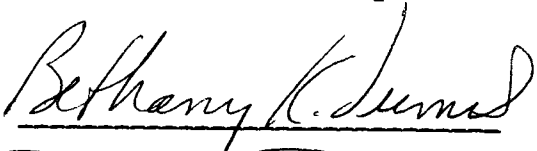


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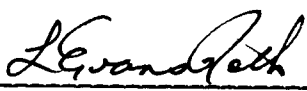
I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Nathan J. Schulman entitled "Toward a Re-evaluation of D. H. Lawrence's The Plumed Serpent." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.


Daniel J. Schneider, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:




Accepted for the Council:


Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

TOWARD A RE-EVALUATION OF D. H. LAWRENCE'S

THE PLUMED SERPENT

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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June 1981

3051776

For Carole
and
for Erich, Bruce, and Neil

ABSTRACT

The Plumed Serpent has been faulted by many of its critics and a re-evaluation of it is needed in order to determine its proper place among Lawrence's novels. Lawrence has been accused of writing an improbable story, of writing fascist propaganda, and of failing to understand the Mexican people. A study of Mexican history covering the period of Lawrence's visits and of Aztec philosophy proves that he understood the Indian psyche and that he accurately portrayed the political and cultural movements of the time. Moreover, his decision to rewrite the work, which was prompted in part by the deteriorating state of his health, suggests that he assumed The Plumed Serpent would be his last novel. The differences between the first manuscript and the published work suggest that it was meant to stand as the final statement of Lawrence's mystical philosophy. A number of the themes found in the four earlier novels are repeated here, but show greater development. It is the most complete statement of his philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

D. H. Lawrence must have realized that he was terminally ill before he completed The Plumed Serpent, which he probably believed would be his last major work. His illness was first diagnosed as tuberculosis as early as 1911, but he would never admit that he was seriously ill. He succeeded in keeping the secret from Mrs. Lawrence for fourteen years, until she had him examined by a physician when he became gravely ill in Mexico. Despite his deteriorating health Lawrence continued to refuse to acknowledge his illness. His letters include many references to a "bronchial condition," to outbreaks of "malaria," or to a troublesome case of "grippe," but with an added note that he would soon recover. The result of this deception is that few people were aware of the state of his health, which remained precarious throughout his writing career. Sagar's Calendar erroneously lists March 1925 as the date Lawrence's illness was first diagnosed as tuberculosis;¹ however, Lawrence was rejected for military service during the First World War because of an earlier diagnosis of the disease.²

Lawrence died before a cure for tuberculosis was found. We have since forgotten how much that once incurable disease was feared, a disease which had been dreaded as cancer is today, but the image of Lawrence that survives is that of a man whose health was fragile. But many critics fail to consider his moribund condition as they consider

¹Keith Sagar, D. H. Lawrence: A Calendar of His Works (Manchester: University Press, 1979), p. 143.

²Richard Aldington, Portrait of a Genius, But . . . (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950), p. 239.

his later works. His belief that the universe is permeated with life and his belief in the split nature of the human soul form the basis of a philosophy that had changed little during his writing career. Some critics have failed to understand The Plumed Serpent because they do not view the work as a living model of this philosophy.

The reputation of The Plumed Serpent suffers for a variety of reasons: it has been called a piece of fascist propaganda; F. R. Leavis, who considers Lawrence one of the greatest English writers, calls it "a bad book and a regrettable performance";³ and it appears that Lawrence had disavowed the work. Moore believes that "within three years Lawrence repudiated the main theme of his novel,"⁴ citing Lawrence's letter to Witter Bynner (quoted below) in which he appears to repudiate what is generally perceived as the role of Ramon as his evidence. Some who believe that Lawrence had indeed disavowed the work also cite as evidence a letter in which Lawrence remembers his Mexican experience with nausea. His letter of May 21, 1925, to Eduardo Rendon includes the following: "It gave me a turn that time [in Oaxaca]: I feel I never want to see an Indian or an 'aboriginee' or anything in the savage line again."⁵ The second piece of "evidence" is found in his letter to Bynner dated March 13, 1928:

³F. R. Leavis, D. H. Lawrence: Novelist (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 21.

⁴Harry T. Moore, The Intelligent Heart, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1954), p. 336.

⁵Harry T. Moore, The Priest of Love: A Life of D. H. Lawrence, p. 403. Quoted in Ronald G. Walker, Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 72.

On the whole, I think you're right. The hero is obsolete, and the leader of men is a back number. . . . I agree with you, the leader-cum-follower relationship is a bore.⁶

Those using the letter to Bynner as evidence that Lawrence had repudiated the work assume that its principal theme is Ramon's attempt to restore the Aztec gods in Mexico and that his actions are based upon the desire to become a political leader. But as I hope to show, the restoration of the Aztec gods is part of an allegory, and Ramon is not a political leader of men but a man who has found psychic wholeness.

Lawrence's revulsion to Mexico as expressed in his letter to Rendon is not extended to the novel which he wrote while living there, as is shown in a letter to Curtis Brown dated June 23, 1925:

I consider this my most important novel so far. Will you show it to Seeker? Perhaps he might set it up soon, if he likes it, in galleys.⁷

Walker quotes from a letter Lawrence wrote to an acquaintance in Mexico City (June 10, 1925) in which Lawrence says,

I shall never forgive Mexico, especially Oaxaca, for having done me in. . . . Yet my Quetzalcoatl novel lies nearer my heart than any other work of mine.⁸

Huxley explains Lawrence's method of editing: "If he was dissatisfied with what he had written, he did not, as most authors do, file, clip, insert, transpose; he rewrote."⁹

⁶D. H. Lawrence, The Letters of D. H. Lawrence Aldous Huxley, ed. (New York: Viking, 1932), p. 719.

⁷Ibid., p. 645.

⁸Walker. p. 71.

⁹Aldous Huxley, Collected Essays (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 121.

He was willing to rewrite, he explained to Garnett, but not to revise: "I must go on producing, producing, and the stuff must come more and more to shape each year. But trim and garnish my stuff I cannot."¹⁰

A radical change from Lawrence's established method of editing could be an indication that The Plumed Serpent was of special importance to him.

Lawrence began The Plumed Serpent by following his usual practice: he wrote a manuscript which he later abandoned in favor of a new manuscript, a complete revision. But he devoted almost the entire month of June 1925 to revising the second manuscript, about half as much time as he had spent writing it. Clark's study of the manuscripts and the typescript reveals that Lawrence had made extensive revisions to the second manuscript, and he notes that important differences exist between the holograph manuscript and the typescript near the end of the book; that there are several changes of typescript, which suggest that revisions made retyping necessary; and that it contains a number of pieced-in and partial pages.¹¹ Both manuscripts were written while Lawrence was living in Mexico, and his illness would have prevented him from returning there to give "the daimon another chance to say what it wanted to say."¹² Lawrence must have had something of extraordinary importance to communicate to his readers for him to invest so much of

¹⁰John Patterson, The Novel as Faith (Boston: Gambit, 1973), p. 175.

¹¹L. D. Clark, "The Making of a Novel: The Search for the Definitive Text of D. H. Lawrence's The Plumed Serpent," in Voices from the Southwest: A Gathering in Honor of Lawrence Clark Powell, eds. Donald C. Dickenson, W. David Laird and Margaret F. Maxwell (Flagstaff, Arizona: Northland Press, 1976), p. 126.

¹²Huxley, p. 121.

his time in the painful process of editing and revising.

Many critics believe that the daimon's message is a demonic prophecy or an outpouring of fascist ideals. Auden says, "It is not accidental that The Plumed Serpent should emit such an unpleasant whiff of fascism, for fascism gives the same answer to the same Cartesian errors."¹³ Although some detect a "whiff of fascism" in the work, Waters finds the novel to be its ultimate expression: "As a prophecy of one of the greatest holocausts in history, The Plumed Serpent has no parallel. Indeed, on close reading it might seem more Hitler's blueprint than Mein Kampf".¹⁴ Meyers is disappointed because of the novelist's "inability to create a meaningful social or religious alternative to the frightening revolutionary reality."¹⁵ One of the earliest reviews of The Plumed Serpent is Muir's, who calls it "the most garrulous book Mr. Lawrence has ever written,"¹⁶ and suggests that Lawrence wishes to provide us with a new myth and a new gospel, but "the book is an outpouring of anything and everything."¹⁷ Moore's only comment on the novel, which he believed Lawrence repudiated, is that "The Plumed Serpent is the most ambitious failure among all Lawrence's

¹³W. H. Auden, Critics on D. H. Lawrence, W. T. Andrews, ed. (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 50.

¹⁴Frank Waters, "Quetzalcoatl Versus D. H. Lawrence's Plumed Serpent." Western American Literature 3 (Summer 1968):109.

¹⁵Jeffrey Meyers, "The Plumed Serpent and the Mexican Revolution," Journal of Modern Literature 4 (September 1974):72.

¹⁶Edwin Muir, review of The Plumed Serpent, by D. H. Lawrence, in The Nation & The Athenaeum, February 20, 1926, p. 719.

¹⁷Ibid.

novels."¹⁸ Leavis calls The Plumed Serpent Lawrence's least complex novel, "the only one that I find it difficult to read through. . . . It is single-mindedly intent on imagining, as a piece of contemporary history, a revival of the ancient Mexican religion."¹⁹ Other comments are that the work is a bore, that Lawrence failed to capture the spirit of Mexico, and that he did not understand Mexican religious history.

Those who offer favorable comments tend to see the work as more than a piece of contemporary history and an attempt to restore the Aztec gods. Rexroth calls it "a book of ceremonial prophecy, but prophecy uttered in the foreknowledge that it would never be fulfilled," and argues that "if the religion of Cipriano and Ramon is taken as an otherworldly system of values, it is profound and true, and due to the freshness of its symbols, tremendously exciting."²⁰ But the bulk of the criticism, particularly the earlier criticism, has been harsh.

The Plumed Serpent has been mauled by the critics from Freida, who called it "desiccated swelled head," onwards. Any critic might be expected to have reservations about this novel, but the wholesale condemnation it has received is indicative, it seems to me, of far deeper failings in the critics than in the book; a failure in imaginative range and flexibility; a failure to meet the basic critical challenge, the challenge to enter wholly, if only temporarily, into the fictional world.²¹

Clark says, "One or two critics have been laudatory, and a few

¹⁸Moore, The Intelligent Heart, p. 335.

¹⁹Leavis, p. 69.

²⁰Kenneth Rexroth, ed., D. H. Lawrence: Selected Poems (New York: Viking Press, 1959), pp. 20-21.

²¹Keith Sagar, The Art of D. H. Lawrence (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), p. 159.

sympathetic, but most have been harsh if not derisive."²² The Plumed Serpent is vulnerable to attack because of its theme of re-establishing the worship of the ancient Aztec gods. A second explanation may arise from the mistaken belief, noted earlier, that the novel is a vehicle for spreading fascist ideals, this belief expressed at a time when fascism seemed to be a real threat to the democracies of Europe.

The novel has fared better with its more recent critics. However, the relative abundance of critical studies on Lawrence's other novels, e.g., Women in Love, would indicate that The Plumed Serpent has been to some degree neglected. The Plumed Serpent contains the fullest statement of his philosophy, which is acted out by living people in a world of Lawrence's making; it is Lawrence's last novelistic "thought adventure," his last reaching out to the world to point the way to psychic balance. Clark calls The Plumed Serpent one of the strangest works of English Literature,²³ and the uneven nature of much of the criticism associated with it could, to some degree, be the result of some critics' unwillingness to enter Lawrence's allegorical world. We do not hear arguments that "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is bad art because of its surreal world; instead we examine the work in terms of its world. I believe that The Plumed Serpent should be treated in a similar manner. 6; The Plumed Serpent may be approached as a model of experience based upon Lawrence's belief that the balanced soul contains

²²L. D. Clark, Dark Night of the Body (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 8.

²³Ibid.

equal measures of sensual and spiritual qualities. When one set of these qualities gains ascendancy, the result is some form of psychic or physical illness. The Plumed Serpent is a record of Kate's struggle to achieve psychic balance, which is a prerequisite to wholeness.

Too many critics forget that Lawrence was a novelist and not a philosopher; their comments are often harsh judgments of his values. If The Plumed Serpent is to be evaluated objectively, the critic must be willing to enter Lawrence's fictional world, to temporarily suspend his disbelief in the unlikelihood that the events which occur in the novel can actually take place. The Plumed Serpent can then be considered in the same manner as are other works of literature.

Perhaps the earlier studies, many of which condemned the work, discouraged some modern scholars from examining it. Perhaps if Lawrence had died without having written Lady Chatterley's Lover, the literary community would view The Plumed Serpent as the evidence suggests it should be viewed, as the final and the fullest statement of Lawrence's mystical philosophy. Lady Chatterley's Lover is a retreat from the sense of optimism and the thrill of adventure found in The Plumed Serpent. The fact that it is his last novel and the notoriety it has received as the result of the charges of pornography made against it have given Lady Chatterley's Lover a sense of importance that it may not deserve. I believe that The Plumed Serpent is a literary statement that is waiting to be re-evaluated by a new generation of scholars. My purpose here is to clear away some of the debris, the result of misinterpretations of the work and misunderstandings concerning its author.

CHAPTER I

SOME OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

The concensus among literary scholars is that The Plumed Serpent is a badly flawed book. Leavis, who calls Lawrence "one of the greatest English writers,"¹ says of Lawrence's art:

Lawrence's insight was penetrating and clear, and he was marvelously intelligent, and the worst difficulty we have in coming to terms with his art is that there is resistance in us to what it has to communicate—if only the kind of resistance represented by habit; habit that will not let us see what is there for what it is, or to believe that the door is open.²

Leavis has not been able to come to terms with The Plumed Serpent, which he says "is single-mindedly intent upon imagining, as a piece of contemporary history, a revival of the ancient Mexican religion."³ He takes Lawrence's most overt intention for the work, an error that occurs often in Lawrence criticism. But the body of unfavorable criticism associated with this work cannot be ignored by scholars, and there is a need to re-assess that criticism in order to determine its validity. This brief examination of some of the typical objections to The Plumed Serpent will, I hope, enable future scholars to approach the work with a greater degree of objectivity.

It is unfortunate that Lawrence's personality and his philosophy are as important topics for debate as is his writing: scholars have found it exceedingly difficult to separate this artist from his works.

¹Leavis, p. 5.

²Ibid., pp. 9-10.

³Ibid., p. 69

One of those who criticizes Lawrence the man is Highet, who calls him

. . . a weak and ill and undereducated man with a rickety and badly stained character, who tried all his life to make himself into a strong and healthy and deeply cultured man with a profound possession of himself and of the world.⁴

Highet's estimation of Lawrence as undereducated and as not quite morally acceptable pales before the charge made by Russell, which attempts to link Lawrence with the atrocities of the Second World War.

He had a mystical philosophy of "blood" which I disliked. "There is," he said, "another seat of consciousness than the brain and nerves." . . . This seemed to me frankly rubbish, and I rejected it vehemently, though I did not then know that it led straight to Auschwitz.⁵

Russell's influence can be felt throughout the body of criticism that surrounds Lawrence. It is not an easy matter to challenge the conclusions of one of this century's leading philosophers.

Waters seems to agree with Russell's conclusions when he calls The Plumed Serpent "one of the most horrible prophecies ever written."⁶ He compares Don Ramon with Adolph Hitler, and he suggests that the symbol of the feathered serpent anticipates the swastika, that the replacement of the Christian faith with the religion of Quetzalcoatl anticipates a parallel movement in Nazi Germany, one that led to the Holocaust.⁷ But Tindall offers a more rational explanation of these remarkable similarities.

⁴Gilbert Highet, People, Places and Books (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 38.

⁵Bertrand Russell, The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: 1914-1944 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), pp. 13-14.

⁶Waters, p. 106.

⁷Ibid., p. 109.

It is likely that the ideas of Lawrence and the Germans are parallel products of identical causes; Lawrence and the Germans had found themselves in the same world and their solutions for its troubles were so obvious and natural under the circumstances that no one need be surprised at their resemblance. Tyranny is an obvious antidote for democratic disorder; and violence, blood, and power are natural for too much science and intellect.⁸

Even this more rational explanation is inadequate. Violence may be a natural response to science and intellect, but Lawrence never advocated violence. As de Sola Pinto says, "It is wrong to call Don Ramon's revolution a fascist movement. Actually the reactionary Mexican fascistas are shown to be his bitter enemies."⁹ He notes that "fascist" and "fascism" were not familiar terms when Lawrence wrote Women in Love, and he suggests that Gerald Crich is an early model of a fascist.

It was Lawrence the prophet who created Gerald and who saw with an insight of a prophetic poet that his devotion to a purely mechanical ideal would lead to spiritual, and ultimately to physical annihilation. The destruction of Gerald is a forecast of the destruction of Mussolini and Hitler.¹⁰

Responding to Russell, de Sola Pinto points out that Lawrence was not a trained philosopher but that he had a powerful and free intelligence with the vitality of a poet's vision. "To speak of such a writer as leading to Auschwitz is sheer nonsense."¹¹

Internal evidence refutes Waters' comparison of Ramon with Hitler;

⁸William York Tindall, D. H. Lawrence & Susan His Cow (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), p. 175.

⁹Vivian de Sola Pinto, "D. H. Lawrence," in The Politics of Twentieth-Century Novelists, ed., George A. Paniches (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1971), p. 43.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 48.

throughout the work Ramon consistently refuses to permit himself to have power over others. He tells his followers that he will not rule over them or serve them, nor should they become rulers over others.¹² In his attempt to explain the purpose of the Quetzalcoatl movement to Carlota he says, "All I want them to do is to find the beginnings of the way to their own manhood, their own womanhood."¹³ Kate's landlord is described as "a great Fascista, the reactionary Knights of Cortes held him in great esteem."¹⁴ It is the Knights of Cortes who organize the assassination attempt upon Ramon. Tindall best sums up Lawrence's relationship to politics when he says that Hitler used religion to advance his political ambitions, but that Lawrence would have used politics as a tool to advance his religion.¹⁵ Fascism has ceased to be an object of fear and Lawrence's flirtation with political ideas is no longer a subject for debate; but if we are to understand Lawrence we must understand his attitude toward the political movements of his day.

A new problem in Lawrence scholarship arose in 1951 with the publication of Bynner's Journey with Genius. Bynner, a playwright and poet, accompanied Lawrence on his first visit to Mexico. He was with Lawrence at the bullfight described in the first chapter of The Plumed Serpent, when Lawrence first saw the figure of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan, and he was with him at Chapala. Because of Bynner's

¹²D. H. Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926; reprint ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 196.

¹³Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 339.

¹⁵Tindall, p. 179.

association with Lawrence in Mexico, Journey with Genius is often quoted in studies of The Plumed Serpent. Bynner's account, unfortunately, is not without bias, and those who use him as a source should understand that his resentment of Lawrence did not diminish with time.

Journey with Genius appeared twenty-eight years after the Chapala manuscript was completed. Bynner supplemented his memory with diaries and letters from the period, and with notes he took at the time. How Bynner's book was received by some of those closely associated with Lawrence is revealed in a letter written by Mabel Luhan (the woman who persuaded Lawrence to come to the United States) to Henriette Harris, who had at one time been employed as Bynner's secretary.

If you want a real treat, a big exhibition of pure hatred, get & read Bynner's "Journey with Genius." Almost all falsified, mean to the Bynner end to Lawrence, untrue in all incidents to me (because I refused him permission to quote from my books when he started this one, because I distrusted his interpretation of Lawrence even before he wrote a word.) Get it! You'll have fun! Frieda is furious, I am disgusted, Brett is hopping.¹⁶

Clark's observation that Lawrence and Bynner saw the universe through each other's faults is correct.¹⁷ Bynner himself confirms this:

Lawrence and I are in pretty thorough disaccord in our views of life, nor are we physically congenial enough to create the real ease which sometimes exists between people with opposite convictions. . . . He seems to have found in life almost nothing that is worth finding and almost everything that is of no value.¹⁸

A quarter-century after Lawrence's death finds Bynner's anger concerning

¹⁶Emily Hahn, Mabel: A Biography of Mabel Dodge Luhan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), p. 216.

¹⁷Clark, Dark Night of the Body, p. 136.

¹⁸Witter Bynner, Journey With Genius: Recollections and Reflections Concerning the D. H. Lawrences (New York: John Day, 1951), p. 137.

Lawrence's portrayal of him as Owen Rhys undiminished.¹⁹ Perhaps he wrote the book in an attempt to relieve himself of this longstanding irritation. The differences between Lawrence and Bynner were more than differences of opinion. When the Lawrences first arrived in Taos, New Mexico, they were to be the guests of Mabel Luhan, then Mabel Dodge; but her guest house was not ready for them, and they stayed at Bynner's house. Willard Johnson, Bynner's secretary and lover, was then living with Bynner.²⁰ Lawrence's possible homosexual tendencies have been much discussed, but no known record exists of him engaging in a homosexual act. Myers quotes from a letter in which Lawrence expresses a feeling of discomfort which occurred when he was in the presence of active homosexuals.

Never bring Birrell to see me any more. There is something nasty about him like black beetles. He is horrible and unclean. I feel I should go mad when I think of your set, Duncan Grant and Keynes and Birrell. It makes me dream of beetles.²¹

Myers concludes that the homosexual element within Lawrence triggered his rage;²² however, the precise reason for Lawrence's discomfort does not concern us: he was obviously ill at ease in the presence of many homosexuals and he must have felt so when he found himself under the same roof with Bynner and Johnson.

Bynner uses Journey with Genius to take Lawrence to task on

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 183, 331.

²⁰Hahn, p. 164.

²¹Jeffrey Meyers, "D. H. Lawrence and Homosexuality," in D. H. Lawrence: Novelist, Poet, Prophet, ed. Stephen Spender (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 138.

²²Ibid.

trivial matters. For example, he is careful to point out that it was Lawrence who left the bullfight arena after the horses had been gored, and he adds:

Lawrence wrote Knud Merrild: "We saw a terrible bullfight and ran away after ten minutes." But he was wrong: the time had been triple that.²³

Bynner also takes Lawrence to task for using the dances of the Indians north of the Mexican border in The Plumed Serpent rather than the dances of the Indians of Chapala.²⁴

Rereading The Plumed Serpent lately, I have been saddened again by Lawrence's not having confined himself to the truth about Chapala and its Mexicans instead of burdening the book with a hundred and seventy-two pages of fabricated, melodramatic myth.²⁵

Lawrence's so-called fraudulent use of the dances of the New Mexican Indians is one part of the charge that he had failed to capture the spirit of Mexico. Clark notes that the first manuscript contains much singing to the music of guitars,²⁶ but the guitars are replaced by drums in the published version. The first manuscript was written in Chapala, a resort town, but the second manuscript was written in Oaxaca, a town to which few tourists ventured. Lawrence could have preferred the dances from the northern tribes because he felt that drums are more appropriate than guitars to convey the idea of the primitive consciousness. As an author of fiction, he had the right to use the

²³Bynner, p. 52.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 209, 264.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 213-14.

²⁶Clark, "The Making of a Novel," p. 120.

dances of any tribes that suited his artistic purpose.

The charge that Lawrence failed to capture the spirit or the reality of Mexico has been repeated by Woodcock, who calls the novel "a fantasy with no relation to Mexican reality in which Indianist movements have always been subordinated to the interests of political demagogues."²⁷ But there is much evidence to refute Woodcock's view. Meyers says that Lawrence was thoroughly familiar with the contemporary political situation in Mexico, and that literary scholars have not taken the trouble to acquaint themselves with the facts of Mexican history.²⁸ Walker notes that a significant artistic movement was taking place in Mexico during the 1920's. Many artists "turned with unprecedented zeal to Mexico's ancient past to discover a racial myth with which to dramatize and ennoble the Revolutionary effort."²⁹ Lawrence did not have to invent the myth of Quetzalcoatl's return to his people in modern Mexico, he had only to witness and make artistic use of the cultural renaissance that was taking place at the time. It is the same quest for cultural identity which is bringing new vigor to the Indian tribes of the United States and which is causing many American blacks to search for their cultural heritage in Africa. Even Bynner observes the renewed interest in Aztec culture; he mentions that the Minister of Education and other prominent Mexicans renounced their Spanish names and assumed Aztec

²⁷George Woodcock, "Mexico and the English Novelist," The Western Review 21 (Autumn 1956):29.

²⁸Jeffrey Meyers, "The Plumed Serpent and the Mexican Revolution," in Journal of Modern Literature 4 (September 1974):56.

²⁹Walker, p. 4.

names.³⁰ Lawrence's use of the return of Quetzalcoatl should therefore be seen as his response to the cultural changes that he observed.

Bynner records that Lawrence heard many stories of atrocities while in Chapala, stories which apparently made him fear for his life.³¹ "Apart from his general suspicion, he was haunted by the banditry which had been rampant shortly before our arrival and by tales of violence."³² If scholars rely upon Bynner's account of Lawrence's fearful attentiveness to stories of banditry they might erroneously conclude that the sense of fear evoked in The Plumed Serpent is the outgrowth of Lawrence's own fear and not a faithful record of the aura of fear that existed in Revolutionary Mexico. As many as two million people were killed between 1910 and 1920, and the population declined by one million during this period despite Mexico's high birthrate.³³

The inhumanity visited upon civilians by soldiers became legendary in the folklore of the Revolution. One could pass off stories of mutilated prisoners hanged from trees or telephone posts as exaggerations had not scores of eager photographers captured hundreds of horrifying scenes for posterity.³⁴

Pancho Villa was assassinated eleven days after Lawrence departed Chapala, and the murder resulted in a fresh wave of revolution. The Roman Catholic Church in 1926 became involved in politics prompting President Calles, with the assistance of General Plutarco, to deport

³⁰Bynner, p. 26.

³¹Ibid., pp. 123-28 passim.

³²Bynner, p. 181.

³³Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman, The Course of Mexican History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 552.

³⁴Ibid.

priests and nuns and to close church schools, monasteries, and convents. The Church responded on July 31, 1926 with a general strike which continued for three years, during which time no baptisms or last rites were performed. The Catholic leaders organized a guerrilla group, the Cristeros, which destroyed government schools and murdered their teachers.³⁵ Therefore, the sense of terror that pervades The Plumed Serpent should be viewed not as Lawrence's invention or the manifestation of his fear but as his artistic interpretation of the violence that was taking place.

If The Plumed Serpent is to be treated by scholars as a prophecy, it should be seen as a prophecy of the events which took place in Mexico shortly after Lawrence's departure. Lawrence, whom Gunn calls the most important English or American author to use Mexico as a setting,³⁶ has surely captured the spirit of Revolutionary Mexico in The Plumed Serpent. Other authors must have felt that his estimation of Mexico is correct. Gunn says that Conrad Aiken borrowed so much from Lawrence that the reader may seriously question whether Aiken saw Mexico through his own eyes, and that Huxley, Wright Morris, and Tennessee Williams went to Mexico while under the influence of Lawrence's writings.³⁷ Walker finds a recurring theme in British and American literature set in Mexico, a theme first exploited in The Plumed Serpent: "The power of the variegated Mexican landscape to induce a kind of dreamy, visionary

³⁵Meyer and Sherman, pp. 579, 587-88.

³⁶Drewey Wayne Gunn, American and British Writers in Mexico, 1556-1973 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), p. 123.

³⁷Ibid.

state in the observer."³⁸ It seems fair to say that Lawrence correctly interpreted the spirit of the aboriginal population of Mexico and that he understood the political and cultural forces then at work.

Although he took the trouble to learn as much as he could about the religion and culture of the Aztecs, he has been accused of making serious errors. The truth is, however, that Lawrence made good use of the material that was available to him. Many new discoveries concerning the Aztecs were made during the half-century following the publication of The Plumed Serpent, and we should never judge Lawrence's knowledge in the light of recent discoveries. A discussion of Lawrence's knowledge of Aztec culture, which includes a list of many of his sources, is given by Clark,³⁹ and it need not be repeated here. Clark (1964) noted that The Plumed Serpent is complete in itself, and that there is no requirement for the scholar to concern himself with sources in order to understand the work.⁴⁰ A later contribution (1976) indicates that Clark has since altered his opinion.

Lawrence wrote The Plumed Serpent while thinking about events of the Mexican Revolution, with many allusions to contemporary happenings in Mexico and assumed knowledge on the part of his readers then that readers this half-century later will no longer possess. He also drew on native American mythology little known to most readers of the Anglo-Saxon world. It seems therefore necessary to include, in an up-to-date edition of this particular novel of Lawrence's, two special appendices, one on the political scene in Mexico in the twenties, another on the mythology of which he made use.⁴¹

³⁸Walker, p. 13.

³⁹Clark, Dark Night of the Body, pp. 102-27.

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 102.

⁴¹Clark, "The making of a Novel," p. 128.

If future editions of The Plumed Serpent would include the appendices suggested by Clark, some of the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the work could be eliminated, and scholars would be better able to focus their attention solely upon the work. Perhaps some of the material gathered here could be used for these appendices.

Bynner records that the Catholic Church's hold upon the Mexicans was depressing to Lawrence, that he felt it was a poor change from the worship of Quetzalcoatl. He quotes Lawrence directly:

One moment they're groveling in the churches. . . . The next moment they're gadding in the streets full of pulque, as though they had never heard of Jesus. . . . They're not thinking about Christ at all, except for a morbid pleasure in the fact that he was tortured and murdered. . . . They're out for blood. They're out to kill. Not Christ's enemies but their own.⁴²

The accuracy of Lawrence's observation that for the aboriginal population of Mexico Christianity is a veneer which obscures the essential belief in the old Aztec religion has been confirmed by numerous anthropologists. It is important that literary scholars understand that this is so because it will enable them to accept the idea of a revolt in which an ancient Aztec religion displaces the Catholic Church, and that it is not beyond the reader's ability to suspend his disbelief. Soustelle says that the Indians of Mexico never renounced their old beliefs but incorporated them into the new faith. "The Spanish priests, in turn, imagined that they had uprooted the tree, whereas they had merely grafted it onto another."⁴³

⁴²Bynner, p. 46.

⁴³Jacques Soustelle, The Four Suns (New York: Grassman, 1971), p. 137.

A review of the political and anthropological knowledge available to Lawrence establishes that he was more careful in conveying essential facts than critics have taken him to be. Lawrence is not, of course, an archaeologist, an anthropologist, or an ethnologist;⁴⁴ he is an artist. Too many scholars forget that The Plumed Serpent is a novel, a work of fiction, and that it should be judged as a work of art and not as an anthropological study. Although Porter elsewhere expresses her concern about Lawrence's use of mysticism in The Plumed Serpent, it does not prevent her from seeing the art.

For sheer magnificance of writing, Lawrence has surpassed himself. His style has ripened, softened, there is a melancholy hint of the overrichness of autumn. Who looks for mere phrases from him? He writes by the passage, by the chapter, a prose flexible as a whiplash, uneven and harmonious as breakers rolling upon a beach, and the sound is music.⁴⁵

Clark believes that in The Plumed Serpent, "we see at work Lawrence's far-ranging knowledge and his sure touch for poetic synthesis,"⁴⁶ and that its particular brilliance is derived from the lake, which Clark calls the omphalos of the work.⁴⁷ Quetzalcoatl was born out of the lake; Kate first becomes entranced by the Morning Star, which she sees in the boatman's eye as she crosses the lake; she is carried to her ritual marriage on the lake; and the peaceful scene in

⁴⁴D. H. Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (New York: Seltzer, 1922, 1921; combined reprint ed., New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 11.

⁴⁵Katherine Anne Porter, The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Delacorte, 1970), p. 423.

⁴⁶Clark, Dark Night of the Body, p. 140.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 141-42.

the final chapter of the men coaxing a bull into a small boat, a scene which is in stark contrast with the bullfight in the first chapter, also occurs on the lake. It is the latter scene on the lake which helps convince Kate to accept life in Mexico. Clark believes that Lawrence's symbolism, like Wordsworth's, "comes from long preoccupation, obsession almost, with the belief that nature is alive as humans are alive,"⁴⁸ and that it is necessary for us to follow him as "he penetrates to the living core of experience, where people and place are transformed into the stuff of myth."⁴⁹

That "long preoccupation, obsession almost, with the belief that nature is alive as humans are alive" is, as Clark suggests, central in Lawrence's fiction. We shall see in Chapter III that the four novels Lawrence wrote in the years preceding The Plumed Serpent tend to focus upon elements of that theme. But there is another reason for Lawrence's intense interest in life as he wrote The Plumed Serpent: his knowledge of the severity of his illness. In order for us to understand why it was so essential for him to define fully his religion of death and rebirth, we need to look briefly at his illness and its influence upon this novel.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 142.

⁴⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER II

LAWRENCE AND TUBERCULOSIS

Lawrence's critics and biographers have yet to assess fully the influence of tuberculosis in his life and works. Woodcock, for example, in his discussion of Lawrence and Graham Greene, says he believes that Lawrence hated Mexico and its aboriginal population, and that he returned to Europe because he needed to draw nearer to his own origins, the English Midlands. "Not only did he depart from Mexico, and never return, but it is significant that he never again traveled among primitive people in the hope of finding the good life."¹ But Lawrence was seriously ill with pulmonary tuberculosis, a communicable disease, when he returned to his ranch in Taos, New Mexico, following his last visit to old Mexico. He was permitted to remain in the United States for six months; health regulations made it impossible for him to prolong his stay. Had Woodcock availed himself of the facts concerning Lawrence's health and his legal status in the United States, he would have reached a different conclusion. The knowledge that Lawrence suffered from tuberculosis, a chronic and often fatal illness, is essential information for students of his work; however, this knowledge alone is insufficient: an understanding of the mythology associated with the disease as well as an understanding of its etiology deepens our understanding of Lawrence's habits during his life.

Tuberculosis was so prevalent during the nineteenth century that

¹Woodcock, p. 29.

it was known as the "great white plague" because of its victims' pallor, a symptom of the anemia which accompanies advanced cases. Most English physicians believed the disease to be hereditary, until Robert Koch (in 1882) proved that the tubercle bacillus is the causative agent. The British authorities were thus late in taking measures to improve the sanitary conditions in their country, with the result that almost one-third of the British population suffered from some form of the disease during the third quarter of the last century. Tuberculosis was much more prevalent in the cities, and the poor were more likely to contract it.

A common site of the initial infection is the lower lung. Lesions are formed which are encapsulated by the body. If these lesions, or tubercles, remain intact, the symptoms may never be more severe than a persistent cough. The disease is characterized by episodes of acute illness which are followed by periods, sometimes years, of remission. Each episode of rupturing spreads the infection upward and adds new lesions until the bronchial tree becomes involved. The spitting of blood, the most dramatic symptom of the disease, results from ruptures of tubercles in the bronchial tubes. Mrs. Lawrence's description of her husband's health during their first years together includes an accurate portrayal of the cyclic nature of the symptoms of tuberculosis.

But there were awful nights when he was still ill and feverish and delirious and I was frightened. Death seemed close. But the shadow of sickness soon vanished in the healthy, happy life we lived. He became strong, and full of energy and hope.²

The theme of death and rebirth, which occurs so often in Lawrence's

²Frieda Lawrence, Not I, But the Wind . . ., (New York: Viking, 1934) p. 35.

fiction, might have been inspired by his affliction.

Tuberculosis has been called the "artist's disease" because so many important figures in the literary and performing arts suffered from it. The belief has persisted throughout medical history that the intellectually gifted are more susceptible to the disease, that "the same fire which wastes the body in consumption also makes the mind shine with a brighter light."³ Fishberg blames what he calls the decline of literature and the arts in our time on the progressive disappearance of tuberculosis. "In the healthful days to come we may not apprehend the past role of tuberculosis in quickening creative facilities; and by way of compensation for good health we may lack certain cultural joys."⁴ The Dubos' suggest that there is some basis for the belief that tuberculosis fosters genius: "Within certain limits fever from any source can heighten emotion, sharpen perception and render intellectual process more lucid and rapid."⁵

Dr. Edmund Clark, an expert on tuberculosis, in his remarks concerning Lawrence's case, notes that among his patients is found "a life performance which might be described as one of intense striving toward their goal in life."⁶ The "intense striving" observed by Clark may be a corollary of the belief that the disease fosters genius: it

³Rene and Jean Dubos, The White Plague (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1952), p. 59.

⁴Arthur Maurice Fishberg, Pulmonary Tuberculosis (New York: Lea & Febiger, 1932), quoted in Dubos, p. 60.

⁵Dubos, p. 63.

⁶Moore, p. 385.

must be expressed; however, the phenomenon is better explained by the recently developed psychology of the terminally ill. Sensing that they haven't long to live, many seriously ill persons intensely strive "toward their goal in life" because they wish to make the best use of the time remaining to them. A study of Lawrence's life and his works from the perspective of this psychology should yield much useful information.

Tuberculosis was long believed to be a "wet" disease, a disease of the dank cities.

When travel to a better climate was invented as a treatment for TB in the early nineteenth century, the most contradictory destinations were proposed. The south, mountains, deserts, islands—their very diversity suggests what they have in common: the rejection of the city.⁷

Sontag suggests that travel as a form of treatment supplied an important model of bohemian life in the nineteenth century. "The TB sufferer was a dropout, a wanderer in endless search of the healthy place."⁸ Lawrence's wanderings covering half the globe and his aversion to cities may have been inspired, to some degree, by his following these nineteenth century therapeutic practices. There were many treatments available, but no cure for his illness; and he rejected what modern science had to offer because, as Huxley says, it was "incompatible with the exercise of his gift,"⁹ his creative genius.

It would appear from Lawrence's scant references to tuberculosis

⁷Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), p. 73.

⁸Ibid., p. 33.

⁹Huxley, p. 119.

and from his secretiveness concerning his condition that he did not accept the evidence that the disease is contagious. There exists no record of his taking precautions to prevent Mrs. Lawrence from becoming infected. That she did not contract the disease may be attributed to her natural resistance or to extraordinarily good luck. He says that "we live terribly and exhaustively from the upper centres. . . . The great sympathetic centre of the breast becomes exhausted, the lungs, burnt by the over-insistence of one way of life, become diseased."¹⁰ He also suggests that "any excess in the sympathetic mode from the upper centres tends to burn the lungs with oxygen, weaken them with stress, and cause consumption."¹¹ Using his statements as a guide, it can be argued that Lawrence spent much of his life attempting to balance the divided portion of his soul, seeking a psychic equilibrium that would manifest itself as a return to physical health, to wholeness.

Aldington is perhaps the best guide to the medical facts concerning Lawrence. He reports that the first attack came in November 1911 and that it was very severe; Lawrence thought that he might die.

The illness which had brought him so near to death left him weak and with shattered health always thereafter under the threat of tuberculosis, which sometimes suspended its attack but never left him.¹²

The doctor who attended Lawrence at this time informed him of the diagnosis and told him that he would not be permitted to resume his career as a teacher. Short of funds and despite the doctor's warning,

¹⁰Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, pp. 53-2.

¹¹Ibid., p. 59.

¹²Aldington, pp. 115-16.

Lawrence seems to have been seeking a job as an English lecturer in an obscure German university. He might have assumed that he could keep the secret of his illness in a foreign land, and he sought assistance in securing a teaching position in Germany from Professor Ernest Weekley, whose wife, Frieda, eventually became Mrs. Lawrence.

The story of Lawrence's chronic ill health is too well known to require additional discussion; however, one attack which occurred after the Lawrences returned to New Mexico from England in 1924 is significant for this study: it occurred after the first manuscript of The Plumed Serpent had been completed and before he returned to Mexico to write the second version. Dorothy Brett was present when the attack occurred:

You suddenly spit, so there is nothing new in that: but this time a splash of bright red blood comes with it, which is new. . . . The following day you are still in bed, and in the afternoon you spit blood again.¹³

Aldington reports that Lawrence instructed his wife to tell Brett and any other inquirers that his problem is "just a touch of bronchial trouble—the tubes are sore."¹⁴ Although this bit of fiction convinced Brett, Lawrence must have realized that he could not maintain the pretense much longer. Perhaps he hoped that he would die in the same manner as did Katherine Mansfield, another consumptive, a year earlier: she suffered a severe hemorrhage and died within a few minutes. Lawrence was a private man who would not tolerate being under the care—and control—of anyone, and his sudden death would enable him to

¹³Dorothy Brett, Lawrence and Brett: A Friendship (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1933; reprint ed., Santa Fe, New Mexico: Sunstone Press, 1974), p. 139.

¹⁴Aldington, p. 342.

avoid becoming an object of pity. "No man was ever better for being pitied."¹⁵

Tanner believes that Lawrence went through a mental crisis in America, which at times appeared as madness to his friends; and he suggests that "the gradual undermining effects of the first stages of the dreaded tuberculosis"¹⁶ contributed to this behavior. However, the episode of blood spitting is proof that Lawrence's illness was then well advanced. It is likely that similar episodes had occurred earlier, and that he was able to keep the symptoms hidden. Lawrence was an intelligent man, and it may be assumed that he was aware of the nature of the disease and of its prognosis. While he had great recuperative powers, he must have realized that the cycle of attack and recovery could not be sustained indefinitely. His realization of this may have prompted the changes in his thinking which took form in the final version of The Plumed Serpent. He felt he had to find the ultimate remedy, the bonding agent that could restore the soul to wholeness. He might have hoped that psychic wholeness would manifest itself as physical health.

When the Lawrences finally reached Mexico City following the near fatal attack which occurred in Oaxaca, Mexico in early 1925, Mrs. Lawrence had Lawrence examined by a physician who bluntly told her that her husband would die within two years. "These doctors in Mexico

¹⁵Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 395.

¹⁶Tony Tanner, "D. H. Lawrence and America," in D. H. Lawrence: Novelist, Poet, Prophet, ed. Stephen Spender (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 170.

City may have realized from their conversations with her that Lawrence had succeeded in hiding his true condition from her."¹⁷ Aldington believes that the doctors deliberately told Mrs. Lawrence of her husband's condition in his presence to prevent him from denying it again. In April Lawrence returned to his ranch in Taos, where he recovered from this attack and where he revised the second manuscript of The Plumed Serpent. He left America for the last time in September 1925, not because of any hatred of America but because the visa which had been granted him on humanitarian grounds was about to expire.¹⁸ Perhaps if Lawrence had attempted to remain in the United States, his visa might have been extended, but the necessary legal proceedings would have required him to make a public declaration of his illness.

The period during which The Plumed Serpent was revised must have been a time of deep depression for Lawrence; he must soon leave his beloved ranch, his cow Susan, and the only tranquility he had known since 1914. The Fourth Hymn of Quetzalcoatl includes a few lines that appear symbolic of Lawrence's illness:

Lo! I release the dragons! the great white one of the north,
Him of the disappointed dead, he is lashing and turning round.
He is breathing cold corruption upon you, you shall bleed
in your chest.¹⁹

The chest bleeding seems an obvious reference to tuberculosis in its more dramatic symptoms, and "the great white one of the north" may refer directly to the disease; it is the "great white plague" which has always

¹⁷Aldington, p. 354.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 357.

¹⁹Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 284.

been more prevalent in the north; and "him of the disappointed dead" may be a reference to himself. While living in North America, Lawrence had to face the reality of his approaching death, and this may be why he refers to America as the "great death-continent."²⁰

Howe recognizes that Lawrence was dying when he wrote The Plumed Serpent, and she believes that he knew he was dying.²¹ "The book is one of several ghost stories Lawrence wrote about himself. . . . The Plumed Serpent is the first of Lawrence's elegies for himself, as 'The Man Who Died' is the last."²² Howe believes that the work is a recording of Lawrence's struggle for survival and as one of a series of strategies against death,²³ all of which eventually fail. "In the final moments of the novel, Ramon is like one of the dead. As his life was translated into terms of self-integrity, so his death is expressed primarily as psychic disintegration."²⁴ Kate asks Ramon if he feels sure of himself.

"Sure of myself?" he re-echoed. "No! Any day I may die and disappear from the face of the earth. I not only know it, I feel it. So why should I be sure of myself?" . . .

"I feel as if my soul were coming undone."²⁵

Bynner suggests that to Lawrence death was a personal defeat, an attitude that is prevalent in western society, where death is the

²⁰Ibid., p. 83.

²¹Marguerite Beede Howe, The Art of the Self in D. H. Lawrence (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977), p. 105.

²²Ibid., p. 106.

²³Ibid., pp. 108-28, passim.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 130-31.

²⁵Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 469.

ultimate enemy, to which one must never willingly submit.

Richard Aldington speaks of being told by "the doctor who attended Lawrence in his last illness" that "although the lungs were badly scarred, there was still plenty of resistance, and he would have survived even then but for the psychological defeat which had destroyed his will to live."²⁶

Bynner believes that Lawrence died because his body was no longer "right for living," and that "it was the final physiological defeat which had destroyed his will to live."²⁷ There is no evidence to support the claim that Lawrence lost his will to live or that he died as the result of a psychological defeat. He returned to Europe in the Fall of 1925, and his health continued to decline. Many of those who saw him during his last years spoke of his thin appearance and his pale complexion. The anemia which was responsible for this pallor also reduced his body's ability to assimilate food, thus rendering him progressively weaker. Lawrence died not because he had given up the fight for life but because his "column of blood" could no longer sustain him.

The evidence suggests that death was on Lawrence's mind as he worked on The Plumed Serpent, and for this reason the Mexican novel may have assumed a special importance for its creator. When we view The Plumed Serpent in relation to the works that immediately preceded it we can see also that it brought to fruition the themes that he was exploring.

²⁶Bynner, p. 344.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 344-45.

CHAPTER III

THE FOUR PRECEDING NOVELS AS INITIATORS OF
THEMES BROUGHT TO FRUITION IN
THE PLUMED SERPENT

The Rainbow and Women in Love, generally regarded as Lawrence's greatest works, are the products of careful and frequent rewriting. However, during the interval between the publication of Women in Love (1920) and The Plumed Serpent (1926), Lawrence wrote four novels which were less carefully prepared: Aaron's Rod (1922), The Lost Girl (1920), Kangaroo (1923), and The Boy in The Bush (1924), the last a collaboration with Maria Louisa Skinner. Aldington, in his introduction to Aaron's Rod, says that Lawrence might have had some idea of what he had intended to do in The Lost Girl, "but the other two [Aaron's Rod and Kangaroo] were wholly improvisations, begun at random with no more coherence and structure than the very important ones of Lawrence's compelling personality and brilliant writing."¹ The Plumed Serpent at first seemed destined to follow the pattern of the four earlier novels: a hurriedly prepared manuscript with little time spent on revision. The first manuscript of The Plumed Serpent was written in about six weeks.² Lawrence must have had plans to submit this manuscript for publication because he had a typescript prepared from it.³

¹D. H. Lawrence, Aaron's Rod (London: Heinemann, 1922; reprint ed., New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 7.

²Clark, "The Making of a Novel," pp. 117-18.

³Ibid., p. 121.

I believe that Lawrence rescued The Plumed Serpent from becoming a fifth "pot boiler" because his health was failing and he wished to create a world in which his ideas could be best expressed; it was to be the most complete statement of his philosophy. The Plumed Serpent shares themes and ideas with Aaron's Rod, The Lost Girl, Kangaroo, The Boy in The Bush, and with its first version, which is referred to here as Quetzalcoatl. My brief comparisons of The Plumed Serpent, with the four earlier novels and with Quetzalcoatl will show that Lawrence brought to fruition the themes he had explored earlier, that he revised The Plumed Serpent to enable it to bear the full weight of his ideas, and that it conforms with his philosophy, what he wished to restore: "just the natural warm flow of common sympathy between man and man, man and woman."⁴

Aldington believes that the theme of Aaron's Rod, in which Aaron is left with the choice between submission to Lilly or disintegration, is the gratification of Lawrence's frustrated longing for friendship.⁵ Lawrence wanted friendship, a Blutbruderschaft, between himself and another man, as he says in a letter to Katherine Mansfield: "I do believe in friendship. I believe tremendously in friendship between man and man, a pledging of men to each other inviolably. But I have not ever met or formed such friendship."⁶ He never formed such a

⁴D. H. Lawrence, Phoenix II: Uncollected, Unpublished, and Other Prose Works by D. H. Lawrence, ed., Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore (New York: Viking, 1970; reprint ed., New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 569.

⁵Lawrence, Aaron's Rod, p. 8.

⁶Lawrence, Letters, p. 462.

friendship, and his desire for friendship could only be satisfied in his imagination, because his need to dominate others combined with his temperamental nature prevented him from forming close friendships. The relationship between Aaron and Lilly is perhaps a close approximation of how Lawrence actually conducted himself with others, but the relationship between Cipriano and Ramon is an idealized one, and it could only exist in the world of The Plumed Serpent.

In Aaron's Rod, Lilly takes in the sick Aaron and nurses him. "Not much fun for you, doing this for somebody who is nothing to you."⁷ Lilly's reply to Aaron set the conditions of their relationship: "I shouldn't if you were unsympathetic to me."⁸ When Aaron fails to rally, Lilly rubs his patient's body with oil, "as mothers do their babies whose bowels don't work."⁹ Lilly, despite his position of dominance, distrusts Aaron. "I know he'll bite me, like a warmed snake, the moment he recovers."¹⁰ Lilly dismisses the now-recovered Aaron as soon as the latter disagrees with him. "I don't have friends who don't fundamentally agree with me. A friend means one who is at one with me in matters of life and death."¹¹ After numerous adventures, Aaron's flute, his source of security, is destroyed; he is now forced to choose between returning to the world from which he had escaped or following

⁷Lawrence, Aaron's Rod, p. 113.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 120.

¹¹Ibid., p. 146.

Lilly. "He would rather give in to the devilish little Lilly than to the beastly people of the world."¹² Lilly tells Aaron that he must submit to the heroic soul in a greater man, and that he has the need to submit. "And whom shall I submit to?"¹³ asks Aaron. The answer is obvious.

The relationship between Ramon and Cipriano, however, is a partnership, a "pledging of men to each other inviolably." Ramon is clearly the superior, but he never exploits his position; he would rather help Cipriano grow to reach his full potential, to achieve the same level of insight enjoyed by Ramon. Kate feels "that Don Ramon and Don Cipriano both had heard the soundless call."¹⁴ Unlike Aaron, who was lost without his flute and who felt himself compelled to submit to Lilly or face chaos, Cipriano defers to Ramon because he recognizes and acknowledges the latter's superiority. "He knows better what is Mexico. He knows better what I am."¹⁵ Cipriano consistently prefers to subordinate himself to Ramon.¹⁶

Ramon has achieved an ideal state toward which Cipriano strives throughout the work. But Cipriano's motives and intentions are often misinterpreted because his loyalty to Ramon is questioned, and the changes brought about through his "transfiguration," which occurs late

¹²Ibid., p. 336.

¹³Ibid., p. 347.

¹⁴Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 62.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 224-25.

in the novel, are not acknowledged by some critics. De Sola Pinto, for example, believes that Cipriano has the potential to become a dictator.

We feel that the noble and humane Don Ramon will be swept aside by Don Cipriano and that the revolution, like all violent revolutions, will end in a military tyranny and perhaps a reversion to the blood sacrifices of Cipriano's ancestors.¹⁷

Following the attack on Jamiltepec in which Ramon was seriously wounded, Kate asks Cipriano if it would have meant very much to him had Ramon been killed. "To me Ramon is more than life. More than life."¹⁸

"I wonder why I do it. I wonder why I bother with him,"¹⁹ Lilly asks himself after massaging Aaron's body with oil. Perhaps Lilly hopes that this act will place Aaron permanently in his debt and force the flautist to "submit to a bit of healthy individual authority."²⁰ The act is not an entirely unselfish one because Lilly is a leader in desperate need of a follower. But Ramon's reason for performing a physical rite upon Cipriano's body is altruistic: its purpose is to induce a mental transfiguration in Cipriano. "It is time you let General Viedma be swallowed up in the red Huitzilopochtli."²¹ Following this experience Cipriano tells the skeptical Kate that he is now ready to assume his place as the living Huitzilopochtli, that she is more than Kate, and that he is more than just a man.²² Aaron's health is restored

¹⁷de Sola Pinto, p. 44.

¹⁸Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 340.

¹⁹Lawrence, Aaron's Rod, p. 118.

²⁰Ibid., p. 119.

²¹Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 402.

²²Ibid., p. 406.

at Lilly's hands, but not without cost. Ramon, however, in bringing about Cipriano's rebirth, makes Cipriano his equal. It is this absence of selfishness in Ramon's and Cipriano's friendship that lifts it to the level of the ideal which Lawrence was never to experience.

There are other signposts in Aaron's Rod which anticipate The Plumed Serpent. After Lilly has rubbed Aaron's body with the oil, he speculates upon the worthlessness of the races of men, with one exception: "I would have loved the Aztecs and the Red Indians. I know they hold the element in life which I am looking for—they had living pride."²³ Lilly's statement concerning "the possessing [of] one's soul—and the being together with someone else in silence, beyond speech,"²⁴ is brought to fruition in The Plumed Serpent.

In The Lost Girl Lawrence's use of a troupe of actors whose repertoire involves assuming the identity of a tribe of American Indians is another indication of his early interest in the aboriginals of North America. Bynner says that Lawrence's use of Alvina's initiation rites conducted by the Natcha-Kee-Tarara is a banality remindful of rites conducted by sophomore sororities, of spiritual seances, and of passages in The Plumed Serpent.²⁵ Clark calls the Indian-like masquerades a device Lawrence used to objectify Alvina's initiation into a new order of sensual being.²⁶ Lawrence's description of the troupe confirms

²³Lawrence, Aaron's Rod, p. 119.

²⁴Ibid., p. 128.

²⁵Bynner, p. 264.

²⁶Clark, "The Making of a Novel," p. 118.

Bynner's opinion that its rites resemble those of some sororities.

The Natcha-Kee-Tarara Troupe consisted of five persons, Madame Rochard and four young men. They were strictly a Red Indian troupe. But one of the young men, the German Swiss, was a famous yodeller, and another, the French Swiss, was a good comic with a French accent, whilst Madame and the German did a screaming two-person farce. Their great turn, of course, was the Natcha-Kee-Tarara Red Indian scene.²⁷

But Lawrence had not seen a Red Indian before coming to North America and the Natcha-Kee-Tarara is the product of his naivete. Bynner ridicules the form of the troupe while ignoring its function, which is to move Alvina from her former, forlorn life, into a newer, darker existence, one in which she is able to find herself. One of the "braves" is an Italian named Cicio, who could serve as an early model of Cipriano.

His skin was delicately tawny and slightly lustrous. The eyes were set so dark, that one expected them to be black and flashing. . . . When he was in his war-paint, for one moment she hated his muscular, handsome, downward-drooping torso.²⁸

Cicio and Cipriano share an important characteristic, the apparent reluctance to talk.

Hafley calls Cicio a "gesturer," a nonverbal commentator upon Alvina's world. "The sheepishness, the turned-aside or ducked head, the jeer, the coolly valuating eyes now and then widened with curiosity—these more than take the place of verbal comment upon the ordinary."²⁹ Cicio perhaps gestures more often than he speaks when he

²⁷D. H. Lawrence, The Lost Girl (New York: Seltzer, 1921; reprint ed., New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 149.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 196-97.

²⁹James Hafley, "The Lost Girl--Lawrence Really Real," Arizona Quarterly 10 (Winter 1954):319.

is in Woodhouse with Alvina. The place is alien to him, and his arguments or protestations would be useless. Cipriano, who is far better educated than is Cicio and should be more articulate than the Italian, also uses few words and fewer gestures: "He made the air around him seem darker, but richer and fuller."³⁰ To borrow one of Lawrence's favorite terms, we might say that Cipriano's quietness constitutes a "fecund" silence. But Kate is in constant need of words of reassurance from Ramon as well as from Cipriano; she does not understand the delimiting function of language, that words impoverish experience. Accompanying Cipriano in Jaramay, Kate begins to acknowledge that "his words said nothing: would never say anything."³¹ As the couple make their way toward the restaurant Kate shakes hands with two of Cipriano's officers.

They were men of flesh and blood, they understood her presence, and bowed low, looking at her with flashing eyes. And she knew what it was to be a goddess in the old style, saluted by the real fire in men's eyes, not by their lips³² [emphasis added].

Kate now begins to dislike direct conversation. "Ah, the ugly blows of direct, brutal speech! She had suffered so much from them."³³

Kate experiences "positive passivity after her marriage to Cipriano. "And talk, and thought, had become trivial, superficial to her: as the ripples on the surface of the lake are as nothing."³⁴

³⁰Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 88.

³¹Ibid., p. 352.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., p. 353.

³⁴Ibid., p. 462.

Cipriano also notices that talk has an "irritant quality," and they both avoid using language.³⁵ Cicio's gesturing and his short speeches signify little more than his dissatisfaction or discomfort, but Cipriano's avoidance of direct conversation is a demand that Kate experience him. In The Plumed Serpent, Lawrence associates speech with the spiritual will. Throughout the novel Kate remains in a dilemma, whether to remain in Mexico or to return to England. She really prefers to remain, but the spiritual will within her, which has not been exorcised, causes her to desire verbal reassurance.

Lawrence believed that the Indians of North America hold the key to the restoration of the souls of white Europeans. The attraction that the Natcha-Kee-Tarara holds for Alvina is a manifestation of Lawrence's belief, crudely developed. After Alvina reaches Califano she is transfigured, to use Lawrence's term, by the beauty of the landscape, which hints of ancient gods; but the gods Lawrence has in mind are Aztec. "The gods who had demanded human sacrifice were quite right, immutably right. The fierce, savage gods who dipped their lips in blood, these were the true gods."³⁶

The novel follows Alvina's progress from that of a girl brought up to live in a world that no longer exists into a new, perhaps transitory, life in Italy. The promise of America remains her ultimate goal. "But she could never endure it [Califano] for a life-time. It was only a test on her. Cicio must take her to America, or England—to America

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Lawrence, The Lost Girl, p. 372.

preferably."³⁷ Hafley says, "The progress of the novel is, of course, Alvina's progress towards fulfillment of herself as an individual."³⁸ The progress of The Plumed Serpent is Kate's progress following her awakening, which begins on her fortieth birthday. "Her waking up at forty marks her venture into the darkness where all our aspirations wait, ready to burst forth from their inchoate origin and source."³⁹ And Lawrence, himself approaching forty, knew that he must soon venture into the darkness called death.

Many scholars have recognized that Kangaroo and The Plumed Serpent share a common theme, the possibility of leadership through political power. In Kangaroo, Lovat Somers is offered the opportunity to play an important role in a political party in Australia, an offer he eventually declines. In The Plumed Serpent Don Ramon has the ability to use his influence as the leader of a religious movement to gain political power in Mexico, but he refuses. Perhaps as important as the points of similarity in the two works is that they have both been subject to similar misinterpretations.

Leavis correctly sees Kangaroo as a daydream in which Lawrence tests the idea of becoming a leader in political action, "an exposure of the idea to something like the full test of reality."⁴⁰ De Sola Pinto

³⁷Ibid., p. 378.

³⁸Hafley, p. 314.

³⁹Jascha Kessler, "Descent in Darkness: The Myth of The Plumed Serpent," in A. D. H. Lawrence Miscellany, ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1959), p. 240.

⁴⁰Leavis, p. 52.

seems to agree with Leavis and suggests that Aaron's Rod, Kangaroo, and The Plumed Serpent are all concerned with Lawrence's flirtation with fascism. "They provide plenty of quotations for the superficial reader who classifies Lawrence as a power-worshipping reactionary."⁴¹ One such reader, Nulle, himself an advocate of fascist ideals, says of Lawrence in Kangaroo: "Not only does he actually give us a detailed organization of a thoroughgoing fascist movement, but he himself is its founder and leader."⁴² Nulle, who goes so far as to applaud Lawrence for having borrowed the spirit of Mein Kampf,⁴³ succumbed to the temptation of ignoring whatever was not in harmony with what he wished Lawrence's philosophy to be. If Lawrence, as Somers, pictures himself as a political leader, why are so many of his statements anti-political? Somers says, "I never take part in politics at all. They are not my affair."⁴⁴ Another statement is a clear indication of Lawrence's attitude toward politics: "I really don't care about politics. Politics is no more than your country's housekeeping. If I had to swallow my whole life in housekeeping, I wouldn't keep house at all."⁴⁵ Somers believes that democracy has run its course and that Australia needs a new religious inspiration rather than a political revolution.⁴⁶

⁴¹de Sola Pinto, p. 39.

⁴²Stebelon H. Nulle, "D. H. Lawrence and the Fascist Movement," New Mexico Quarterly 10 (February 1940):7.

⁴³Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁴Lawrence, Kangaroo, p. 54.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 71.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 111.

until after Kangaroo is killed. He rejects Kangaroo's deathbed request to affirm his love for Kangaroo, and he soon leaves for America without attempting to bring about the spiritual revitalization he believes is so sorely needed.

Don Ramon, like Somers, rejects the use of political power to achieve his ends; but, unlike Somers, he labors to bring about the revitalization of the religious spirit in Mexico. Ramon's repudiation of the use of political power is clearly stated. He tells Cipriano that he does not wish to acquire a political smell and that the surest way to destroy the Church of Quetzalcoatl, "like any other living thing—is to get it connected with any political party."⁴⁷ He tells his followers, "We will be masters among men, and lords among them. But lords of men and masters of men we will not be"⁴⁸ [emphasis added]. Ramon is not offering them political power, he is giving them the opportunity to gain the state of self-confidence that comes with wholeness. Ramon, as this study will show, is not a dictator but a man who has achieved psychic wholeness, who guides Cipriano and Kate toward that state. What Ramon achieves, Somers never attempts.

Huxley says that Lawrence called adobe the best building material because there could be no everlasting monuments built with it.⁴⁹ Lawrence's disbelief in the concept of permanence is expressed in Kangaroo.

⁴⁷Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 271.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁹Huxley, p. 120.

Kangaroo, where he says that ideas are subject also to death.

But the idea is perishable. Say what you like, every idea is perishable: even the idea of God or Love or Humanity or Liberty—even the greatest idea has its day and perishes. Each formulated religion is in the end only a great idea. Once the idea becomes explicit, it is dead. Yet we must have ideas.⁵⁰

Lawrence uses Kangaroo to express his belief that all ideas must die; Kangaroo's political party will die with him.⁵¹

The idea is further exploited in The Plumed Serpent, where it has been carefully woven into the work. It appears in the tale of Quetzalcoatl growing old and ascending to God for regeneration as Jesus arrives in Mexico. It is used to justify Ramon's crusade to re-establish the worship of Quetzalcoatl: Jesus is now old and tired, and must return to God for regeneration; and the refreshed Quetzalcoatl is ready to return to the Mexican people. The victory over the Knights of Cortes should not be seen as permanent, for Ramon does not rejoice but broods upon his death and dissolution.⁵² It is possible that the Church of Quetzalcoatl will not long survive its founder's death. In Kangaroo ideas are born, flourish, and seem doomed to die. But ideas do not suffer dissolution in The Plumed Serpent: Jesus has returned to heaven where he is receiving a fresh influx of the life-giving energy, and it is likely that he will eventually return to Mexico when the religion of Quetzalcoatl degenerates into dogma.

The Boy in The Bush is a collaboration with Maria Louisa Skinner.

⁵⁰Lawrence, Kangaroo, p. 291.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 381.

⁵²Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 469.

Ellis," in August 1923. He wrote to her on September 2, 1923 that he had read the manuscript, liked it, but "I'm afraid as it stands you'd never find a publisher. . . . If you like I will take it and recast it, and make a book of it."⁵³ Lawrence rewrote "The House of Ellis," which he retitled The Boy in the Bush, and completed in mid November. He wrote to Skinner on November 1, "The only thing was to write it all out again, following your MS almost exactly, but giving a unity, a rhythm, and a little more psychic development than you had done."⁵⁴ Skinner's manuscript is now apparently lost, making it almost impossible to determine how much of the material was contributed by each of the two authors. Since it was Lawrence who wrote the final manuscript and who submitted it for publication, it is reasonable to assume that he agreed with its contents, especially the narrative dealing with the psychic element; his letter, quoted above, indicates that he had added it.

The novel tells the story of a British lad, Jack Grant, whose parents sent him to frontier Australia in the 1880's, and follows him through a series of adventures. This main story is unquestionably Skinner's; the Lawrences were guests at her boarding house in Darlington, in Western Australia. She showed Lawrence the original draft of the story, and he advised her to write from her own experience.⁵⁵ The manuscript which he eventually received from her is the fruit of his suggestion. Skinner wrote from her knowledge of

⁵³Sagar, Calendar, p. 131.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 132.

⁵⁵D. H. Lawrence and M. L. Skinner, The Boy in The Bush (New York: Seltzer, 1924; reprint ed., New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. ix.

the fruit of his suggestion. Skinner wrote from her knowledge of frontier Australia, material not immediately available to Lawrence, and he added material from his psychic "experience" and from his philosophic and religious views. This study is concerned only with Lawrence's probable contribution.

At one point in The Boy in the Bush, following a brutal fight with Easu, Grant finds himself contemplating levels of consciousness.

Man is like this. He has various levels of consciousness. When he is broken, killed at one level of consciousness, his very death leaves him on a higher level. And this is the soul in its entirety being conscious, super-conscious, far beyond mentality. It hardly needs eyes or ears. . . . And man's divinity, and his ultimate power, is in this super-consciousness of the whole soul.⁵⁶

Grant never attained or sought a higher level of consciousness, it is the state reached by Ramon and later by Cipriano. In what I believe is a transfiguration scene,⁵⁷ Ramon tells Cipriano that it is time to let General Viedma become swallowed up in the red Huitzilopochtli, it is time to experience death at one level of consciousness which will lead Cipriano to a higher level.

Christianity is portrayed in The Plumed Serpent as a religion that has ceased to live, an attitude developed in The Boy in the Bush as well as in Lawrence's earlier novels.

Then there was an occasional Minister of the Gospel, on a pony, dressed in black. Jack's heart always sank when he saw that black. He decided that priests should be white, or in orange robes, like the Buddhist priests he had seen in Colombo, or in a good blue, like some nuns.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 169.

⁵⁷Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, pp. 402-05.

⁵⁸Lawrence and Skinner, p. 238.

The Christian goodness had gone bad, decayed almost into poison. It needed again the old heroic goodness of untamed men, with the wild great God who was for ever too unknown to be a paragon.⁵⁹

There is no movement in The Boy in the Bush to replace Jesus with a regenerated deity as Lawrence later did in both versions of The Plumed Serpent; his statements concerning the value of Christianity in The Boy in the Bush merely reflects his longstanding conviction that Christianity is in a moribund state. that remained unchanged throughout his American experience.

The strategies against death in The Plumed Serpent as described by Howe are also found in The Boy in the Bush. After recovering from a near fatal attack of illness Grant muses about death.

And at the end of life I see the big black door of death, and the infinite black labyrinth beyond. I like to think of going in, and being at home and one of the masters in the black halls of death, when I am dead.⁶⁰

It should be noted that the blackness associated with death is not the same blackness associated with Christianity. Death is not oblivion but a part of life, a part of the eternal to and fro.

Because, just as a red fire burning on the hearth is a fusion of death into what was once leaves, so the creation of man in the dark is a fusion of life into death, with the life dominant.

The two are never separate, life and death. And in the vast dark kingdom of afterwards, the Lord of Death is Lord of Life, and the God of Life and creation is the Lord of Death.

But Jack knew his Lord as the Lord of Death. The rich, dark mystery of death, which lies ahead, and the dark sumptuousness of the halls of death. Unless Life moves on to the beauty of the darkness of death, there is no life, there is only automatism.⁶¹

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 338.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 299.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 312.

Ramon, in the chapter, "Lords of the Day and Night," tells his followers to give up their individual will in favor of the greater will:

And say to thy death: Be it so! I, and my soul, we come to thee, Evening Star. Flesh, go thou into the night. Spirit, farewell, 'tis thy day. Leave me now. I go in last darkness now to the nakedest Star.⁶²

The mystical quality of The Plumed Serpent is conveyed through Lawrence's use of the sun, the dark sun, and the Morning Star as his symbols for God and for the soul throughout the work. Lawrence rewrote Skinner's manuscript after he had completed Quetzalcoatl, and The Boy in the Bush uses a significant amount of cosmic symbolism, much more than is found in Aaron's Rod.

In England the sun had seemed to him to move with a domestic familiarity. It wasn't till he was out here that he had been struck to the soul with the immense assertive vigour and sacred handsomeness of the sun.⁶³

The clear Australian air brought Lawrence into more intimate contact with the sun, and the clear air of Mexico strengthened his connection with it; but it was the Australian sun which first showed its divinity to Grant, who "had seen the Great God in the roaring of the yellow sun."⁶⁴ Lawrence had not yet found the dark sun although he wrote of a divinity within the sensual darkness. "Since I am travelling the dark road, let me go in pride. Let me be a Lord of Death, since the reign of the white Lords of Life, like my father, has become sterile and a futility. Let me be a Lord of Death."⁶⁵ This movement toward darkness,

⁶²Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 198.

⁶³Lawrence and Skinner, p. 182.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 183.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 228.

the dark gods, and the theme of regeneration also appears in The Boy in the Bush.

My God is dark and you can't see him. You can't even see his eyes, they are so dark. But he sits and bides his time and smiles, in the spaces between the stars. But there's deep, powerful feelings inside him, and he's only waiting his time to upset this pigsty full of white fat pigs.⁶⁶

The dark gods worshipped by Jack Grant and Quetzalcoatl rest in the cosmos; the god of the Mexicans returns to relieve his people of the white man's oppression and his religion, but Grant's god is still waiting for the right time to return to Australia. Lawrence associates the dark gods with what he calls "blood consciousness," a form of consciousness that is primitive and nonmental. He does not view death as dissolution but as the flowing back of a wave that is gathering energy to throw itself back upon the beach. The concept of a dark sun is a further development of the idea of dark gods, but it is a concept borrowed from Aztec philosophy, as is noted in the next chapter.

One more instance in which The Boy in the Bush anticipates The Plumed Serpent is that Kate in the Mexican novel approaches God in much the same manner as does Monica in the Australian novel. Kate seems not interested in seeking God on her own; she seeks fulfillment through Cipriano, who communes directly with God. Monica must also approach God through her man.

She must give herself up. He demanded this submission, as if it were a submission to his mysterious Lord direct. . . . Monica would have first to submit to himself, Jack, in person, before she would really yield before the immense Lord.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 300.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 175

Monica's eventual submission to Jack and to his wild mode of living in the Outback is only one of many episodes in Grant's life. But Kate's vacillations and her submission to Cipriano as well as her acceptance of her place in the pantheon of the Church of Quetzalcoatl form a tension which is maintained throughout the novel.

The first version of The Plumed Serpent, written in Chapala, has never been published. The manuscript is housed in the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin, and the typescript prepared from it is in the possession of Harvard University. The holograph manuscript of the second version, written in Oaxaca, according to Clark was in the possession of Laurence Pollinger, Lawrence's literary executor, in 1960 and Clark notes that it was exhibited at the University of Nottingham in that year.⁶⁸ The typescript prepared from the Oaxaca manuscript, extensively corrected in Lawrence's hand, belongs to the University of Texas at Austin. One would expect to find numerous points of similarity between The Plumed Serpent and Quetzalcoatl; they both tell essentially the same story, using the same characters in the same setting. Therefore, my purpose here, using Clark's study of the available manuscripts and typescripts, is to discuss the differences between the two versions, to determine what Lawrence has done to reshape it into what might have been intended as his last literary statement.

Clark suggests that Lawrence planned to publish the Chapala manuscript. "The few corrections that Lawrence made upon it [the typescript] seem hurried and incomplete; and although scattered

⁶⁸Clark, Dark Night of the Body, p. 46.

proofreader's marks in another hand indicate that preliminary plans may have been made to print it, these must have been soon abandoned."⁶⁹ The typescript was prepared in New York where it remained while Lawrence made his second visit to Mexico, wrote The Boy in the Bush, and returned to Europe. He arrived back in New York in March, 1924, and retrieved both manuscript and typescript at that time.⁷⁰ The documents accompanied Lawrence on his final visit to Mexico, to Oaxaca, that fall. He apparently intended only a revision, but according to Brett, after re-reading it, he decided upon a complete rewrite. "'I will have to rewrite it,' you say. 'Chapala has not really the spirit of Mexico, it is too tamed, too touristy. This place is more untouched!'"⁷¹ But the Sayula of The Plumed Serpent remains the Chapala of Quetzalcoatl. Something other than the relative primitiveness and the absence of tourists in Oaxaca caused him to abandon the Chapala manuscript.

Clark notes that in the interval between the completion of Quetzalcoatl and his trip to Oaxaca, Lawrence attended the spring corn dance at Santa Domingo in April and the Hopi snake dance in August. Clark says that the ceremony that preceeds the rain in The Plumed Serpent appears only in the final version and was based upon these dances; and "the circular dance in the plaza of Sayula into which Kate is drawn soon after her arrival, also new to the later version of the novel, may have had its origin in Lawrence's earliest observation of

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Clark, "The Making of a Novel," p. 121.

⁷¹Brett, p. 181.

Taos dances."⁷² He also believes that the dances had a "profound effect upon the novel."⁷³

Lawrence's illness also had a profound effect upon the novel. During the same interval Lawrence, chronically ill, in a fit of coughing, expelled blood. Brett, who was a friend of Katherine Mansfield and who was aware of the significance of this symptom, witnessed this; but she accepted Lawrence's invented explanation that his bronchials were merely sore. The attack was not severe and did not prevent him from going to Mexico as planned. The severe attack came in Oaxaca, perhaps on the very day he completed the manuscript of the second version, in January, 1925. He was too ill to return to Taos until April. He regained some of his lost strength there and devoted the month of June to the revision of the Oaxaca manuscript. But although he recovered from this attack, his health became increasingly fragile. He must have known that he was dying—even without the doctor's pronouncement that he was terminally ill. It was not the dances but his deteriorating physical condition that motivated him first to rewrite the novel and later, as Clark says, to lavish so much care on its revision.⁷⁴

Perhaps the most striking difference between Quetzalcoatl and The Plumed Serpent found by Clark is the change made in the endings.

Kate was merely packing to leave, we remember, at the end of Quetzalcoatl. At the end of the Oaxaca [holograph] manuscript,

⁷²Clark, "The Making of a Novel," p. 122.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 125.

Don Ramon sends her back to Europe as a sort of missionary, but warns that she will have little success and charges her to return to Mexico when the attempt at the conversion of Europe is over. In the Texas typescript Kate succeeds in getting Don Cipriano, now her husband both by civil ceremony and those of the new religion, to beg her to stay.⁷⁵

Clark adds that the ending Lawrence finally decided upon was not written until he corrected the galleys at his sister's house in Derbyshire, in October, 1925.⁷⁶ Lawrence must have changed the final sentence at this time, since the Texas transcript reads, "Le gueux m'a plantee la!" [That slut has deceived me!] she said to herself in the words of an old song."⁷⁷

Clark's study reveals other interesting differences. The Kate of Quetzalcoatl is not a seeker but a wanderer; there is a clearly defined revolution of the aboriginal population against the European culture which has been imposed upon them; Ramon's mysticism is deeply imbued with the doctrines Lawrence had learned from Madame Blavatsky and from other sources; Lawrence provides a complete presentation of Ramon's struggle to rid himself of Christian belief—the burning of the images from the village church is the point of crisis in this struggle; there are few drums and more guitars, a sign that the Indians of Chapala are not sufficiently close to the "blood consciousness" necessary for wholeness; and the new political structure envisioned by Lawrence in Quetzalcoatl closely resembles his scheme for an ideal colony, his Rananim. Lawrence calls the village a commune to be ruled by a local

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 129.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 126, 128.

⁷⁷Clark, Dark Night of the Body, p. 47.

living Quetzalcoatl and a living Malinchi, the chief and chieftainess of peace.⁷⁸

If the differences pointed out by Clark are examined with the assumption that, after completing the first version Lawrence knew he was dying, we may be better equipped to understand why Lawrence chose to rewrite rather than submit the first draft for publication. As a wanderer Kate had no destination and she was not pressed for time. Perhaps she is as purposeful as the hobos in Waiting for Godot, who aimlessly collide with each other in a seeming infinity of days. The Kate of The Plumed Serpent, however, has turned forty; "the first half of her life was over."⁷⁹ After reading the newspaper account of the god who has emerged from the Lake of Sayula, Kate wants to see this lake. "Amid all the bitterness that Mexico produced in her spirit, there was still a strange beam of wonder and mystery, almost like hope. A strange darkly-iridescent beam of wonder, of magic."⁸⁰ Clearly this Kate is an active seeker, and perhaps she may be compared with the three wise men who saw the Star of Bethlehem and followed it.

The de-emphasis of the political revolution of the Indians against European cultural domination, the elimination of Ramon's long sermons which smack of Madame Blavatsky's theosophy, and the discarding of the material describing Ramon's struggle with Christianity all indicate a major shift in emphasis from Quetzalcoatl to The Plumed Serpent. In the

⁷⁸Clark, "The Making of a Novel," pp. 119-121.

⁷⁹Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 52.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 60.

Chapala manuscript Ramon is a full blooded Indian whose "quest for a racial self is nevertheless made more transparently a correlative of Lawrence's own quest for self than in the later version of the novel."⁸¹ The emphasis in the final version is clearly upon Kate, the character who experiences the greatest amount of change. The de-emphasis of the political revolution and the deletion of most of the theosophic material helps the reader to focus his attention upon Kate. Lawrence changed Ramon into what some critics would call a poorly developed character. He may have made these changes because he was experiencing the depression that often accompanies a severe and incurable illness, and the feeling of hopelessness resulted in his becoming less concerned with political and religious struggles. He abandoned Blavatsky because theosophy is opposed to his daimon: the secrets of life and death are mysteries beyond all human explanation. Lawrence could have patterned Ramon after himself in Quetzalcoatl, but the Ramon in the final version is surely not Lawrence. Rananim, Lawrence's utopian model of ideal community, is another casualty in the second version. Perhaps Rananim was never more than a daydream, a mental exercise which afforded temporary relief from a world in which he could not fit. With death a near reality Lawrence turned his attention away from this world to prepare himself for the final mystery.

A new character is added to the final version, Joachim Leslie, Kate's late husband, a man not unlike Lawrence, "a man fighting for something beyond the ordinary life."⁸² A few scholars believe that

⁸¹Clark, "The Making of a Novel," p. 120.

⁸²Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 75.

Lawrence represented himself as the dead Joachim in The Plumed Serpent. Sagar says that "Joachim is clearly Lawrence."⁸³ It would be difficult to prove that Joachim is Lawrence, although there are affinities between them: each is the second husband of a wife who had been divorced; Joachim's and Lawrence's marriages produced no offspring; and Kate is a widow, and Mrs. Lawrence would soon lose her husband. However, if Lawrence represented himself in this manner, he would be able to project himself into the future—beyond his death—and give himself a sort of immortality. It also suggests that he accepted the inevitability of his death.

Porter's review of The Plumed Serpent, which was written in 1926, places the work in its proper perspective as the summation of Lawrence's philosophy.

The Plumed Serpent is a confession of faith, a summing up of the mystical philosophy of D. H. Lawrence. Mexico, the Indians, the cult of the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl—the Plumed Serpent—all these are pretexts, symbols made to the measure of his preoccupations. It seems only incidentally a novel, in spite of its perfection of form; it is a record of a pilgrimage that was, that must have been, a devastating experience.⁸⁴

Although The Plumed Serpent brought to fruition some of the themes from Lawrence's earlier novels, we must view the work as more than a summation. Lawrence's characters behave according to the principles of his philosophy; those who lack psychic balance suffer according to their excesses. It is only in the Mexican novel that Lawrence provides a full picture of the fulfillment of the quest for psychic wholeness. In no

⁸³Sagar, The Art of D. H. Lawrence, p. 160.

⁸⁴Porter, p. 421.

other work does Lawrence attempt to apply the principles of his beliefs to restore a nation's wholeness by radically changing its form of worship. It is his final adventure.

Lawrence wrote only one more novel, Lady Chatterley's Lover, otherwise he confined himself to shorter works for the remainder of his life. He may have turned away from the novel because he thought he might not be able to complete a major work. The fact that Lawrence did not die within two years of the attack suffered in Mexico might have given him with a sense of hope which enabled him to complete another novel. But Lady Chatterley's Lover is not the culmination of Lawrence's work, it is an epilogue to it.

CHAPTER IV

MEXICAN LEGEND AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE PLUMED SERPENT

As I have observed earlier, Lawrence made good use of the sources available to him in writing The Plumed Serpent. A number of scholars have misinterpreted the work because they have not examined his sources. Clark notes that Lawrence read a number of books on American anthropology, archeology, and history, including The Fundamental Principles of Old and New World Religions, by Zelia Nuttall.¹ Lawrence visited Mrs. Nuttall at her home outside Mexico City, and she appears in The Plumed Serpent as Mrs. Norris. Tindall, who unabashedly calls this work the best by far of Lawrence's novels, says that "Lawrence used the myths of the Aztecs to carry his message."² Part of Lawrence's message seems to be in accordance with his belief that the Christian churches are preaching Christ Crucified when they should be preaching Christ as the Risen Lord.

Now man cannot live without some vision of himself. But less still can he live with a vision that is not true to his inner experience and inner feeling. And the vision of the Christ-child and Christ Crucified are both untrue to the inner experience and feeling of the young.³

No small part of the triumph of The Plumed Serpent is that Lawrence was able to use with great effectiveness elements of the philosophy and of the legends of the Aztecs to carry his message. The majority of the

¹Clark, Dark Night of the Body, p. 103.

²Tindall, p. 113.

³Lawrence, Phoenix II, p. 573.

scholars of English literature not well acquainted with the philosophy and the folklore of the Aztecs have not been able to determine if Lawrence's attempt to integrate them in The Plumed Serpent has been successful. I shall attempt to show that it was Lawrence the schoolteacher who used his knowledge of Aztec philosophy and traditions to explain his his own philosophy.

According to the Verrills, Quetzalcoatl, the god whose name means "Plumed Serpent," was not the most important of the Aztecs' many deities, but is undoubtably the most widely known.⁴

In addition to worshipping their numerous deities, the Aztecs also adored Citlapan or the "Great Star" which was the planet Venus. But when Venus became the morning star it was called Tlauizcalpanecutli or "Lord of the Dawn" and was believed to be a visual manifestation of Quetzalcoatl.⁵

The Morning Star is an important leitmotif in The Plumed Serpent, and we can see its justification based upon Aztec traditional belief.

The story that the arrival of Cortez had been prophesied by the Mexican Indians is well known, but less known is that the prophecy is attributed by them to Quetzalcoatl himself. And perhaps the least known part of the prophecy is that "eventually he [Quetzalcoatl] would return and reestablish the Aztecs and their faith."⁶ In The Plumed Serpent Lawrence uses the myth of a god who is replaced but later returns to his people and he extends it to include his belief that religions, as all living things, eventually become senile and die. It should be noted

⁴A. Hyatt Verrill and Ruth Verrill, America's Ancient Civilizations (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1953), p. 67.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 104.

that the Aztec practice of human sacrifice was not connected with Quetzalcoatl. According to Meyer and Sherman, "The cult of the Feathered Serpent held that the god wished sacrifices of snakes and butterflies, not humans."⁷ The mistaken practice of associating Quetzalcoatl with human sacrifice might lead some scholars to mistakenly associate the religion taught by Ramon with the brutal practices of Nazi Germany.

Lawrence found in Mexico a mystical philosophy congenial with his own: both deny the scientific theory of evolution. Lawrence speaks of the relationship of man to monkey, that there is no connection of evolution between them: "He stands in one Sun, you in another."⁸ An understanding of the Aztec use of Sun is needed in order to understand the sentence quoted above. According to Soustelle, the Aztec mind (like Lawrence's) does not accept the concept of a stable universe: "Our universe, according to the ancient Mexicans, is the fifth in a series. Four Suns have preceeded it."⁹ The Aztec definition of a "Sun" is a period of years between cataclysms.

[The Aztec tradition] did not so much contemplate a superhuman order as recollect cosmic cataclysms and wait in anguish for more to come. Hence the feeling of insecurity in which all of recent Mexican civilization is wrapped, for never, at any time does anyone forget that the fifth universe is destined to disappear like the first four Suns--and that the end may come tomorrow.¹⁰

⁷Meyer and Sherman, p. 24.

⁸D. H. Lawrence, Mornings in Mexico (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. 16.

⁹Soustelle, p. ix.

¹⁰Ibid., p. x.

Soustelle also notes that one of the twenty days of the Aztec calendar is called ollin, which means both "movement" and "earthquake": "Our universe was born on the day of 'Four Movement,' when the sun began to move in the heaven; and it will collapse amidst earthquakes and cataclysms."¹¹ Lawrence sensed the Indians' ever-present fear, "the horror and climax of death-rattles, which is Mexico."¹² Mirabal, at Ramon's dinner party, says that the Indians cannot escape from despair, "because they haven't got hope in anything."¹³ Christianity has not erased this sense of fear, which is a product of the philosophy of the Aztecs, nor has it eradicated the memory of the old gods. Kate visits the pyramids of Teotihuacan with its House of Quetzalcoatl, and she thinks of the god: "He has not died. He is not so dead as the Spanish churches, this all-enwreathing dragon of the horror of Mexico."¹⁴

The Sun in the Aztec sense is used symbolically throughout the work. Ramon's destruction of the church's images can be viewed as a cataclysm: "Rocks cracked and exploded like guns. . . . One of the supporting stones burst with a bang, bars of iron and blazing stumps of images tumbled in a confused roar."¹⁵ Lawrence seems to be describing the end of the world, but on a microcosmic scale. The firing of rockets to celebrate the event may call forth or invoke Tlauizcalpanecutli, the

¹¹Ibid., p. ix.

¹²Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 62.

¹³Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 314.

name of Quetzalcoatl as the Morning Star. It is the type of ceremony that the Aztecs would understand. The earlier period of transition, when Quetzalcoatl was replaced by Jesus, is also described as a time of chaos. "In his [Quetzalcoatl's] ears was the sound of the tearing down of his temples in Mexico. . . . As he went, behind him rose a cry of people dying, and a flame of places burning."¹⁶ Quetzalcoatl's return to Mexico also takes place in the midst of a calamity, Mexico's bloody revolution. The newspaper article in which Kate first learns of his return ends with a reminder of the destruction now taking place. "These little fantasies create a pleasant diversion in the regular order of banditry, murder, and outrage, which is usually our duty to report."¹⁷ It is clear that Lawrence intended to regard Quetzalcoatl's departure as occurring at the end of a Sun, the end of an era; and his return coincides with the end of another Sun. The newspaper article reports that the god told the peasant woman, "I have come from out of the lake to tell you the gods are coming back to Mexico, they are ready to return to their own home."¹⁸ The return signals the beginning of a new era.

The resemblance between the Quetzalcoatl salute and the Nazi salute should be seen as nothing more than coincidence. Lawrence seems to have borrowed the form of the salute directly from Nuttall's writings. The salute is described as Ramon poses for a painting. "Then suddenly, in a concentration of intense, proud power, he flung his right

¹⁶Ibid., p. 245.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 59.

arm up above his head, and stood transfixed, his left hand hanging softly by his side."¹⁹ Nuttall believes that the periodic partial disappearance of the constellations Cassiopeia and Ursa Major behind the northern horizon of Mexico suggests a descent into an underground space.

This appellation can only be understood when it is realized that, in a sufficiently southern latitude, an observer, watching the setting of a circumpolar constellation below the horizon, would always see it disappear to his left and subsequently rise to his right. It is evident that in time this fact would give rise to the association of the left with the underworld, the lower region, and the right with the region above.²⁰

She suggests that the movements of the two constellations were used by the Aztecs in developing their concept of what Nuttall calls "the Above and Below."²¹ The position of the arms in the Quetzalcoatl salute, with the right arm thrust upwards and the left hanging, is a symbolic representation of the Above and Below. Quetzalcoatl seems to embody the Above and Below. He tells the departing Jesus, "I am the lord of two ways. I am master of up and down."²²

One of the most striking symbols used by Lawrence is the Dark Sun. Perhaps he noticed Nuttall's reference to a black sun: "I . . . had also paid particular attention to the fact that the Mexicans had conceived the ideas of two suns, a young day sun and an ancient night or black sun."²³ She later suggests that the Black Sun "may have been the

¹⁹Ibid., p. 191.

²⁰Zelia Nuttall, The Fundamental Principles of Old and New World Civilizations (Salem, Mass.: Salem Press, 1901), p 40.

²¹Ibid., p. 41.

²²Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 250.

²³Nuttall, p. 13.

sun during its nightly stay in the House of the Underworld."²⁴ Ramon's dual role as god and man may also be based upon Nuttall's writings. An ancient Mexican ruler was addressed in part:

You are the image of our lord god and represent his person. He reposes in you and he employs you like a flute through which he speaks and he hears with your ears. . . . Although thou art our neighbor and friend and son and brother, we are no more thy equals, nor do we consider you as a man, for now you have the person, the image, the conversation and the communion of our lord god.²⁵

Were the Mexicans able to make the transition from that of worshipping a god who walked among them to worshipping the image of a dead god nailed to a cross? Lawrence thinks not. He says that "Jesus is no saviour to the Mexicans. He is a dead god in their tomb."²⁶ Nuttall states that the practice of offering human sacrifice is of "comparatively recent origin and had been invented by the Mexicans for the purpose of intimidating their vassals, after a prolonged period of wars and bloodshed, which menaced the very existence of the integral state."²⁷ Lawrence voices this idea through Mirabal, who tells Kate that the "Aztec horrors" came about because the people had reached a point at which they saw nothing but death.²⁸ I believe that the purpose of the bullfight scene which opens the novel is to show that Christian Mexico has now reached the same level of desperation as had the Aztecs when

²⁴Ibid., p. 54.

²⁵Ibid., p. 73.

²⁶Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 148.

²⁷Nuttall, p. 263.

²⁸Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, pp. 64-65.

they began the practice of human sacrifice. The opening line of the book connects the bullfight with Easter,²⁹ the Christian holiday that celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. The sport of bullfighting is a blood rite, but the goring of the blindfolded horses amid the cries of pleasure from the crowd add a sense of perversion to the scene.

One additional example of Nuttall's influence upon Lawrence should suffice. After Kate arose on the morning of her fortieth birthday she saw the two volcanos on the horizon, "two monsters, watching gigantically and terribly over their lofty, bloody cradle of men, the Valley of Mexico."³⁰ Nuttall says of these volcanos:

No one can look upon the grand snow-clad peaks of the great volcanoes, which surround the high central plateau of Mexico, without realizing that mighty upheavals and disturbances, such as the world has seldom seen, must have attended the formation of the huge craters next to which Vesuvius seems but a hillock.³¹

Tindall notes that Lawrence also had access to Mrs. Nuttall's library, which contained an extensive collection of Mexicana.³² Lawrence's imagination was fired by what he had read, but we will not be able to determine the extent of his debt to the archaeologists and ethnologists who wrote of Mexico's past until we reconstruct the body of knowledge as it existed in the 1920's.

²⁹Ibid., p. 1.

³⁰Ibid., p. 50.

³¹Nuttall, p. 270.

³²Tindall, pp. 114-15.

CHAPTER V

THE PLUMED SERPENT AS A PRESCRIPTION FOR

ACHIEVING PSYCHIC BALANCE

A number of critics have made mention of a theme which they believe pervades the majority of Lawrence's writings: the search for wholeness.

What he wanted was to restore the wholeness of mankind, which it seemed to him had been destroyed by their long cultivation of will to the disadvantage of impulse and by their preoccupation with abstractions to the exclusion of sensual and emotional experience.¹

Lawrence's preoccupation with man's need to permit the sensual or unconscious half of his psyche to develop is a crucial element in his philosophy, and it is expressed in many ways in his writings.

We all have our roots in earth. And it is our roots that now need a little attention, need the hard soil eased away from them, and softened so that a little fresh air can come to them, and they can breathe. . . . We have roots, and our roots are in the sensual, instinctive and intuitive body, and it is here we need the fresh air of open consciousness.²

Kessler recognizes that the objective of Kate's struggle is wholeness of being,³ and Howe believes that the "virginity" regained by Kate "symbolizes the wholeness that she gets through conjunction with Cipriano."⁴ If we also take into account Lawrence's illness and his

¹Brewster Ghiselin, "D. H. Lawrence and a New World," The Western Review 11 (Spring 1947):157.

²D. H. Lawrence, Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence, ed., Edward D. McDonald (New York: Viking, 1936; reprint ed., New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 280.

³Kessler, p. 246.

⁴Howe, p. 124.

belief that the attainment of psychic wholeness can restore physical health, we should expect that the restoration of wholeness is more than a major theme in The Plumed Serpent; it is a goal.

As one of the more unusual works in English literature, The Plumed Serpent does not lend itself to the more traditional methods of study such as character analysis. Lees, for example, praises the development of character in Lawrence, but says of the Mexican novel, "The only lifeless figures in his books are lay figures in an unconvincing parable, like Ramon in The Plumed Serpent."⁵ The scholar who seeks an interpretation of the work through its characters will become misled. Lawrence tries to lead us away from the individual as when Kate thinks to herself that sex is a potent power, "a mystery greater than the individual. The individual hardly counted."⁶ If we view the work in its entirety we must view it through its patterns, as Tindall suggests in his introduction to the work.

More like a tapestry or a painted window than like the novels we are used to, it triumphs by arrangements of shape and color. Not people but functions, the characters exist like figures in the carpet only by relationship with other parts of the great design.⁷

I suggest that if The Plumed Serpent were viewed as a vast allegory the work would be more clearly seen as both a record of a journey and as a guide to wholeness. In an allegory the emphasis is not upon the characters themselves but upon their functions. As an allegorical

⁵Richard Lees, A Study of D. H. Lawrence and Simone Weil (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1958), p. 17.

⁶Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 167.

⁷Ibid, p. ix.

figure, Kate's struggle can be seen as the struggle of modern man, when he chooses to undertake it, to have "the hard soil eased away" from the roots of his sensual consciousness, which would then permit it to grow. Cipriano, who is both priest and fighter, represents man in his sensual nature. He is divided within himself, and he must unite with Kate, with the spiritual element of consciousness, in order to become fulfilled. And Ramon is Lawrence's model of an ideal man. He had come through the trials that now face Kate and Cipriano, and had achieved wholeness before the novel opens. One of his functions is that of a catalytic agent who brings the other two together.

Lawrence associates Kate with modern man early in the novel. "Like most modern people, she had a will-to-happiness."⁸ The "Fortieth Birthday" chapter has many allusions to death and rebirth; Kate must undergo death and rebirth if she is to find the object of her search. The first half of her life has ended, and she seeks comfort in Jesus' words, whose meaning Lawrence extends. "Ye must be born again. Even the gods must be born again. We must be born again."⁹ She wishes to escape into the "flower-like potency which was beyond understanding."¹⁰ But with newness comes fear, which is one cause of Kate's vacillations concerning whether she should remain in Mexico or return to England, to remain with the men who have resurrected Quetzalcoatl or return to her Christian culture. She tells Cipriano that the Mexican night is strange

⁸Ibid., p. 5.

⁹Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 62.

because it is at night that the flowers open and send forth their fragrances. He replies, "The smell of the flowers at night may make one feel afraid, but it is a good fear."¹¹ Before Kate can accept the fear and take her place in the pantheon of Quetzalcoatl, she must first cross the Lake of Sayula with its spermy waters; the crossing symbolizes Kate's rebirth into a new existence. She then must go through a painful process of education, a loosening of the hard soil from the roots of her sensual consciousness.

The crossing of the lake separates Kate from the white man's consciousness and places her in the world of the sensual. The man who rows her across, who has "the pathos of grace in him," is described as being truly male, a quality difficult to find in a civilized white man. "It was of the dark, strong, unbroken blood, the flowering of the soul."¹² The image of an open flower is now associated with the dark blood of the oarsman. Walker says that Lawrence uses the trope "dark blood" to identify what Walker calls the "primitive" mode of consciousness. "The figure is invoked repeatedly in The Plumed Serpent as his heroine proceeds reluctantly toward her fulfillment through immersion in the 'sea of living blood' in Mexico."¹³ Kate is indeed a reluctant seeker, reluctant to surrender herself to the mystery, to make contact with the earth.

Soon after the crossing, Kate soon find herself drawn to the

¹¹Ibid., p. 72.

¹²Ibid., p. 117.

¹³Walker, p. 25.

Indian dance in the plaza. She seems to want to join the dancers, but fears to do so. A bare-breasted man silently waits to lead her to the group and Juana, her criada pleads, "Look! Nina! This master is waiting for you. Then come! Oh Nina, come."¹⁴ Kate is awkward in the dance because "in her shoes she felt inflexible, insulated, and the rhythm was not in her."¹⁵ But Juana discards her boots and surrenders herself to the dance; her function here is to teach Kate by example. But Kate is never able to fully surrender herself to the blood consciousness although her shooting of one of the would-be assassins is a baptism in blood that causes her to identify herself more closely with Ramon and his church. But she seeks escape to her house, her individual consciousness, after viewing the bodies of the attackers.

If only the soul in man, in woman would speak to her, not always this strange, perverse materialism, or a distorted animalism. If only people were souls, and their bodies were gestures from the soul! If one could but forget both bodies and facts, and be present with strong, living souls.¹⁶

Earlier, as she watched the doctor bandage Ramon's bloodsoaked body, "Kate saw, vividly, how the body is the flame of the soul."¹⁷ She does not remember that souls and bodies cannot exist independently of each other. The experience of the attack prepares her to yield, at least temporarily, her mental consciousness through union with Cipriano. She is learning a rule that Lawrence wishes us all to accept: "One cannot

¹⁴Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 142.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 334.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 329.

have one's way, and the way of the gods. It has to be one or the other."¹⁸ It is a lesson that Kate re-learns many times, and her inability to surrender herself to "the way of the gods" becomes perhaps a more important cause of her vacillations than is her fear.

Following the attack, Kate is taken home. The experience has left her numb, and she cannot bear the presence of others. "The common threads that bound her to humanity seemed to have snapped. . . . Her eyes seemed to have gone dark, and blind to individuals. They were all just individuals, like leaves in the dark, making a noise."¹⁹ Kate is undergoing redemption from what von Broembsen calls the Laurentian original sin that damns western society: "the abandoning of role in favor of individuality."²⁰ The change that Kate later fears is taking place too quickly has already begun. "She knew now what was the black, glinting look in Cipriano's eyes. She could understand marrying him, now."²¹ Kate's progress from a limited sense of individuality to a greater awareness is not steady but has many reverses, and it is doubtful if she can approach the level of passivity and non-individuality of Teresa, Ramon's second wife.

Kate's vacillations are to be expected. Lawrence warns that the Indian mode of consciousness is alien and potentially fatal to the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 352.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 336.

²⁰F. von Broembsen, "Mythic Identification and Spatial In-scendence: The Cosmic View of H. H. Lawrence," Western Humanities Review 39 (Spring 1975):148.

²¹Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 341.

western mode of consciousness. This is the reason for Kate's fear that the change "must not come upon her too soon and too suddenly, or it would rupture her and she would die."²² Lawrence explains the reason behind Kate's vacillations and the radical nature of her change of consciousness in Mornings in Mexico, which he wrote at the same time he prepared the Oaxaca manuscript of The Plumed Serpent.

The consciousness of one branch of humanity is the annihilation of the consciousness of another branch. That is, the life of the Indian, his stream of conscious being, is just death to the white man. And we can understand the consciousness of the Indian only in terms of the death of our consciousness.

And let this not be turned into another sentimentalism. Because the same paradox exists between the consciousness of white men and Hindoos or Polynesians or Bantu. It is the eternal paradox of human consciousness. To pretend that all is one stream is to cause chaos and nullity. To pretend to express one stream in terms of another, so as to identify the two, is false and sentimental. The only thing you can do is to have a little Ghost inside your head which sees both ways, or even many ways. But a man cannot belong to both ways, or to many ways. One man can belong to one great way of consciousness only. He may even change from one way to another. But he cannot go both ways at once. Can't be done.²³

Kate vacillates because she tries to retain her western sense of consciousness as she acquires the Indian mode. Can't be done. Her struggle to have both is the same struggle that awaits western man if he attempts to gain sensual consciousness.

As Kate turns toward the dark consciousness of the Indian, she is able to acknowledge her incompleteness. "We are all fragments. And at best, halves."²⁴ She is learning that she cannot be whole unto herself,

²²Ibid., p. 456.

²³Lawrence, Mornings in Mexico, pp. 105-06.

²⁴Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 426.

she must commit herself to Cipriano if she is to be made complete. Ramon knows that Kate must make this commitment if she is to assume her "proper" role. He sees in her house "the rather weary luxury and disorder, and the touch of barrenness of a woman living her own life."²⁵ She is silently rebuked by Teresa as well, who sees her as a typical European; they keep their souls to themselves.²⁶ Kate tells Teresa that she must return to Europe, to her mother and her children. But when Teresa asks if they want her, Kate replies, "Not very much, really. But I want them."²⁷ One may wonder at this point why Kate would still want to return to Europe. Perhaps it is a manifestation of her unwillingness to relinquish her old mode of consciousness. Although she seems committed to leaving Mexico until the very end of the novel, in the final chapters she is found thinking of England in terms of sterility and death.

Kate wants to return in time for Christmas, the holiday commemorating the birth of the saviour who has just relinquished his place to Quetzalcoatl. Winter is approaching, but in Mexico there is warmth and life and color. "Sunlight lay in a rich gleam on the mountains, and shadows were deep and velvety. The green almost covered the rocks and the pinkish land."²⁸ Kate tells Teresa that she wants to leave "all this abstraction" and to return to a simpler life. "To see

²⁵Ibid., p. 440.

²⁶Ibid., p. 450.

²⁷Ibid., p. 452.

²⁸Ibid., p. 467.

the 'buses rolling on the mud in Piccadilly, on Christmas Eve, and the wet pavements crowded with people under the brilliant shops."²⁹ It is little wonder that Teresa asks, "Is that life, to you?"³⁰

"And you are a soldier among women, fighting all the time," Teresa continued. "I am not such. But some women must be soldiers in their spirit, and they need soldier husbands. . . . You would always fight. You would fight with yourself, if you were alone in the world."³¹

Kate makes no reply, she is prepared to sail from Vera Cruz on November 30. She mistakenly believes that Cipriano's "stoic kind of tolerance"³² to the news that she would soon leave is coldness or indifference.

Kate's thinking about her relationship with Cipriano leads her to consider her women friends in England: late middle aged, "grimalkins, greyish, avid, and horrifying, prowling around looking for prey that becomes scarcer and scarcer."³³ Lawrence uses the term grimalkin when describing Kate's English friends eight times on two successive pages. There must be no mistake concerning the life that is awaiting Kate in England. "Of all the horrors, perhaps the grimalkin women, her contemporaries, were the most repellent to her."³⁴ Kate realizes that it is better to abandon some of her ego than to join the ranks of the grimalkins. She reconsiders her decision to leave, and goes to

²⁹Ibid., p. 472.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., p. 476.

³²Ibid., p. 479.

³³Ibid., p. 480.

³⁴Ibid., p. 481.

Jamiltepec to make a sort of submission to Ramon. She seems to want him to ask her not to leave. But her contriteness vanishes when she finds Ramon and Cipriano "in the thick of their Quetzalcoatl mood."³⁵ She tells the men that she would prefer to remain in Mexico, but she feels unwanted there. Ramon replies that it is she who refuses to make a commitment. Although married to Cipriano, Kate has not overcome her mild desire for Ramon. Cipriano finally asserts himself when he tells Kate that it is not for Ramon to tell her whether she is wanted; it is he, Cipriano, who wants her to stay. Kate's realization that she is wanted by Cipriano causes her to say, finally: "You won't let me go."³⁶

That Kate will be able to yield her individual consciousness and find permanent contentment is problematical. Lawrence believes that life is a process, one in which there is no final happiness or despair, no final death. A state of final peace is impossible because, "There is a basic hostility in all of us between the physical and the mental, the blood and the spirit. The mind is 'ashamed' of the blood. And the blood is destroyed by the mind."³⁷ Kate's struggle is an internal one, between the blood and the spirit, the two halves of her soul. Lawrence says that if one "wants to be free, one must give up the illusion of doing what one likes, and seek what IT wishes done."³⁸ The IT refers to

³⁵Ibid., p. 486.

³⁶Ibid., p. 487.

³⁷D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: Seltzer, 1923; reprint ed., New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 92.

³⁸Ibid., p. 13.

the "deepest self" as opposed to the conscious self. Kate cannot comply with what her deepest self wishes done without a struggle, and this is the cause of her vacillation.

Cavitch believes that Kate's recognition that Ramon and Cipriano "seemed nothing but men" is indicative of the failure of the symbolic elements in the novel to assert their meaning for the reader.³⁹

She appears in the last chapters not as Malintzi but as a middle-aged woman fearful of loneliness, appreciative of calm, occasional sex, and connected to Mexico by love for both her husband and Ramon—who is represented in the Quetzalcoatl myth as a young god born from the principle of their marriage. In the conclusion of the narrative, Kate is reinstated with a husband whom this time does not abandon her for another. In Ramon she is given a mature son similar to her former boy-husband Leslie.⁴⁰

Cavitch's interpretation is incorrect; Kate clearly desired Ramon above her "demon lover" husband. Freeman says that Kate is left under the spell of Cipriano;⁴¹ but this is not so. Kate is incapable of complete surrender. When she dresses for the ritual marriage ceremony, she reads Ramon's note: "Leave no thread nor thing that can touch you from the past."⁴² "But she wanted a belt. She tied a piece of ribbon round her waist."⁴³

Cipriano is also an allegorical character; he represents the "dark blood" or primitive consciousness. He seems to be much closer to

³⁹David Cavitch, D. H. Lawrence and the New World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 186.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 188.

⁴¹Freeman, p. 186.

⁴²Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 361.

⁴³Ibid., p. 363.

psychic balance than is Kate. He needs only to "let General Viedma [to] be swallowed up in the red Huitzilopochtli,⁴⁴ and to unite with Kate. The purpose of having General Viedma swallowed up in the red Huitzilopochtli is to reduce Cipriano's dependence upon Ramon and to enable him to enter into the perfect unconsciousness, "within the womb of undisturbed creation."⁴⁵ Cipriano is needed by the Church of Quetzalcoatl as a god, not as a general. His need to unite with Kate illustrates another element of Lawrence philosophy.

When a man approaches the beginning of maturity and the fulfillment of his individual self, about the age of thirty-five, then is not his time to come to rest. On the contrary. Deeply fulfilled through marriage, and at one with his own soul, he must now undertake the responsibility for the next step into the future. He must now give himself perfectly to some further purpose, some passionate purposive activity.⁴⁶

Cipriano must have Kate if he is to find fulfillment in some purposive activity. "Marry me, and help Ramon and me. We need a woman, Ramon says, to be with us."⁴⁷ Cipriano's invoking of Ramon indicates that he is not totally cognizant of what he needs. We should note that Cipriano does not court Kate in the western, romantic manner. "He would never woo."⁴⁸ He continues to seek Kate's hand even after she tells him that she will soon leave Mexico. That Cipriano does find fulfillment through his union with Kate is shown as she watches her husband bathe in the

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 402.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 404.

⁴⁶Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, p. 124.

⁴⁷Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 259.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 342.

ocean. Lawrence is careful to point out that the sun was too high in the sky to shine red, but "he was red as fire, as a piece of pure fire."⁴⁹ Cipriano is seen as one of the Sons of the Morning, a column of blood, and as a Red Indian; he has become godlike.

Although Cipriano is a Red Indian, we should not make the assumption that he symbolizes Lawrence's belief that we should turn to primitivism for wholeness.

We can't go back. We can't go back to the savages: not a stride. We can be in sympathy with them. We can take a great curve in their direction, onwards. But we cannot turn the current of our life backwards, back towards their soft warm twilight and uncreate mud. Not for a moment.⁵⁰

That "we cannot turn the current of our life backwards" is borne out in the novel.

Do not look with the eyes of yesterday, nor like yesterday listen, nor breathe, nor smell, nor taste, nor swallow food and drink. Do not kiss with the mouths of yesterday, nor touch with the hands, nor walk with yesterday's feet. And let your navel know nothing of yesterday, and go into your women with a new body, enter the new body in her.⁵¹

If the pendulum is allowed to swing too far in the direction of the sensual, the human psyche will become unbalanced and this condition will lead to the state of hopelessness from which Ramon is attempting to lead his people.

Ramon is not as fully developed as are Kate and Cipriano because his struggle for psychic balance has been successfully completed before the novel opens. There is no need to develop him further because he is

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 465.

⁵⁰Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 145.

⁵¹Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 220.

at the point of Laurentian perfection, and it would be impossible for him to experience further growth. Also, if too much attention were given to Ramon, it might have the effect of distracting the reader away from Kate and her struggle. During the tea party which occurs early in the novel, Ramon tells Kate that he had suffered from "would-be-cocksure religion" and that he is nauseated by the human will.⁵² "Kate listened in silence. She knew the road he had gone, but she herself had not come to the end of it."⁵³ Later, after Kate had crossed the lake, she sits with Ramon as he silently considers his past and his present life.

Ramon knew what it was to gnash at his leashes. He had gnashed himself almost to pieces, before he had found the way to pass out in himself, in the quick of himself, to the Quick of all being and existence, which he called the Morning Star, since men must give all things names. To pass in the quick of himself, with transfiguration, to the Morning Star, and there, there alone meet his fellow man.⁵⁴

As an ideal man, Ramon immediately recognizes the change that occurred in Kate as a result of the attempt upon his life. "She had the face of one waking from the dead, curiously dipped in death, with a tenderness far more new and vulnerable than a child's."⁵⁵ Only Ramon can tell Kate, with authority, that despite the bullets and the knives with which she now associates Mexico: "Don't go away. You will find nothing in England."⁵⁶

⁵²Ibid., p. 78.

⁵³Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 277-78.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 343.

⁵⁶Ibid.

Among the other characters in The Plumed Serpent is Carlota, Ramon's first wife. Her life is an object lesson in Christian idealism: it leads to automatism, mechanism, and nullity.⁵⁷ During their first meeting, Kate recognizes that Carlota is "an intense, almost exalted Catholic."⁵⁸ Carlota's Christian idealism causes her at one point to accuse Ramon of the sin of pride. "Don't you think it was just against this danger that Christ came, to teach men a proper humility?"⁵⁹ It is not coincidental that Carlota dies as the once Christian church is reconsecrated to Quetzalcoatl; her death suggests the final result of idealism.

Carlota enters the church, interrupts the service, and after asking Jesus to kill Ramon in order that his soul may live, suffers a seizure, collapses, and is taken to a nearby hotel, where she later dies. "The doctor came hastening, and the priest came after a while. Neither could do anything."⁶⁰ Carlota had turned their two sons against Ramon and after her funeral they express their hatred of him. "Thou hast killed our mother, and we shall kill you. When we are men we ought to kill thee."⁶¹ Ramon asks his sons what they wish to do with their lives; one would be a doctor and the other a priest.⁶² Lawrence had

⁵⁷Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, p. 130.

⁵⁸Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, p. 172.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 181.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 383.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 389.

⁶²Ibid., p. 390.

little faith in the efficacy of medical doctors, possibly because they could do nothing to halt the progress of his illness.

Lawrence believed that Christianity with its doctrine of "faked love" and its neglect of the body had produced the unhealthy growth of the cerebral or ideal consciousness which was responsible for the spiritual sickness of modern industrial democracy.⁶³

One son would treat the body and the other would treat the soul; but "neither could do anything." This is the legacy of the ideal Christian consciousness.

It would not be correct to see Kate's failure to embrace fully the new religion as a manifestation of Lawrence's self doubts, and Kate's failure should not be viewed as the novel's failure. A critical evaluation of the work should take into account how the characters act in accordance with Lawrence's philosophy; it should not be a critique of the philosophy. The yielding of one's sense of individuality is not the task of a moment, and Kate should not be expected to yield without a struggle. Clark says, "Lawrence not only created a religion on his own terms, as a novelist may, but also a context in which to put it, his own aboriginal land, which he calls Mexico."⁶⁴ The triumph of The Plumed Serpent is that Lawrence has combined his knowledge of Mexico's past, his impressions and experiences in that country, and his mystical philosophy; and with these he has created a living world.

Lawrence calls the novel a book of life, a book from which we can develop an instinct for life.

⁶³de Sola Pinto, p. 38.

⁶⁴Clark, Dark Night of the Body, p. 78.

But in the novel you can see, plainly, when the man goes dead, the woman goes inert. You can develop an instinct for life, if you will, instead of a theory of right and wrong, good and bad.⁶⁵

Lawrence says that "the only thing that ever avails is the living adventurous spark in the souls of men."⁶⁶ Kate's quest for wholeness is an adventure, and as long as she can retain the "living adventurous spark," she will continue to live. The D. H. Lawrence who emerges as the creator of The Plumed Serpent becomes, as we have seen, far less dogmatic than critics have seen him to be. He becomes, like Kate, a person whose quest for wholeness invites us to embark upon a similar adventure.

⁶⁵Lawrence, Phoenix, p. 538.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 733.

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VITA

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