Lawrence reads La Morte D’Arthur in the Desert (1964)

Having killed
Six Turks
Personally, in style,
I will enjoy
Extreme quietness
For a while.

They shot
(Briefly) at our last
Flag. It sighed
And exhaled around
The wound, and died
As the wind died

And fell. Six
Hundred camels
Tramped its bellying.
This incident,
Neither vital nor
Particularly sullying,

Ended a certain
Revolution
Of colours. From
That battle, we
Without the shame-rag
Of Chivalry come

As frank as Arthur
After the fall
And free as Adam.
So are we all
The plainest equations
Reduced to Latin.
For man shall know
It was not Honour
That made Launcelot
Love Guenever.
It was not
    The mottoes, not

The morals, “Might
For Right,” that brought
This gentle knight
To Camelot.
Each corruption,
Every night

That sows the seed
    — Eternal spirochete of Eve —
Is of guilt
A dark haven
In the great house
My father built.

In one shadow
My stern mother
Still unmarried
Scolds the silence.
Here Elaine
The Rosy tarried,

Beckoning
To Launcelot.
Here is Prometheus,
Still surprised
By his fire,
Still curious.

Beneath the extinguished
Chandelier
Stands another
Of greater portent:
Young King Oedipus
Married his mother
Killed his father
Knowing nothing
Of Chivalry,
Only the divine
Architecture
Of, “to be,”
The celled house
Of human fate
Prometheus saw
That dazzled him;
The broken window
Of causal law;
The celled house
Of human knowledge
Of which the builder
Is the precious
Fire Prometheus
Grasped and flung.
Fair Arabia,
Pride abandoned
On some fouled desert,
Plain as Man,
Has only to watch
As the single hurt
Where she caught the fire
And knew the end
Cancers the hale
Tanned body.
Knowing as well
That I will fail,

I and Arabia
Sit and watch
Naked of pretense
As Prometheus.
We can laugh
From crumbling tents

At the great joke
We could not stop.
I have a body,
And the fleshy Arab
Is guilty as Eve
And twice as shoddy.

It’s good to know
I couldn’t help it.
Not with Honour
(It came to Launcelot)
Not with religion
(My mother a Puritan!)

It’s good to know
So I can enjoy
So I can see
The Greater Aesthetic,
Winged and beaked,
Devour me.
BATHROOM SONGS