CHAPTER - IV

Birds, Beasts and Flowers

The Unexplored World of Experience:

Quest for Poetic Experience
Lawrence started the collection ‘Birds, Beasts and Flowers’, at San- Gervasio near Florence in Sept. 1920. By the end of Feb. 1923, the collection was completed. Lawrence wrote these poems in free verse which became popular in New Mexico, Italy, Sicily, and in several other countries. Meanwhile, he traveled from one country to another in Asia, Europe and America with hope for a place where he could establish the new way of life and looking at people for sharing for his idealism, his emotions and his inner conflicts. During the same period, he wrote some of his best works—Aaron’s Rod (Pub. in 1922), Kangaroo (1923), Plumed Serpent (1926). Birds, Beasts and Flowers covers a longish stretch between Aaron’s Rod and the Plumed Serpent, but they are not obviously connected with the fiction, they are like the travel essays, Sea and Sardinia and Morning in Mexico and embody insights and apprehensions. The poems in this section are divided into nine groups and are based on John Burnett’s famous book, Early Greek Philosophy, which was given to Lawrence by Burtrand Russell. These poems are by-products and are more comprehensively worked out in the novels. In these poems, Lawrence, for the first time has expressed his poetic genius which can hardly find its place in the prose. The mystery and originality of these poems represent the intuitive behaviour of the creatures either when they attack or retire, and establishes Lawrence as a prolific seer poet. ‘Snake’, ‘Turtle’, ‘Mosquito’, ‘Bat’, ‘Eagle’, have sensuous and darting lines and reveal the ancient embodiment of the life force principle and explores indomitable sacred embodiment of the element energy that man must find in him self. Lawrence’s perception of man is a part of nature in which man as biological species is different from the other species only on basis of certain frailty and imperfect contrivances such as language, instincts of lust, or aggression which stirred inside him. He feels himself
as a scarcely civilized creature capable of surviving only if he acknowledged and reconciled the best within.

In this section there are expressions of more astonishing strokes of his natural genius. Images come one after another, which reflects Lawrence's brain in their original splendour and without ornament. Everything is molten, is in a state of poetic eruption when a definite image is shot out and it has some heat of the chaos where it was shaped.

Lawrence is one of the most comprehensive poets who does not care whether he hits the nail on the head or swings the hammer more and more lustily in the sky still people admire his curve of expressing emotions as a powerful weapon of poetry. Lawrence is also a powerful thinker and his really great power embodies his imagination. We can find passages of splendid beauty in this section which confronts us with the savage magnificence of nature and gives a vivid sense of personal experience in abundance and roughness of natural life. Here the intuitive description of the lion is glorious:

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!

It would be hard to beat such realizations and Lawrence frequently uses it in this section.

In fact, Lawrence was a prolific and instinctive poet even in his treatment of nature. His close description of flowers (Bavarian Gentians) or animals (Snake, Kangaroo, Bat, Mountain Lion, Fish) penetrate into the essence of living things and are among the most carefully observed depictions of nature in English poetry. He ranged, from descriptive poetry to love poetry, from light satirical verse to philosophical meditation (The Ship Of Death). Had his reputation not been made by his novels, Lawrence would be remembered as an important poet of the 1920's even
beyond the poetic currents of his times. He has a deep, instinctive response to his creations which reflected the natural world that would appear in the post Second World War works of Ted Hughes and Dylan Thomas. The significant poems of Lawrence brings together his poetic potential. Lawrence wants to make his work of art emotionally alive in every fibre, and ‘life’ emerges out of the intellect emotion integration as depicted by him. Lawrence deplores the fact that in the modern age people go to extremes. They, no longer, care for the direct utterance of the instant whole man in whom the soul, the mind and body surge at once. Today, there is an apparent discord between mind and body. The mind, according to him, has a stereotyped set of ideas and feelings, and the body only acts. On the other hand, Puritans believed in being secretive about the body and its existence. The moderns do not fear the body or deny its existence but they treat it as a sort of toy to be played with, to get sum fun out of it, and both attitudes are unhealthy and undesirable.

According to him most of the literature of the present age is inspired by an excessive insistence either on the intellect or on emotions. In his views, it is the body that feels real hunger, thirst, pleasure, pain, love, warmth, etc. All the emotions belong to the body and are recognized by the mind. He believes in a ‘profound emotion that has the mind’s connivance’. Seeking from the fundamental springs of personality he goes below personality. He goes under the Plimsoll Line of identity. Whenever he writes about animals, or plants, the anger and frustration which too often intrude in his descriptions of human beings vanish, ‘agape’ takes their place, and the joy of vision is equal to the joy of writing. The creatures are symbols of great mysterious powers for Wordsworth; examples of a beautiful or interesting species to be observed objectively for the naturalist; but Lawrence loves them as neighbours. For example, to a fig tree or a tortoise, he gives that passionate personal attention usually offered by lonely or shy people, or by children, invalids, prisoners and the like:

I remember, when I was a boy,
I heard the scream of a frog, which was caught with his foot
in the mouth of an up-starting snake;
I remember when I first heard bull-frogs break into sound
in the spring:
I remember hearing a wild goose out of the throat of night
Cry loudly, beyond the lake of waters;
I remember the first time, out of a bush in the darkness, a
nightingale’s piercing cries and gurgles startled the
depths of my soul;
I remember the scream of a rabbit as I went through a
wood at midnight;
I remember the heifer in her heat, blorting and blorting
through the hours, persistent and irrepressible;
I remember my first terror hearing the howl of weird,
Amorous cats;
I remember the scream of a terrified, injured horse, the
sheet-lightning,
And running away from the sound of a woman in labour,
something like an owl whooing,
And listening inwardly to the first bleat of a lamb,
The first wail of an infant,
And my mother singing to herself,
And the first tenor singing of the passionate throat of a
young collier, who has long since drunk himself to death,
The first elements of foreign speech
On wild dark lips.
And more than all these,
And less than all these,
This last,
Strange, faint coition yell
Of the male tortoise at extremity,
Tiny from under the very edge of the farthest far-off horizon of life.²

The poems in this section suggest the emergence of a new poet who had shaken off much of the emotional hangover of the previous section and had embarked upon probing the non-human consciousness of birds, beasts and flowers in the effort to transcend the junk-yard of personal emotions. Lawrence’s marriage with Frieda in 1914 was the culmination of a long phase of struggle and uncertainty. But the assurance and self-confidence born out of this marriage did not last long and the
restless spirit of Lawrence broke through the apparent peace and serenity and set out to explore the world of flora and fauna to supplement and make his more comprehensive vision of the universe. Marriage was a turning point in the emotional history of Lawrence which liberated him from the emotional tangles, temporariness. He wrote a letter to Gooden Campbell in 1914:

'...We want to realize the tremendous non-human quality of life – it is wonderful. It is not the emotions, nor the personal feelings and attachments, that matter. These are all only impressive and expression has become mechanical. Behind it all are the tremendous unknown forces of life, coming unseen and unperceived'.

The First World War filled Lawrence with intolerable repulsion and he was desperate to get out of the chaos and anarchy which was let loose. His despair finds expression in the poems of this section **Birds, Beats and flowers**, what H.T. Moore called, “ammunition dump”.

As ‘Fantasia of the Unconscious,’ and ‘Birds, Beats and Flowers’ were written under the same spell of time, so Lawrence’s attitude towards nature reflects his knowledge of the contemporary attitude towards the functioning of nature. Here Lawrence found a new theme, which freed him from the trammels of autobiography and the subject matter was the immediate apprehension of the flux of life, especially of sexual life, in non-human organisms. Probably, there has been much nature poetry in English since Wordsworth, but Lawrence’s nature poetry breaks sharply tradition of old time and makes it an energetic and intuitive attempt to penetrate into the being of natural objects and to show what they are in themselves but not on how they can sustain our moral nature. It presents encounters between man and the non-human, the perpetual mystery of the animal and vegetable creation. Of course, radically subjective, it is more an attempt to put common subjectivity in its place by showing the myriad of queer, separate, non-human existences around it.
In this section, Lawrence narrates in the poems his dangerous unorthodox attitude in the religious sense. His attributes to new symbolism refer to Christian and Pagon myths. In a letter dated 10, Feb. 1923 Lawrence called the collection as his 'best book of poems'. The title *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, seems to be taken from S. Baring Gould’s ‘Evening Hymn’. The second stanza of which reads as such:

```
Now the darkness gathers,
   Star begin to peep,
Birds and beasts and flowers
   Soon will be asleep.\(^5\)
```

On the basis of Burnett’s ‘Early Greek Philosophy’, Lawrence in 1930 prefaced the section, *Birds, Beasts and flowers*, with the title ‘Fruits’ as such:

```
For fruits are all of them female, in them lies the seed.
And so when they break and show the seed, then we look into the womb and see its secrets. So it is that the pomegranate is the apple of love to the Arab, and the fig has been a catch-word for the female fissure for ages. I don’t care a fig for it! men say. But why a fig? The apple of Eden, even, was Eve’s fruit. To her it belonged, and she offered it to the man. Even the apples of knowledge are Eve’s fruit, the woman’s. But the apples of life the dragon guards, and no woman gives them....

   No sin is it to drink as much as a man can take and get home without a servant’s help, so he be not stricken in years.\(^6\)
```

In this section, the poems range from short lyrics like ‘Peach’ to long quasi-philosophical, reflective poems such as ‘Fish’ and from humorously autobiographical encounters such as ‘Mosquito’ to the poignant evocations of sexuality in the ‘Tortoise’ poems. Combining all together, they form one of the most individual and exciting volumes of English poetry of the present century. These poems are addressed to uncommon Gods. In the ‘Preface’ to the ‘Collected Poems’ (1928), Lawrence spoke
that, they are prayers which are empowered by a demonic energy. His demon is clear and bold. Lawrence’s popularity as a poet has grown up because he is a poet who indeed speaks of the strange gods nakedly. He was not mystic and a poet’s business is not necessarily to convey, ‘an orderly insight’, but to give artistic expression to his own experiences and the sensibility of his age.

Sometimes Lawrence’s apprehension of the mystery of life tortured and his complete honesty as an artist compelled him to exhibit this tortured apprehension as part of his own sensibility and that of his age. But with reference to Lawrence’s poetry the word ‘tortured’ has been used freely. The poems in the section may fairly be described as representing tortured states of mind, and passages, and deserve the epithet ‘hysterical’, that Blackmur has applied for too glibly to the whole of Lawrence’s poetry. The best poetry in the collection, however, is neither tortured nor hysterical nor strident. It is an affirmation of the grandeur and intuitive mystery of the life of nature and it is expressed in an entirely original and un-Wordsworthian idiom. Such an affirmation is to be found in the famous poem ‘Snake’. The poem is a triumph of style and idiom in free verse embodying perceptions in rhythms which contribute to meaning of the poem and can bear comparison with excellent poems in English. It contains some beautiful lines of powerful poetry:

Someone was before me at my water-trough,
And I, like a second comer, waiting.
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,
Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels
of the earth
On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.
The voice of my education said to me
He must be killed,
For in Sicily the black, black snakes and innocent, the gold
are venomous.
And voices in me said, If you were a man
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish
him off.7

The poem is based on the complete truthfulness to the facts of common experience that Lawrence shares with Wordsworth and Hardy, but the common experience is transformed and invested with mythical grandeur, which is a rare and memorable achievement. In ‘Resolution and Independence’, Wordsworth did something similarly. In the poem, the common place meeting with old leech-gatherer is transmuted into a myth of overwhelming majesty. The ‘Snake’ which Lawrence saw one hot morning drinking in his water-trough at Toormina remains in the poem as an ordinary, ‘earth-brown, earth-golden’, Sicilian snake, but at the same time becomes a mythical, godlike lord of the underworld, an embodiment of all those dark mysterious forces of nature which man ignobly fears and neglects:

Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?
Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?
I felt so honoured.
And yet those voices:
If you were not afraid, you would kill him!
And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,
But even so, honoured still more
That he should seek my hospitality
From out the dark door of the secret earth.
He drank enough
And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,
And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black,
Seeming to lick his lips,
And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,
And slowly turned his head,
And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice a dream,
Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round
And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.8
The poem that comes under the ‘Reptiles’ section, is one of the finest poems and provides an appropriate answer to Blackmur’s argument that Lawrence’s use of expressive form excludes craftsmanship and the control of the rational imagination. The style of this poem is simple, the diction mostly colloquial, that word-order that of common speech and above all, the effect is one of grandeur and dignity. There is no fake poetic language. The poem has a subtle pattern of expressing with curious felicity in its alternation of short and long lines, the relationship between the poet’s nagging thoughts and the sinuous majesty of the snake’s movement. The natural description is synergic, amounting to more than the some of its parts. As the snake disappears, the poet himself is left alone to write a poem in tones of elegiac regret as an expiation for missing the chance, as Lawrence regrets:

\[ 'with one of the lords of life'. \]

The poem justifies its place in the anthologies simply as a definite realization of the appearance and distinctive life mode of a snake. The water trough in the poem is the natural meeting-point of two worlds; the snake descends the earth-wall from his fissure; the man descends the steps from his doorway. Each is in need of water: the snake has priority because it arrived first at the trough but because it asserts priority in the very quality of its being. It looks straight through the man without recognizing his existence. The man feels glad and honoured and the images he chooses to describe the snake reveals his growing appreciation of its stature and significance: first, ‘like cattle’, the snake is just another creature, a beast; then, ‘like a guest in quiet’, he is granted a human equality; ‘like a forked night on the air’; links him to the wider forces of the cosmos; and, ‘like a god’ exalts the whole episode to the level of a divine visitation from ‘one of the lords of life’. From point of view of Lawrence, he sees human life as an inseparable part of some profound and mysterious forces which are beyond human understanding. Perfect living relationship comes when there is no conflict between human life and these vital forces. He realizes,

\[ \text{We have to know ourselves pretty thoroughly before we can break through the automatism of ideals and} \]
At certain times Lawrence succumbs to the worst part of Whitman’s influence and mistakes strident statement for poetic expression. We can affirm it only in this famous poem ‘Snake’:

The voice of my education said to me
He must be killed,
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous.
And voices in me said, If you were a man
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.
But must I confess how I liked him,
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my water-trough
And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,
Into the burning bowels of this earth?

Lawrence looked on god’s creatures in a unique way. Therefore, instead of reacting conventionally, he allows his spontaneous feelings of love and acceptance to find expression. ‘Snakes’ have their own beauty and their own place in the universal creatures.

So, the superb ‘Reptile’ series is probably the most sustained attempt to penetrate the mysterious life of a remote part of the brute creation in literature. The motive of these poems is to present the encounters between animal and man. An easy natural piety has used faithful dogs, spiritual skylarks, as opportunities for extension of the normal sympathetic emotions. And a profounder kind of natural piety is present in the same way as it recognizes points of otherness and difference There prevails Lawrence’s theme in ‘Snake’! when frightened by the snake, Lawrence throws a log at it and:
And Immediately I regretted it.
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human
education.
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.
And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
Of life.
And I have something to expiate;
A pettiness.\textsuperscript{12}

In ‘Fantasia of the Unconscious’, Lawrence wrote of the snake “whose consciousness is only dynamic and non-cerebral. The snake has no mental life, but only an intensely vivid dynamic mind”.\textsuperscript{13}

A similar description of the snake is to be found in Lawrence’s later novel ‘The Plumed Serpent’, when Kate submits in marriage to Don Cipriano, a vivid description of the snake occurs:

Suddenly before her, she saw a long, dark soft rope,
lying over a pole boulder. But her soul was softly alert
at once. It was a snake, with a subtle pattern along its
soft dark back, lying there over a big stone, with its
head sunk down to earth.

It felt her presence too, for suddenly, with incredible soft
quickness, it contracted itself down by the boulder, and
she saw it entering a little gap in the wall.

The hole was not very big, as it entered it quickly looked
back, poising its little dark, wicked painted head, and
flickering a dark tongue. That it passed on, slowly easing its length into the hole.

When it has all gone in, Kate could see the last fold still and the flat little head resting on the fold, like the devil with his chin on his arms, looking out of a loophole. So the wicked sparks of the eyes looked out at her, from within the recess, watching out of its own invisibility.  

Keith Sagar calls it "the creative meeting of poet and phenomenon".  

Like the poem 'Snake' we can see a similar passage in the poem 'Fish':

I saw a water-serpent swim across the Anapo,  
And I said to my heart, look, look at him!  
With his head up, steering like a bird!  
He's a rare one, but he belongs...  

At one point, one is tempted to testify Lawrence's occult penetration into the being of other creatures, even if fruits and flowers, his ability to look out through the eyes of a mountain lion or to be a bat flicker is splashing round a room:

He could not go out,  
I also realized......  
It was the light of day which he could not enter,  
Any more than I could enter the white-hot door of a blast furnace.  

The poet keenly observes a fish in the water:

Your life a sluice of sensation along your sides,  
A flush at the flails of your fins, down the whorl of your tail,  
And water wetly on fire in the grates of your gills;
It is the fact that the deep purpose of these poems is to reveal the sheer unknowable otherness of the non-human life. For example fish takes us as near to the watery life of the fish and reflects human perception and language:

Slowly to gape through the waters,
Alone with the element;
To sink, and rise, and go to sleep with the waters;
To speak endless inaudible wavelets into the wave;
To breathe from the flood at the gills,
Fish-blood slowly running next to the flood, extracting fish-fire:
To have the element under one, like a lover;
And to spring away with a curvetting click in the air,
Provocative.
Dropping back with a slap on the face of the flood.
And merging oneself!19

Even in Lawrence’s another poem ‘Man and Bat’ under the ‘Creatures’ series, the dominant feeling is one of hostility and repulsion:

What then?
Hit him and kill him and throw him away?
Nay,
I didn’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.
Let the God who is maker of bats watch with them in
Their unclean corners..............20

Here, the otherness, the unbreachable barrier, is turned to comic effect:

Let the God who is maker of bats watch with them in
their unclean corners.....
I admit a God in every crevice,
But not bats in my room;
Nor the God of bats, while the sun shines.\textsuperscript{21}

The confusion of worlds here highlights the bat having entered the indoor day light, world of man which makes the man mad and the bat obscene. At the end of the poem, the bat is happily restored to its element.

The animal section trace the development of the poet’s mystical awareness by demonstrating his growing ability to comprehend animal consciousness and that of their otherness. ‘By becoming one with the ‘other’, the tortoise, the whale and many others - the poet becomes one with the cosmos. They have their own unique kind of existence; without any responsibility and restraint. The sequence of tortoise poems also represents the best of Birds, Beasts and Flowers’. The baby tortoise, ‘a tiny fragile, half-animate bean’ is, mythically, taken to be the first in coronation of active free ranging life on earth, the prototype for all higher forms. A tortoise is creation first asserting itself against ‘inanimate chaos’:

\begin{quote}
And slowly pitching itself against the inertia
Which had seemed invincible?\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

It moves forward with ‘slow ageless progress’ impelled by the ‘indomitable will and pride of the first life’. He is the prototype of the human challenge and is the pioneer adventurer of life like Adam and Ulysses:

\begin{quote}
All life carried on your shoulder,
Invincible fore-runner.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

The arrogant triumph of his own existence ‘a brisk brindled little tortoise’, all to himself- is torn apart at adolescence by the ‘Crucifixion into sex’. He is:

\begin{quote}
Doomed to make an intolerable fool of himself
In his effort toward completion again.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}
The concluding poem of the sequence, ‘Tortoise Shout’, is a moving poem in so far as it contains the Lawrentian theme of resurrection. It draws on all the sources of meaning tapped in the earlier poems. Lawrence follows the tortoise, ‘On The End’, under ‘the very edge of the farthest, far off horizon of life’. Through the extremity of crucifixion to the resurrection, Lawrence, therefore associates sex with death, and he has consistently done so for with a purpose. Death, after all, must precede rebirth, the fruit must not rot before the seed can emerge. S. M. Gilbert here remarks:

Lawrence reminds us in ‘Tortoise Shout’, one of his major statements on the subject, that makes us aware of our loveliness, our finiteness.25

A poem will become a good poem simply or by observing all the requirements of poetry such as unfettering rhythm, flawless rhymes, and perfectly harmonious sounding of the whole poem. It becomes a good poem by virtue of the poet being able to put life, thrill concentration of delight with deeper instincts into it, and this is possible only when his conscious being is visited by ‘strange gods from the dark forest of his soul’, which may translate as myriads of mysterious instincts of which he is normally unaware. Lawrence’s poetic practice bears out his theoretical doctrine in his poems ‘Snake’ and ‘Mountain Lion’ that tells about incident of meeting two Mexicans. It reflects about his feelings when the Mexicans had killed the mountain lion:

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!26

How was this kind of reflection made possible? By the chance of interaction with the strange gods and that of the moments of observation of a certain incident in
life, such uncanny experience takes place when one feels as one would be going through the fibres of hell, and the fibres of the heart part one after the other:

And yet the soul continuing, naked-footed, ever more vividly embodied
Like a flame blown whiter and whiter
In a deeper and deeper darkness
Ever more exquisite, distilled in separation.  

Keith Sagar remarks that ‘the abandonment to life’ is the celebrated idea in these poems with touch of clarity and splendour that we find in ‘The Ship Of Death’ and ‘Bavarian Gentians’.  

It is the sense of wholeness, death and rebirth is the phenomenon of natural process. And such wholeness achieved through an imaginative integration into the consciousness of unknown modes of being is finally the subject of Lawrence’s exploration in this section.

The section is a sort of book of poems charged with life in all its energy and its variety which is token of the poet’s wonder at the non-human otherness of the creative mystery within himself. Lawrence here for the first time uses his poetry to express a special sense of life that can hardly find its place in his prose. Keith Sager has commented on how Lawrence records in his poems the creative meeting of poet and phenomena. Graham Hough observes that Lawrence’s nature poetry breaks sharply with this “Wordsworthian or Romantic tradition”. Lawrence is not interested in just drawing verbal portraits of the various creatures or flowers. It is a matter of a vital and complex relationship between the two difficult fluency in words and at wholly unabstract grounds. Graham Hough, ‘Simultaneously is of the view that this volume of poems, “makes an 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”. In other words, according to Graham Hough, the perpetual mystery of the animal and vegetable creation is the subject matter of these poems.
Lawrence is of the view that the non-human world can teach us much about the dignity of life or the naturalness of behaviour. He enters the non-human world of birds, beasts and plants and his growing sympathy for them becomes more marked by his awareness of the ‘Unknown forces’ or ‘the creative mystery’ symbolized by them. The dark mysticism verging on the erotic mysticism is abundantly manifest in these poems. He understood the predatory instincts in all living beings and as for trees and flowers, he encompasses even them in his principle of animism. After a long struggle Lawrence is successful in achieving ‘the hidden emotional pattern’ in his poetry. A sense of objectivity is discernable in the poet’s concentration in observing a particular creature or plant. Symbolically Lawrence does seem to reach his goal of journey of poetry communicating and appealing to human hearts. It is the end of promise of a penetration into the invisible world behind the visible world.

Lawrence’s reputation as a great poet is based only on the fact that his poems, especially in ‘Birds, Beasts and Flowers’ are addressed to the strange gods, to uncommon gods, whom Eliot would define as devils in ‘After Strange Gods.’ They are prayers empowered by a demonic energy and Lawrence, in the ‘Preface’ to the ‘Collected Poems’, 1928 spoke that:

A young man is afraid of his demon and puts his hand over the demon’s mouth some times and speaks for him. And the things the young man says are very rarely poetry. So I have tried to let the demon say his say, and to remove the passages where the young man intruded.

Indeed, Lawrence’s popularity has grown more and more because he speaks of the strange gods. In this section, Lawrence refers to Christian as well as Pagan myths and attributes a new symbolism to them. His Journey of thought is centered on earth in order to trace the evolutionary history, that man has forgotten. It is the source of sacred energy of life, which originated directly from the power of earth. It is the seed of all energy in animals and human beings.

Though there is no argument or any Introduction given to this Collection yet this Collection, as a whole, is very carefully organized which begins with ‘Fruits’
moving through ‘Trees’, ‘Flowers’, ‘Evangelicals Beasts’, ‘Creatures’, ‘Reptiles’, ‘Birds’ and ‘Animals’ to ‘Ghosts’. The Collection manifests the same energy and the same urge as in man. Lawrence, through ‘Birds, Beasts and Flowers’ by presenting psychological processes in terms of natural ones, produces a fundamental connection. Viewing man from the perspective of nature as one manifestation of the life process through myths, Lawrence tries to point out that the intercourse between sun and seed, man and soil is analogous to the intercourse between man and women—including the seasons of moods, the cycles of fertility, the periods of gestation and the terms of birth. So human sexuality miniatures the cosmos in Lawrence.

Though the first section is called ‘Fruits’ yet it includes the poems like ‘The Revolutionary’, ‘The Evening Land’, and ‘Peace’ which make the section paradigmatic. The section both tells a story and begins with a story, i.e. it tells an archetyped story of eating fruits and being changed by the magical properties of fruit. The poem ‘Revolutionary’ is preoccupied with the idea of the ‘New World.’ He wishes to set upon ideal kingdom where blood knowledge, the intuitive vision, dominates the blood. The first poem of this beautiful section is ‘Pomegranate,’ that starts with an important statement of Lawrence when he enquires:

You tell me I am wrong
Who are you, who is anybody to tell me I am wrong?
I am not wrong. 33

The ‘You’ in the poem stands for the Victorian English Society in which the poet was grown up. But the same society has now exiled him out because he is not fit for the present society and is somehow wrong. But through next verse Lawrence is determined to challenge the society which itself is unmistakably wrong as it refuses to see the dangerous suggestive sexual fissure, the crack in the surface of the phenomenal world:

Do you mean to tell me you will see no fissure?
Do you prefer to look on the plain side?
For all that, the setting suns are open.
The end cracks open with the beginning:
Rosy, tender, glittering within the fissure. 
Do you mean to tell me there should be no fissure? 
No glittering, compact drops of dawn? 
Do you mean it is wrong, the gold-filmed skin, integument, 
shown ruptured?34

The Christian society of Lawrence insists on looking at the plain side of life from where there is no nourishment and no entrance into the mysteriously flaming realm behind the 'setting sun.' His heart is broken while eating the fruit:

For my part, I prefer my heart to be broken, 
It is so lovely, dawn-kaleidoscopic within the crack.35

The poem like few other poems of 19th century poets-like Keats’s, ‘La Belle Dame Sans Mercy’, Christiana Rossetti’s, ‘Goblin Masket’, etc. that tells stories of eating of strange fruits or roots etc. connects partially to the same tradition of eating the fruit. He thus revises the myth of the fall of Persephone, the queen of the underworld.

In fact, his poems look as an essential story or history, or confession, unfolding one from the other organic development in an organized way. But the whole revealing and the intrinsic experience of a man during the crises of growing manhood, he realizes the power of sex in life. He believes that the resurrection of an individual’s soul is within the living body. He recognizes the law of nature and considers man in terms of love and sex. He is a love revolutionary and a rebel. He also recognizes the entity of soul; the ‘naked footed’ soul. Sex is the flame of life which should not be put off by a man. Lawrence hopes that our civilization must not extinguish this divine flame. It is noteworthy to quote the famous poem ‘Figs’:

And open it, so that it is a glittering, rosy, moist, honied, heavy-petalled four-petalled flower. 
Then you throw away the skin 
Which is just like a four-sepalled calyx, 
After you have taken off the blossom with your lips.
But the vulgar way
Is just to put your mouth to the crack, and take out the flesh
in one bite.36

Every fruit, Lawrence says in this poem, has its secret. It seems to be male but for romance it is female:

The fig is a very secretive fruit,
As you see it standing growing, you feel at once it is symbolic:
And it seems male.
But when you come to know it better, you agree with the Romans, it is female.37

The flowering of the fruit is all ‘inword’ and womb-fibrilled. Now there is a fruit like a ripe womb:

The flowering all inward and womb-fibrilled;
And but one orifice.
The fig, the horse-shoe, the squash-blossom.
Symbols.
There was a flower that flowered inward, womb-ward;
Now there is a fruit like a ripe womb.38

The ‘Fig’ as Lawrence sees it, symbolizes not only female creative energy but also the mystical darkness or secrecy in which female energy generates and regenerates life:

Fig, fruit of the female mystery, covert and inward,
Mediterranean fruit, with your covert nakedness,
Where everything happens invisible, flowering and fertilization, and fruiting
In the inwardness of your you, that eye will never see
Till it’s finished, and you’re over-ripe, and you burst to give up your ghost.
Till the drop of ripeness exudes,
And the year is over,
And then the fig has kept her secret long enough.
So it explodes, and you see through the fissure the scarlet.
And the fig is finished, the year is over.\(^39\)

The poem follows the imagery of ‘Medlars and Sorb Apples,’ in which it becomes clear that in eating the fruit, the poet not only has broken the law of Nature but also has himself entered Nature and does not despair like ‘Eve’ after eating the fruit and expresses that:

Wonderful are the hellish experiences,
Orphic, delicate
Dionysos of the Underworld.
A kiss, and a spasm of farewell, a moment’s orgasm of rupture,
Then along the damp road alone, till the next turning.\(^40\)

He embarks on his crucial journey and feels as a loner on the way of love:

Going down the strange lanes of hell, more and more
   intensely alone,
The fibres of the heart parting one after the other
And yet the soul continuing. Naked-footed, ever more vividly embodied.
Like a flame blown whiter and whiter
In a deeper and deeper darkness
Ever more exquisite, distilled in separation.\(^41\)

In the ‘Bare Fig-Tree’ the way the twigs bud sideways and then turns vertically upwards is seen as the effort by each twig to assert its individual identity:

‘to hold the candle of the Sun upon its socket-tip’.\(^42\)
This gives rise to some reflections on fig-democracy with analogical sidelights on human democracy:

Oh weird Demos, where every twig is the arch twig,
Each imperiously over-equal to each, equality over-reaching itself
Like the snakes on Medusa’s head,
Oh naked fig-tree!
Still, no doubt every one of you can be the sun-socket
as well as every other of you.43

Through the next poem ‘Grapes’, Lawrence would return to the last world of unadulterated experience. What the poet seeks to sing is a world of ‘tactile sensitiveness’ that existed before the laser-like eyes of visionaries:

Of which world, the vine was the invisible rose,
Before petals spread, before colour made its disturbance,
before eyes saw too much.44

Lawrentian myth of renewal and discovery is the central point to ‘Grapes’. His recognition of the blood-knowledge or the intuitive vision unfolds the poet’s yearning for a life of senses. The intuition is exalted to underrate the intellect because the latter is a source of dryness. The restoration of the whole man is possible only through the resurrection of the body. He alludes to the glaciers and Noah’s flood in the poem and these elusions clearly indicate that the ideal Lawrentian world is antediluvian. Through the ending lines of this beautiful poem, Lawrence enters the other world with grim determination. Here intoxicated with loveliness, tired with heavy sleep, shrouded in secrecy he seeks his own lost powers:

And we must cross the frontiers, though we will not,
Of the lost, fern-scented world:
Take the fern-seed on our lips,
Close the eyes, and go
Down the tendrilled avenues of wine and the otherworld.45
The horror and the necessity of blindness are like curses which are the insurmountable obstacles for the downward journey which is the subject of the present narrative section. Lawrence, here revises the story that is told through the fables or in the John Milton's *Samson Agonists*. Lawrence's Samson is strong enough and does not mourn his blindness, where as Milton's Samson complains that he has been exiled to a living death. But Lawrence's Samson makes plot which necessities the mystical virtues. As revolutionary he sets himself sardonically against the 'yellow authority of those pillars of the society, who hold up, 'the high and super gothic heavens' and thus yelled:

I do not yearn, nor aspire, for I am a blind Samson.
And what is daylight to me that I should look skyward?
Only I grope among you, pale-faces, caryatids.

Lawrence's Samson is imprisoned in the 'living grave' of his body that he feels intuitively:

To me, the earth rolls ponderously, superbly
Coming my way without forethought or afterthought.
To me, men's footfalls fall with a dull, soft rumble,
ominous and lovely,
Coming my way.

But Milton's Samson is 'eyeless in Gaza' at the will of slaves while Lawrence's Samson is a revolutionary who seems to take pride in his work only:

Am I not blind, at the round-turning mill?
Then why should I fear their pale faces?
Or love the effulgence of their holy light,
The sun of their righteousness?

He firmly believes that his hero unlike the Bible's and Milton's will certainly survive and is intent on bringing down the rigid pillars that support the dome of such lofty idealism:
See if your skies aren’t falling!
And my head, at least, is thick enough to stand it, the smash.
See if I don’t move under a dark and nude, vast heaven
When your world is in ruins, under your fallen skies.
Caryatids, pale-faces.
See if I am not Lord of the dark and moving hosts
Before I die.⁴⁹

Lawrence’s exploration of such mystical paradoxes—where he travels into the world of darkness and tombs become wombs and where Hell becomes an ecstatic experience of heaven, links with ‘The Evening Land’ he thus expresses his feelings:

Oh, America,
The sun sets in you.
Are you the grave of our day?⁵⁰

The poem is devoted to an analysis of his personal anxiety about the death of American promises. It is a death that also permeates through England:

The winding-sheet of your self-less ideal love.
Boundless love
Like a poison gas.⁵¹

But America has an elusive nature. The state of death-in-life carries Lawrence to another world where he wants to be carried, and compelled to quest for life:

‘Deep pulsing of a strange heart’.⁵²

And this kind of strong quest links this poem with the next poem ‘Peace’, which is about the volcanic apocalypse:

Peace is written on the doorstep
In lava.
Peace, black peace congealed.
My heart will know no peace
Till the hill bursts.
Brilliant, intolerable lava,
Brilliant as a powerful burning-glass,
Walking like a royal snake down the mountain
towards the sea,
Forests, cities, bridges
Gone again in the bright trail of lava.
Naxos thousands of feet below the olive-roots
And now the olive leaves thousands of feet below
the lava fire.
Peace congealed in black lava on the doorstep.
Within, white-hot lava, never at peace
Till it burst forth blinding, withering the earth;
To set again into rock,
Gray-black rock.
Call it Peace?53

Lawrence believes that the sense of hell destruction, the eruption of lava waking like a ‘snake’ down the mountain towards the sea that passes through different obstacles will create a new world. It reminds us of Shellyan revolutionary zeal of ‘Ode to the West Wind’. Therefore, under this section ‘Fruits’ all poems, like ‘Revolutionary’, ‘The Evening Land’, and ‘Peace’, appear strange as conclusion as Lawrence tries to reveal the sacred and the hidden energy of life which originates directly from the earth.

The next section ‘Trees’ again has its introductory note from John Burnett’s Early Greek Philosophy translated by Burnett from the Greek account of Empedokles by Aetius:

"Empedokles says trees were the first living creatures to grow up out of the earth, before the sun was spread out and before day and night were distinguished; from
symmetry of their mixture of fire and water, they contain
the proportion of male and female; they grow, rising up
owing to the heat which is in the earth, so that they are
parts of the earth just as embryos are parts of the uterus.
Fruits are excretions of the water and fire in plants". 54

‘A Mediation Upon Cypresses’, significantly begins in the section:

What would I not give
To bring back the rare and orchid-like
Evil-yclept Etruscan?
For as to the evil
We have only Roman word for it,
Which I, being a little weary of Roman virtue,
Don’t hang much weight on.
For oh, I know, in the dust where we have buried
The silenced races and all their abominations,
We have buried so much of the delicate magic of life. 55

Associated with Tuscany and the lost, supposedly ‘evil’, the Etruscans, the
trees are presented as ‘softly swaying pillars of dark flame’, the living monuments to
the lost dark race. In their mysterious concentration of dark life the cypresses to the
poet that becomes the perfect emblem for his sense of the mysterious Etruscans.
Cypress is traditionally considered as the death tree which is tall, dark, immortal,
hovering like black flames. Here he repudiates the optimism of Darwin’s theory:

They say the fit survive,
But I invoke the spirits of the lost,
Those that have not survived, the darkly lost,
To bring their meaning back into life again,
Which they have taken away,
And wrapt inviolable in soft cypress-trees,
Etruscan cypresses.
Evil, what is evil?
There is only one evil, to deny life
As Rome denied Etruria
And mechanical America Montezuma still.\textsuperscript{56}

In the next section 'Flowers', Lawrence deals with the theme of resurrection through death. The poems under this section reveal Lawrence's ability to apprehend life essences swiftly and almost mystically. ‘Almond Blossom’ is the most triumphant poem. The poem is a work about the wonder of natural process and the poet animates the tree with a consciousness of the world. In Tom Marshall’s words:

Like Lawrence himself the trees are in exile.
They suffer through the long ages like wandering Jews.\textsuperscript{57}

Like ‘Cypresses’, ‘Almond Blossom’, belongs to world of another order that we normally experience. The ‘Almond Tree’ is transformed into symbol of energetic and vigorous life which is:

Life-divine
Fearing nothing, life-blissful at the core
Within iron and earth.\textsuperscript{58}

Since renewal is possible only through the blossoming of the Almond Tree, the process of unfolding assumes great significance in the poem.

In the next section ‘Evangelistic Beasts’ the poet transforms the biblical creatures into animals imbued with human qualities.

‘Fish’ for Lawrence is a symbol of primordial non-human otherness, more than the mosquito, the bat or the tortoise. In ‘Fish’ poet observes a creature whose consciousness is 'comprehensible' for man. Since the fish has a sensuous life, a blood knowledge, it poses a difficult problem for the poet to experience an occult penetration into its being. The sexuality of the fish, like its sheer unknowable otherness, is unique and the poem achieves a subtle mockery of animal sexuality by humorously emphasizing the contrast between the sex lives of fish and animals.
In ‘Spirits Summoned West’, Lawrence entreats his mother to come and join in the Rocky Mountains as now she is free from her husband and that of the burden of morality. Lawrence wrote this poem within two months after his arrival in Taos. Lawrence is yearning for reunion with his dead mother and implores that his heart is the proper long prepared home for her, unfulfilled virgin soul which only he saw and loved her:

Come back then, mother, my love, whom I told to die.
It was only I who saw the virgin you
That had no home.
The overlooked virgin,
My love,
You overlooked her too.
Now that the grave is made of mother and wife.
Now that the grave is made and lidded over with turf:
_Come, delicate, overlooked virgin, come back to me_
_And be still,_
_Be glad._
I didn’t tell you to die, for nothing.
I wanted the virgin you to be home at last
In my heart,
Inside my innermost heart,
Where the virgin in woman comes home to a man.
The homeless virgin
Who never in all her life could find the way home
To that difficult innermost place in a man.\(^{59}\)

So, the section ‘Birds, Beasts and Flowers’ represents Lawrence’s farthest movement from his earlier poetic self and from the human world to the world of creatures. He sought to explore the mysticism in this section. There was a total immersion of Lawrence’s self in _Look! We Have Come Through!_ and the forgoing discussion shows how Lawrence emerged from the plasm of his earlier poetic self. He struggles to know the unknown flora and fauna that becomes Lawrence’s life-
affirming vision. He makes an energetic and intuitive attempt to penetrate into the being of natural objects. Through his exploration of non-human world of animals and vegetation, Lawrence tries to show what they are in themselves, not how they can sustain our moral nature. At the same time Lawrence presents an encounter between man and the non-human and that of the perpetual mystery of animal and vegetable creation. In this venture, the visionary always accompanies the mystic, and Lawrence vindicates the purity and instinctual being of animals and plants as a contrast to the evils of modern mechanical civilization. He envisions a new world, a world entirely different from this world of mechanization and gross materialistic pursuits.

In fact, these poems present and possess a poetic quality of a high degree. They begin with close and delicate observation. When a poem begins it seems that these aspects are arbitrarily chosen fragments, but when the poem ends, they seem to be the visible imaginative whole. These poems, independent of literary tradition, are described intuitively and their ultimate mode of existence is the timeless contemplation. To penetrate the mysterious life of the brute creation like tortoise series is probably the most sustained attempt in literature. From the naked solitary independence of the baby tortoise to the weird cry of the male tortoise in the extremity of coition a small organic unit of non-human existence is brought as it is the human imaginative apprehension.

During the period of maturity, Lawrence presents his ‘Birds, Beasts and Flowers’, which is free from the trammels of his autobiography and depicts the immediate apprehension of flux of life, especially of sexual life of non-human organisms. Moreover, his prophetic concerns carry weight and conviction in so far as he proposes to establish a saner and healthier outlook towards humanity.

In the end, of this section we may quote a letter written to the Brewsters in 1921, where much discussed Lawrence describes with great gusto, how he would like to reverse the process and have the cowards hunted down by his brightly burning tigers:

But I don’t want the tiger superseded- Oh, my each she-tigress have seventy-seven whelps. And may they all
grow in strength and shine in stripes like day and night; 
And may each one eat at least seventy miserable 
featherless human birds and lick red chops of gusto after 
it leave me my tigers, leave me spangled leopards, leave 
me bright cobra, snakes and I wish, I had poison fangs 
and talons as good, I believe in wrath and gnashing of 
teeth and crunching of coward’s bones.\textsuperscript{60}

In brief, we can find Lawrence as an innovative and intuitive poet who is 
different from the Romantic tradition of nature poets. To him, nature is a source of 
reality but not a source of morality. His genius as a poet makes him a milestone of 
English poetry that we will study in the coming chapters.
Notes And References


15. Keith Sagar, *The Art of D. H. Lawrence*, *op. cit.* , p. 120.
    *op. cit.*, p. 337.
    Cornell University Press, 1972) ,p. 186
    *op. cit.*, p. 402
29. *Ibid.*, p.120.
    *op. cit.* ,p. 28.
34. Ibid., p. 278
35. Ibid., p. 279
36. Ibid., p. 282
37. Ibid., p. 282
38. Ibid., p. 282
39. Ibid., p. 283
40. Ibid., p. 280
41. Ibid., p. 281
42. Ibid., p. 299
43. Ibid., p. 300
44. Ibid., p.p. 285-286
45. Ibid., p. 287
46. Ibid., p. 287
47. Ibid., p. 288
48. Ibid., p. 288
49. Ibid., p. 289
50. Ibid., p. 289
51. Ibid., p. 291
52. Ibid., p. 292
53. Ibid., p.p. 293-294
54. Ibid., p. 295
55. Ibid., p.p. 297-298
56. Ibid., p. 298
