawrence's keenness about Look! and BBF becomes understandable on critical investigation. Both represent the essential Lawrence in poetry in respect of theme and style and the 'naturist' philosophy. In Look! the poet celebrates the life of the instinct and the pristine glory of nudity as a viable alternative to the life of the mind and social taboo. In BBF Lawrence is again very close to nature. Only this time his focus shifts from the natural human world to the original non-human world of birds, beasts, plants, trees, flowers and reptiles, and the 'savage enough pilgrimage' that started in Look! culminates in BBF with a more comprehensive focus on and penetrating insight into the mystery of life. Both mark a glorious recovery of health, wholeness and all that we lost on our road to civilization. The belief that animates Lawrence in both these books of verse is expressly presented at the end of Apocalypse, his last important work: "For man the vast marvel is to be alive. For man, as for flower and beast and bird the supreme triumph is to be most vividly, most perfectly alive." This is Lawrence's vitalist philosophy, his profound belief that "all living things, even plants, have a 'blood-being' and man is only 'part of the living, incarnate cosmos'.\(^{10}\) While Lawrence's belief in blood-being or 'blood-consciousness' is confirmed by his reading of Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough and Totemism and

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9 Letters. IV, 378.

10 See Letters. II, 470; and Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 149; henceforth referred to as Apocalypse.
Exogamy, Tylor's *Primitive Cultures*, Jane Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual*, his belief in the instinctual life as wiser than mental consciousness is deepened by the Nietzschean distinction between the 'Dionysian' and the 'Apollonian' spirits. Both Nietzsche and Lawrence ultimately want an ideal combination or balance between the two spirits, and what makes them emphasize the Dionysiac qualities of experience is the knowledge that in his endeavour to become exclusively 'Apollonian' modern man has lost contact with the vital source of nature. John Burnett's *Early Greek Philosophy* further clarified Lawrence's vision, while Henry David Thoreau's quiet participation in the natural life in *Walden* might have been another source of influence. The inspiration also comes from Whitman's reverence for the primal, animal mode of being in *Leaves of Grass*:

"I think I could turn and live awhile with the animals
they are so placid and self-contained,
I stand and look at them sometimes half the day long"
(Section 32)

But the most enduring and formative influence on Lawrence's nature philosophy must have been Darwin. John Alcorn has persuasively argued in his book *The Nature Novel From Hardy to Lawrence* (Macmillan: 1973, rpt. 1986) that the 'naturist' philosophy in the literature of the twentieth century is a legacy of Darwin. As Alcorn gives it in the Preface of the book: "The naturist world is a world of physical organism where biology replaces theology as the source of both psychic health and of moral authority. The naturist is a child of Darwin; he sees man
as part of an animal continuum; he reasserts the importance of
instinct as a key to human happiness; he tends to be suspicious
of the life of the mind; he is wary of abstractions. He is in
revolt against Christian dogma, against conventional morality,
against the ethic which reigns in a commercial society". Read in
the light of this definition, Look! We Have Come Through! and
Birds, Beasts, and Flowers, do impress as two significant master-
pieces in the naturist mode of twentieth century literature.

Lawrence's proneness towards the 'vast array of non-
human life, darkly self-sufficient, and bristling with energy' can be traced quite early in his life. Jessie Chambers informs us
that "an outing with Lawrence was a memorable experience ....His
face and particularly his eyes were caught alight with
eagerness"; and "there seemed no flower, nor even weed, whose
name and qualities Lawrence did not know." In his letters of
1914-15 Lawrence occasionally speaks of 'the tremendous non-human
quality of life' and expresses contempt for 'men' and desires to
be a blackbird, 'so remote, so buried in primeval silence'. As
the war broke out, his dislike for the human world of meaningless
clamour went deeper. We have seen in our discussion of Bay how
the war wrecked Lawrence. Interestingly, the more he was 'weary
of humanity', the more he was drawn to thoughts that

11 Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the
Unconscious (Penguin) 45; henceforth referred to as Fantasia.

12 Personal Record. 34, 39.

'transcend(ed) humanity'.\textsuperscript{14} \textit{BBF} which is a post-war publication, is basically an attempt to 'transcend humanity' and to find a poetic correlative for the original life of nature.

Lawrence's 'return to nature' as envisaged in \textit{BBF}, is, however, markedly different from the practice of the great Romantics. Of course, he shares with the Romantics a genuine interest in the 'unknown modes of being', but he never derives any soothing moral or 'intimations of immortality', never worships nature in the way his forbears did, or goes to her to seek the 'bliss of solitude'. Lawrence's interest in the non-human world is primarily an attestation of the naturist tendency to neutralize the subjective preoccupation, the Wordsworthian 'I', the egotistical sublime, so as to discover the content of the mystery of natural life. As Graham Hough points out: "It is not passive appreciation; it has not much to do with beauty as such; it does not use natural objects as stimulants to generalized and habitual emotions. Instead it makes an energetic and intuitive attempt to penetrate into the being of natural objects, to show what they are in themselves, not how they can sustain our moral nature."\textsuperscript{15} In his sensuous understanding of the living creatures -- for "life is not and never was anything but living creatures"\textsuperscript{16} -- Lawrence goes farther than the Romantics who either neglected the instinctive world of animals or viewed it

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Letters}. III, 127.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{The Dark Sun}. 201.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Fantasia}. 22.
from hilltop with distant sympathy, often learning from them some moral 'too deep for tears'. As a naturist, Lawrence sees the world of birds, beasts and flowers from close proximity, believing that as 'man' he too is 'part of an animal continuum', a fellow inmate, a co-dweller of the cosmos. He does not idealize the non-human world, does not advocate a return to the primitive, nor does he glorify the savage. In fact, he scathingly criticizes Keats and Shelley for idealizing the nightingale and the skylark as 'immortal' or 'blithe spirit'.\textsuperscript{17} For Lawrence, romantic glorification is an abstraction, as it is a denial of the living marvel, the birdness of the bird with a body. He does not look at the non-human world with any superior, pre-conceived notion, not with sympathy but with empathy or einfühlung and transforms the Romantic's compassion for glossy water-snakes into the naturist's comprehension of the 'otherness' of the snake. It is not feeling for others but feeling into them. Lawrence insists that man should move out of his civilized ego into the non-human world and 'leave off bossing it'. For man is not the measure of the universe; he shares the living cosmos with other creatures; and "life itself consists in a live relatedness between man and his universe: sun, moon, stars, earth, trees, flowers, birds, animals, men, everything --and not in a conquest of anything by anything."\textsuperscript{18} This precisely is Lawrence's 'naturism' which in its freshness and genuineness can function as an act of balance.

\textsuperscript{17} See Lawrence's essay "The Nightingale" in Selected Literary Criticism. See also Study of Thomas Hardy ch.VII.

\textsuperscript{18} Phoenix 31.
to the horrifying mind-hell in which people live in this century of intellectualized, mechanized, commercialized society.

Lawrence's apprehension of the 'otherness' of the non-human world is decidedly modern. 'Otherness' is Lawrence's term for 'the vivid and imminent unknown'. By it he means not only the distinctive, individual existence of every living item but also its unique design which cannot be rendered in any discursive language. A daisy or a snake is, for Lawrence, uniquely different from every other daisy or snake. It has been rightly pointed out that only Hopkins had this profound realization of minute design of things before Lawrence, and what Hopkins called 'inscape', Lawrence terms 'thisness'. Both Hopkins and Lawrence rejoice at the singularity and plurality of beings, at the particularity of multiple selfhoods and both find in the pied beauty of the world some natural, divine glory. The difference, however, is that while Hopkins is overtly religious in his discovery of God's glory in dappled things, Lawrence finds in it some mysterious, primal life-force, an elan vital which induces in him a deep religious sensation. Thus Hopkins's poetry is a song of praise; it is the result of his Christian inspiration. Lawrence's poetry is the outcome of his intuitive perception, of the 'natural religious sense' of wonder which he

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19 The Symbolic Meaning, 60.

finds inherent in all life. It is the result of his modern quest for the 'life-divine blood-being' invested with some pagan grandeur. Lawrence's signal contribution to modern poetry lies in this naturist quest, and by tapping the vast reservoir of life in nature, Lawrence offers in **B.B.F.** a kind of poetry that communicates the very feel of nature and effects a fresh shock in the modern mind by its sheer immediacy and terrible intensity.

*Birds, Beasts and Flowers* is not immune from the general Lawrentian defect of indiscriminate inclusiveness. As in other books of verse, here too, Lawrence, in haste for publication, includes some poems which are hardly related to the thematic pattern. "The Revolutionary", "The Evening Land" (287-93) do not fit the collection. "Peace" (293-94) and "Tropic" (301-2) are not directly related to the title, but are relevant as records of human response to the spirit of place. While "Peace" is remarkable for the image of burning lava 'walking like a royal snake down the mountain towards the sea' — an image which hints at potent turmoil beneath the apparent calm, "Tropic" exemplifies the 'subtle and complex' 'correspondence between the plasm of the human body' and 'the material elements outside' 22

"Sun, dark sun,
Sun of black void heat,
Sun of the torrid mid-day's horrific darkness:

Behold my hair twisting and going black.
Behold my eyes turn tawny yellow
Negroid."

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21 Selected Literary Criticism. 8.

22 The Symbolic Meaning. 175.
This is an encounter with elements, the tropical sun, and the change in the physical features implies a change in consciousness, evidently from Apollonian to Dionysian. For yellow eyes of a negro are indicative of the underworld ethos, of dark animistic life (the 'yellow eyes' of the he-goat, the 'incomprehensible' god that he is, may be recalled). The passage to the original world of birds, beasts and flowers animated by a pre-historic rhythm thus significantly begins with the poet's reaction to the tropical sun. The beginning is apocalyptic: "Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen". 23

Lawrence's search for the myth of primal life begins with the vegetative world and the first two sections of BRB are about 'Fruits' and 'Trees', and since fruits and trees are related immediately to 'flowers', the poems can be read as a kind of prelude to the flower poems. Now 'every fruit has its secret', so Lawrence writes in "Figs", and "Pomegranate" (278-79) is the first poem where an attempt is made to penetrate the secret by cracking the fissure and looking beneath the 'plain side'. This may explain why Marjorie Perloff in her brilliant article "Lawrence's Lyric Theater: Birds, Beasts and Flowers" describes the poem as 'paradigmatic of the whole collection'. 24

"Pomegranate" is often interpreted as a symbolic re-creation of the myth of Persephone, and in a related

23 Apocalypse. 149.

extension, of the myth of the blood of Dionysus and the birth of Adonis. But the poem can be read in a more simple manner as an allegory of self-introspection. The casual, arrogantly confident, opening which is reminiscent of a Donne poem ---

"You tell me I am wrong,
Who are you, who is anybody to tell me I am wrong?
I am not wrong" --- is practically a means to take the reader or, it may be, the rationalist alter-ego of the poet, into confidence. The main point is that the 'fissure' must be ruptured if one wishes to see the rosy seeds within. An average man prefers the 'plain side', but as an artist, the poet must encounter the rupture so as to attain a vision of the whole:

"For my part, I prefer my heart to be broken
It is so lovely, dawn-kaleidoscopic within the crack."

The pomegranate now symbolizes the poet's self-- the heart of the poet holding seeds. But this is not a retreat 'into the crack of his own ruptured heart, safe inside', as Marjorie Perloff describes, but a moving self-introspection which shows Lawrence's modern aptitude and sets the trend of the collection towards the mysterious other world.

In "Medlars and Sorb-Apples" (280-81) Lawrence's passage is downward, to the heart of hell; in "Figs" (282-84) the journey is wombward, to the unutterable secret of female penetralia; and in "Grapes" (285-87) his trek is backward, to the biblical days before 'Noah's flood'. The thematic pattern shows at once Lawrence's sensuous apprehension and mythic imagination. In the 'delicious rottenness' of medlars and sorb-apples the poet
tastes the 'distilled essence of hell' which inspires his quest for the dark god-- 'Dionysos of the Underworld'. He visualizes the scene of 'Orphic farewell' through the 'winding, leaf-clogged, silent lanes of hell':

"I say, wonderful are the hellish experiences, Orphic, delicate Dionysos of the Underworld".

It is unfortunate that R.P. Blackmur finds only 'hysterical' and 'ritual frenzy' in the slow and sedate movement of the poem where intoxication induces 'loneliness' of the individual, or what Harold Bloom would call, 'a perfect lonely, intoxicated finality of the isolated self of the poet'.

Lockwood, in fact, rightly points out that "the poem is one of the high points of intensity in the book as a whole. It is a journey into the underworld like that later in "Bavarian Gentians" in Last Poems, with the difference that the stress here is not on marriage and meeting (Persephone coming to Pluto) but on leave-taking, separation and divorce (Eurydice leaving Orpheus)."

The fig for Lawrence, as it was for the Romans, is a 'very secretive fruit' symbolic of 'yoni' and 'female mystery'.

25 See Language as Gesture, 297, and A DHL Miscellany, 362.

26 Lockwood, 105.

* It is interesting to note that even a traditionally 'religious' poet like Eliot uses this image of 'fig's fruit' in Ash-Wednesday -- 'a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit'; and recent criticism tends to believe it to be an image of repressed sexuality in Eliot, the 'fig's fruit' suggesting 'the satisfactions of the vagina' and the beyond. See Ronald Bush, T.S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style (New York: O.U.P. 1984) 144-45.
The whole myth of the loss of innocence is associated with fig leaves, for it is with fig leaves that Eve, newly awakened into an awareness of nudity, covered her 'yoni' and women have been sewing fig leaves ever since. The fig leaves thus, in Lawrence's imagination, are archetypal symbols of cover that conceals the female mystery while the fig fruit holding seeds is the ripe womb. The secret has been affirmed despite 'Lord's indignation', and the 'wombward' journey has been in process ever since the 'ripe fig'.

Lawrence's sensuous vision of the underworld inspired by intoxication in "Medlars and Sorb Apples" is deepened in "Grapes", where, under the influence of Bacchus, he sinks into a 'dream's dream' and visualizes the days before 'Noah's flood'. The imagery that crops up in the dream is highly evocative of the prehistoric past:

"And if we sip the wine, we find dreams coming upon us
Out of the imminent night.
Nay, we find ourselves crossing the fern-scented frontiers
Of the world before the floods, where man was dark and evasive
And the tiny vine-flower rose of all roses, perfumed,
And all in naked communion communicating as now our
clothed vision can never communicate.
Vistas, down dark avenues,
As we sip the wine." (286)

The correspondence between sense-perception and rhythmic form in all these free verse lyrics shows how Lawrence masters the art of poetry and communicates the otherwise incommunicable mystery of the other world where common human norms and practices have no relevance.
The preface to the 'Trees' section quotes Empedokles: "Trees were the first living creatures to grow up out of the earth", imbibing in proportional measures both fire and water, male and female. And thus the naturist in Lawrence finds a chance to apprehend in the section the symmetry of original life. Trees have always been to Lawrence 'little living myths, that baffle understanding,' and they occur in his poetry again and again—ash tree, yew tree, oak -- both as image and emblem and as subject of imaginative pursuit. The idea that trees are concrete reservoir of Life-Motion, was first adumbrated in "Corot" in organically rhymed poetry. The same idea becomes a matter of sustained interest in the three free verse poems of BBP, namely, "Cypresses" "Bare Fig-Trees" and "Bare Almond Trees" (296-301) where Lawrence draws heavily on the primitive worship of trees, a subject treated at length by Frazer in The Golden Bough. The poems form a sequence, and in each of them we get the very feel of prehistoric life-motion. While "Bare Fig Trees" is a rendering of myriad inscape in one stem of life, "Cypresses" is a rendering of the primal life-flow."Cypresses" (which brings to mind Whitman looking in Louisiana at 'a live-oak growing, all alone' 'uttering joyous leaves of dark green') is unquestionably the best poem of the sequence. It begins with a question of wonder and gradually the poet probes with critical admiration the secret of the 'flame-tall' existence of the trees:

"Tuscan cypresses
What is it?

27 Twilight in Italy. 88.
Folded in like a dark thought
For which the language is lost,
Tuscan cypresses,
Is there a great secret?
Are our words no good?

The undeliverable secret,
Dead with a dead race and a dead speech, and yet
Darkly monumental in you,
Etruscan cypresses.

Ah, how I admire your fidelity,
Dark cypresses!"(296)

As Lawrence apprehends, the rhythm of natural flowering
of the Etruscans has been arrested for centuries in the brooding,
softly swaying flames of the cypresses. The Romans tried to
abolish the Etruscan race, but the cypresses stand as symbols of
the indestructible, inexhaustible quality of Etruscan life. They
contain in their existence the 'aroma of lost human life' and
deliver the message that 'there is only one evil, to deny life'.
Both in "Corot" and "Cypresses" Lawrence apprehends the
aboriginal quick and motion of life in the leisurely rapture of
the trees. And the poems belonging to two different phases, show
how Lawrence deals with the subject in two different verse styles.
"Corot" is formal poetry in consistent rhyme and metre;
"Cypresses" is free verse with a hidden rhythmical structure
sufficient to capture the fluid flame of the trees. The ten year
gap between the two poems testifies to the change of poetic
style--from formal to informal verse.

Each tree in the sequence has an undeliverable secret
which no human language can decipher; and Lawrence often laments-
"Ah, if it could but answer! or if we had tree-speech!"  

Wrapped in pagan mystery, the trees exist in terms of their own science of life, having their own tree-speech and raison d'être. A quote from Fantasia, Lawrence's 'tree-book' should be in order here: "The looming trees, so straight. And I listen for their silence--big, tall-bodied trees, with a certain magnificent cruelty about them--or barbarity--...... Their magnificent, strong, round bodies! It almost seems I can hear the slow, powerful sap drumming in their trunks. Great full-blooded trees, with strange tree-blood in them, soundlessly drumming...... A vast individual life, and an overshadowing will--the will of a tree; something that frightens you"  

Of course, 'trees suffer, like races down the long ages'. ("Almond Blossom") But, as Lawrence believes, in their non-human mode of being they bear the imprint of original life and absorb the ethos of the soil which is imperishable. It is practically this primal mystery about them that determines their inaccessible otherness and makes them 'living myths'. A believer in blood-being, and in prehistoric roots of being, Lawrence cannot help wondering at the trees and exploring their symbolic forms in naturist terms.

In the 'Flowers' section (303-18) Lawrence returns to a subject which occupied him throughout his career. In between "Guelder Roses" and "Campions" of the earliest period and "Red Geranium" and "Bavarian Gentians" of the last phase, there stand

28 Sea and Sardina. 100.
29 Fantasia. 43.
"Almond Blossom", "Purple Anemones", "Sicilian Cyclamens" and "Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers" in BBF. The flower poems in this collection are again different from the "Rose" poems of Look! where the rose symbolism enables the poet to explore the mystery of consummation in love. In BBF Lawrence apprehends the flowers as subject and looks deep into their non-human mode of being with the honesty of a naturist who combines archaic sense and modern sensibility.

In "Bare Fig Trees" Lawrence wonders at the small twigs 'giving off hues of life'; in "Almond Blossom" he is overwhelmed by the annual rejuvenation of the tree in blossom. It is an intense, ecstatic poem of the renewal of life. The 'strange electric sensitiveness' of the bare almond trees enjoying 'December rain' in Sicily--itself a charming spectacle--becomes all the more exciting as the poet finds that even the 'black, rusted iron trunk' can put forth new life:

"Even iron can put forth,
Even Iron.
This is the iron age,
But let us take heart
Seeing iron break and bud,
Seeing rusty iron puff with clouds of blossom." (304)

Immediately the natural fact of flowering becomes symbolic of the mysterious life-motion, and Lawrence's wonder at this pagan process of flowering is couched in vivid, imagistic details:

"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)

Vivian de Sola Pinto comments: "Here the poet is not using images
as illustration or decoration but is thinking in images,
'recreating thought into feeling', to use T.S.Eliot's phrase". 30
To this we may add that Lawrence here approximates "the mental
working of the pagan thinker or poet -- pagan thinkers were
necessarily poets -- who starts with an image, sets the image in
motion, allows it to achieve a certain course or circuit of its
own and then takes up another image." 31 Besides, "Almond
Blossom" shows how the rhapsody is held by the controlling
prosody of free verse. The poem's ecstatic celebration of the
indomitable life-force operating in and through the natural world
does not lapse into effusion. It is a case of powerful emotion
held in powerful control.

The style of 'thinking in images' and the pagan sense
of wonder are also at work in "Sicilian Cyclamens". The flowers
reflect the peace in ambient nature giving the naturist poet a
scope to imagine once again the prehistoric dawn. The flowers
open up before him the vista of far-off 'Mediterranean morning
when our world began'. There is no obvious myth in the poem, and

30 Introduction. Complete Poems. 15.
31 Apocalypse. 96
yet Lawrence's description of the Sicilian morning, its peace and festive mood, reflected in the riot of flowers, partakes of the nature of a myth, though it is, as Lockwood would say, a 'myth of Lawrence's own creation'. In "Purple Anemones", however, Lawrence dwells, consciously on the myth of Persephone and Pluto, but, unlike "Bavarian Gentians", it is a myth of the underworld creative force rushing upwards as is manifest in the royal, lush flowers which are hell-hounds in the wild pursuit of Persephone. Pluto or Dis let Persephone out of hell 'to track her down' in 'husband strategy', and when 'she broke from below/Flowers came/hell-hounds on her heels'. Purple anemones which are 'little hells of colour' opened around her sumptuously, snapping at her ankles and catching her by the hair', and what follows is 'spring'. Lawrence's mythic imagination has its ease and felicity in the casual leaps of the lines which imitate the wild hide and seek game of 'hell purple' anemones and Persephone. It is a poetry of the sportive kind sportively re-creating the myth of a flower.

"Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers" is the only poem--quite a longish one--of the flower sequence which is marked by hysterical rant. Lawrence, of course, liked the poem 'immensely', but on critical inspection, the poem fails, because Lawrence here, as Sandra Gilbert points out in passing,

32 Lockwood. 111.
33 See Letters. III, 659.
"imposes political dogma on nature" without attending to the flowers.\(^{34}\) The poem has received no attention so far. It is only in very recent times that Tom Paulin tries to focus a new light on the poem as recording Lawrence's 'distinctively puritan response to the political situation in Italy' and dramatizing his 'feelings about revolutionary socialism.'\(^{35}\) Paulin's study of the poem though otherwise interesting, is not convincing, and "Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers" reads simply as a flamboyant attack against the socialists who speak of dead ideals and misuse ceremoniously such natural symbols as flowers. Almost the entire poem is spat out in a heat of passion and the poet is so overpowered by angry feelings that he forgets his immediate subject and the flowers just become an occasion for an outlet for his indignation.

In the three sections "Fruits", "Trees" and "Flowers" Lawrence is engaged in the re-creation of the vegetable world, the original, near-mythic, verdant nature whose majestic otherness guards and recognizes the independent, distinctive entity of wild life. And the poems that follow are about beasts and birds that roam at large in the grand domain of nature. This shows how consistently Lawrence conceives of the scheme of the volume slowly shifting his focus from woods to animals. Significantly, the new section deals with the "Evangelistic

\(^{34}\) Acts of Attention. 146.

Beasts" (319-340) who befit the canvas of original world and nature. The animals are, as Lawrence apprehends them, apocalyptic re-creation of the four natures of man, and their association with the four Evangelists -- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John--only ironically highlights the naturist view of Lawrence that Christian idealism cannot do full justice to life. In "St Mark" Lawrence laments the plight of the lion bewitched by the magic of the Lamb of God who gives him wings and makes him eventually a 'sheep-dog' 'guarding the flock of mankind'. For Lawrence, this metamorphosis is ironic as the lion cannot forget his leonine nature and his voluptuous thinking of blood does not die down. The anthropomorphism is an act of perversion as it is a denial of the native character, a violation of the innate otherness of the lion. The degeneration is in process also in the case of the bull represented by St Luke. The prehistoric bull with horns of power, 'power to kill, power to create' has been magically transformed into a winged bull serving the Son of Man. In "St John" Lawrence sees into the condition of the 'sun-peering eagle' represented by John, the intellectual Evangelist, who knows all, even the Logos-- "In the beginning was the Word". But 'the almighty eagle of fore-ordaining Mind' now looks weary and shabby, 'moulting and moping and waiting' 'so that a new conception of the beginning and end can rise from the ashes', phoenix-like. The vision is given in highly evocative terms of the burning of the mythic bird:

"Phoenix, Phoenix,
The nest is in flames,
Feathers are singeing
Ash flutters flocculent, like down on a blue, wan fledgeling."(330)

It is "St Matthew" that completes Lawrence's interpretation of the Evangelists; and here he takes the winged man to show that 'man is still a creature that thinks with his blood'. St Matthew who represents the state and status of glorified man and thereby approximates the condition of Jesus, (for after all, Jesus too, for Lawrence, is man glorified by his crucifixion and deprived by that process of his blood-being; this may call to mind the story The Man Who Died), makes a plea for the restoration of his lost identity, with an urge for a return to the non-human world of birds, beasts and flowers, and even to the subterranean world with which the human world has a regular and intimate interaction.

"Put me down again on the earth, Jesus, on the brown soil
Where flowers sprout in the acrid humus, and fade into humus again.
Where beasts drop their unlicked young, and pasture, and drop their droppings among the turf.
Where the adder darts horizontal.
Down on the damp, unceasing ground, where my feet belong
And even my heart, Lord, forever, after all uplifting:
The crumbling, damp, fresh land, life horizontal and ceaseless.

Matthew I am, the man.
And I take the wings of the morning, to Thee, Crucified, Glorified.
But while flowwers club their petals at evening
And rabbits make pills among the short grass
And long snakes quickly glide into the dark hole in the wall, hearing man approach,
I must be put down, Lord, in the afternoon,
And at evening I must leave off my wings of the spirit
As I leave off my braces,
And I must resume my nakedness like a fish, sinking down the dark reversion of night
Like a fish seeking the bottom, Jesus."(321)
The prayer, steeped in Tennysonian languor and punctuated by slow rhythm, and also remarkable for the precision of imagistic details, can be read as a naturist's protest against sublimation or glorification at the cost of original identity. The point is that man cannot afford to stay long in the company of gods, and Jesus should release him when the hour strikes. Let Gods stay in mid-heaven; let Jesus climb the 'Whitsun zenith', but Matthew, being a man, and therefore 'part of an animal continuum', should be at best a 'traveller back and forth.' "St Matthew" thus has a significant place in the total scheme of BBP. It links the human world with the non-human world restoring to man his original animal identity, a precious identity indeed for a naturist like D.H.Lawrence.

The downward journey--'down between the steep slopes of darkness' -- envisaged in "St Matthew" can be taken as a precedent for Lawrence's direct encounter with 'blood-veined' creatures and reptiles in the next section comprising poems like "Mosquito", "Bat", "Fish", "Man and Bat", "Snake" and "Tortoise". (332-67) In "St Matthew" 'bat', 'fish' and 'snake' are three functional images -- bats threading, thrilling and flickering ever downward, 'fish seeking bottom', long snakes gliding 'into the dark hole in the wall'. Now, every image-item becomes a subject of unique comprehension. In all the poems of the section Lawrence shows the naturist tendency to establish the 'live relatedness' between man and his neighbours in the natural world, and while recognizing the otherness of the creatures as
intense 'blood-beings', he strongly refuses man the crown of superiority.

In "Mosquito" Lawrence is involved in the comical play with the insect, apparently 'a nothingness', but in reality a 'winged victory' with a certain magnitude and strange 'evil little aura' about it. In the final battle the poet also becomes 'mosquito enough to out-mosquito' it which establishes the insect's distinctive existence. The varying tone of the poem--serious or mock-serious, cajoling, humorous or witty, exhortatory or exhortatory -- reflects the varying phases of the encounter between the two separate individuals having their respective otherness. A similar encounter, but all the more dramatic, takes place in "Man and Bat" where he encounters the filthy creature face to face in his own room. The whole poem issues out in the heat of reaction to the bat recording the man's mixed feelings of fear and disgust and his final awe. 'Out, out of my room!' so the man cries in the hot chase and the bat at last yields as it falls in a corner, spent and tired. Now, the man has time and scope to appreciate the bat in detail--its 'black bead-berry eyes', its 'improper derisive ears', 'shut wings','brown, nut brown furry body.' As in "Snake", here too, the accursed human education urges the man to kill the filthy creature. But the naturist voice wins:

"Nay
I did't create him.
Let the God that created him be responsible for his death.
Only in the bright day I will not have this clot
in my room".(346)
The bat is ultimately thrown away, but it wins by this time its recognition as a 'fathom-flickering spirit of darkness' that Matthew has given it earlier, and the poet is deeply reverent toward its otherness as it 'flickers over' in triumphant flight.

It is in "Fish" where the journey 'down the steep slopes of darkness' rightly takes place, and the shift from the 'beast in air' to the creature under water becomes interesting as here the encounter with the fish sets the direction of the quest towards elemental, primordial life. The poem opens, as in many other poems of the collection, in the mode of an address:

"Fish, oh Fish,  
So little matters!  

Whether the waters rise and cover the earth  
Or whether the waters wilt in the hollow places,  
All one to you.  

Aqueous, subaqueous,  
Submerged  
And wave-thrilled." (334)

A highly sensuous creature, a fish is only 'water-thrilled'. 'Food, and fear and joie de vivre/Without love' -- this is all that defines his existence. This loveless existence is so baffling that it defies all empathic understanding. Lawrence can understand the snakes for 'even snakes lie together', or the ass, 'the first of all animals to fall finally in love', and the tortoise who is 'crucified' into sex. All these creatures have a sense of belonging to the root of sex and sensuality. But the fish does not belong. 'Alone with elements' in 'pre-world loneliness', this 'intense individual' has a God of his own.

"This is beyond me, this fish  
His God stands outside my God."(339)
In one of the last poems "Whales Weep Not" (694-95...) Lawrence apprehends, rather easily, the gigantic otherness of a bull whale who 'reels with drunk delight' and 'lies up against his bride/in the deep blue bed of the sea/ as mountain pressing on mountain in the zest of life". This huge aquatic creature too has a phallic existence and pagan power of love which overwhelms but does not baffle. But the primordial non-human otherness of the fish is too profound to be plumbed. It only instils a deep sense of religious reverence and some mystic feelings of wonder:

"But I, I only wonder
And don't know.
I don't know fishes.

In the beginning
Jesus was called The Fish.....
And in the end."(340)

It may be relevant to note that 'Fish' occurs in Apocalypse and the Zodiac--Pisces as one incarnation of mythological God.

Lawrence's near-physical encounter with an ugly bat in "Man and Bat" is extended further in "Snake " (349-51) where the 'live relatedness' between man and one of the non-human 'Lords of life' has been rendered with greater dramatic skill and greater imaginative insight. For Lawrence here apprehends the snake both as his immediate subject and as a composite symbol. So long 'snake' has occurred in Lawrence's poetry as an image item. In "River Roses" in Look!, for example, the rose and the snake become one in the 'simmering marsh' emitting suggestions of sexuality. In BRF too the image occurs evoking mixed feelings of
beauty and fear. In "Peace" the burning lava is imaged as a 'royal snake' wriggling 'down the mountain towards the sea'. In "St Matthew" again Matthew visualizes an earth where 'long snakes quickly glide into the dark hole in the wall, hearing man approach'. A close look will reveal that in the present poem all these three images with all their suggestions of sexuality, natural royalty of being, beauty and fear, and uncanny darkness of the underworld, along with the implication of the dialectic between the human and the non-human have been powerfully compressed into a comprehensive symbol which, in Lawrence's act of apprehension, becomes a subject of intense quest. In other words, the snake in the poem is not just an image or an emblem, but an image-thought or a theme-image which acquires great symbolic value and significance in course of the poem and ultimately ends up as a myth.

Keith Sagar in his two perceptive readings describes the poem as 'a parable' 'working on several levels', and 'the several levels are not discrete but composite'. 36 And Ross C. Murfin observes that Lawrence acknowledges "Blake's thought in poems such as 'Snake' by suggesting that there are secret doors to reality that lie beyond the blinkers of man's limited vision." 37 This only points to the thematic and symbolic complexity of the poem. Thus apart from its excellent free verse

36 See The Art of DHL, 121 and Life into Art. 235.

37 The Poetry of DHL: Texts and Contexts, 220.
structure which we shall examine later, "Snake" can be seen squarely from four angles—the physical contours of the snake and its ambient setting, the interaction between man and snake, the rich set of mythical-classical allusions and their relevance, and finally, the poem's allegorical-symbolical import. These four aspects of the poem again can be paired into two; and thus while the descriptive, physical details of the snake reinforce the man-snake interaction, the classical associations of the snake have close bearing on the poem's continual myth-making.

The poem begins with a dramatic description of the situation in which the man and the snake encounter each other—the hot day of Sicilian July, 'the deep, strange-scented shade of the dark carob-tree', the 'water-trough', and a man with a pitcher and a 'yellow-brown' snake 'from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom'. The silent interaction between the two intense individuals is conveyed in precise imagistic details:

"He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do, And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do, And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a moment, And stooped and drank a little more."(349)

Up to this there is no obvious conflict but an explosive tension is implied beneath the uneasy calm. At the human level, psychological complexity deepens, as the speaker-poet is tossed between fascination and revulsion, or as Sandra Gilbert describes, is 'crucified into double consciousness' arising out of 'nerve-brain intelligence' and 'instinctual blood-being'.

The enlightened self is horrified by the dark potency of the snake and urges to kill him, while the instinctive self is not only bewitched by the dark glory and godliness of the snake, but feels honoured that he has come 'like a guest in quiet at my water-trough'. This is a highly complex, psychic state of fascinated horror in which the Apollonian and the Dionysian tendencies intensely act on each other. As a naturist, Lawrence sides with the Dionysian self, for the Apollonian qualities of mind tend to destroy the dark beauty of the chthonic creature instead of attempting a 'live relatedness' with him. The snake goes on drinking 'dreamily', looks around insouciantly like a God 'unseeing' and 'slowly, very slowly as if thrice adream' returns to the hole 'snake-easing his shoulder'.

This is one of the high points of intensity in the poem. The spell of appreciation on the part of the bewitched self is broken as the voice of human education suddenly overpowers. The lines reflect the excitement of the final action and the sudden crescendo of horror.

"A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing into that horrid black hole. Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing himself after Overcame me now his back was turned. I looked round, I put down my pitcher I picked up a clumsy log And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter."

It is interesting to see that in the encounter with the bat the same voice of education was heard, but a moral prevailed there,
and the poet passed the responsibility of the bat's death to the 'God that created him'. The situation is more tensional in "Snake" and more complex because of the battle of the two voices—the voice of education and the voice of instinct. It is significant that the educated self throws the log at the snake precisely as 'a sort of protest against his withdrawing into that horrid black hole'. Which means total neutralization of the snake image; for otherwise the silent and inoffensive withdrawal would have been welcome. The attempt towards neutralization of the snake image ironically only heightens the intensity of the voice of instinct, and the snake withdrawn into hole becomes conspicuous by his absence. For now, ambiguity, so long swathing the allegory, gives way to clarity, and the spontaneous self openly invokes the snake, openly recognizing that the snake was but a symbolic projection of his own dark self. The natural self is now so powerful that the educated self has to repent of what it has done and join the other self in the invocation:

"And I thought of the albatross
And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld
Now due to be crowned again."

This is a naturist desire, for the return of the snake-image will mean revival of the glory of the natural, primitive self and retrieval of the crown lost under the duress of civilization and taboo. This is not to be explained as a return to the primitive but a return of the primitive power which acts as a balance to
the mechanically thought-oriented modern mind or 'accursed' voice of education.'

The primitive power should be explained in Lawrentian term of sexuality, and immediately there crop up the rich classical allusions associated with the snake. For who is this snake described as 'one of the lords of life?' Keith Sagar feels 39 that it is Lucifer, once brightest of all angels, and he refers to Jung who describes Lucifer as deliberately cutting off a vital part of himself, the phallus, when cast by God. Now, Lucifer might have cut off his link with the world of flesh so as to foil God's plan. But for Lawrence, recrowning the 'king in exile' means the revival of the phallic glory and power, and thus his snake has nothing to do with evil or the snake in the garden of Eden. Lawrence improves upon the myth so radically that the snake becomes a myth of his own creation and comes to represent the phallic God of the Unconscious. As for Nietzsche and the Greeks, so for Lawrence, the symbol of sex is the most venerated of symbols. And thus the image of the 'earth-lipped fissure' swallowing the withdrawing snake is one of fellatio and the snake flickering 'his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black' in the 'intense still noon' impresses as a vibrant symbol of the dark Unconscious which has to be recognized with reverence, for the sticks of civilization cannot reach its depth. Such a reading becomes more revealing when we remember Lawrence's response to

39 Life Into Art. 237.
the snake in "The Reality of Peace" (1919) and his description of the soul in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923/24) "If there is a serpent of secret and shameful desire in my soul, let me not beat it out of my consciousness with sticks. It will lie beyond, in the marsh of the so-called subconsciousness where I cannot follow it with my sticks ... For a serpent is a thing created. It has its own raison d'être. In its own being it has beauty and reality." 40

"That my soul is a dark forest.
That my known self will never be more than a little clearing in the forest.
That gods, strange gods come forth from the forest into the clearing of my known self and then go back." 41

In the poem, 'voice of education' becomes correlative to 'sticks' and super ego and 'marsh' corresponds to the 'burning bowels of earth'. The snake, the 'strange god', comes from the 'dark door of secret earth which parallels the 'dark forest' of the soul. The God comes to the 'water-trough', to the 'clearing' of the 'known self' and then goes back to the 'horrid black hole' the Unconscious to where it belongs. Civilization considers the snake to be 'venomous', for it is afraid of this strange god's majestic sway and dark, sexual potency. 'Earth-brown', 'earth-golden' the snake is one with elements which signifies his primitive power and beauty and confirms his sovereignty and title to original life. This dark god of the underworld should be crowned again,

40 Phoenix, 677.

41 *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 22.
for to deny him the crown or to throw a log at him means sinful disowning of the dark splendour of natural life.

The "Tortoise" sequence (352-67) comprising six poems explores a new area of non-human mystery in terms of the evolution of a tortoise from birth to consummation and attainment of sexual integrity. As some of the earliest poems written at Villa Canovaia in September 1920, the series betrays the general features of the collection. Its tone varying from jocular to serious, its mythic mode of penetrating the being of the tortoise, its symbolic reflection on man's search for wholeness through sexual ordeal and its overall religious vision typify the poetic style of D.H.Lawrence. Significantly, a whole series is devoted to one particular reptile. The sequence begins with "Baby Tortoise" with an intimate address:

"You know what it is to be born, alone, Baby tortoise!"

'Not yet awake', 'not quite alive', the tiny creature slowly enters the process of evolution, and the poet appreciates the indomitable spirit of the 'little Ulysses' whose near-comical response to the 'touch of sun' or 'the lingering chill' has a certain magnitude of solitary adventure. The poem shows Lawrence's power of acute observation of the otherness of the tiny reptile, and his realistic imitation of the slow and lonely journey of the baby tortoise through inertia towards life in terms of varying movement of rhythm which is initially torpid and then slowly activated into beat and spasm perfectly in
consonance with the progress of the tortoise. Lawrence's description of the cruciform structure of the tortoise shell in the poem of that name contains metaphysical wit, and its meaning becomes gradually clear in the following poems where the fatherless, motherless, brotherless, sisterless little tortoise becomes a prototype of Adam, 'all to himself' ("Tortoise Family Connections"). Born of an egg, unaware of his parents, with isolation as 'his birth-right', the tortoise goes on 'moving and being himself' and 'decidedly arrogantly' rows forward until finally he is 'crucified into sex' with a 'large and matronly and rather dirty' 'reptile mistress' ("Lui et Elle") who is his Eve. Tortures of sexual awakening is a novel experience which makes the tortoise an adult and 'dignified stalker through chaos'. And now, once and for all, the tortoise story becomes to Lawrence an archetype of the life-process. The tortoise newly 'doomed in the long crucifixion of desire' deliberately breaks himself in his dogged persistence of the apathetic spouse. Evidently, Lawrence's sympathy is for the male one who is more 'pestered and tormented' in the 'race of love' than the huge she:

"What can he do?
He is dumb, he is visionless,
Conceptionless.
His black, sad-lidded eye sees but beholds not
As her earthen mound moves on,
But he catches the folds of vulnerable, leathery skin,
Nail-studded, that shake beneath her shell,
And drags at these with his beak,
Drags and drags and bites,
While she pulls herself free, and rows her dull
mound along."(362)

The scene of dragging to 'hard humiliation' continues
in the next poems "Tortoise Gallantry", but the point of the 'awful persistency' does also become clear. It is not just gallantry but an urge from within,'a need to add himself on to her', and the consummation devoutly to be wished is finally achieved in "Tortoise Shout", the last poem of the sequence. The agelessly silent tortoise now 'in extremis' gives a cry of accomplishment as he cleaves 'behind the hovel-wall of that dense female' 'in tortoise-nakedness':

"A scream,/A yell,/A shout,/A paean,/A death-agony,/A birth cry,/A submission,/All tiny, tiny, far away, reptile under the first dawn."

The description mounts upwards from 'scream' to 'paean', and the 'death-agony' of the fragmented being becomes in the next phase a 'birth-cry'. Now, the answer to 'why were we crucified into sex' becomes as clear as the poet's intention in comparing the tortoise with Adam and Osiris all through the sequence. The idea is that since the days of Adam needing to add himself to Eve the life process has involved ruptures and severances which alone can assure wholeness. The identity of a male, whether Adam or a tortoise or he-goat, becomes complete when he dies, to re-live, in the female of his choice. Thus, in Lawrence's act of apprehension, coition is the mythic Cross which breaks the silence of 'single inviolability' and breaks the so-called integrity 'tearing a cry from us':

" Sex, which breaks up our integrity, our single inviolability, our deep silence, Tearing a cry from us."
Sex, which breaks us into voice, sets us calling across the deeps, calling, calling for the complement, singing, and calling, and singing again, being answered, having found. Torn, to become whole again, after long seeking for what is lost, the same cry from the tortoise as from Christ, the Osiris-cry of abandonment, that which is whole, torn asunder, that which is in part* finding its whole again throughout the universe. * (366-67)

As usual, R.P. Blackmur finds in the sequence, and especially in the lines just quoted, nothing but 'ritual' and 'formal or declarative prayer' marking "a natural end of emotions of which the sustaining medium is hysteria". 42 We have shown how Lawrence develops the idea of growth and consummation within the thematic design of the sequence, and how powerfully his vision of the severance of self as a step towards spiritual unison culminates in the quoted lines where the ecstasy of the painful experience of sexual act corresponds to the glory of Christ's Crucifixion. Again, a moment's reflection on the rhythmical pattern of the lines reveals Lawrence's mastery over the art of marrying feeling and form into the coherence of free verse. "The scattering and reuniting of the self", as Harold Bloom points

* The idea rendered here may remind one of Yeats's "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop":

"But love has pitched his mansion in The place of excrement For nothing can be sole or whole That has not been rent."

42 Language as Gesture. 298-99.
out, "is incanted successively",
and this is in keeping with the general experience of fragmentation and completion, division and unison that the series so effectively dramatizes in terms of the evolutionary process of a reptile to final crucifixion into sex. Kenneth Inniss feels that the tortoise poems do not represent the sexual philosophy of Lawrence. For 'in Lawrence's art' "sex is usually not emphasized in its aspect of crucifixion but of resurrection". Such reading, however, presents only the surface truth. For 'crucifixion' preludes 'resurrection', and crucified into sexual act, one regains one's single being. In fact, there are continual human overtones in the sequence; and the poet's reflection on the tortoise's experience holds good to human world as well, having a comprehensive significance of life-process. R.E. Pritchard is thus justified in his observation that "these poems, in their intelligence, wit and humanity are far more successful and mature than the obsession and self-inflation of much of the contemporary fiction".

The idea of 'crucifixion' into sex continues, but loses much of its edge and intensity, in the animal poems where Lawrence's penetration into the animal mode of sex is somewhat marked by confusion. Thus, a biblical creature whom Jesus rode, the ass suffers like man and unlike tortoise, the knot of

43 A DHL Miscellany. 367.
everlasting lament in everlasting desire' since the day he 'fell into the rut of love', and the baffling imbalance in the make-up of the ass is reflected in the woolly language of the poem. The mystery of sex is rendered more concretely in the two 'Goat' poems which can be justifiably called 'Sex Poems' for here the determining factor in Lawrence's apprehension of the 'He-goat' and the 'She goat' is largely their sexual character.

There is some remarkable joyousness in Lawrence's description of the she-goat that looks over the boards into the day 'like a belle at her window'. The 'ugly female' compels the attention of the poet who looks at her whole being objectively -- her normal pranks, staccato dance, her obtuseness, her standing in the garden 'like some huge, ghoulish grey bird in the air, on the bough of the leaning almond-tree' and her sheer will and libidinous desire while on heat. Her otherwise defiant stature only yields when the goat mounts her apparently in triumph, but in the act of love it is the she-goat that finally wins. 'Mona Lisa' that she is, she stands with her goaty mouth smiling the while as he strikes since she is sure that even in his highest orgasm he will never quite strike home, the target-quick' because 'her quick is just beyond the range of the arrow he shoots!' ("He Goat") Lawrence here obviously hints at the mystery of the female, and as in Look!, the quick of the essential female, remains beyond the range of male power.

It is significant that except for the moment of sexual ecstasy, Lawrence looks at the she-goat as a she-goat only. But
the he-goat, in his apprehension, is more than an animal, with his 'yellow eyes incomprehensible', he is presented in the poem as one of Lawrence's dark gods. An 'egoist', 'devilish aware of himself', 'overweening', and 'determined to stand on the highest peak' and 'look on the world as his own' -- the goat is prototype of the aboriginal male who is godly in himself. One understands why Joyce Carol Oates rates this poem high in psychological effect and finds it fascinating to examine (along with "She-goat") in Freudian terms: "For here, and probably only here, in a domesticated animal herd, do we find the absolutely uninhibited id, never challenged even by another id of comparable strength but enjoying dominion over any number of sexual subjects; it is as if the rest of the world had been obliterated, all other rivals, all paternal figures, and the superego banished, forgotten."46

" But he -goat,
Black procreant male of the selfish will and libidinous desire,
God in black cloud with curving horns of bronze,
Find an enemy, Egoist, and clash the cymbals in face-to-face defiance,
And let the lightning out of your smothered dusk.
Forget the female herd for a bit,
And fight to be boss of the world."(383)

The pitch in the description of the primal power and otherness of the he-goat is marked by a bathetic and ironic fall in the last line of the poem:

" But bah, how can he, poor domesticated beast! "

One can hardly miss in the line Lawrence's grouse against the human process of taming the wild and destroying their dignity of otherness.

The grouse becomes more vehement in "Elephant" (386-92), the only poem that Lawrence wrote during his sojourn in Ceylon in the spring of 1922 when the Prince of Wales came there to receive the salaam of the natives. His Majesty, the 'pallid dispirited Prince' on the royal animal provides Lawrence with an image of comic contrast:

"He is royalty, pale and dejected and fragment up aloft.
And down below huge homage of shadowy beasts;
bare-foot and trunk-lipped in the night."

"Elephant" is one of Lawrence's longish poems and its sheer length robs the poem of some of its positive qualities like the sustained effect of rice-field imagery. The self-glorification of the poet towards the end is also quite uncalled for and the political overtones are not only un-Lawrentian but self-destructive for the poem. Equally remarkable is "Kangaroo" (392-94), the only poem written during Lawrence's stay in Australia in July 1922 on the only non-human totemic animal of the continent. The 'yellow antipodal' mother kangaroo with 'her sensitive, long, pure-bred face' acquires some mythic character in Lawrence's act of apprehension. As the cypresses contain the aroma of lost Etruscan life and impress the poet as 'living myths', so the 'wonderful liquid eyes' of the Kangaroo which have been watching 'so many empty dawns in silent Australia', contain
the lost gleam of life of the continent:

"How full her eyes are, like the full, fathomless shining
eyes of an Australian black-boy
Who has been lost so many centuries in the margins
of existence!"

The rhythmic ductility of the free verse of the whole poem is in
perfect harmony with the agile animality of the kangaroo.
Lawrence's verse here captures the very movement of the animal.

The poems in **BBF** are by and large address verses,
'odes' of a unique kind where the poet's empathic apprehension of
his subject is often the outcome of an actual encounter with a
living non-human item -- plant, fruit, flower, beast or bird-- or
a non-living natural item -- the sun or the moon. It is only
casually that a second human self (which may be a projected alter
ego, a persona or social self of the poet) interferes with this
unique poet-subject relationship that does not degenerate into a
gush of subjectivity as in romantic poetry. For Lawrence's best
poetry is always powerful emotion held in powerful check. Thus in
"Pomegranate", "Peach" or "Purple Anemones" the 'you' is just an
occasion for looking into the subject. The address in the poems is
of two kinds: one, a direct address to the subject in a
dramatic, often in a jocular, theatrical manner, and the mould of
such poems being of the dramatic monologue kind, the second
presence involved is interestingly the subject itself. The poet
here explores the subject by way of a dialogue or interview with
the subject. In "Peach" and "Pomegranate" the poet first
encounters the 'you' and then gradually comprehends his actual
"You tell me I am wrong,
Who are you, who is anybody else to tell me I am wrong!
I am not wrong." ("Pomegranate")

or,

"Would you like to throw a stone at me?
Here, take all that's left of my peach." ("Peach")

or,

"Who gave us flowers?
Heaven? The white God?
Nonsense!"

*** *** ***

Who then?
Say who.
Say it -- and it is Pluto." ("Purple Anemones")

The dialogue in these poems ends shortly and sharply as the poet soon sees into his subject leaving the 'you' out of the process. But the second voice of poetry functions in a different key when the poem is the record of an absorbed interaction between the viewer and the viewed, and in such cases an intimate relation between the poet and his subject gradually takes place in Lawrence's 'lyric theater!' The tone in such poems is often too intimate to be formal:

"Tuscan cypresses,
What is it?

*** *** ***

Is there a great secret?
Are our words no good?" ("Cypresses")

* The phrase is borrowed from Marjorie Perloff's article already mentioned.
"Oh, America, 
The sun sets in you. 
Are you the grave of our day?" ("The Evening Land")

"Come up, thou red thing. 
Come up, and be called a moon." ("Southern Night")

"When did you start your tricks Monsieur? 
What do you stand on such high legs for?" ("The Mosquito")

"You know what it is to be born alone. 
Baby tortoise!" ("Baby Tortoise")

Barring "Cypresses" and "Medlars", the casual, informal tone in these poems is perfectly in keeping with the overall jovial comical play of the poet with his subject. But the case is different when Lawrence is quite serious about his exploration of the unknown otherness of the non-human world. Then the voice of poetry is unfailingly the first voice -- sedate and dignified, often gravely philosophical, as the poet sees the subject from certain artistic distance. The details then gain new depth of significance as the interest in the encounter becomes more condensed. "Almond Blossom", "Fish", "Snake", "He-goat", "She-goat", "Kangaroo" and many others illustrate the point. The only third voice in the collection -- the voice of a character -- is in "St Matthew". But that too is only apparent, for in reality it is a disguised first voice as Matthew is after all Lawrence's persona. R.E. Pritchard's comment on the overall ease and gaiety and seriousness of the volume may be worth-recalling in this connection: "These poems' colloquial ease and vigour, sensuous apprehension, and wit manifesting serious intelligence, make them
reminiscent of seventeenth-century poetry (and truer equivalents than the dry, clever verse of Eliot and Empson), particularly of the emblem poems, where objects are interpreted by ingenious allegorisation.\textsuperscript{47}

After Australia, Lawrence does not look to England which seems 'full of graves' to him, but to the 'evening land', the 'uncanny' America, or more specifically, to New Mexico where the sun sets in the desert 'in the last twilight'. The poems of this period have some special beauty as Lawrence here is engaged in his quest for a new myth sufficient to capture the spirit of the place. In the New Mexican poems which he calls 'Taos or Lobo poems'\textsuperscript{48} Lawrence takes yet another plunge into the aboriginal past. Unlike "Grapes" and "Cypresses" however, Lawrence's journey in these poems is not simply a return to the ancient life, but, as Lockwood would suggest, "an attempt to re-establish continuity where there has been a hiatus in our cultural development."\textsuperscript{49} In other words, Lawrence picks up a lost thread and pursues the trail to the origin of civilization. This largely explains why Lawrence is so tense and serious in his treatment and pursuit of the Mexican birds, beasts and people who imbibe the savage spirit of Mexican nature. In contemporary letters passim as also in numerous passages in \textit{Mornings in Mexico} and \textit{The Plumed Serpent}.

\textsuperscript{47} DHL: Body of Darkness. 143.
\textsuperscript{48} Letters. IV, 407.
\textsuperscript{49} Lockwood. 116.
Lawrence describes the savage spirit of the place, and gradually understands that the spirit of the locality which expresses itself in its birds, beasts and men, cannot be rendered in traditional myths and symbols. The myths of Persephone, Osiris and Dionysos that helped him explore the mystery of the fruits and flowers and even plumb the enigmatic otherness and raison d'être of the Sicilian snake or the underwater fish do not suit the blood-thirsty eagle of Mexico or its savage people who 'laugh in their sleep'. And since the gods of this world are equally strange and occult, Lawrence conceives of new myth in these poems so as to correspond to the gory rites and mores of the Mexican world and recapture the uncanny spirit of the place.

Except in "Bibbles" (394-400) where Lawrence indulges in a long and ludicrous play with the small black bitch, and in "The Blue Jay" (375) where he and his Bibbles encounter the jeering jay, the poet is engaged seriously in the Lobo poems to explore the Mexican nature, its birds, beasts and men. Thus "Men in New Mexico" and "Autumn at Taos" (407-9) serve the important purpose of furnishing the numinous Mexican setting in vivid, eidetic details. The rocky mountains where tigress is 'brindled with aspen', the 'jaguar-splashed, puma-yellow, leopard-livid slopes of America' where the 'blanket-wrapped' mountains never wake and react to the sun, impress the poet as a country of aboriginal quiet. Here men 'dance and run and stamp' in wakeful state, but after all, it is a country of sleep and forgetting, and even the whiteman becomes a somnambulist in this uncanny
country. The silent world gets slightly animated with the entry of two Mexicans with a dead lion in "Mountain Lion" (401-2). The near-prose opening of the poem—"Climbing through the January snow, into the Lobo canyon Dark grow the spruce-trees, blue is the balsam, water sounds still unfrozen, and the trail is still evident"—is a photographic description of the atmosphere. Significantly, "Mountain Lion" is the only poem in BLF where Lawrence presents an animal, however dead, along with two savages in the Lobo canyon, with the observation that man is 'the only animal in the world to fear'. The fearful presence of primal men carrying a mountain lioness recently killed in the morning and walking triumphantly across the vast solitary natural scene, offers the naturist-poet a chance to speculate on the 'live relatedness' of man and animal in the cosmic system. The lioness still retains 'dark, keen, fine rays in the brilliant frost of her face' and still her 'beautiful dead eyes' glimmer. The precision of the details of the animal's physical grandeur and of the dark 'cave in the blood-orange rock' she belonged to, deepens the intensity of savage life. The poem turns out to be an elegy on the death of a naturally vibrant, wild animal:

"So, she will never leap up that way again, with the yellow flash of a mountain lion's long shoot! And her bright striped frost-face will never watch any more, out of the shadow of the cave in the blood-orange rock, Above the trees of the Lobo dark valley-mouth!" (402)

The threnodic tone continues in the last stanza where the poet sadly thinks of the vacuum created by the death of the
mountain lion and feels some intrinsic relation with her in this world and the world beyond:

"And I think in this empty world there was room for me and a mountain lion. And I think in the world beyond, how easily we might spare a million or two of humans And never miss them. Yet what a gap in the world, the missing white frost-face of that slim yellow mountain lion!"

(402)

In the bird poems (368-74), except "The Blue Jay", Lawrence's imagination is at once mythopoeic and apocalyptic. It takes him up to the sky (for 'birds are the life of the skies') and back to the primal dawn of 'awful stillness' and straight to the gory circle of Aztec priests. In "Humming-Bird", for example, Lawrence visualizes the 'half inanimate' scene of the prehistoric dawn with no flowers but just a humming-bird flashing 'ahead of creation':

"I can imagine, in some otherworld Primeval-dumb, far back In that most awful stillness, that only gasped and hummed, Humming-birds raced down the avenues. Before anything had a soul, While life was a heave of Matter, half inanimate, This little bit chipped off in brilliance And went whizzing through the slow, vast, succulent stems. I believe there were no flowers then, In the world where the humming-bird flashed ahead of creation. I believe he pierced the slow vegetable veins with his long beak."

(372)

Up to this, the poem is an imaginative re-creation of the myth of proto life with the tiny humming-bird as a small growing point. But soon the tone of the poem changes as the poet hints at an
apocalyptic vision. Perhaps we look at the little bird 'through the wrong end of the long telescope of Time':

"Probably he was big
As mosses, and little lizards, they say, were once big. Probably he was a jabbing, terrifying monster."

This is decidedly a modern tendency to look at life from the reverse point, 'the wrong end', so as to get at the other side of truth. This tendency is very much active in Lawrence throughout BBF. It is this tendency that makes him consider the she-goat an archetype of the female, or the snake a strange god of the underworld; it is because of this tendency again that he can identify the fish with Jesus or describe the coition of the tortoise as 'crucifixion into sex.' Of course, such practice in poetry shocks and jars upon our accustomed sense of propriety, and may strike one as a rather ridiculous tendency towards vulgarism in poetry. But a quiet reflection reveals Lawrence's point which is missing in the obsessed and coloured vision of the idealists and romantics. His is the naturist tendency to shock the so-called modern, enlightened mind into an honest awareness of the uncontrollable mystery of his original bestial self, -- an awareness which binds him in the same natural animal spectrum. Lawrence knows that the naturist and apocalyptic vision of the other side is not always so noble, and the savage world is dangerous and boring. The last words of "Humming-Bird"- 'Luckily for us' -- hint at this realistic perception of things. But fear of boredom or shock never daunts Lawrence in undertaking the voyage to the prehistoric world scuttling across the floors
of civilization, and he ultimately visualizes a state of complete simplicity of natural life which paradoxically involves savagery and violence. This mission is a measure of his integrity, as a man and as a poet.

The mythopoetic and apocalyptic imagination with which Lawrence explores the Mexican other world finds its full play in the other two bird poems "Turkey Cock" and "Eagle in New Mexico". Turkey-cock, a gorgeous aboriginal bird, with its red-hot, sky blue wattles, does, for Lawrence, correspond, both physically and temperamentally, to the dark Red Indian, and he imagines the hour of the bird’s making, its unfinished ‘firing in the furnace of creation’ which recalls Blake’s imagination of the creation of the tiger in the burning workshop of God. This ‘will-tense’ bird not only represents a ‘raw American will that has never been tempered by life’ but also the ‘sinister splendour’ of ‘red-blood sacrifices’ celebrated by the ‘half-godly, half-demon’ Aztecs and Amerindians, and this precisely makes it different from the peacock of the far East.

"The peacock lifts his rods of bronze
And struts blue-brilliant out of the far East.
But watch a turkey prancing low on earth
Drumming his vaulted wings, as savages drum
Their rhythms on long-drawn, hollow, sinister drums.
The ponderous, sombre sound of the great
drum of Huichilobos
In pyramid Mexico, during sacrifice."

The image of savages beating rhythmically the ‘hollow, sinister drums’ during sacrifice has some terrible beauty about it; it is
evocative of primitive intensity and power, and by equating the drumming wings of the bird to this image, Lawrence renders the turkey-cock's primitive vitality. The rendering is equally intense and terrible in "Eagle in New Mexico" where Lawrence is more categorical about the 'bond of bloodshed' between 'blood-thirsty' eagle and the occult priests of Mexico who worship the sun with mystic exultance:

"When you pick the red smoky heart from a rabbit
or a light-blooded bird
Do you lift it to the sun, as the Aztec priests
used to lift red hearts of men?"

One may recall the old priest in "The Woman Who Rode Away" 'seeing beyond the sun' and accomplishing the sacrifice as the red sun sends his ray 'full through the shaft of ice deep into the hollow cave'. What is important to note is that in both the poems Lawrence prefers a balanced interaction between the primitive and the civilized. The turkey-cock, he believes, must 'go through the fire once more' till it is 'smelted pure', and as for the American Eagle, Lawrence has his explicit suggestion:

"Even the sun in heaven can be curbed and chastened at last
By the life in the hearts of men.
And you, great bird, sun-starer, heavy black beak
Can be put out of office as sacrifice bringer." (374)

This is a sure pointer to the fact that Lawrence reveres primitivism only for its creative vitality and potency and not for its savage cult or occult practices. But equally

50 See Collected Short Stories of DHL. 509-41.
noteworthy is the point that Lawrence has no respect for the 'American Eagle' (413-14) which turns into an ideological emblem of the 'new proud Republic'. For it is not a live bird but a symbol, and he hates symbols that degenerate into abstraction. Lawrence's choice hangs unmistakably in between the two eagles of primitive and modern cult--cult of blood-thirst and cult of money-thirst. BBF ends dropping this subtle suggestion in "The American Eagle", and this alone partly justifies the inclusion of this otherwise bad and irrelevant poem in the collection.

As we have noted quite early in our discussion, BBF suffers from disorderly arrangement and random inclusion of poems. Most unfortunate of all is the last poem "The American Eagle" which is critically judged as 'the worst poem in the volume'. As a matter of fact, this last poem was a late insertion in the collection. Both thematically and stylistically the poem belongs to *Pansies*, and a proper ending of BBF ought to have been with such a poem as "The Red Wolf" (403-5).

"The Red Wolf" is a thoroughly allegorical poem, a symbolic résumé of the entire collection, a symbolic and imaginative re-creation of the poetic self of Lawrence in quest of the dark sun. The dramatic dialogue between the old demon and the pale-face, red-bearded white man is symbolically between the strange Mexican god and the modern poet. The encounter may bring

51 Life Into Art. 244.
52 For a similar view see Lockwood. 140.
to mind Lawrence's first travel essay written in New Mexico entitled "Indians and an Englishman". The 'dark old demon' who declares himself as Old Nick, tells the poet to go home and even frightens him with pueblo dogs with long fangs. But the 'red-dawn-wolf' that the poet has grown in his long pursuit of the sun, is not frightened:

"Has the red wolf trotted east and east and east
From the far, far other end of the day
To fear a few fangs?"

Lawrence's journey to the non-human world of birds, beasts and flowers started, as we have noted in the beginning, with live, physical as well mental reactions to the dark, tropical sun of Sicily. Now, in the end, when the sun sets in the 'twilit desert' of Taos, the poet encounters personally the strange god -- 'the red old father' of the Mexican essay -- who calls himself in the poem 'the red wolf'. With a poet's courage to face the dark, Lawrence rejoins: "All right, the red-dawn-wolf I am". The word 'dawn' in between 'red' and 'wolf' indicates that he has achieved the combined power of nature and culture. And hence, instead of feeling alien and forlorn, he sits on his tail and waits in the mystic twilight for the sun 'to come back with a new story' and the poem ends resoundingly with deep apocalyptic reverberations.

BBF is Lawrence's crowning achievement in poetry, and it appears that in this volume Lawrence exhausts his poetic

53 See Phoenix, 92-99.
power and resources in exploring the profound mystery of the non-human world of nature. The sheer range and variety of interest from the green world of plants and trees to the world of reptiles, birds and beasts; the corresponding sweep of imagination and depth of insight, embracing myth (both traditional and personal), occult religion, Bible, history and even prehistoric world of primitive simplicity and violence; and the overall freeness and felicity of the expressive mode -- 'free essential verse' -- all these sufficiently establish the volume's title to greatness -- necessarily qualitative and quantitative -- seldom achieved in poetry. It is his single greatest original contribution to English poetry. David Ellis has the grain of this understanding when he observes that "no collection of verse published in the twentieth century is more uniformly successful or has more genuine variety (despite the constrictions implied by its title)". Early in our discussion, we have traced the modernism of the collection in Lawrence's honest exploration of the thisness of the non-human world and in his instinctive perception of primitivism and the philosophy of naturism. Let us now complete the point by asserting that the quest for thisness and the valuation of primitivism and naturism are aesthetic exigency to Lawrence for the attainment of a kind of weltanschauung, the vision of an ideal, total world in which the

'live relatedness' between the human and the non-human, the city and the savage, is the most important and vital. BBF realizes this vision creating a landmark in the twentieth century English poetry, and the relevance of the vision is manifest in the most recent Anglo-American poetry, most notably in the poetry of Ted Hughes.