

**An Exploration of a New Poetic Expression beyond Dichotomy:  
An Analytical Approach to the Meta-poetic Features of the Poems  
of D.H. Lawrence**

by

**Shin'ichiro Ishikawa**

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Okayama University

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of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Literature

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by  
Shin'ichiro Ishikawa

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## INTRODUCTION

### 0.1 D. H. Lawrence as a Poet

D. H. Lawrence is generally recognised as one of the greatest novelists in the history of English literature. His fictional works —such as *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*— have been widely read and highly evaluated. As Frank Raymond Leavis emphasises, he is a writer who inherits “the great tradition” of English novels.

Lawrence, however, has also written a voluminous amount of poems in his life. At the age of twenty-eight, he publishes *Love Poems and Others* (Duckworth, 1913), followed by *Amores* (Duckworth, 1916), *Look! We Have Come Through!* (Chatto and Windus, 1917), *New Poems* (Martin Secker, 1918), *Bay* (Cyril W. Beaumont, 1919), *Tortoises* (Thomas Seltzer, 1921), *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (Martin Secker, 1923), *Pansies* (Martin Secker, 1929), and *Nettles* (Faber and Faber, 1930). At the age of forty-three, Lawrence edits the two-volume *Collected Poems* (Martin Secker, 1928) by himself. After his death in the year of 1930, Richard Aldington edits and publishes *Last Poems* (G. Orioli / Martin Secker, 1932).

*Selected Poems* are also edited by various scholars: W. E. Williams (Penguin, 1950), James Reeves (Heinemann, 1951), Kenneth Rexroth (The Viking Press, 1959), Keith Sagar (Penguin, 1972), John Lucas (Routledge, 1991), Mara Kalnins (J. M. Dent, 1992), Jan Todd (Oxford U P, 1993), and James Reeves and Andy Whittle (Heinemann, 1995).

The entire picture of Lawrence's poetic achievement can now be seen in *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* edited by Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts. It is originally published in two volumes in 1964. One volume edition of *Complete Poems* is published in 1971 by the Viking Press and by Penguin in 1977. As the Cambridge edition of Lawrence's

poetry is still in preparation, this is “the most comprehensive collection currently available” (Anne Fernihough, ed. 273).

*Complete Poems* includes all of his poetic works, even unpublished draft pieces or the poetic fragments appearing in his novels. After reading the approximately one thousand poems included in this thick volume, we are led to believe that Lawrence is not only a great novelist but also a great poet.

## 0.2 Evaluation of His Poems

While Lawrence's novels have been widely read and highly evaluated by the critics, proper attention was not given to his poems until recent years. For example, denouncing the lack of form in Lawrence's poems, R. P. Blackmur concludes that they are “hysterical” and just “ruins of great intentions” (255). Even Vivian de Sola Pinto, one of the editors of *Complete Poems*, suggests that “there can be no question that Lawrence's poetic genius finds its fullest expression in prose works” (Introduction 5). As Manji Kobayashi comments, it seems that Pinto neither evaluates Lawrence's technique of poetry writing nor admits the existence of poetry as a genre in his literature (“Poems of Lawrence” 206).

Thus, Lawrence's poems have tended to “be acknowledged only as a supplementary note to his novels or an index to his biography” (Kazuo Ueda “Poetry” 190).

However, some critics recognise the significance of his poems in the history of English poetry. For example, John Gould Fletcher says that some of Lawrence's poetry is “something that seems to transform all the poetry now written in English into mere prettiness and feebleness” (83).

The number or the variety of critical studies of Lawrence's poems is very limited in

comparison with studies of his novels, but here we will list the major studies of his poems which have been published in book forms. In 1951, Dallas Kenmare writes *Fire-Bird: A Study of D. H. Lawrence*, a first book mainly discussing Lawrence's poetry works.

Critics' interest in Lawrence's poems has risen after publication of *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* in 1964. In 1970, Tom Marshall writes *The Psychic Mariner: A Reading of the Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, which is the first full-scale academic book on his poems. In 1972, Sandra M. Gilbert publishes *Acts of Attention: The Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, one of the most extensive and reliable studies in this field. In 1974, Joyce Carol Oates writes *The Hostile Sun: The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence*, a critical essay based more on impression than analysis.

Studies of Lawrence's poems have proliferated in the eighties, but most of these seem to be interested in the poet's life as seen through his poetic works. In 1982, Jillian de Vries-Mason publishes *Perception in the Poetry of D. H. Lawrence*, which exclusively discusses the problems of perception seen in Lawrence's poems. In 1983, Ross C. Murfin writes *The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence: Texts and Contexts*, a sort of textual criticism with attention to the poet's life. In 1984, Gail Porter Mandell writes *The Phoenix Paradox: A Study of Renewal through Change in the Collected Poems and Last Poems of D. H. Lawrence*. This work is unique in that it intensively discusses the pieces written in the poet's later days. In 1986, Douglas A. Mackey publishes *D. H. Lawrence: The Poet Who Was Not Wrong* and Takeo Iida publishes *The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence: On 'Darkness' and Light*. Iida's book is the first major study of Lawrence's poems by a Japanese scholar. In 1987, M. J. Lockwood writes *A Study of the Poems of D. H. Lawrence: Thinking in Poetry*, and in 1988, Holly A. Laird publishes *Self and Sequence: The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence*, which also focuses mainly on the context in which individual pieces are written.

Criticism of Lawrence's poems has solidified in the nineties. In 1990, Sandra M. Gilbert revises her *Acts of Attention*, a book originally published in 1972. In 1994, Rita Saldanha publishes *The World Anew: Themes and Modes in the Poetry of D. H. Lawrence*. This book written by a critic in India shows the international spread of Lawrence studies. In 1995, Patricia Hagen writes *Metaphor's Way of Knowing: The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence*, which discusses how Lawrence's work anticipates postmodernist trends from the standpoint of metaphor and knowledge. In that same year, Hitoshi Kaneyama, another Japanese scholar, publishes *The Poetry and Thought of D. H. Lawrence*, an attempt to understand Lawrence's poems in the context of his actual life.

In 2003, Amit Chaudhuri, a scholar, poet, and novelist in India, publishes *D. H. Lawrence and 'Difference,'* which discusses the elements of intertextuality, "difference," and postcoloniality in Lawrence's poems. This is virtually the first attempt to re-read Lawrence's poems based on modern critical theory as advocated by Jacques Derrida and Michel Paul Foucault.

### 0.3 From Poetry as Biography to Meta Poetry

As was briefly mentioned in the previous section, most of criticism of Lawrence's poems is based on the critics' interest in his life. The critical tendency to regard his poems as a kind of biographical record is partly caused by the poet himself. In the preface to *Collected Poems* published in 1928, Lawrence describes his collected poems as "a biography of an emotional and inner life" of the poet. Emphasizing the importance of biography for understanding his poems, he writes as follows:

It seems to me that no poetry, not even the best, should be judged as if it existed in the absolute, in the vacuum of the absolute. Even the best poetry, when it is at all personal, needs the penumbra of its own time and place and circumstance to make it full and whole. (CP28)

Thus, Lawrence's poems come to be read as love poems dedicated to his lovers and his wife, elegiac poems lamenting over his dead mother, travel sketches from his visits to Italy, and swan songs by which he seeks his own renewal through death.

It is true that Lawrence's poems are greatly influenced by his actual life and experience, but they are never just a personal biographical record. Even while writing personally, he seems to suggest something impersonal. Although he writes about the animals and plants which he sees, he often describes something abstract.

This impersonal and abstract element in Lawrence's poems has been neglected by previous critics, but it actually reflects the poet's critical reconsideration of the act of poetry writing. Although Lawrence is generally considered one of the Romantics who worship love, sex, body, and nature in a passionate way, he is also a modern intellectual who is highly conscious and sceptical of the validity of concepts like inspiration, perception, and language, which constitute the act of poetry writing. This suggests that some of Lawrence's poetry should be treated as meta poetry, i.e. poetry about poetry itself.

Although the concept of meta poetry is ambiguous and often difficult to define, we would like to follow the definition proposed by Peter Graves. In his review of the anthology of a Swedish poet, Graves writes in this way:

...what is metapoetry and what does it do? It is not, as is perhaps most commonly

thought, poetry that discusses itself and its own poetics, rather it is poetry that draws attention to the fact that it is poetry (ie. that it is a construct, an illusion not reality) and, by doing so, it aims to establish a more truthful relationship with its audience which, made aware of the problematically illusory nature of language, will be engaged in a critical discourse from the start.

We need to notice that meta poetry is essentially related to the poet's awareness of "the problematically illusory nature" of poetry itself or the act of poetry writing. In this sense, Lawrence's poetry clearly contains some meta-poetic features, which we would like to discuss here.

#### 0.4 Aims and Outline of the Dissertation

In this dissertation, we aim to re-evaluate Lawrence's poems, largely based on close stylistic analysis of his text. We avoid the traditional approach of biographical criticism and instead use a new interpretative approach: a meta-poetic reading.

In evaluating Lawrence's poems, we need to notice the strands of literary influence or "the affiliative relations between past and present literary texts and/or their authors" (Louis A. Renza 186). While owing a lot to his predecessors, the English Romantics, Lawrence also exerts a considerable influence on his successors—modern poets like Dylan Thomas. The literary value of Lawrence's poems can be understood more clearly by comparing his work with the works of poets who come before and after him. By paying appropriate attention to these poets, we aim to discuss Lawrence's poems in a sort of three-dimensional critical space.

The dissertation focuses on four key concepts which structure the act of poetry writing. In the first chapter, we look at the problem of poetic inspiration. Where the Romantics tend



to privilege inspiration as the absolute origin of poetry, Lawrence attempts to hold the poet's subjectivity and inspiration in a kind of mutual balance. This may reflect the poet's careful intent to avoid blindly following his precursors, while still drawing influence from them.

The second chapter examines the problem of perception. Many poets, including the Romantics, take the act of perceiving an object for granted and give it little attention, but Lawrence, who is acutely aware of the limitations of the logical and analytical act of perception, struggles with how to overcome its limitations.

The third chapter discusses the problem of language as a medium of poetry writing. Traditional poets regard language as a reliable foundation for poetry writing. Lawrence, on the other hand, discerns its oppressive nature, and how it limits vitality and the variety of the world as an object. He searches for a way to enliven language and extract some essence of freedom from it.

Factors like inspiration, perception, and language constitute the act of poetry writing, and all of them are closely related to dichotomy, which is examined in the fourth chapter. Although the problem of dichotomy influences all of Lawrence's writings, we will limit ourselves to discussing the dichotomous image of light and darkness. This examination lets us see how Lawrence is aware of the limitations of the dichotomous world view which has dominated European thought for centuries, and how he struggles to overcome it.

CHAPTER 1   INSPIRATION: RE-EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
INSPIRATION AND THE POET'S SUBJECTIVITY—A MISREADING OF THE  
ROMANTICS

1.1 The Views on Inspiration by Lawrence's Precursors and Successors

1.1.1 Inspiration for Poets

In this chapter, we aim to examine how D. H. Lawrence as a poet thinks about inspiration. Inspiration, which may also be called a muse, invention, imagination, intuition, or luck (Robert Wallace and James G. Taaffe, eds. 225), has been widely regarded as one of the most important factors in the process of poetry writing (Shin'ichiro Ishikawa, "Inspiration and Self-consciousness," and "D. H. Lawrence's View about Inspiration").

For instance, Cecil Day-Lewis, a modern British poet, suggests, "a great deal of the creating of a poem has already taken place before the poet reaches for his pen and starts writing anything down." The poet is presented with some "seed or germ of a poem" like a "feeling," "experience," "idea," "image," "phrase," or "line of verse" through something (72). Octavio Paz, a modern Mexican poet, also insists that a certain other factor besides the poet himself is involved in the act of poetry writing:

The act of writing poems looms up before us like a knot of opposing forces, in which our voice and the other voice are entwined and confused. The contours grow dim: our thinking is imperceptibly transformed into something that we cannot control completely; and our *ego* gives place to an unnamed pronoun, which is not totally a *you* or a *he*. (143)

Thus, the inspiration, which Paz calls “the other voice” and “an unnamed pronoun,” is respected and also adored by poets. However, easy absolutisation of it may lead to negation of the poet’s “*ego*.” How then, did Lawrence deal with this contradictory relation between inspiration and the poet’s subjectivity?

Before examining some of Lawrence’s writings, we will consider the views on inspiration of the Romantic poets as his precursors and those of Dylan Thomas as one of his successors in Section 1.1.2. and Section 1.1.3, respectively.

#### 1.1.2 The Romantics’ Views on Inspiration

Tony Pinkney, who has analysed Lawrence’s novels from the viewpoint of modernism, concludes that Lawrence’s “long battle with ‘classiosity’ throughout his career” characterises his prose works (163), but as for poetry, it is rather the battle with Romanticism that is key to his creation.

The English Romantics of the nineteenth century are the most influential precursors of Lawrence. The Romantics generally consider inspiration as something that only chosen poets with great sensitivity and intellect can receive, and often consecrate it as a staple and absolute factor in the act of poetry writing.

Meanwhile, they put only secondary weight on the poets’ subjective working to textualise it into poems. From the viewpoint of Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of the so-called second-generation Romantics, poems are generated beyond the control of the poet’s mind, consciousness, and spirit:

Poetry, as has been said, in this respect differs from logic, that it is not subject to the controul of the active powers of the mind, and that its birth and recurrence has no necessary connexion with consciousness or will.

(*Shelley's Poetry and Prose* 534)

The poet's creative mind is regarded as just "a fading coal" as shown in the extract below:

A man cannot say, "I will compose a poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it: for the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness...but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet.

(*Shelley's Poetry and Prose* 531)

We need to notice temporariness of inspiration, which is described as something being "already on the decline" when a poem starts to be written about it. Therefore, in order to manage to seize this faint and easily perishing inspiration in a purer form, Shelley is willing to blow out "a fading coal" as a symbol of the poet's subjectivity.

Self-negation by poets is also seen in 'Ode to a Nightingale' (*Keats: Poetical Works* 207-09) written by John Keats, another second-generation Romantic. In this poem, paralysis or numbness of the speaker's mind is consistently stressed:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains

My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,

Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains

One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk... (ll. 1-4)

It is noteworthy that the speaker's "sense" becomes numb and falls into oblivion ("Lethe") just as when he has drunk some narcotic drug. It seems clear that this "drowsy numbness" of consciousness is a prerequisite condition for him to receive inspiration. As seen in Harold Bloom's remark that Keats "has yielded his being too readily to that of the bird. And he welcomes this dangerous vertigo" (Introduction to *The Odes of Keats* 8), consumption of the subjectivity is rather "welcomed" by the poet who seeks for an encounter with a nightingale as a symbol of inspiration:

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell

To toll me back from thee to my sole self!

.....

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music... Do I wake or sleep? (ll. 71-72, 79-80)

Inspiration is essentially transient; and similarly, the experience given by it never lasts long, however ecstatic and epiphany-like it may be. The speaker has flown high in the sky of imagination guided by a nightingale, but he is now excluded from the celestial realm with his own words "Forlorn!" It triggers his falling down to the terrestrial reality.

After the strategy of minimizing his subjectivity has ended in failure, the speaker as a persona of Keats is given a chance to consider how poets should get along with inspiration, and to ponder whether his subjective act of creation is "a heightening or merely an evasion

of the state of experience" (Harold Bloom, *The Odes of Keats* 13). However, the poet does not pursue this crucial pondering; instead of it, he quickly moves into an ambiguous interrogative: "Do I wake or sleep?" and cunningly avoids "a battle with identity" (Thomas Weiskel 50-51).

As briefly shown above, Keats and Shelley have a general tendency to be willing to abandon their subjectivities, so as to be more receptive to the faint and ephemeral inspiration. Meanwhile, William Wordsworth, one of the first-generation Romantics, puts a weight not only on inspiration but also on the poet's subjectivity. Borrowing key words of the Romantic criticism, Keats and Shelley pursue "sublime" experiences beyond individual poets, but Wordsworth pursues "egotistical sublime" experiences based on the poet's own "ego."

Let us take the poem, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', which is also known as 'Daffodil,' as an example. According to the diary-like essay written by Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy and William are said to have seen "a few daffodils close to the water side" "in the woods beyond Gowbarrow Park" (*The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals* 85). Therefore, the sight of daffodils described in the poem is of course an actual one, but it is also, as many critics mention, some illusionary vision brought by inspiration:

For oft when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude,  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the Daffodils. (ll. 13-18)

What we should perceive here is that this vision of daffodils, though it could be influenced by ephemeral inspiration, does not pass quickly, but is steadily fixed in the poet's textual world. For Wordsworth, inspiration is something that can be played back many times in his own recollection even after a long time span.

One of the factors making it possible for Wordsworth to redefine inspiration not as something temporal but as something lasting and reproducible may lie in his rhetorical strategy to internalise inspiration. Our attention should be paid to the fact that he has set an "inward eye" within himself. By this rhetorical device, he makes externally originated inspiration united with his own subjectivity.

In this poem, inspiration becomes truly meaningful and effective not when it suddenly visits the poet but at "the hour of possession" (Thomas Weiskel 53) when it has been captured, internalised, unified, aged, and then, recollected by him. We could say that the poetic truth is simultaneously dependent on inspiration and the poet's subjectivity. In other words, his poems spring from his "nature-consciousness, joined to an answering self-consciousness" (Geoffrey H. Hartman 123).

While Keats and Shelley somewhat intentionally exaggerate the concept of poets as some passive and "transparent" receivers of inspiration, Wordsworth holds the notion of poets as independent controllers of it, which may remind us of Dylan Thomas, another Romantic poet appearing in the twentieth century.

### 1.1.3 Dylan Thomas' View on Inspiration

Concerning literary successors of Lawrence, we could name a few poets. However, we will limit ourselves to discussing just one case, i.e. Dylan Thomas. Thomas is a modern poet born in 1914, but unlike other modernist poets in those days, he has a strong predisposition

to Romanticism. Thomas, who is known to have rewritten Lawrence's 'The Ship of Death' as a performance piece (Edward Lucie-Smith 224), seems to inherit this Romantic tendency immediately from Lawrence.

Comparison of Lawrence with Thomas might give us a clearer picture of each poet, though it has hardly been attempted except for several studies, for example, by Helen Sword who refers to Thomas in her analysis of Lawrence's 'The Ship of Death' (132) and by Shin'ichiro Ishikawa who compares the images of darkness appearing in the poems by Lawrence and Thomas ("Light and Darkness" 55-66). In this section, we will briefly survey Thomas's view on inspiration with an aim to compare it with Lawrence's.

Like the Romantic poets of the nineteenth century, Thomas admits the great value of inspiration for poets. However, Thomas, as a man living in the modern age of knowledge, writes that the chance of an encounter with inspiration has become much less frequent than before in his poem 'No, Pigeon, I'm Too Wise' (*Dylan Thomas: The Poems* 234):

No, pigeon, I'm too wise;  
No sky for me that carries  
Its shining clouds for you;  
Sky has not loved me much,  
And if it did, who should I have  
To wing my shoulders and my feet?  
There's no way.  
Ah, nightingale, my voice  
Could never touch your spinning notes,  
Nor be so clear. (ll. 1-10)



In the poem quoted above, the speaker as a persona of the poet talks about his encounter with a “pigeon” or a “nightingale,” but he does not seem to enjoy sublime experiences given by those birds which have traditionally symbolised inspiration. The modern Romantic is “too wise” to blind himself to his own subjective function of mind.

It might be true that Thomas has had some blessed moments of encountering inspiration, but it is too ephemeral and fragile for him. In the poem ‘When Your Furious Motion’ (*Dylan Thomas: The Poems* 232), the poet writes as follows:

When your furious motion is steadied,  
And your clamour stopped,  
And when the bright wheel of your turning voice is stilled,  
Your step will remain about to fall.  
So will your voice vibrate  
And its edge cut the surface,  
So, then, will the dark cloth of your hair  
Flow uneasily behind you. (ll. 1-8)

As implied in the words such as “furious motion,” “clamour” or “bright wheel,” the vision given by inspiration can be strong, dynamic, and lustrous at the moment of its first appearance. However, as soon as it reaches the poet, it starts to “vibrate” uncertainly. It gradually deteriorates until it eventually disappears. The image of the dark cloth of hair flowing behind, which seems to be within our reach, but is actually out of it, implies the enlarged gap between inspiration falling into some faint remnant of memory and the poet