D H Lawrence and Shyness

As D. H. Lawrence wrote and revised *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), he felt caught between toughness and tenderness. He wrote to Dorothy Brett:

> I have been re-writing my novel, for the third time. It's done, all but the last chapter. I think I shall re-christen it 'Tenderness'. And I really think I shall try to publish it privately here, at ten dollars a copy. I might make a thousand pounds, with luck, and that would bring us to the ranch nicely. If only the fates and the gods will be with us this year, instead of all the time against, as they were last year. If only one were tough, as some people are tough!
>
> (*Letters*, IV, 255)

In her recent biography, *Burning Man* (2021), Frances Wilson has described Lawrence as a writer of extremes and 'fierce certainties' (2), albeit ones she came to realise were 'riven with contradictions' (3). He is known as a writer who embraced the explicit, pushing the limits of what might be said, and incurring aesthetic and ethical risks along the way.[i] But this passage suggests something else: alongside what is elsewhere expressed as a defiance and determination to publish *Lady Chatterley's Lover* regardless of its likely reception, there is here a not-just-pragmatic interest in doing so 'privately', and a sense that the novel encapsulates tenderness, even as Lawrence wishes for personal toughness. With his wish, 'If only one were to be tough', Lawrence echoes a recommendation he made to a friend, at the start of his career, about how to be a writer: 'If one writes one must have a tough soul and put up with things, and keep grinding on' (*Letters*, II, 28). His later letters suggest that developing such toughness was, for him, still a work-in-progress.

This language of 'toughness' and 'tenderness' echoes a distinction made by William James in *Pragmatism* (1907) between the 'tender-minded' and the 'tough-minded' (15). James' distinction is one between being drawn to empiricism or rationalism, to

optimism and pessimism, amongst other things, but interestingly it was also a distinction that Carl Jung was to later see as the equivalent to his distinction between 'introversion' and 'extroversion' ('Psychological Typology', 502). Invested in tenderness, and longing for toughness, describes the posture that Lawrence adopted towards a particular emotional quality, akin to (though separate from) introversion: shyness. This article will explore how Lawrence captures shyness, by which I mean how he records moments where characters seem tenderly to retreat, or recoil, into an inner world, moments where they seem unable to break out of the private recesses of the self. Shyness is at once something depicted in his literary characters, something felt by Lawrence as a writer, and also something that might be prompted in his readers. The article will move, therefore, between these focus points, starting with Lawrence's characters, then thinking about Lawrence as a writer, and then considering potential readerly shyness. Moving from Lawrence's letters to his early fiction to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, I will suggest that shyness is centrally important to what have long been recognised as the major concerns of Lawrence's work. It shapes his sense of sympathetic connection; it is structural to his exploration of emotion.

Shyness is, as many critics have noted, a state that has become increasingly pathologized. Christopher Lane's *Shyness: How Normal Behaviour Became a Sickness* (2007), which traces the meaning of shyness across cultures and histories, argues that shyness, especially in North America and in the UK, has become medicalised: 'Shyness isn't just shyness any more. It is a disease' (1).[ii] Lane suggests that experiences encapsulated by shyness have come to be understood under the heading of 'social phobia'. Other commentators have sought to redeem shyness from

such pathologisation. Joe Moran in *Shrinking Violets* (2017) reconstructs the history of shyness, and aims to uncover its conceptual richness. Various literary critics have undertaken an analogous task, suggesting that the works of a range of writers and artists (as various as Hawthorne, John Ashbery, and Andy Warhol) reveal shyness's cognitive and literary importance. Shyness, it has been suggested, might be a way of being a 'close reader' (Moran, 6), it might proffer a 'heightened form of awareness' (Davis, 412), it might be an expression of queer identity (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 137-8), or it might propel a distinctive, modernist aesthetic of 'disjunctions, evasions, non-sequiturs' (Glavey, 131).[iii]

These arguments have uncovered a sense of the creative potential of shyness, and posed important questions about how we medicalise emotional life. They can, however, risk valorising shyness. Susan Cain has suggested that, unlike introversion, shyness 'is inherently painful' (13). The move to question the medicalisation of shyness can entail seeing it too neutrally, and can involve divesting it of such pain: it can perhaps mean not thinking through the question of what it might mean to be at once interested in shyness, and also to attempt to rid oneself of it. It can mean viewing shyness too abstractly, and not in terms of what it is to feel shy oneself.[iv] Turning to Lawrence's work allows us to see something more nuanced. Lawrence is known for being interested in forms of repression, for writing to dismantle shame and inhibition. He writes against self-consciousness, which in his work seems to mean something between personal torture and reprehensible narcissism.[v] He has been seen as inherently hostile to self-consciousness, concerned with returning us to our 'true, pristine, unconsciousness' (12).[vi] Shyness is a state of recoil and retreat to which he gives a more sympathetic hearing, and which is expansively important in

his work; but his awareness of how it might overlap with, or lead to, self-consciousness, means that Lawrence never downplays the pain that might be involved in it. He at once values shyness and pushes beyond it. This conflicted attitude to shyness is something Lawrence consistently explores intellectually: his work echoes then-contemporary models for understanding shyness, from William James on the 'tender-minded', to Jung's early twentieth-century ideas of introversion, to notions of the 'inner blush' – the theory, important to thinkers including James and the physiologist Angelo Mosso, that all emotions cause measurable rushes of blood within the body.

Unfolding these historical connections, I want to present a new perspective on Lawrence, exploring a state rarely associated with his work, and also to reconfigure notions of him as an 'embarrassing' writer, a point variously explored by critics from Eliseo Vivas to Santanu Das. I will take up, too, Noreen Masud's suggestion that Lawrence 'is not the writer for the eloquent' (1533). Critics writing on shyness repeatedly fight shy of having to define it in an absolute way, noting its inherently shifting quality.[vii] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick memorably explores how one might shift from 'from shame to shyness to shining—and inevitably, back, and back again' (135).[viii] This article will primarily understand shyness in Lawrence's work as a feeling of retreating or recoiling from the world, and it will show how the state fades in his later work, metamorphosising into a lingering interest in unease and embarrassment (embarrassment is here something with the potential to induce shyness in the reader). Lawrence pays close attention to shyness, even as his letters suggest that it was a quality he had to discard as a writer. Tracing how shyness unfolds across Lawrence's work reveals the changing shape of his writing, the

surprising persistence of his sense of reticence (which returns 'back, and back again'), and his sense of the importance of moving beyond such reticence.

Absorption

Lawrence's early fiction, as Lara Feigel has noted, is filled with 'young men trapped by their own detachment, unable [...] to inhabit their own bodies' (29). It contains several examples of what looks like shyness – Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers* (1913) experiences 'convulsions' (95), overcome with a sense of exposure as he goes towards his first job interview: 'Charles the First mounted his scaffold with a lighter heart' (119). It is in *The Rainbow* (1915), however, that Lawrence creates one of his shyest protagonists and traces the meanings of shyness most closely. From the first descriptions of his childhood, *The Rainbow*'s Tom Brangwen is described as uneasy. It is an unease that variously finds a focus point in reading, writing, and sexuality. Lawrence depicts, for instance, Tom Brangwen's experiences of reading at school. He is shown as loving Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' when it is read out loud, but reading it silently creates a horrified blushing, a 'prickly sensation of repulsion to go over his skin, the blood came to his face' (18). The moment of unease seems internal, drawing something out of him: 'the blood came to his face' and causing him to retreat. But it is also external – the 'repulsion' seems to travel across his face, like a passing atmospheric influence. There is something about his own lack of ease in reading that makes him want to retreat from everything. He blushes, again, when he tries to write: the narrative recounts that he 'reddened furiously', and 'would have been torn to pieces rather than attempt to write another word' (18). This difficulty in reading and writing speaks to an absolute retreat from utterance, and even from proximity to poetic expression.

The shifting, uneasy emotions prompting Tom Brangwen's blushing are traced carefully in *The Rainbow,* shading as he grows up into what we can recognise as variations of shyness, encompassing repression, and shame, and a form of introversion. Lawrence describes how he becomes trapped in himself: 'doubt hindered his outgoing' (21). As Tom gets older, he is characterized in terms of 'self-consciousness and unsureness' (22) and seems increasingly trapped within himself:

> he stared fixedly before him, watchful yet absorbed, seeing everything and aware of nothing, coiled in himself.
>
> (29)

Lawrence presents an increasing sense of Tom's withdrawal, linking it both to preternatural sensitivity, 'seeing everything', and an impoverished lack of consciousness, 'aware of nothing'. The word 'yet' in the phrase 'watchful yet absorbed' is especially telling. 'Watchful *and* absorbed' might have seemed more natural as a construction, suggesting that Tom is absorbed in watching the world around him. 'Yet' creates an obstruction in the sentence, suggesting that this absorption disrupts and distorts Tom's watchfulness and his happiness, and that he has been absorbed back into himself.

Lawrence's representation of shyness as a form of experience that at once prompts and limits sensitivity is also evident as Tom is described as finally breaking free of his peculiar absorption and unease – and here there is also a sense of how much is at stake in Lawrence's understanding of shyness. Tom's first meeting with Lydia Lensky takes him out of himself:

> Then he turned to look at her. She was dressed in black, was apparently rather small and slight, beneath her long black cloak, and she wore a black

> bonnet. She walked hastily, as if unseeing, her head rather forward. It was her curious, absorbed, flitting motion, as if she were passing unseen by everybody, that first arrested him.
>
> She had heard the cart, and looked up. Her face was pale and clear, she had thick dark eyebrows and a wide mouth, curiously held. He saw her face clearly, as if by a light in the air. He saw her face so distinctly, that he ceased to coil on himself, and was suspended.
>
> (29)

Elsewhere I discussed the way this description 'lists adverbs' (151) in order to focus our attention onto how Tom Brangwen is moved by something which relates to Lydia's own way of moving.[ix] He attends to the way Lydia holds her mouth and to the way she walks. Lawrence seems to be thinking through what it would mean to base an idea of sympathy and connection on the details of bodily movement.[x] And, in this moment, it seems that shyness is crucial to enabling such sympathy. Lawrence suggests that a shy perspective on the world reveals forms of connection: shyness engenders a form of watchfulness that notices things that other ways of being in the world might not. Tom Brangwen's close observations of Lydia, his attentiveness to the particular way she holds herself (her 'mouth, curiously held') and later 'the way she sat and held her head lifted' (32) seem to amount to the hyper-vigilance, the 'close reading' that Joe Moran has seen as crucial to shyness. Tom and Lydia's first encounter itself is marked by furtiveness, with Lydia 'flitting' 'as if she were passing unseen by everybody'. Her own 'absorbed…motion' echoes Tom's own absorption – there is a sense in both characters of furled, recessive inner lives. And yet it is also a moment in which Brangwen seems lifted out of his own shyness, as he 'ceased to coil on himself, and was suspended'.

Lawrence's treatment of shyness is paradoxical: his work at once links it to sensitivity – and specifically a form of sensitivity that is central to his work – but also connects it to a loss of sensitivity, and to entrapment. He suggests at once that shyness might engender a watchfulness that allows for sympathetic connection, and that such connection might represent a release from shyness. Lawrence's depiction of shyness is poised between acknowledging the insights gained by a fearful attentiveness to the world, and suggesting a desire for escape from being absorbed by such attentiveness. It is characteristic of Lawrence's approach to shyness that he anatomises it, mapping how it is positioned in relation to the body, tracing shyness as a series of internal movements and gestures. Pervading such anatomical mappings is one particular image for shyness: that of the 'coil'. Tracing this image, I will now suggest, shows how Lawrence constantly revises his sense, evident above, of the relationship between shyness, selfhood and integrity, and finds ways to untangle his sense of the paradox of shyness.

Beyond Absorption: Coiling

The words 'coil', 'coiling' and 'recoiling' recur in Lawrence's writing, and they generate different images of selfhood when used with different prepositions.[xi] Tom Brangwen begins by being 'coiled in himself', which evokes a type of self-enfolding retreat into the self. When later it is stated that he ceased 'to coil on himself, and was suspended', there is a subtle shift that shows Lawrence trying to map the relationship between shyness and the self. Ceased to 'coil on himself' is a strange, awkward phrase: it seems as if the word 'in' is missing. It makes 'coil' static and stuck, collapsing onto a surface, without anywhere to retreat to, or to return inwards towards. 'Coiled *in* himself' implies a type of self-infolding curling, like a snake, but

'coil *on* himself' seems more visceral, even more sexual, or it seems to gesture towards intestinal coils and the physicality of the way in which bodies coil back on themselves. Lawrence's expression pushes towards something physically explicit, an unveiling of the body. It intimates that shyness might be an obstruction for the self rather than an expression of it: '*on* himself' implies some kind of separate inner core that Brangwen has collapsed back onto (where we might expect 'into').

Lawrence re-writes this coiling construction throughout his work. One notable occurrence is in his early short story 'Love Among the Haystacks'. Here again Lawrence depicts the figure of the shy young man, transformed by an encounter with a woman again named Lydia. In the story the character Geoffrey is described as painfully self-conscious:

> His blue eyes were unsteady, they glanced away quickly; his mouth was morbidly sensitive. One felt him wince away, through the whole of his great body. His inflamed self-consciousness was a disease in him.
>
> (88)

Geoffrey's mode of being here is linked with sensitivity, but a type of sensitivity that impedes and is linked to deathliness. It is described as illness, and as involving his body acting independently: '*his mouth* was morbidly sensitive'. Derek Attridge has suggested in his work on James Joyce's 'lipspeech' that the description of body parts acting independently in *Ulysses* (1922) troubles ideas of a 'unitary' self (161) 'under the command of a central will' (163), and in doing so constitutes an 'organic liberation' (167), and erotic 'linguistic adventure' (172). This early short story by Lawrence, with its shy protagonist, offers a different sense of the relationship between the self and the body, one in which the independence of bodily parts is less erotically adventurous and more fragmented and pained. Geoffrey's awkward

sensitivity prompts a particular kind of sympathy in the narrator: 'One felt him wince away'.[xii] The description of Geoffrey wincing 'through the whole of his body' positions Geoffrey himself as a fugitive pained presence in his own body.

Amidst these descriptions of Geoffrey's shyness, the story includes an early use of Lawrence's image of 'coiling'. Geoffrey is described at first as 'coiled within himself' (88), suggesting a self-protective retreat. Lawrence also describes his shyness more despairingly as tortoise-like:

> He would *always* shrink now. He had hoped and hoped for the time when he would be careless, bold as Maurice, when he would not wince and shrink. Now he would always be the same, coiling up in himself like a tortoise with no shell.
>
> (94)

This image, compared to the later iteration in *The Rainbow*, suggest Lawrence gradually reaching the conclusion that shyness cannot offer any final place of safety. 'Coiled *within* himself' and 'coiled up *in* himself' both suggest some kind of retreat into an inner space. But in the collapse of 'coil on himself' in *The Rainbow* shows Lawrence increasingly suggesting that in shyness the self falls back onto itself, rather than being able to find hiding-places within the self. This loss of a place of retreat within the self can also be seen especially clearly in comparing Lawrence's work to later discussion of introversion. Lawrence's images of coiling often invoke shelled creatures such as tortoises and snails, and the image of the 'shell' was to be used by psychoanalytic discussion of introversion. Carl Jung in particular would later refer to 'the introverted self creeping still deeper into its shell' (551).[xiii] Jung's image implies the possibility of introversion as retreat: Geoffrey's lack of the shell in 'Love Among the Haystacks', and Lawrence's use of prepositions elsewhere, cast doubt on the possibility of any such refuge.

Lawrence later became aware of Jung's theories of introversion from Mabel Dodge Luhan, and he seemed to reject the concept of both introversion and extroversion, writing to her on 7th February 1924 to say that: 'those classifications mean so little to me' (*Letters,* IV, 573). He did however return to them in several subsequent letters. He suggested on 10th February 1924 that extroversion as well as introversion was 'a destructive influence' (*Letters,* IV, 577). Introversion, however, seemed finally a type of untenable retreat for Lawrence: 'If being an introvert means always drawing in, in, in to yourself, and not going bravely out, and giving yourself, then for God's sake wash windows also and go out to them, if only savagely' (Letters, IV, 574).

Lawrence in this way always emphasises the personal importance of moving beyond an impulse to retreat into the self. His metaphoric coiling suggests that exploring shyness, thinking about it rather than just inhabiting it, teaches important things about the relationship between emotion, selfhood, and the body, providing a particularly expansive understanding of inner life. The images of coils suggest an impatience with shyness, a desire to unfold it and move beyond it, but they also suggest an interest in tracking it through the body, in a way that complicates the binaries of extroversion and introversion. This sense of the explorative potential of shyness, of thinking about shyness as a way of thinking about emotion, is something that becomes especially evident as Lawrence explores images of the heart, and of blushing, in his reflections on his own writing and his own shyness.

Plethysmography

Lawrence began his writing career feeling something akin to shyness. John Worthen has described how Lawrence would hide his creative writing:

> Everyone was proud of the scholarly books and prizes on the shelves: but Lawrence would tuck away the exercise book containing his own writing where he believed no-one would look for it, not even his poetry-writing mother: between the prize volumes in the glass-fronted bookcase.
>
> (132)

The exercise book seems at once concealed and not-concealed, in a way that echoes Lawrence's own sense of shyness and the semi-explicit, evasive meanings of his coiled-up protagonists. It is buried amidst what has been publicly recognized, shored up and concealed by the 'prize volumes'. It is at once visible – inside the transparent 'glass-fronted bookcase' – and also 'tucked away'. It echoes the coiling retreat, with its search for a retreat that does not exist, attempting to hide but only finding another place of potential visibility. Such an attempted retreat could be seen less about bashfulness about his writing than as a guarding of privacy, a cherishing of a space for self-expression. But the hidden exercise book was perhaps connected to a more deep-rooted ambivalence around publishing. Jessie Chambers first remembers Lawrence talking in a 'quiet and unexpressive voice', and in a 'still, *indrawn* mood' (155, emphasis mine), about publication, and after an initial rejection deciding that 'I don't care if I never have a line published' (156).[xiv] Worthen claims that the retreat and not-retreat indicated by the tucked away creative writing was related to Lawrence's class-position, because becoming a writer 'intensified [...] the profoundest problems of his background and class' (150). He argues that for Lawrence, becoming a writer 'was explicitly to set oneself apart from the place and its concerns: apart, too, from one's family' (131).

Whilst assessments of the exact import of the placing of the exercise book in the cabinet can only remain speculative, Lawrence's early career was marked by a particular sense of difficulty around writing and speaking. This difficulty repeatedly surfaces in relation to his early work, and in particular in relation to his second novel *The Trespasser* (1912). He wrote to Frederick Atkinson on 11th February 1911:

> I have been thinking about the 'Siegmund' book, which has been sunk in my consciousness for some time. You are going to tell me some nasty things about it. I guess I have told them, most of them, to myself – amid acute inner blushes. The book is execrable bad art: it has no idea of progressive action, but arranges gorgeous tableaux-vivants which have not any connection with the other [...] I shall not publish it ever.
>
> (229)

Lawrence, drawing on the language of 'inner blushes', picks up on a theory of emotional life prevalent at the time: the idea that one could blush inwardly, that discomfiture might cause blood to rush to particular parts of the body. He continues to draw on images of blushing, of the heart, and of the throbbing body, as he continues to refer to the book as one that reveals him, writing to Edward Garnett on 21st January 1912:

> But this is a work one can't regard easily – I mean at one's ease. It is so much oneself, one's naked self. I give myself away so much, and write what is my most palpitant, sensitive self, that I loathe the book, because it will betray me to a parcel of fools. Which is what any deeply personal or lyrical writer feels, I guess. I often think Stendhal must have writhed in torture every time he remembered Le Rouge et le noir was public property: and Jeffries at The Story of My Heart. [...]
>
> I wish The Trespasser were to be issued privately, to a few folk who had understanding. But I suppose, by all the rules of life, it must take open chance, if it's good enough.
>
> (353)

Again there's the sense of expression as loss: 'I give myself away so much', and as self-betrayal, and the focus on the heart, evident in the throbbing connotations of 'palpitant'. Lawrence compares his book to autobiography (Richard Jeffries' *The*

Story of My Heart, 1883), and also to Stendhal, whose *Le Rouge et Le Noir* (1830) is full at once of shyness, and blushing, and whose protagonist Julien Morel wages a 'battle between timidity and pride' (p64).[xv]

All the images of hearts, palpitating, and inner blushes suggest that Lawrence was interested intellectually in his own shyness, because these images link his thinking on shyness to then-contemporary theories of emotional life, and of the relationship between feeling and the body. This is especially evident in his recourse to the idea of the 'inner blush'. The blush had been identified as a key sign of embarrassment in Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions* (1872), and subsequent work had sought to understand whether other emotions should also be understood in terms of blushing. Otniel Dror records:

> Investigators observed emotions by measuring visceral blood flows into and out of various organs and limbs. Emotions were observed in terms of 'engorgements' and vasomotor changes—the dilation and constriction of blood vessels in a variety of internal organs. The observation of emotions in terms of visceral blood flows was modelled on the familiar and natural facial blush and male erections.
>
> (334)

This interest in 'inner blushes' shapes the ways in which Lawrence tries to map the difficult-to-trace coils of response and selfhood involved in shyness. Thinking about inner blushes reveals how tracing shyness might bring into play thinking about interiority: shyness brings into play, and makes tangible, surreptitious shifts in visceral blood flow, something that becomes evident in tracing the history of this form of scientific measurement.

In 'What is an Emotion?' (1884) cited in the Dror chapter, William James drew on the idea of the inner blush:

> The researches of Mosso with the plethysmograph have shown that not only the heart, but the entire circulatory system, forms a sort of sounding-board, which every change of our consciousness, however slight, may make reverberate.
>
> (191)

James is referring to the Italian physiologist Angelo Mosso's experiments with a machine aimed at measuring blood pressure (the plethysmograph), and through this coming to an understanding of how emotions might be measured, how the blood flow around the body responded to, and was an essential part of, different emotions. Lawrence read William James from early on, and may have been aware of the plethysmograph.[xvi] This idea of the body as a 'sounding-board', reverberating with sensitivity, echoes the wincing sensitivity evident in Lawrence's descriptions of shyness, and the sense of the constant shifting and coiling of the self.

Turning to Mosso's plethysmograph illuminates how thinking about shyness provides a starting-point for an expansive awareness of interiority, and a way of thinking about emotional transparency. The plethysmograph attempted to see emotions directly, unmediated through speech. Mosso's work aimed to penetrate emotions: his experiments record, for instance, initially working with patients with holes in their skull, so that you might be able to see inside their body and imagine that you might see their emotions, with Mosso recording of one patient that '[h]e had a hole in the very middle of the forehead, that seemed made to allow one to look into the skull as an old Greek philosopher once wished to do with the human heart' (75). The plethysmograph suggested the possibility of (almost) looking into the 'human heart' – it suggested that one's body betrays one's emotions, that it would be possible

to read emotions that one was not even aware that one had, that these emotions reverberate automatically about the body. The plethysmograph, as Paul V Trovillo has noted, was to become a precursor to the lie-detector machine (858).[xvii]

Importantly, Mosso's attempt to read the human heart, to think about the inner life, was also prompted by an experience akin to shyness: academic stage-fright. Mosso begins his book with thinking about his first experiences as a lecturer:

> All I had to do was to communicate the results of some of my investigations into the physiology of sleep, and yet, as the hour drew nearer, stronger waxed within me the fear that I should become confused, lose myself, and finally stand gaping, speechless before my audience. My heart beat violently, its very strings seemed to tighten, and my breath came and went, as when one looks down into a yawning abyss. At last it struck eight. As I cast a last glance at my notes, I became aware, to my horror, that the chain of ideas was broken and the links lost beyond recall
>
> (1)

Fear prompts an anatomical understanding of the body: 'My heart beat violently, its very strings seemed to tighten'. Thinking about the fear of lecturing seemed to offer a way of tracking emotions through the body, and of thinking about the detail of how they manifest in the body. The fear of public speaking seemed to offer the key to thinking about what emotion itself was: 'We can better understand the influence of the emotions on the organism if we consider the long novitiate, the unwearying efforts and the countless trials of even the greatest orators before they attained to self-control, and to the simple end of preserving before the public the same intonation, gestures, and persuasive force which are natural to them when in the company of their friends or the retirement of the family circle' (4-5). Fear in this way seemed to derail emotion, forcing it through 'countless trials', and by doing so reveal its myriad relationships with the body and mind.

It also opened up a sense of the emotional space between feeling and uttering. Mosso exclaimed in discussing the process of writing itself:

> How anxious and agitated we are when we enter upon a new field of science; when, at every step, the doubt arises whether some important phenomena may not have escaped us! How we are tormented by the fear of not being able to face the most vital questions, nor to find out those phenomena most fruitful in results and most subtile! What trepidation overcomes one before one writes down even a few lines in the book of science
>
> (69-70)

Describing fear using the word 'subtile' Mosso echoes how he described emotional and physical life itself: 'The pulse in the finest branches of the vessels and in the inward recesses of the organs is such a subtile, delicate phenomenon…' (66) Tracing the doubts and obstructions and tortuousness of shyness seems to allow for the full appreciation of the delicacy and subtlety and difficulty of feeling itself.

Fear for Mosso, then, opened up a sense of the possibility of thinking about the body, about selfhood, and about the tortuous passages of emotion and blood and inner blushes about the body. Lawrence's interest in the inner blush, his perception of it in his own responses, and his tracing of the pulses and coils of feeling in his characters, suggests that he similarly found shyness and fear to illuminate how people might feel and exist: shyness offered a way of thinking about the landscape of bodily emotion. For Mosso such shyness was at once revealing and something to be overcome. He wrote, callously, that any social fear could be tackled, that we ought to 'remember that fear is a disease to be cured; the brave man may fail sometimes, but the coward fails always' (278). Lawrence's work, carefully tracing shyness and what it reveals about the spaces within the human body, and the spaces between feeling and

utterance, can be helpfully connected to Mosso: at times Lawrence offers a form of writing that itself tries to act as a writerly plethysmograph. He urges the importance of breaking through shyness, of risk, and of trying to speak. But Lawrence's treatment of shyness is less impatient and brutal than Mosso's, and he remains centrally interested in shyness as a phenomenon. His early shyness remains as a presence in his writing, in part through the way he displays it in his characters and uses it in exploring interiority, but also in the way his writing worries at the importance of embarrassment.

Embarrassing Lawrence

In the midst of his uncertainty about his early work, Lawrence imagined what it would be to be free of a certain type of sensitivity and susceptibility, telling Blanche Jennings on 13th May 1908:

> As true as I am born, I have a capacity for doing something delicately and well. As sure as I am poor, I am being roughened down to a blunt blade. […] My greatest happiness, I am sure, lies in being coarse, not easily vulnerable, in a word common-place, like the rest of the dull blades and the flat muddy pools.
>
> (53-4)

The passage indicates a desire for imperviousness. It suggests that something-like-shyness was connected to class for Lawrence, with his references to poverty and roots: 'As sure as I am poor', 'As true as I am born', and to the 'coarse', and the 'common-place'. Happiness seems to reside in the opposite of caring what others think: 'My greatest happiness […] lies in being […] not easily vulnerable', and in the wry wish to become like 'the rest of the dull blades and the flat muddy pools'. This yearning for invulnerability seems to result in Lawrence bursting through a certain kind of reticence. When *The Trespasser* was published, Lawrence was in Germany

with Frieda; in a letter to Ford Madox Ford on 10th December 1912 he seems almost inured to his qualms about the book, or is at least attempting to brazen it out:

> Thanks for your full opinions on The Trespasser. I agree with you heartily. I rather hate the book. It seems a bit messy to me. But whether it injures my reputation or not, it has brought me enough money to carry me [...] One must publish to live.
>
> (485)

Writing here, seems to be a necessity for 'making a living', but also to be related to living more generally (to the 'rules of life', invoked by Lawrence above), to allowing for riskiness, and loss.

The sense of breaking through shyness as a necessary risk, one integral to being alive, is especially evident in 'Love Among the Haystacks'. Discussing Geoffrey in particular, Lawrence is very aware of the painfulness of shyness:

> Quite frantically, he longed not-to-be. The idea of going through life thus coiled up within himself in morbid self-consciousness, always lonely, surly, and a misery, was enough to make him cry out.
>
> (95)

The passage conveys desperation, pervasively linking withdrawal to death. There is a sense of being limited, stuck—[now] he would always be the same—and of wanting to 'cry out', to break into utterance. Noreen Masud has written compellingly of Lawrence as 'not the writer for the eloquent', as instead 'the writer of the struggling-to-exist, the intently but unproductively regarded, the staged-and-restaged without result' (1533). She suggests that '[t]he error we have made with Lawrence [...] is to read such affects as mere preliminaries to relationships which eventually, belatedly emerge in his novels' (1533). Lawrence's depiction of shyness is not a 'mere preliminary'; it matters more than that, and it is something that never gets entirely

left behind. But he also emphasises here that extreme recoil, even whilst it reveals something of the intense sounding-board of the body, cannot be wished for indefinitely.

A final way in which Lawrence seems to preserve an interest in shyness is that the very texture of his work seems to prompt it: he can make his readers feel shy, and indeed self-conscious. In particular, creating, and considering, embarrassment is central to Lawrence's own writing. His work is potentially embarrassing in a whole range of ways, from its exposure of intimacy to a critical sense that there is something about the way that Lawrence writes that is inherently discomfiting. Eliseo Vivas described the 'gaucherie' of Lawrence's poetry as 'embarrassing' (viii). More sympathetically, Santanu Das notes that 'there is a curious reluctance, almost an embarrassment, in admitting what makes *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* so immediately thrilling' (64). Whilst Vivas owns that his embarrassment is an impediment to his reading of Lawrence's poetry, Das responds to the embarrassment of others through critically reconsidering Lawrence, urging the importance of the sensory in Lawrence's poetry.

Another way of responding to the embarrassment of Lawrence's work, however, offers an alternative to either criticising it or on the other hand trying to see past such embarrassment. It is possible instead to see embarrassment as a prompt to a form of shy feeling that Lawrence saw as revelatory. As Christopher Ricks' *Keats and Embarrassment* (1974) suggests, it is possible for writers to bring embarrassment into view as a way of taking it seriously, noting that

> Keats as a man and a poet was especially sensitive to, and morally intelligent about, embarrassment; that the particular direction of his insight and human concern here is to insist upon raising the matter of embarrassability (whereas some other writings and people furnish a different kind of principled relief for us, by means of the cool tactful pretence that the possibility of embarrassment does not arise in their company)
>
> (1)

The way in which Lawrence's work raises 'the matter of embarrassability' similarly offers an alternative to a 'cool tactful pretence'. It also suggests a particularly expansive view of emotional life, and a particular sense of possibility. Embarrassment, I am arguing, can relate to a juggling of roles, to a sense of there being lots of possible answers. This is something that Erving Goffman, whose work is important in Ricks' *Keats and Embarrassment*, argues:

> By showing embarrassment when he can be neither of two people, the individual leaves open the possibility that in the future he may effectively be either. His role in the current interaction may be sacrificed, and even the encounter itself, but he demonstrates that, while he cannot present a sustainable and coherent self on this occasion, he is at least disturbed by the fact and may prove worthy at another time.
>
> (270, cited by Ricks, 2)

Goffman's work speaks to the possibilities of both shyness and embarrassment in ways that resonate with Lawrence's work. One aspect of the value of shyness is that it 'leaves open [...] possibility', not quite committing oneself to specific utterance or a specific way of being in the world, and preventing the possibility of conclusive wrongness. Andrew H. Miller has written recently of the ways in which literature and criticism register the limitations of only having one life, whilst being aware of all the other lives one might have led. He suggests in conclusion that one way of circumventing thoughts of these limitations is not to engage at all: 'We can avoid second thoughts by not starting' (161). Shyness is a way of 'not starting', of remaining at an angle, uncommitted.

Lawrence's work seems to appreciate the way shyness opens up vistas onto interiority, but he could not rest on the idea of 'not starting'. Turning to late Lawrence suggests that embarrassment, akin to shyness, provides a way for shyness to linger. Whilst Lawrence seems to have had personally to move beyond shyness, generating embarrassment becomes a way of continuing to prompt shyness in the reader, continuing to suggest its importance, even as he cultivated his own hard-won indifference. In Lawrence's late texts his characteristic shy protagonist figures fade out: there is no equivalent of Tom Brangwen or Geoffrey or the young Paul Morel from *Women in Love* onwards. But there are moments of reticence, and moments which seem to prompt and entangle the reader in shynesses of their own.

This becomes especially evident in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). This is a text that is not often associated with shyness, or with holding back of any kind. Lawrence described the book to Martin Secker in a letter of 9th March 1928 in terms of necessary shock and destructiveness, as a type of 'beneficent' 'bomb' (*Letters*, VI, 316). But his letters also keep returning to the importance of privacy. He wrote to Mabel Doge Luhan in 18th November 1927 that 'I must avoid publicity with it – it is so tender and so daring' (*Letters*, VI, 223), here moving between declaration ('so daring') and a sense of bruised retreat ('so tender'). In the novel this emphasis both on declaration and tenderness is perhaps characteristic of Mellors, who offers an alternative to the shy protagonists of Lawrence's early fiction. A particular scene in the novel seems to re-write Lawrence's earlier treatment of shyness, to move beyond it, and to prompt it again:

> He slipped out of bed with his back to her, naked and white and thin, and went to the window, stooping a little, drawing the curtains and looking out for a moment. The back was white and fine, the small buttocks beautiful with an exquisite, delicate manliness, the back of the neck ruddy and delicate and yet strong. There was an inward, not an outward strength in the delicate fine body.
>
> "But you are beautiful!" she said. "So pure and fine! Come!" – She held her arms out.
>
> He was ashamed to turn to her, because of his aroused nakedness. He caught his shirt off the floor, and held it to him, coming to her.
>
> "No!" she said, still holding out her beautiful slim arms from her drooping breasts. "Let me see you!"
>
> He dropped the shirt and stood still, looking towards her. The sun through the low window sent in a beam that lit up his thighs and slim belly, and the erect phallos rising darkish and hot-looking from the little cloud of vivid gold-red hair. She was startled and afraid.
>
> "How strange!" she said slowly. "How strange he stands there! So big! And so dark and cock-sure! Is he like that?"
>
> (209)

This suggests initial shame rather than shyness (it reminds me of Sedgwick's discussion of moving 'from shame to shyness to shining'). The passage, and the novel as a whole, writes against shame, and traces a movement away from it, as Mellors drops the shirt and turns towards Connie. There's a careful shifting of prepositions and also an emphasis on shifting from 'inward [...] in the delicate fine body' to outwardness 'she held her arms out', 'looking towards her', an outward-facing openness that combats what Lawrence saw as the 'in, in, in' of introversion. Alongside this emphasis on unveiling there's also an emphasis on Mellors' embarrassment, not wanting to be seen by Connie, and a sense of something like the erotics of shyness, the way shyness suggests a degree of secrecy that can tantalise. And something of his awkwardness remains in the text in the form of other, proliferating awkwardnesses. The passage tangles into all the reasons to be embarrassed by Lawrence: the type of ode to the penis (lit up by heavenly light), the

weird sense of the woman as subservient ('startled and afraid'). Lawrence's writing at once describes the overcoming of unease, as well as prompting and preserving it.

Conclusions

Lawrence's work suggests finally both how much shyness matters – how much a feeling of retreat might tell us about the inner life – and how much might be at stake personally in moving beyond it. He suggests what is to be lost and gained through breaking through shyness. In his letters about his own writing Lawrence worries repeatedly about something being at once exposed and lost through writing, using the repeated phrase: 'I give myself away'. This poised sense of both gain and loss is echoed in Tom Brangwen's thoughts as he lingers on the edge of abandoning his own sense of reserve:

> He had something to lose which he was afraid of losing, which he was not even sure of possessing.
>
> (21)

Moran's work on shyness suggests ultimately that the state might be 'neither a boon nor a burden' (26), not to be thought of 'in terms of some calculus of profit or loss at all, but as part of the ineluctable oddness of being human' (26). For Lawrence, too, questions of loss and gain in shyness are complex. Shyness is persistent and persistently important in his work, and allows for his exploration of the tortuous complexities of bodily and emotional experience. His tracing of shyness uncovers how the body can become a sounding-board of emotion, showing how the convulsive complexity of shyness can reveal the complexity of emotional life.

Ultimately, however, the idea of shyness as neither 'boon nor burden' seems too non-committal to describe Lawrence's view of it. Instead, Lawrence's interest in shyness is at once in its untenability and its expansiveness. Shyness helps reveal and chart inner spaces in emotional experience, but it seems, finally, that pushing through shyness opens up other possibilities which are too valuable to miss. To return to 'Love Among the Haystacks': the brother who is not shy, Maurice, is easily attuned to the world. Unconcerned by shyness, he is able to notice the very quality of the air around him: 'As he dried himself, he discovered little wanderings in the air, felt on his sides soft touches and caresses that were peculiarly delicious: sometimes they startled him, and he laughed as if he were not alone' (105). Tom Brangwen's move away from being absorbed in his own bruised, painful shyness, meanwhile, seems to open up a sense of space:

> Big holes were blown into the sky, the moonlight blew about. Sometimes a high moon, liquid-brilliant, scudded across a hollow space and took cover under electric, blown-iridescent cloud-edges. […] And all the sky was teeming and tearing along, a vast disorder of flying shapes and darknesses and ragged fumes of light […]
>
> (48)

These images of sudden expansiveness, from a whimsical awareness of 'wanderings in the air' to a sense of overwhelming cosmic distance, begin to suggest what Lawrence felt could be gained by unfolding one's own shyness. For Lawrence, perpetual shyness was too convoluting and painful to be borne. His work and his protagonists and his writing voice repeatedly reach beyond it. The remaining awkwardness in his work, though, speaks to a state that is not without value, even if it had to be left behind. Lara Feigel has argued recently that '[p]eople don't just read Lawrence, they have their lives changed by him', and that '[t]here has been a century of people using Lawrence as a guide to life' (7). Understanding Lawrence's work as offering resources for thinking about shyness presents a different slant on using

Lawrence as a 'guide to life', because it shows him giving a sympathetic hearing to an emotional state rarely associated with him. He shows shyness to be revelatory of the expanses of emotional life, whilst at the same time urging us into the spaces beyond it.

[i] For a recent discussion of this quality of Lawrence's work see Lara Feigel's *Look! We Have Come Through! Living with D. H. Lawrence* (2021), which notes how Lawrence 'took his thoughts too far, pushing them beyond the palatable, the liveable' (40-41).
[ii] See Lane's *Shyness* for discussion of varied cultural understandings of shyness, 17-18, and for the history of the word shyness, 11-12.
[iii] Beci Carver's article ''An elf wearing a hat which makes him invisible': Modernism's Shy Irony', though more focussed on irony than on shyness, similarly suggests that shyness might drive a particular aesthetic, shaping the use of irony in Beckett, Joyce, and Bowen.
[iv] Moran's work, which does start by acknowledging his own shyness, notes the danger of valorising shyness, and whilst his book opens up a sense of the conceptual richness of the topic, his conclusion views it more neutrally – see my discussion below.
[v] See for instance Lawrence's discussion of 'self-consciousness' in 'The Future of the Novel' (1923), *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays,* 152.
[vi] See for instance Adam Phillips' essay 'Mr Phillips', which notes of a self-conscious protagonist in a John Lanchester novel that he is exactly 'the kind of modern man D. H. Lawrence wanted to abolish' despite the way his 'very real shyness, his taken-for-granted embarrassments [...] make him so winning', *Equals* (2002), 205. The reference to the 'true, pristine, unconsciousness' is from Lawrence's *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921).
[vii] Moran writes variously, for instance, about shyness, Thomas Browne's 'bashfulness' (14) and Darwin's 'diffidence' (30).
[viii] Glavey also makes use of Sedgwick's Warhol-derived formulation 'from shame to shyness to shining' in his article, 132.
[ix] In Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy* (2013).
[x] For further discussion see my blog post 'Sympathy in Modernist Literature', https://blog.oup.com/2013/04/modernism-gesture-sympathy/. 17th April 2013. Accessed 6th September, 2022.
[xi] See, for instance, Lawrence's famous statement in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that it is the 'way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives', 101.
[xii] Lawrence associated 'wincing' with painful involuntary sympathetic connection – in a letter of 6th December 1910 he wrote to Louie Burrows of his dying mother that 'My heart winces to the echo of my mother's pulse' (Letters, I, 195).

[xiii] I owe my knowledge of this passage to Anya Reeve's '"In a conch-shell": A Conchology of Form and Self in the Poetry of H.D., Marianne Moore, and Amy Lowell' in *The Modernist Review*, September 2021.
[xiv] Lawrence then became a published poet with Jessie Chambers' assistance, after he suggested that she might send some of his poems ('whatever you like') to the *English Review* (Chambers, *D. H. Lawrence*, 1981, 157).
[xv] Julien Sorel in *The Red and the Black* is 'seized with an overpowering timidity' when he first sees the house of M. de Rênal (33), and 'blushed deeply' upon speaking to Mme de Rênal (37). Throughout, the novel pays close attention to forms of discomfiture, both of Julien and his 'shy mistress' (47). I am grateful to Maria Scott for her thoughts on Lawrence's response to Stendhal, and suggestions for further reading.
[xvi] John Worthen discusses, for instance, Lawrence's response to William James in relation to religion (*D. H. Lawrence*, 1992, 180).
[xvi] For further discussion of the significance of Mosso's work, see Stefano Sandrone, Marco Bacigaluppi, Marco R. Galloni, Stefano F. Cappa, Andrea Moro, Marco Catani, Massimo Filippi, Martin M. Monti, Daniela Perani, Gianvito Martino, 'Weighing brain activity with the balance: Angelo Mosso's original manuscripts come to light', *Brain* , 137:2 (February, 2014), 621-633.

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