"Only satire is decent now": Pansies and Nettles
In May 1922 D.H. Lawrence wrote to Amy Lowell: "Alas for me and my erotic reputation! Tell them I have sent my Muse into a nunnery." The Muse, of course, was not sent into a nunnery till the publication of *BFI* in October 1923. But after that, there was a divorce with the Muse in actual terms. Barring the few hymns in *The Plumed Serpent*, the period from the middle of 1923 to the late 1928—nearly five years—a significantly long period indeed for a poet like Lawrence who wrote poetry untiringly all along—proved to be poetically sterile. Lawrence kept himself busy during the time in writing stories and essays and the new occupation that gradually engrossed him was painting. He wrote to Martin Secker, his old publisher, rather joyfully: "Painting is much more amusing art than writing, and much less to it, costs one less, amuses one more. Think, I shall try to sell pictures and make a living that way." 

Evidently, Lawrence's enthusiasm for poetry ebbed down, and except the poetic passages in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that occupied him quite long, till death, the only significant poetic endeavour of the time can be found in his organization of *Collected Poems* (1928) which received appreciation in several

1 Letters. IV, 243.
American reviews 3 and even earned from J.C. Squire the comment that "his poems are better than his novels". With the publication of Collected Poems, Lawrence recovered his penchant for poetry, though of a different kind. This last spell started from November 1928 resulting in the composition of Pansies (1929) and the posthumously published books of verse Nettles (1930) and More Pansies and Last Poems (1932). While Pansies and Nettles form a long sequence by their unique points of thematic, tonal and stylistic similarities, More Pansies and Last Poems demand a separate study as they record the last strand of thought of Lawrence as poet deeply preoccupied with loneliness, God and death.

A common critical assumption about the poems in Pansies and Nettles is that they mark the exhaustion of Lawrence's poetic power. They are a dull "species of journalism, a means by which Lawrence emptied his veins of the bile that had turned his blood into a poisonous, amber fluid". 5 Richard Aldington's remark is in the same vein: "I cannot feel that Pansies is anything but a decline from his earlier poems while Nettles is about the worst and the most trivial thing he ever published. It seems to me that nearly all these Pansies and Nettles came out of Lawrence's

3 See The Priest of Love. 477.
4 The Critical Heritage, 302.
The contemporary reviews of *Pansies* have also an agreement that here Lawrence 'writes from a fixed point of prejudice' and the poems, 'distressingly flat', read like 'index to his opinions' 'bare opinions nakedly in verse'. And to Virginia Woolf the thoughts, in *Pansies* and *Nettle's* read like sayings that small boys scribble upon stiles to make housemaids jump and titter. There is much truth in such observations and a patient reading will reveal that numerous poems in these collections are loosely and hurriedly written ideas set in a miserably low key. They are bitty, scrappy, and often spurtingly angry expressions in poetry. Lawrence jotted them down and the speed of random writing can be grasped when we take the stock-account. The first draft of *Pansies* was finished by November-December 1928 and Lawrence wrote as many as one hundred and sixty four poems in the two months. Between the end of April and mid June 1929, he wrote some fifty to sixty more pansies, and in the next five months he finished two hundred and fifty more pieces. This only shows how things fall apart in Lawrence's poetic world, and how with buoyant flippancy he takes the task of writing verses during the fag end of his life. Such dissipation of talent is markedly different from his sincere undertaking of the art form up to 1923. One possible explanation of such random writing might be psychological. Lawrence perhaps

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6 *Introduction to Last Poems in Complete Poems*. 595.


understood intuitively that his days were numbered. As Keith Sagar points out: "It was probably more his need to write what could be produced without taxing imaginative effort, his desire to communicate with a larger audience than that which 'art' poetry commands, and his need, time being short now, to encapsulate his ideas which led him to jot down loosely versified thoughts, the poetic equivalent of the newspaper articles he was writing at the same time". 9

It is significant that Lawrence knew well that he was spiritually run down and poetically effete. In one 'pansy' he honestly confesses: "My soul is almost blank, my spirit quite"(501), and candidly he states in a letter to the Huxleys that he has been only dallying with poetry: "I have been doing a book of pensees, which I call pansies, a sort of loose little poem form: Frieda says with joy: real doggerel.- But meant for pensies, not poetry, especially not lyrical poetry". 10 It was obviously a pleasant pastime, and Lawrence enjoyed himself in indulging in this amusingly easy mode of writing. As Rhys Davies, the young Welsh novelist who stayed with the Lawrence's during November 1928, records: "At this time in Bandol he was writing the satirical poems to be called Pansies.... For all his fury and rages, he got immense fun out of writing Pansies. He would write

9 Life Into Art. 327.

them in bed in the morning, cheerful and chirpy, .... and he was intensely happy and proud of the Pansies: would read out the newest ones with delight, accentuating the wicked, sharp little pecks in them."\(^{11}\) But however delighted he might be, Lawrence knew well that the 'sharp little pecks' would irritate people and publishers might not easily accept them. He wrote to L.E. Pollinger. "Today I am sending you a couple of Mss. of the poems Pansies. They may displease you, so be prepared. If you offer them to Secker and he doesn't care for them, I don't mind".\(^{12}\) The apprehension came true. The typescript sent to England was held by Post Office at the instruction of Scotland Yard, and was released and returned to Lawrence after the intervention of a barrister. This depressed and angered Lawrence, and his reactions are recorded in his letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell dated 5 February 1929: "Scotland Yard ....holding up my mail and actually confiscating two copies MS, copies of my poems Pansies ..... saying the poems were indecent and obscene which they are not, and putting me to a lot of trouble ... Really, why does one write ! Or why does one write the things I write! I suppose it's destiny but on the whole, an unkind one."\(^{13}\) In July Martin Secker published Pansies without the fourteen poems which had been objected to, and in August Charles Lahr, the noted anarchist, brought out a private and unexpurgated edition.

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12 Moore. II, 1114.
13 Moore. II, 1124.
of the poems which brought Lawrence a good deal of money.

There is no doubt that *Pansies* and *Nettles* (and *More Pansies* to some extent) mark a certain break with the progress Lawrence has so far achieved as a poet. They have none of the thematic variety and unity of early poetry, the sustained treatment of a complex subject as in *Look!* and *Bay,* and the mythopoetic depth and newness of *BDF.* They constitute, as critics believe, "an impressive and subsequently influential body of what Yeats would have called rhetoric, made out of a writer's quarrel with othermen." And yet, they are poems of some kind having a definite relation to the body of Lawrence's poetry; and if we read them in terms of what Lawrence wants them to be, they may impress as something unique in English poetry. Majority of the poems do not surely impress as, what Keith Sagar calls, 'art poetry'. But Lawrence does not want them to be either; for him they are 'a bunch of pansies, not a wreath of immortelles' (424).

In the Introduction Lawrence describes the pansies in their root sense of 'pensees' - 'handful of thoughts', and of 'panser' ...'to dress or soothe a wound' - the former pointing to the content and the latter to the purpose of the poem, As with Donne, so with Lawrence 'thought' is not an idea in isolation; for it involves the whole man, as he says in the poem called "Thought" in *More Pansies* : "Thought is a man in his wholeness wholly attending" (673). In the Introduction (417) he is more

categorical: "Each little piece is a thought; not a bare idea or an opinion or a didactic statement, but a true thought, which comes as much from the heart and the genitals as from the head. A thought with its own blood of emotion and instinct running in it like the fire in the fire opal... Perhaps if you hold up my pansies properly to the light, they may show a running vein of fire. At least, they do not pretend to be half-baked lyrics or melodies in American measure. They are thoughts which run through the modern mind and body, each having its own separate existence, yet each of them combining with all the others to make up a complete state of mind". The pansies attest Herbert Read's contention that in poetry Lawrence maintains a "steady purpose to find what the heart really believes in and what the heart really wants."  

The poet keeps the thoughts in verse form because he feels "that a real thought, a single thought, not an argument, can only exist easily in verse or in some poetic form". (423) Graham Hough misses the cardinal relation between the two points -- Lawrence's definition of thought 'with its own blood of emotion' and the 'poetic form' it assumes -- when he says that the 'casual thoughts' in Pansies "could be written out in quite normal and respectable prose".  

The most convenient example that critics cite to show how in Lawrence the formal organization of poetry becomes irrecoverable when it is set down in prose order,

15 The Cult of Sincerity (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) 164.

16 The Dark Sun. 208.
is the famous pansy called "Wages". (521) 17 But Sandra Gilbert has shown that the prose rendering of the poem cannot deny the poetic form which is a 'necessity': "The poetic necessity that gives it its form is undeniable so that its prosody (the visual as well as auditory arrangement of its words) conveys a kind of logic; to write the poem out as prose is to blur the meaning". 18 The 'poetic necessity' Sandra Gilbert speaks of becomes more convincing when we understand that the poems in Pansies, Nettles and More Pansies often typify Lawrence's considered notion of the 'poetry of the present'. 'Each little piece is a thought' -- the thought of a moment and for a poet who believes philosophically in the intensity and eternity of moments, even moment of moments, the casually written doggerels with no pretension to established poetic have their worth and significance. In recording the thought of a moment which involves the 'instant whole man' -- the quality of the thought being relatively unimportant, even a non-issue -- the poems well illustrate Lawrence's theory of 'instant poetry', his poetic of 'the immediate present, the Now', The bits of thoughts expressed in 'free essential verse' arrest the flux, the quick of the moment, and Lawrence maintains in them a correspondence between momentary thought and poetic form. David Ellis is thus justified in his observation that "more than any other of the collections of verse Lawrence published, Pansies

conforms to the Lawrentian ideal of allowing the subject of a poem to determine its form. And when the subject is meant to be some thought about the world which is self-contained and relatively non-sequential ... the choice of verse or even of what Lawrence himself disarmingly refers to as 'some poetic form' allows for a variety difficult to achieve in prose."19

Most of the poems in Pansies are results of Lawrence's continual ill health and his growing bitterness at the mulitity and pretensions of modern western civilization, at man's obsession with money, at the industrialization and mechanization of human life and society and at the imbecility of the mass. They are not simply pensees but panser: "These are my tender administrations," Lawrence says, "to the mental and emotional wounds we suffer from" (417). 'Tender' in Lawrence's euphemism for 'bitter', for the poems are, in most cases, social satires 'with a running vein of fire', and they are animated by caustic criticism. Interestingly, here Lawrence's anger finds no hysteric outburst; rather it is punctuated with sarcasm and mordant irony and is often enlivened by beautifully sunny humour seldom found in Lawrence. Vivian de Solè Pinto's comment may be relevant in this context: "The poems that Lawrence wrote at the end of his life have a peculiar quality of freshness and directness. The Whitmanesque rhetoric and the 'ritual frenzy' that Blackmur condemns have now disappeared. We hear in the poems the voice of

19 "Verse or Worse : The Place of Pansies in Lawrence's Poetry". DHL's Non-Fiction. 164.
a very wise man who is also humorous completely disillusioned, yet never cynical, a man who loves life, but is saddened and embittered at the way in which it is being fouled and violated by 'mass' civilization'.

**BBF** ends in Mexican twilight with apocalyptic suggestions, and **Pansies** begins with poem of dusk and twilight which hint at the impending doom of modern civilization. Thus instead of registering a complete departure from the preceding collection, **Pansies** marks, in a sense, the continuity of Lawrence's search for meaning and wholeness. Now he shifts his focus from the intensely alive non-human world to the familiar human scene of muck, money and machine, taboo and social insanity. Thus the opening poem "Our Day Is Over" sets the key to the collection with the image of oncoming waves of darkness, or what Yeats calls 'darkening flood', which will engulf the modern man:

"Our day is over, night comes up
Shadows steal out of the earth

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We wade, we wade, we stagger, darkness rushes between our stones. We shall drown. " (425)

Lawrence's main targets in **Pansies**, his bêtes noires, can be easily located. They are the 'beastly bourgeois', machine and money-muck, communism and soviets based on wages and working class, democracy, and the great tragedy of our material-

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20 Introduction. Complete Poems. 15.
mechanical civilisation crushing out the natural human life. Lawrence's inspiration for hatred comes, of course, from his old and deep-seated belief that man must be fully alive in flesh and blood and must not be 'monkeys minding machines'. His work will be an absorbing 'game of life' for 'life is lived in work'; he must not be 'a wage-slave'. Equally bitter is his contempt for unnatural craze for money and acquisitiveness in pansies like "The Root of Our Evil", "Money-Madness", "Kill Money" etc. Lawrence traces the root cause of ugliness, dreariness and emotional etiolation of modern life in the perverted instinct for money which is 'our vast collective madness', and the intensity of the acid criticism can be felt in lines like:

"There is no way out, we are all caged monkeys blue-arsed with the money-bruise and wearing our seats out sitting on money " (485)

The poet, of course, knows what it means to be poor, but he does not want to be a 'multimillionaire' either. He craves rather for the natural growth and abundance of the pine trees, and the genuineness of the desire is reflected in the smooth and suave lines:

"When I look at this pine-tree near the sea,. that grows out of rock, and plumes forth, plumes forth, I see it has a natural abundance.

With its roots it has a grand grip on its daily bread, and its plumes look like green cups held up to sun and air and full of wine.

I want to be like that, to have a natural abundance and plume forth, and be splendid. " ("Poverty", 498)

The most important feature of Pansies is that Lawrence
here thinks with pen in hand, and there is a sequence in the
thoughts begetting thoughts, or what Lockwood calls, 'imaginative
unity' between different groups of poems. "The continuity
produced by the way in which thought inspires thought is balanced
by a principle of organization which places pansies together in
groups of related interest or related feeling."21 One such
subject related to money and machine is wage and working class,
and poems like "O ! Start A Revolution" (453), "A Same
Revolution", "Always This Paying", "Poor Young Things" (517-18)
"The Combative Spirit", "Wages" (519-21) etc. form a sequence.
Saddened deeply by the 'money-system', by the plight of young men
who are 'born prisoners' 'in a universal workhouse', Lawrence
envisages a 'sane revolution' which will abolish labour and the
working class and make work a 'game of life'. Such revolution
will usher in 'new world of wild peace where living is free',
and will do away with 'work-cash-want circle':

"The wages of work is cash
The wages of cash is want more cash.
The wages of want more cash is vicious competition.
The wages of vicious competition is--the world we live in.

The work—cash-want circle is the viciousest circle
that ever turned men into fiends."

(521)

David Ellis's comment on the poem "Wages" from which these lines
are cited, is noteworthy: "The relentless succession of
statements, relieved only by Lawrence's humorous side-glance at
his own solemnity in 'viciousest'; and the grim ingenuity which
allows for the inclusion of the beneficiaries of unearned income in the total picture, make this 'pansy' a minor masterpiece: a classic statement of quite what money means to the twentieth century 'free world'".22 The poignancy of Lawrence's satire on the money and machine-oriented social system becomes understandable when we remember that he had a deeply idealistic vision of social life where communism would be based not on wages or profits, 'nor any sort of buying and selling but a religion of life' ("Root of Our Evil" 482-83) In a letter to Rhys Davies, 28 December 1928, Lawrence writes: "I get more revolutionary every minute, but for life's sake. The dead materialism of Marx socialism and Soviet seems to me no better than what we have got. What we want is life and trust; men trusting men and making living a free thing, not a thing to be earned".23 Thus what gives his satires on social insanity some additional power is his unique sympathy for the hapless man whom socialism and civilization have caged into a workhouse and transformed into a 'living clay', 'a wage-slave', 'money-slave'. ("A Man" 524) The undertone of pity and tenderness for the man-turned-slave makes Lawrence's satire 'a form of sympathy'.

After money-oriented social life Lawrence devotes quite a good many 'thoughts' to mind-oriented sex life and vain idealism in love and hollowness in women. "Sex and Trust",

22 *DHL's Non Fiction*. 158.
"Sex Isn't Sin", "Touch", "Noli Me Tangere", "Touch Comes", "Chastity", "Climb Down O Lordly Mind", "Ego-Bound Women", "Volcanic Venus", "Wonderful Spiritual Women", "Leave Sex Alone", "The Mess of Love", "Cerebral Emotions", "It's No Good", "Don't Look At Me" etc. form an interesting sequence giving vent to Lawrence's contempt for 'this mind-mischievous age' in which man has made a great 'mess of love' by 'cerebral emotions'.* Sex which, for Lawrence, is a 'state of grace', has in modern times become the 'mind's preoccupation', so much so that now 'in the body we can only mentally fornicate'. ("Leave Sex Alone") This is a very mordant satire on modern attitude to the primal instinct of life, and the 'priest of love' raises an alarming cry for release from the 'mind-perverted, will-perverted, ego-perverted' modern love:

"O leave me clean from mental fingering
from the cold copulation of the will,
from all the white, self-conscious lechery
the modern mind calls love!" (469)

* Lawrence's contempt for 'cerebral emotions' born in people's minds and 'forced down by the will on to their poor deranged bodies', his utter dislike of feelings that people intend and 'mean to feel' may remind us of Yeats's "A Prayer For Old Age":

"God guard me from those thoughts men think
In the mind alone
He that sings a lasting song
Thinks in a marrow-bone."

The kinship of Lawrence and Yeats is understood in such subtle points and beliefs. For each poet, 'thought' has a 'body'; each 'thinks in a marrow-bone' to sing 'a lasting song', and each dies 'a foolish, passionate man'.

The pansies regarding the ego-bound modern woman, the 'volcanic Venus' apparently read like squibs, but they are, in reality, some of the genuinely felt thoughts of Lawrence about the hollowness and meaningless spirituality of women who arrogate the place of man to themselves. The overwhelming presence of ego and thought in women, according to Lawrence, results in the most appalling of all passions, 'lesbian passion'. Lawrence's fear of energetic aggressive women deepened as he became impotent by the early middle age, according to Frieda Lawrence, since 192624 and impotence led to phallic anxiety and sadism as is manifest in the pansies like "Don't Look At Me", "What Does She Want?" "It's No Good", etc. The point, however, remains that Lawrence never lost his reverence for the profound female mystery or his love and tenderness for the loving woman who waits with submission for her man. "All I Ask" and "I wish I Knew A Woman" (479, 506) are two soothing pansies which balance the incisive satires on the 'wonderful, thoughtful women'. The tone in these two personal poems is tender enough having the characteristic mellow beauty of a Lawrence love poem.

Lawrence's poetic sanity and the clarity of his vision of life and society can be measured when we look at such pansies as celebrate normalcy, individuality and natural rhythm of life, pansies which provide contrast to the satires on middle class morality and prestige, money and industry, social and mental

24 See The Priest of Love. 455.
pretensions and emotional bankruptcy of the modern intellectuals. The pansies about the non-human beings are remarkable in this respect, as they balance by contrast the meanness and unnaturalness of man. Thus 'while people mince mean words through their teeth', the nightingale 'makes of himself a belfry of throbbing sound' ('Paltry Looking People', 530); and while fashionable women 'cut their shimmery hair' 'a peacock in a forest of high trees' 'shimmers in a streams of blueness and long-tressed magnificence'. ('Peacock' 530) Again, a running lizard impresses Lawrence as a 'dandy fellow' and gives him a chance to speculate how man in his craze for modernity has lost the glory of selfhood. The comment is pithy:

"If men were as much men as lizards are lizards they'd be worth-looking at. " ('Lizard' 524)

The terseness of such expression is the result of the closeness of observation; and the quality gains in biting sharpness of contrast in the little masterpiece called "The Mosquito Knows":

"The mosquito knows full well, small as he is he's beast of prey. But after all he only takes his bellyful, he doesn't put my blood in the bank. " (466)

The two pansies "Little Fish" and "Elephant Is Slow to Mate" (466, 465) do not fit the collection as in them Lawrence penetrates the otherness of non-human beings, and rightfully they belong to BBF. "Little Fish" is a tiny poem of simple appreciation of the animal's joyful, aquatic mode of life, and it
has none of the poet's profound perception of the fish in *BBF*. But "Elephant Is Slow to Mate" is much better than its counterpart in *BBF*. The poem shows Lawrence's competence in handling well-rhymed, organized formal verse. Its slow rhythm is consistent with the details of slow but fruitful mating of the huge beast. After a long courtship through drinking, browsing and loitering along the river beds, the elephants at last enjoy themselves in rut:

"So slowly the great hot elephant hearts grow full of desire, and the great beasts mate in secret at last, hiding their fire.

Oldest they are and the wisest of beasts so they know at last how to wait for the loneliest of feasts for the full repast.

They do not snatch, they do not tear; their massive blood moves as the moon-tides, near, more near, till they touch in flood."

(465)

In a collection of verse where numerous poems read like opinionated statements or at best bitter satires, poem like "Little Fish" or "Elephant Is Slow to Mate" or the twilight poems of the beginning have their undeniable significance. Two sets of pansies centring round 'the swan' and 'the sun' do also compensate for the dearth of 'poetry' in the volume. The poems, of course, have message to give and are, at bottom, 'rhetorical' and opinion-oriented but the opinion or message does not starkly surface in them and statements are mostly rendered in images, which is as it should be in poetry.
The swan series includes "Swan", "Leda", "Give Us Gods" and "Won't It Be Strange -- ?" (435-39). While in the first two Lawrence re-creates the Greek myth of Zeus and Leda, the latter two record the modern response to the re-creation of the myth which has been central to the literary tradition of Europe. Mallarmé and Rilke have already written poems on the Leda and Swan theme with variations; and W.B. Yeats in his "Leda and the Swan" powerfully describes the plight of Leda suddenly assaulted by the 'great wings' and 'brute blood of the air'. Lawrence goes a step further and improving upon the previous literary traditions he universalizes the myth to make it symbolic of procreative vitality, or, as Giorgio Melchiori feels, to project "his idea of the moment of vision in violent sexual terms". Lawrence's swan, a denizen of the vast space of chaos, stoops in the dark upon the featherless Ledas of the world and 'stamps his black marsh-feet on their white and marshy flesh' in a zeal to procreate a new world of wild cygnets. Worldly men are overwhelmed as they witness the primal scene of mutual impulse; and Lawrence, it seems, has a personal share in the women's revelatory experience.

"Far-off
at the core of space
at the quick
of time
beats
and goes still
the great swan upon the waters of all endings
the swan within vast chaos, within the electron.

For us
no longer he swims calmly
nor clacks across the forces furrowing a great gay trail
of happy energy,
nor is he nesting passive upon the atoms,
nor flying north desolative icewards
to the sleep of ice,
nor feeding in the marshes,
nor honking horn-like into the twilight.

But he stoops, now
in the dark
upon us;
he is treading our women
and we men are put out
as the vast white bird
furrows our featherless women
with unknown shocks
and stamps his black marsh-feet on their white and
marshy flesh." (435-36)

This is a representative Lawrence poem, and Helen Sword in a most recent article "Leda and the Modernists" comments revealingly on its poetic excellence and distinction: "In fact, the poem itself, in its unfettered form, forceful diction, and unconventional imagery, seems to partake of the swan's vibrant energy, as Lawrence striving for raw power rather than for intricate artifice, sounds a vehement rejection of the symbolist aesthetic governing Mallarmé's elaborate verbal labyrinths and Yeats's and Rilke's immaculate versifications". 26

The pansies about the sun -- quite a favourite subject and term of reference of D.H. Lawrence -- are related to the swan series. The swan absorbs the spirit of the sun as he beats his luminous wings within the vast space, and in his contact women get the chance to 'drink life direct from the source'. In the sun

26 See PMLA. March 1992, 311.
series too the poet speaks of the live space with a wild heart, and feel "aristocratic, noble" as he feels a pulse going through him from the sun of suns. A soul-to-soul communion is proposed now between the sun and the sun-men and sun-women:

"Men should group themselves into a new order of sun-men. Each one turning his breast straight to the sun of suns in the centre of all things, and from his own little inward sun nodding to the great one." (525)

The sun-women also raise a chorus declaring allegiance not to men or children but to the sun, and joyously they uncover themselves to the sun-men as a marigold opening before the sun:

"How delicious it is to feel sunshine upon one! And how delicious to open like a marigold when a man comes looking down upon one with sun in his face, so that a woman cannot but open like a marigold to the sun, and thrill with glittering rays." (526)

The sensuous abandon in the lines may remind one of Lawrence's preoccupation with the idea of the sun-woman opening before the sun in the famous story called "Sun".

There are poems in Pansies which show how an intensely-felt opinion can be translated into wonderful poetry if only the poet puts his "thought" not hastily in "some poetic form" but in some poetic language which includes, among other things, felt imagery. "Fidelity" (476-77) is one such poem where Lawrence describes the difference between fidelity and love in terms of a flower and a gem. In a parallel poem "The Universe Flows" (479)
the poet dwells upon the theme of flux, but the idea there is not rendered in concrete terms. In "Fidelity" the same theme finds a better expression as the poet here resorts to the metaphor of flower and gem to make clear, initially, the difference between fidelity and love, and philosophically, the character of continual passage of time:

"All flows, and every flow is related to every other flow, Flowers and sapphires and us, diversely streaming."

The poem evinces how Lawrence can concentrate on a metaphor to make the subject of his poetry a comprehensive 'thought'. To this may be added R.T. Jones's revealing comment drawing our attention to how "the poem relates human experience to the non-human world so that each helps to make the other intelligible. The flower and the gem are essential to the meaning of the poem; they are vividly apprehended as real things, and it is their reality, the factual sense of what they are, that throws light on love and fidelity, not the mere idea of flower and gem". 27

A few short imagistic lyrics in Pansies like "New Moon", "Spray", "Sea-Weed", (467) show how Lawrence's 'thoughts' derive their power from emotion and how stray scenic snatches present the calm of a thoughtfully emotional mind. Significantly, these poems have not even subtle reference to any bitter aspect of life and society; their appeal is purely aesthetic. There are again

small poems, imagistically bright and containing deep meaning of life such as "Desire Is Dead" or "When the Ripe Fruit Falls" (504-505):

"Desire may be dead
and still a man can be
a meeting place for sun and rain,

wonder outwaiting pain

as in a wintry tree."

This is a minor masterpiece seldom found in English poetry.

Finally, mention must be made of the poems in the collection in which Lawrence is preoccupied with his lonely soul and the Unconscious. "Moon Memory", "There is Rain in Me", "Desire Goes Down Into The Sea", "The Sea, The Sea", "November by the Sea" (453-55) form a successful sequence round the central image of sea. Sea-awareness, symbolic of death-awareness, permeates these poems so deeply that they virtually become death poems anticipating the mood and mind of Last Poems and marking thereby a remarkable departure from the general trend of Pansies. Disillusioned of all the uses of the world, the poet now absorbedly looks at the mid ocean and surrealistically he visualizes a deep black sea of the Unconscious from which snow-leopards emerge with violence and then go down grumbling with 'salt rage'. The idea is rendered in symbolic language in "There Is Rain In Me":

"There is ocean in me
Swaying, swaying O so deep
So fathomlessly black

and spurting suddenly up, snow-white
like snow-leopards rearing
high and clawing with rage at the cliffs of the soul
then disappearing back with a hiss
of eternal salt rage, angry, is old ocean
within a man. " (454)

Lawrence here draws clearly on the Freudian Unconscious. The image of the old angry ocean in man projecting the violent self and then swinging back with a hiss, makes the poem a work of powerful vision and insight. In the three other poems Lawrence is closer to elemental waters, the sea as source, and as he feels that 'now in November' (a symbolic month indicating journey toward the end) the sun of his soul sets darting a 'few gold rays', the vision of the dark sea widens:

" The wide sea wins and the dark
winter and the great day-sun and the sun in my soul
sinks, sinks to setting and the winter solstice
downward, they race in decline
my sun, and the great gold sun. " (455)

The sedate and composed voice in the lines anticipates the voice of his last journey in "The Ship of Death".

It follows from this discussion that notwithstanding the presence of a good many squibs and doggerels hurriedly written out in casual, racy, journalistic manner, often with epigrammatic smartness reminiscent of 'haiku', Pansies cannot, on the whole, be brushed off by such criticism that the poems do not come out of the real poetic self of Lawrence or that they are distressingly flat index to his opinions crudely expressed in verse. Such awful generalization falls short of appreciation of the sheer variety in interest, mood and concern that D.H.
Lawrence so effectively displays in numerous poems of the collection. In fact, this long undervalued poetic work of Lawrence demands all the more serious attention because it attempts reconciliation between a restlessly critical mind and a passionately imaginative, vatic soul.

It is an acknowledged fact that Nettles which was published weeks after his death (on 2nd March 1930), indicates the low watermark of Lawrence's poetic talent, and is not worthy of serious consideration. Nettles was a product of both psychic and physical depression. Lawrence wrote the poems in August 1929 at the Kurhaus Plättig where he fell awfully ill. His genial spirit fell; and most dejectedly and wearily he wrote to G. Orioli: "It is so ugly and awful, I nearly faint, I have never felt so down, so depressed and so ill, as I have here, these ten days; awful .... At present I can do nothing: except write a few stinging Pansies which this time are Nettles. I shall call them nettles".  

The confiscation of Pansies and especially the police raid on the exhibition of his paintings on 5 July 1929 at Warren Gallery, London, added to his depression. Thirteen of his paintings and copies of colour reproduction of them published in June 1929 were seized by the police, and subsequently on court hearing presided over by Mr Mead, the Marlborough Street Magistrate, they were returned to Lawrence on condition that they

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28 Moore. II, 1172-73.
would not be exhibited again. Lawrence felt run-down and he dipped his pen in gall, screaming feelings of hatred, bitterness and frustration somehow in the poems of *Nettles*, and the collection betrays clear symptoms of weariness in Lawrence's inner world. Critics often feel that while Lawrence was 'justified in his exasperation and petulance', "it would have been more poetic not to have published his exasperation so stridently". As is manifest in the title, the 'nettles', are meant to bite, and Lawrence's vengeful and vitriolic mood is clear in a letter to Giuseppe Orioli: "I've done nice stinging nettles, and let's hope they 'll sting the arses of all the Heads and Persians of shiny London". To this reference to Mr. Mead, the Magistrate, may be added Lawrence's 'squibby bits of poetry' in letters to Charles Lahr later included in *More Pansies* (680), deriding the raiding London police and T.W. Earp who reviewed his painting exhibition in *The New Statesman* 17 August 1929. We quote the lampoons in the letters as they fit in with the mood in *Nettles* and show the extent of Lawrence's bitterness and anger.

1. "I heard a little chicken chirp
   My name is Thomas, Thomas Earp!
   And I can neither paint nor write
   I only can set other people right.

29 James Reeves, Introduction. *Selected Poems of D.H.L.*

30 Moore. II, 1174.

31 Moore. II, 1181 and 1196.

All people that can write or paint
do tremble under my complaint.
For I am a chicken, and I can chirp;
and my name is Thomas, Thomas Earp."

2. "Lately I saw a sight most quaint:
London's lily-like policemen faint
in virgin outrage as they viewed
the nudity of a Lawrence nude!"

The poems in *Nettles* like "The British Boy", "13,000 People" and "Innocent England" (576-80) record Lawrence's reactions to the sense of morality and judgement of Britannia that 'jabbed her British trident clean through the poor boy's pictures'. Evidently, these poems are motivated by gall and wormwood and caustic satire which make them raw verse. This observation holds good in case of other nettles about the general election of May 1929 or the Act of Parliament of 1928, about the industrial masses with 'ready sensations' and the British police as a whole. But, as we know, when tenderly felt emotions are added to feelings of anguish and anger, the birth of a good poem becomes inevitable. "Give Me A Sponge" (580-81) is one such -- and the only one -- relatively good poem in the volume. The poem is steeped in lonely sorrows of an artist who suffers humiliation of hostile and impervious reception of his paintings. The hurt feelings of neglect find articulation in the controlled measure of satire that moves as well as nettles:

"Give me a sponge and some clear, clean water
and leave me alone a while
with my thirteen sorry pictures that have just been
rescued from durance vile.

Leave me alone now, for my soul is burning
as it feels the slimy taint
of all those nasty police-eyes like snail-tracks smearing
the gentle souls that figure in the paint.

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Ah the clean waters of the sky, ah! can you wash
away the evil starings and the breath
of the foul ones from my pictures? Oh purify
them now from all this touch of tainted death!