1969

Blood-knowledge and The plumed serpent

Steven Mark Schwartz

BLOOD-KNOWLEDGE AND THE PLUMED SERPENT

BY

STEVEN MARK SCHWARTZ

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

AUGUST 1969

Approved for the Department of English
and the Graduate School by

John C. Boggs, Jr.

Director of Thesis

William B. Guthrie

Chairman of English Department

Edward Pope

Dean of the Graduate School

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I:

THE CONCEPT OF BLOOD-KNOWLEDGE

The intent of this paper is to study D. H. Lawrence's theme of blood-knowledge as it is found in a selection of his fictional works. The most outstanding work which concerns itself with this theme is The Plumed Serpent, a novel which centers around the re-birth of the ancient Mexican religion of Quetzalcoatl. Begun by Lawrence while he was in Oaxaca, Mexico, near Lake Chapala, in late 1923, The Plumed Serpent was first published in 1926. In speaking of the book, Lawrence, in a letter to Curtis Brown dated 23 June, 1925, said "I consider this my most important novel, so far."[1] Labeling a work "most important," even when the labeling is done by the author himself, is risky. Still, there are substantial qualities in this book which would justify such a statement. Almost every facet of blood-knowledge is found in The Plumed Serpent--such as the concept of the god-in-man, a concept Lawrence used to express the in-born power found in some men, and the concept of blood-ties with the past, ties which cannot be erased

---

[1] D. H. Lawrence, The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. by Aldous Huxley (New York: The Viking Press, 1932), p. 645.

by the advance of civilization.

But these two aspects make up only a part of the total blood-knowledge theme. It would appear, therefore, that this concept is a multi-faceted one, finding expression through more than one idea. To provide greater understanding to the entire theory I have chosen three works which each illuminate an aspect of the blood-knowledge theme. These shorter works are St. Mawr (1925), The Virgin and the Gipsy (1930) and "The Man Who Died" (1929). The concepts of blood-knowledge found in each of these works leads to a discussion of the more complex Plumed Serpent, since each of the shorter works presents a different aspect of the total philosophy.

Just as a discussion of the total blood-knowledge theory is supported by a recognition of some of its individual aspects, an examination of the terms used in conjunction with these aspects will also be helpful. Terms such as mind, will, knowledge and even blood have special relationships which must be established. In one work in particular, Studies in Classic American Literature (1923), Lawrence uses these terms in such a way as they can be used as a basis for the theory of blood-knowledge. In his essay on Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example, Lawrence uses the term blood-knowledge to describe his idea of the relationship that existed between Adam and Eve before their fall.

> In the first place, Adam knew Eve as a wild animal knows its mate, momentaneously, but vitally, in blood-knowledge. Blood-knowledge, not mind-knowledge. Blood-knowledge, that seems utterly to forget, but doesn't. Blood-knowledge, instinct, intuition, all

> the vast vital flux of knowing that goes on in the dark, antecedent to the mind. [2]

In this passage blood-knowledge would exemplify that which is felt, or intuitively known. Its antithesis is mind-knowledge. Mind-knowledge no longer uses the intuitive senses, but rather depends on cerebral understanding. Such an understanding, Lawrence argues, can take the vitality out of any act. In his essay on Edgar Allen Poe Lawrence presents one of his most explicit arguments against the knowledge of the mind.

> It is easy to see why each man kills the thing he loves. To know a living thing is to kill it. You have to kill a thing to know it satisfactorily. For this reason, the desirous consciousness, the SPIRIT, is a vampire.
>
> One should be sufficiently intelligent and interested to know a good deal about any person one comes into close contact with. About her. Or about him.
>
> But to try to know any living being is to try to suck the life out of that being.
>
> Above all things, with the woman one loves. Every sacred instinct teaches one that one must leave her unknown. You know your woman darkly, in the blood. To try to know her mentally is to try to kill her....
>
> Man does so horribly want to master the secret of life and of

---

[2] D. H. Lawrence, "Hawthorne and The Scarlet Letter," in Studies in Classic American Literature (London: Martin Secker, Ltd., 1924), p. 86.

> individuality with his mind. It is like the analysis of protoplasm. You can only analyse dead protoplasm, and know its constituents. It is a death process. [3]

Besides making a distinction between the knowledge of the mind and that of the blood, Lawrence showed that there existed a conflict between the two. In his essay on Hawthorne he wrote, "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, actually."[4]

But Lawrence did not feel that man could or should live with only one "brand" of knowledge--mental or intuitive. What he did feel, however, was that blood-knowledge was being sacrificed for the advancement of mind-knowledge. One critic expressed this concept when he said that Lawrence "felt that civilization had gone too far in the direction of cerebral activity and needed a strong dose of its opposite to help restore the balance."[5] According to Lawrence, however, this strong dose was not being administered. In fact he felt that

---

[3] D. H. Lawrence, "Edgar Allen Poe," in Studies in Classic American Literature, pp. 72-73.

[4] D. H. Lawrence, "Hawthorne and The Scarlet Letter," p. 88.

[5] Harry T. Moore, The Life and Works of D. H. Lawrence (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1951), p. 237.

the exact opposite was happening, and that the forces of the mind were trying to destroy, utterly, the potent blood-life. His interpretation of Melville's Moby Dick reflects this belief.

> What then is Moby Dick? He is the deepest blood-being of the white race; he is our deepest blood-nature.
>
> And he is hunted, hunted, hunted by the maniacal fanaticism of our white mental consciousness. We want to hunt him down. To subject him to our will. And in this maniacal conscious hunt of ourselves we get dark races and pale to help us, red, yellow, and black, east and west, Quaker and fire-worshipper, we get them all to help us in this ghastly maniacal hunt which is our doom and our suicide. [6]
>
> The last phallic being of the white man. Hunted into the death of upper-consciousness and the ideal will. Our blood-self subjected to our will. Our blood-consciousness sapped by a parasitic mental or ideal consciousness.
>
> Hot-blooded sea-born Moby Dick. Hunted by the monomaniacs of the idea. [7]

In this passage the term will is used as if interchangeable with the word mind. The two words have connotations

---

[6] The different races that Lawrence speaks of in this passage refer to the three harpooners of the Pequod: Queequeg, the South Seas Islander; Tashtego, the Red Indian; and Daggoo, the Negro.

[7] D. H. Lawrence, "Herman Melville's Moby Dick," in Studies in Classic American Literature, pp. 160-161.

which are alike, connotations which make them the antithesis of blood-knowledge. The uses of these terms in Lawrence's works are exceedingly different from the uses they generally have. Such usage points to one of the romantic qualities that Lawrence portrays: the utilization of ordinary language to make itself manifest in extraordinary ideas. The terms mind and will, for instance, stand for characteristics that are opposed to the entire concept of blood-knowledge. In the short novel The Virgin and the Gipsy, for example, Lawrence presents a character, the Mater, whose grotesque personality is emblematic of the will she exerts over her family: "The will, the ancient, toad-like obscene will in the old woman, was fearful, once you saw it: a toad-like self-will that was godless, and less than human! It belonged to the old, enduring race of toads, or tortoises."[8]

In still another short novel, St. Mawr, the will is seen as the active manifestation of mind-knowledge. Rico, for example, tries to ride the stallion by sheer force of will. He tries, in other words, to manipulate the animal instincts of the horse by the force of his own mind.

The confrontation between blood-knowledge and will is one of the central themes in St. Mawr. Because the two factors are set one against another they both remain explicit

---

[8] D. H. Lawrence, The Virgin and the Gipsy (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 96.

enough where a discussion of their usage in the novel can be used as groundwork for further discussion of the blood-knowledge theory.

While the conflict of blood-knowledge and mind-knowledge in St. Mawr is generated between the stallion and Rico, the character employed to express this conflict is Lou Carrington, the twenty-five year old wife of Rico. It is Lou, who, through her discovery of the potent forces of the blood, is made to feel the lifelessness of a society characterized by an over-extension of the mind. The first traces of the mind are found in Lou's marriage. The relationship she has with Rico is based on nerves,[9] and this connection between the two is destructive.

> Lou and Rico had a curious exhausting effect on one another: neither knew why. They were fond of one another. Some inscrutable bond held them together. But it was a strange vibration of the nerves, rather than of the blood. A nervous attachment, rather than a sexual love. A curious tension of will, rather than a spontaneous passion. Each was curiously under the domination of the other. They were a pair--they had to be together. Yet quite soon they shrank from one another. This attachment of the will and the nerves was destructive. As soon as one felt strong,

---

[9] The idea of nerves as seen in the quoted passage exemplifies something which is anti-blood. Nerves, as Lawrence speaks of them, are found in every man and woman. But an over-extension of them, as found in Lou's marriage, is destructive.

> the other felt ill. As soon as the ill one recovered strength, down went the one who had been well. [10]

Through her marriage Lou feels the lifelessness of her husband. Rico is presented as being totally disconnected from the world of nature--totally unaware of the deep, potent forces of life. Rico, Lawrence writes, travels around Europe "being an artist." (p. 4) His "being an artist," F. R. Leavis suggests, is a manifestation of Rico's ability to see only surface, superficial traits.[11] His first view of St. Mawr, the magnificent stallion which his wife bought, instills in Rico none of the fire and passion with which his wife first gazed on the animal. Instead, he sees the stallion only as a useable subject for a painting: "'He'd be marvellous in a composition. That colour!' And all Rico could do was to gaze with the artist's eye at the horse, with a glance at the groom." (p. 17) Not the eye of a man does Rico use, but the eye of the artist. The bright red-gold of the horse was to the painter just another color, and not an indication of the fire which lay beneath the skin.

The groom whom Rico noticed was Lewis, the Welshman who went with St. Mawr. It is through the groom's eyes that

---

[10] D. H. Lawrence, St. Mawr and The Man Who Died (New York: Vintage Books, 1953), p. 6.

[11] F. R. Leavis, D. H. Lawrence: Novelist (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 284.

we get the most distinct picture of Rico.

> Lewis turned his remote, coldly watchful eyes on the young baronet. Rico was tall and handsome and balanced on his hips. His face was long and well-defined, and with the hair taken straight back from the brow. It seemed as well-made as his clothing, and as perpetually presentable. You could not imagine his face dirty, or scrubby and unshaven, or bearded, or even moustached. It was perfectly prepared for social purposes. If his head had been cut off, like John the Baptist's, it would have been a thing complete in itself, would not have missed the body in the least. (p. 18)

Rico represents a head, a mind without a body. Others like him are found throughout Lawrence's works. There is Francis of Aaron's Rod (1922), the artist-intellectual of the nineteen-twenties; and there is Clifford Chatterly, also an artist, whose paralysis is emblematic of his bodilessness. These men represent a lack of emotional vitality, of blood-knowledge. They can be symbolized as living only by their minds because the forces of physical passions are almost non-existent in them. The physical passions spoken of here are not so much of a lustful nature, but rather are a deep-felt reverence for the physical being. Lawrence made more explicit his reverence for the physical being in his essay on Walt Whitman. And while he found a great deal to criticize in that poet, Lawrence applauded Whitman's attempts to put the soul of man not in the mind, but in the flesh.

"There!" he said to the soul.

> "Stay there!"
> Stay there. Stay in the flesh. Stay in the limbs and lips and in the belly. Stay in the breast and womb. Stay there, Oh Soul, where you belong.
> Stay in the dark limbs of Negroes. Stay in the body of the prostitute. Stay in the sick flesh of the syphilitic. Stay in the marsh where the calamus grows. Stay there, Soul, where you belong. [12]

In the novel, the physically-based soul is symbolized by St. Mawr. It is through the animal that Lou is first made aware of the distinction between blood-knowledge and mind-consciousness. When Lou looks at the horse for the first time, she is almost immediately overcome with an awareness of the animal's primitive power. The horse, she is told, is very wild--even to the point of destruction. It had been responsible for the deaths of two men. Still, there is <u>something</u> in the touch of the animal which fascinates the woman. "She paused, as if thinking, while her hand rested on the horse's sun-arched neck. Dimly, in her weary young-woman's soul, an ancient understanding seemed to flood in." (p. 13)

This "ancient understanding" is more than a sense of history brought out by the horse's power; it is more even than a sense of hot-blooded life running through the stallion's veins. Rather, it is a sense of potency which only a direct link with a god can deliver. In his book-length essay

---

[12] D. H. Lawrence, "Whitman," in <u>Studies in Classic American Literature</u>, pp. 170-171.

Apocalypse (1931), Lawrence explained more explicitly the chain of connection between man and the god-in-horses.

> Horses, always horses! How the horse dominated the mind of the early races, especially of the Mediterranean! You were a lord if you had a horse. Far back, far back in our dark soul the horse prances. He is a dominant symbol: he gives us lordship: he links us, the first palpable and throbbing link with the ruddy-glowing Almighty of potence: he is the beginning even of our god-head in the flesh. And as a symbol he roams the dark underworld meadows of the soul. [13]

In the blood-knowledge theory the horse represents a life of passion and of affinity with the natural world--two qualities which must be felt in the blood. In the novel, the horse represents various levels of blood-knowledge. Generally speaking, he is seen as that force which confronts the mind-knowledge which predominates in modern society. This is especially seen through St. Mawr's confrontations with Rico.[14]

Besides a foil to Rico, St. Mawr acts as a representative

---

[13] D. H. Lawrence, Apocalypse (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), p. 97.

[14] The scene in the novel which brings the two antagonists into their most dramatic conflict occurs when the horse, seeing a recently dead adder, begins to rear. Rico, not realizing that St. Mawr's action is a defense mechanism against a natural danger (the snake), tries to control him. The result is that the horse falls backwards, injuring Rico.

This action would exemplify the will trying to dominate the natural instincts of the animal.

of a new life-force--a life-force which is characterized by vitality and potency. By coming into contact with the intense life-force that St. Mawr radiates, Lou feels that her existence depends on somehow finding her own expression of the same powers. She tells her mother "I want the wonder back again, or I shall die." (p. 50)

What exactly "the wonder" is that Lou wants back is never made explicit in the story, though at one point in his writing Lawrence calls it "the one universal element in consciousness which is fundamental to life...."[15] In his essay "Hymns in a Man's Life," he speaks of wonder in terms which make it a definite facet of blood-knowledge.

> We say again: Familiarity breeds contempt. So that as we grow older, and become more familiar with phenomena, we become more contemptuous of them. But that is only partly true. It has taken some races of men thousands of years to become contemptuous of the moon, and to the Hindu the cow is still wondrous. It is not familiarity that breeds contempt: it is the assumption of knowledge.[16]

The assumption of knowledge, the predominance of mind over emotion, kills the wonder that is found in life. What St. Mawr represents is an aspect of life which can never be

---

[15] D. H. Lawrence, "Hymns in a Man's Life," in Selected Literary Criticism, ed. by Anthony Beal (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 8.

[16] Ibid., p. 7.

known by the mind or conquered by the will. He represents that part of life which must remain a mystery and a wonder--that which is felt, but never known. This quality which Lou is very quick to recognize in the stallion suggests to her the potent "maleness" which she feels most men of her age are lacking. She tells her mother:

> 'We call him an animal, but we never know what it means. He seems a far greater mystery to me than a clever man. He's a horse. Why can't one say in the same way, of a man: He's a man? There seems no mystery in being a man. But there's a terrible mystery in St. Mawr.' (p. 48)

The qualities of maleness presented in this work find expression in The Plumed Serpent, especially in the character of Don Cipriano. And they are also seen in the short novel The Virgin and the Gipsy. In this work Lawrence creates a character whose maleness is recognized on two levels--the sexual and the natural. As in St. Mawr, the person making the discovery of the forces of blood-knowledge is a young woman. Yvette, the nineteen year-old daughter of a rector, becomes aware of the potent forces of the male through her acquaintance with a handsome young gipsy.

The impression that the gipsy makes on Yvette is given more impetus by the lifeless surroundings she exists in. Her family, at whose head is the old, sightless and sinister Mater, is characterized throughout the novel by stuffiness and decay. And Yvette's friends, like those of Lou Carrington, appear as pale imitations of real men and women. For the young men

especially she feels a repulsion. She notices in them a lack of masculinity which is characterized by their effeminate elegance.

> She looked at the young men dancing, elbows out, hips prominent, waists elegantly in .... Yet she did particularly dislike the forced elegance of the waists and the prominent hips, over which the well-tailored coats hung with such effeminate discretion. (p. 62)

The effect of these men on Yvette was offset by the effect of the gipsy. As St. Mawr did to Lou, this gipsy had a mysterious effect on Yvette, and made the rest of society look superficial in comparison to him.

> He looked at Yvette as he passed, staring her full in the eyes, with his pariah's bold yet dishonest stare. Something hard inside her met his stare. But the surface of her body seemed to turn to water. Nevertheless, something hard in her registered the peculiar pure lines of his face, of his straight, pure nose, of his cheeks and temples. The curious dark, suave purity of all his body, outlined in the green jersey .... (p. 32)

That the emphasis on the gipsy's body in this passage suggests his effect on the girl is sexual, or at least sensual, proves to be true. Yvette comes to realize that the gipsy conveys a great desire for her, a desire which is much more powerful than the sexual appetite her young men display towards her.

Sexuality, however, is not the only aspect of the gipsy's maleness. He is also shown as a man closely in tune with the

forces of nature. When the gipsy is first seen, for example, he is riding in a horse-drawn wagon while Yvette and her friends come up behind him in a car. The distinction between the mechanical and the natural forces in this scene is more than a distinction between a wagon and an automobile. On the one hand there are connotations of a natural order, while on the other a suggestion of artificiality. In addition, Yvette is told that during the war the gipsy worked with horses. The idea of the man working with animals is similar to Lewis' influence over St. Mawr. In both cases it suggests men who share the same instincts that are found in the animal world--instincts of the blood, and instincts which enable the men to enjoy a close affinity with the natural world. In an essay on Lawrence, one critic emphasizes the role of blood-knowledge to the natural world by suggesting that blood-knowledge, the celebration of the whole man, would bring about a balance in life. It would help the natural forces against the mechanical.[17]

Another expression of the gipsy's character is the aura of religious mystery which surrounds him. At one point, Yvette is told by his former army commander that the gipsy "nearly died of pneumonia. I thought he was dead. He's a resurrected man to me."(p. 88)

---

[17] Harry T. Moore, The Intelligent Heart: The Life of D. H. Lawrence (New York: The Grove Press, Inc., 1962), p. 539.

His being a resurrected man points to the god-like qualities of the gipsy: qualities such as mystery, potency and aloofness. The god-in-man aspect of blood-knowledge is illustrated not only in The Virgin and the Gipsy, but in other writings of Lawrence as well, including The Plumed Serpent. The characters who attain the god-in-man qualities do not undergo a supernatural transformation from men to deities. Nor are they endowed with any miraculous physical powers. Rather, a Lawrencian god is a man who obeys the inner voices of his own soul-- who abides by the forces of blood-knowledge that are inherent in him.[18]

---

[18] In a letter to Ernest Collings dated 17 January, 1913, Lawrence wrote of blood-knowledge and its relationship to an individual. The letter is one of the first statements on the concept of blood-knowledge, and the need of men to abide by their own desires is stressed. "My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true. The intellect is only a bit and a bridle. What do I care about knowledge. All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without fribbling intervention of mind, or moral, or what-not. I conceive a man's body as a kind of flame, like a candle flame, forever upright and yet flowing: and the intellect is just the light that is shed on to the things around. And I am not so much concerned with the things around--which is really mind--but with the mystery of the flame forever flowing, coming God knows how from out of practically nowhere, and being itself, whatever there is around it, that it lights up. We have got so ridiculously mindful, that we never know that we ourselves are anything--we think there are only the objects we shine upon. And there the poor flame goes on burning ignored, to produce this light. And instead of chasing the mystery in the fugitive, half-lighted things outside us, we ought to look at ourselves, and say 'My God, I am myself!' ..." "The real way of living is to answer to one's wants. Not 'I want to light up with my intelligence as many things as possible' but 'For the living of my full flame--I want that liberty, I want that woman, I want that pound of peaches, I want to go to sleep, I want to

In another work, "The Man Who Died," Lawrence presents Christ as a god-like hero who is resurrected not as a spirit, but as a living man. And this living man becomes a prime example of the god-in-man concept which is later recognized in the main characters of The Plumed Serpent.

The man who died reflects a superiority which is a result of his godliness. In a passage from "Fenimore Cooper's White Novels," Lawrence made more explicit the superiority which some men hold.

> I feel I'm the superior of most men I meet. Not in birth, because I never had a great-grandfather. Not in money, because I've got none. Not in education, because I'm merely scrappy. And certainly not in beauty or in manly strength.
>
> Well, what then?
>
> Just in myself.
>
> When I'm challenged, I do feel myself superior to most of the men I meet. Just a natural superiority. [19]

This superiority, as reflected in Christ, is a manifestation of still another concept of blood-knowledge--a reverence for the cosmic forces. In this story the man who died gets the first seeds of his will to live from the sun. While laying in the peasant's courtyard, he sees the sun as a cosmic

---

go to the pub and have a good time, I want to look abeastly swell today ....' Instead of that, all these wants, which are there whether-or-not, are utterly ignored, and we talk about some sort of ideas." (Letters, pp. 96-97)

[19] D. H. Lawrence, "Fenimore Cooper's White Novels," in Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 49.

power capable of instilling life and vitality.

Seeing the cosmic world as an awe-inspiring and life-giving entity is a basic concept of blood-knowledge, perhaps so because at one time the sun and stars were seen as deities--mysterious and most powerful:

> I would like to know the stars again as the Chaldeans knew them, two thousand years before Christ. ... The human consciousness is really homogeneous. There is no complete forgetting, even in death. So that somewhere within us the old experience of the Euphrates, Mesopotamia between the rivers, lives still. And in my Mesopotamian self I long for the sun again, and the moon and stars, for the Chaldean sun and the Chaldean stars. I long for them terribly. Because our sun and our moon are only thought-forms to us, balls of gas, dead globes of extinct volcanoes, things we know but never feel by experience. By experience, we should feel the sun as the savages feel him, we should " know" him as the Chaldeans knew him, in a terrific embrace. [20]

In this passage Lawrence places an emphasis on the cosmic forces, an emphasis which is reflected in The Plumed Serpent. In that novel the Earth especially is seen as a powerful and awesome being. But the concept of looking at the cosmic forces as life-giving entities is only one facet of blood-knowledge shared by the stories discussed and The

---

[20] D. H. Lawrence, "Intorduction to The Dragon of the Apocalypse," in Selected Literary Criticism, pp. 160-161.

Plumed Serpent. Another is the concept of the god-in-man, which is one of the main themes of "The Man Who Died," and which is also illustrated in the novel, especially through the characters of Don Ramón and Don Cipriano. The godliness that these characters represent is reflected not only in their actions and dialogue, but also in the standing they assume throughout the novel--as gods in the pantheon of Quetzalcoatl.

The maleness which is seen in The Virgin and the Gipsy finds expression in Don Cipriano in The Plumed Serpent. The general, through his relationship with Kate, shows a sensual maleness very much like the gipsy's in that character's affair with Yvette. Also, in connection with his soldiers, the general portrays a manhood characterized by growing strength and inner potency--two qualities of blood-knowledge.

The concepts of the blood-knowledge theory as they are found in St. Mawr are also seen in The Plumed Serpent. The same traits which are discovered by Lou through her stallion are discovered by Kate through her acquaintance with the Men of Quetzalcoatl and with Mexico. Furthermore, the facets of blood-knowledge are, in the novel, presented in conjunction with the main topic--the religion of Quetzalcoatl.

PART II:

BLOOD-KNOWLEDGE IN THE PLUMED SERPENT

CHAPTER I: QUETZALCOATL AND CHRISTIANITY

The religion of Quetzalcoatl, the religion of worshipping the ancient Aztec and Toltec gods, is brought to Mexico by Don Ramón Carrasco. By re-establishing the ancient gods, Don Ramón tries to give the Mexicans a religion with which they can associate--a religion which they could feel in their blood. Like the sun and stars were to the ancient Chaldeans, Don Ramón wants for his people a religion which is more than simply a "thought-form." (Above, p. 18)

In presenting the ancient religion, Lawrence sets it up in opposition to Christianity. Throughout the novel Christianity is presented as a religion which has been imposed on the Mexicans from without. It is presented as a religion of the white races which cannot make itself potent to the Mexicans, the descendents of Montezuma. In one of his essays printed in Phoenix, Lawrence contended that the religious and ethical codes of the European had no place in Mexico; rather, he felt that the people in the new world would have to turn to their own heritage in order to instill in themselves a more profound life.

> A great and lovely life-form, unperfected, fell with Montezuma. The responsibility for the producing and the perfecting of this life-form devolves upon the new American. It is time he accepted the full responsibility. It means a surpassing of the old European life-form. It means a departure from the old European morality, ethic. It means even a departure from the old range of emotions and sensibilities.... Montezuma had other emotions, such as we have not known or admitted. We must start from Montezuma, not from St. Francis or St. Bernard. [21]

The Mexicans with which Lawrence opens the novel have no awareness of the "emotions and sensibilities" which they possess--which are in their blood and which are part of their heritage. These people are portrayed as a degenerate people, described by Lawrence as "lost mongrels."[22] The most devastating attack on this society is presented in the scenes of the bull-fight. The Mexican men, in their skin-tight silk trousers, and the Mexican women, whose whitened skin shows an excess of face-powder, appear to Kate as a degenerate mob. The fights they came to see are nauseating; but as revolting and physically upsetting as the gore of the sport may be, it

---

[21] D. H. Lawrence, "America, Listen to Your Own," in Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence, ed. by Edward D. McDonald (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), p. 91.

[22] D. H. Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), p. 8.

is just as important to notice the sickening pleasure with which the crowd attends:

> Down went the horse, collapsing in front, but his rear was still heaved up, with the bull's horn working vigorously up and down inside him, while he lay on his neck all twisted. And a huge heap of bowels coming out. And a nauseous stench. And the cries of pleased amusement among the crowd. (p. 16)

The classing together of the bowels, stench and amused crowd is a nauseating comment on the people of the city. Kate is further disgusted by the Mexican women she sees in the crowd: "These fat mammas had a pleased, excited look in their eyes, almost sexual, and very distasteful in contrast to their soft passive bodies." (p. 18)

The "almost sexual" look in the eyes of the women gains a more significant poignancy, if not a more distasteful one, if the slow and rhythmic movements of the bull's horn inside the horse is symbolic of a most perverted sexual union.[23]

That Mexico City and most of its inhabitants are presented so revoltingly is an accurate comment on Lawrence's feelings towards mechanical, urban dwellings. A similar feeling was presented in The Virgin and the Gipsy, where the

---

[23] In his essay "Pornography and Obscenity," Lawrence described his idea of truly obscene people in terms which are indicative of the bull-fight spectators: "But in the degraded human being the deep instincts have gone dead, and then the two flows become identical. This is the secret of really vulgar and of pornographical people: the sex flow and the excrement flow is the same to them." (Selected Literary Criticism, p. 39)

gipsy's association with the natural world, with the horse rather than with the automobile, helped identify him as a character of blood-knowledge. (Above, p. 15) One critic has expressed Lawrence's dislike of cities by saying that "society, for Lawrence, is lame, sterile, and rationale; man finds vitality and fertility when he goes out from the city into Sherwood Forest, or when he embraces the primitive and sub-rationale."[24] The Sherwood Forest of The Plumed Serpent is the outlying region of Sayula and Jamiltepec. It is in this area, surrounding the spermy waters of the Lake of Sayula, that the ancient religion has its re-birth. And yet even this locale, like Mexico City, is in need of regeneration. The Indians who live here are characterized as heavy stones of obsidian, weighing down the spirit and the soul of everything around them.

> The Indians on the seats, they too watched the dancers for a while. Then they turned against them the heavy negation of indifference, like a stone on the spirit. The mysterious faculty of the Indians, as they sit there, so quiet and dense, for killing off any ebullient life, for quenching any light and colourful effervescence. (p. 126)

William York Tindall, in his introduction to The Plumed Serpent, has pointed out that the death-like indifference of the Indians was a result of the alien religion and politics

---

[24] H. L. Weatherby, "Old Fashioned Gods: Eliot on Lawrence and Hardy," Sewanee Review, LXXV (Spring, 1967), p. 312.

which left them unawakened.[25] The politics which the Indians were subjected to did nothing to put life into Mexico. The socialism which the new president, Montes, was embracing, could only be superficially beneficial to the country. Don Ramón very emphatically pointed this out to Cipriano when the general asked Ramón what he thought of the new administration.

> 'Politics, and all this social religion that Montes has got is like washing the outside of the egg, to make it look clean. But I, myself, I want to get inside the egg, right to the middle, to start it growing into a new bird. Ay! Cipriano! Mexico is like an old, old egg that the bird of Time laid long ago; and she has been sitting on it for centuries, till it looks foul in the nest of the world. But still, Cipriano, it is a good egg. It is not addled. Only the spark of fire has never gone into the middle of it, to start it.' (p. 210)

Just as the social religion could not penetrate the shell of Mexico, neither could the spiritual religion, Catholicism. Catholicism, to the Mexicans, is presented as a superficial discipline--an imposed order too separate from the life flow of the Indians to have any potent influence on them. It is made clear throughout the novel that Lawrence attacks not the church as such, but the church in Mexico. The ineffectivity of the church is shown by presenting Christianity as

---

[25] William York Tindall, "Introduction" to The Plumed Serpent, p. x.

something alien and out of place in the country. In one scene, for example, Kate, herself a Catholic, becomes aware that the ceremonials of the church, which were so elegant in Europe, appear in Mexico trashy and "just a cheap sort of charade." (p. 304) This observation, and others like it, indicate that Christianity, a religion significant to and made manifest by the white races, has no place in the hearts of the Mexicans, no meaning to the descendents of the Aztecs. In an essay first printed in Phoenix, Lawrence made more explicit his idea that the white culture has never gone into the soul of the new world.

> The great paleface overlay hasn't gone into the Mexican soil half an inch. The Spanish churches and palaces stagger, the most rickety things imaginable, always just on the point of falling down. And the peon still grins his Indian grin behind the cross. And there's quite a lively light in his eyes.... He knows his gods. [26]

But this religion, imposed on the Mexicans from without their own heritage, is not only ineffective, but destructive as well. By denying the people the vital life forces which they would have found in the Quetzalcoatl religion, Christianity left the soul, the inner man, disorganized and sloppy. An example of this is seen, again by Kate, during one of the holidays.

---

[26] D. H. Lawrence, "Au Revoir, U. S. A.," in Phoenix, p. 105.

> The day of Corpus Christi came, with high mass and the church full to the doors with kneeling peons, from dawn till noon. Then a feeble little procession of children within the church, because the law forbids religious processions outside. But all, somehow, for nothing. Just so that the people could call it a fiesta, and so have an excuse to be more slack, more sloshy and uncontrolled than ever. The one Mexican desire; to let themselves go in sloppy inertia.
>
> And this was the all-in-all of the religion. Instead of doing as it should, collecting the soul into its own strength and integrity, the religious day left it all the more decomposed and degenerate. (p. 304)

Lawrence adds to his comment on Christianity by using the character of Doña Carlota, Don Ramón's wife. As the outstanding personification of Christianity in the novel, and as a devout Catholic, Doña Carlota could look on the re-birth of the ancient religion only with scorn for its doctrines and fear for her husband's salvation. Like the rector's family in The Virgin and the Gipsy, Carlota's emotions are characterized not by the blood, nor by the instincts, but by the will. (Above, p. 6) And the love-by-will which she exerts over her husband and her sons seems to drain them of their vitality. Her love is the type that Lawrence wrote of in his essay on Poe--a vampire love. (Above, p. 3)

Carlota, who represents in Kate's words the "mental-spiritual world," is a parallel to the state of Christianity in Mexico. Basically, Carlota is a good woman, very much unlike the Mater in The Virgin and the Gipsy. Still, the half-Spanish, half-French Carlota, like the Catholicism she

represents, is left void of all blood-knowledge and potency. She is reduced to serving on charity works, which is the only expression her religion can take in the new world; and the charity works, as Lawrence pointed out in his essay on Thomas Hardy, are but a substitute for an individual's fulfilling himself. What he says of Clym Yeobright can also be said of Carlota:

> What is Clym's altruism but a deep, very subtle cowardice, that makes him shirk his own being whilst apparently acting nobly; which makes him choose to improve mankind rather than to struggle at the quick of himself into being. He is not able to undertake his own soul, so he will take a commission for society to enlighten the souls of others. [27]

Doña Carlota could not cope with the atmosphere in Mexico, an atmosphere, it will be seen, which is antagonistic to her religion. The woman was left, just before her death, as a convulsing heap, broken in spirit and body. Her antagonism, however, did not stop her husband from continuing his efforts in bringing to Mexico a new religion. The death of his wife, on the day the Men of Quetzalcoatl took over the church at Sayula, represents the beginning of the death of the foreign religion. The new religion, with its pantheon of gods, was on its way to becoming re-established in the land where it had once controlled the lives and destinies of millions of people.

---

[27] D. H. Lawrence, "Study of Thomas Hardy," in Selected Literary Criticism, p. 171.

CHAPTER II: THE RELIGION OF QUETZALCOATL

The religion of Quetzalcoatl is presented in the novel in three different aspects. It is seen as a religion of regeneration, hopefully trying to change the lives of the Mexicans from the degeneration seen in Mexico City to the revitalization seen under the leadership of Don Ramón. Also, the religion is reconciliatory, bridging a large number of opposites by the re-birth of the ancient beliefs. Third, the religion is seen as one to which the soul of Mexico can deeply respond, a religion which is a profound expression of the people to whom it applies.

Regeneration is one of the basic principles behind the religion of Quetzalcoatl as it was practiced by the ancient civilizations of Mexico. According to one myth, Quetzalcoatl is seen as a very old and benevolent ruler of the Toltec culture. Through sorcery he was defeated by other gods, and consequently forced to flee eastwards. The old god-king promised his followers he would return to them in the year Ce Acatl, or 1519 on the Christian calendar.[28]

---

[28] Ironically, this was the year that Cortés, sailing from the East, landed in Mexico. The conquistador was looked upon by Montezuma and his people as the returning Quetzalcoatl who had come back to claim his former empire.

What happened to the old god during his journey from the Toltecs varies from myth to myth; but in all cases he did undergo a regenerative process.[29] In the hymns written by Don Ramón, Quetzalcoatl was, when he was old, anointed with oil and laid to rest--to sleep the sleep of regeneration.

> 'Lastly, they anointed all my head with the oil that comes out of the darkness. Then they said: He is sealed up. Lay him away.
> 'So they laid me in the fountain that bubbles darkly at the heart of the worlds, far, far behind the sun, and there lay I, Quetzalcoatl, in warm oblivion. (p. 248)

After centuries of sleeping the god awoke, and found himself no longer old, but rather in the prime of life: "I said to myself: I am new man. I am younger than the young and older than the old. Lo! I am unfolded on the stem of time like a flower, I am at the midst of the flower of my manhood." (p. 249)

One example of the manifestation of regeneration in The Plumed Serpent is seen when Kate sees an Indian peon and a new born ass-foal. The scene exemplifies the regenerative Mexico, especially when put in contrast to the bull-fight at Mexico City. (Above, p. 22)

> 'How nice it is!' cried Kate in delight, and the peon laughed at her with a soft, grateful flame, touched with reverence.

---

[29] Alfonso Caso, The Aztecs: People of the Sun, trans. by Lowell Dunham (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), pp. 24-25.

> The ink-black ass-foal did not understand standing up. It rocked on its four loose legs, and wondered. Then it hobbled a few steps, to smell at some green, growing maize. It smelled and smelled and smelled, as if all the dark aeons were stirring awake in its nostrils. (p. 477)

The suggestions in this passage are of newness, growth and an awareness of life--an awareness not rationally known, but rather instinctively felt. Moreover, the peon Kate gazes on shows a nobility and significance that the "lost mongrels" of Mexico City know nothing of.

> Glancing up, Kate met again the peon's eyes, with their black, full flame of life heavy with knowledge and with a curious reassurance. The black foal, the mother, the drinking, the new life, the mystery of the shadowy battle-field of creation; and the adoration of the full-breasted, glorious woman beyond him: all this seemed in the primitive black eyes of the man. (p. 478)

The process of regeneration among the Mexicans basically points to a contrast of what their lives could be once they have an awareness of the primitive religion, and what their lives are without such an awareness. The religion, in effect, plays a role similar to St. Mawr's, where the natural and instinctive powers of the horse made Lou aware of blood-knowledge. But going a step further than the short story, Lawrence, in The Plumed Serpent, shows the religion also as a reconcilor, bridging the gap between a number of extremes.

As was true with regeneration, there are various myths concerning Quetzalcoatl in the role of a god of reconciliation.

In one legend, for example, when the old King Quetzalcoatl fled his Toltec empire he threw his body into a fire, and his spirit rose up from the flames to take its place as Venus, the morning star. In this respect the god serves as a link between night and day. The conception of the god as a bridge is reinforced since Venus is also the evening star, linking day and the ensuing night.[30] In his book Apocalypse, Lawrence, in talking of pre-Christian gods, considered the planet Venus as a major deity.

> The morning-star was always a god, from the time when gods began. But when the cult of dying and reborn gods started all over the old world, about 600 B. C., he became symbolic of the new god, because he rules in the twilight, between day and night, and for the same reason he is supposed to be lord of both, and to stand gleaming with one foot on the flood of night and one foot on the world of day, one foot on sea and one on shore.[31]

Within the novel the aspects of the religion as a reconcilor are seen on various levels. The symbol itself, for example, reconciles the eagle "out of the depths of the sky," with the serpent "out of the bowels of the earth." Also, the serpent, as Lawrence uses it, represents opposite concepts: the snake, symbol of the phallus, expressed in a circle, symbol of the womb.

---

[30] Ibid., p. 24.

[31] D. H. Lawrence, Apocalypse, p. 163.

On a more significant level the religion represents a meaningful union between men and women. The religion teaches that the souls of men and women are incomplete in themselves, gaining complete fulfillment only when they are in union with one another. Even then, however, they must retain an individuality and an isolation. At one point Don Ramón tells Kate that "men and women should know that they cannot, absolutely, meet on earth. In the closest kiss, the dearest touch, there is the small gulf which is none the less complete because it is so narrow, so nearly non-existent." (p. 277)

But through the religion, man and woman, though remaining "strangers" to each other, can become reconciled to each other. During their marriage ceremony, Kate and Cipriano are told by Ramón that their souls can meet in the morning star, the place in which "the dark of woman and the dawn of man" can mingle to completeness.

The concepts of reconciliation and regeneration as found in the religion help show how that religion gains its significance. What must next be considered is to see how the Mexican soul responds to the religion--to see if the religion is simply a political system "based on the sacrificial rite of an ancient cult of the 'dark god,'"[32] or if it is a deeper, more meaningful expression of the people to whom it offers a new way of life.

---

[32] Eugene Goodheart, The Utopian Vision of D. H. Lawrence (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 142.

A partial answer as to how the religion acts upon Mexico depends on an examination of the country itself. The spirit of Mexico, which is so heavily stressed throughout the novel, is only one example of Lawrence's use of a physical setting that strongly effects a society. In his essay on Hardy, speaking of The Return of the Native, he says "what is the real stuff of tragedy in the book? It is the Heath. It is the primitive, primal earth, where the instinctive life heaves up."[33] In an essay titled "Spirit of Place," Lawrence wrote a more general statement on the spirit of a physical locale.

> Every continent has its own great spirit of place. Every people is polarised in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality. The Nile valley produced not only the corn, but the terrific religions of Egypt. China produces the Chinese, and will go on doing so.[34]

The spirit of place is greatly emphasized by Lawrence, not only in essays, but in fictional works as well. One example of the spirit of a place is found in St. Mawr, where

---

[33] D.H. Lawrence, "Study of Thomas Hardy," in Selected Literary Criticism, p. 172.

[34] D. H. Lawrence, "Spirit of Place," in Selected Literary Criticism, p. 301.

the author devotes many passages to the spirit of the American Southwest, and how that spirit affects the inhabitants of the area. One such passage was used in describing the history of a ranch that Lou had bought.

> The pack-rats with their bushy tails and big ears came down out of the hills, and were jumping and bouncing about: symbols of the curious debasing malevolence that was in the spirit of the place. The Mexicans in charge, good honest men, worked all they could. But they were like most of the Mexicans in the South-west, as if they had been pithed, to use one of Kipling's words. As if the invidious malevolence of the country itself had slowly taken all the pith of manhood from them, leaving a hopeless sort of corpus of a man.
>
> And the same happened to the white men, exposed to the open country. Slowly, they were pithed. The energy went out of them, and more than that, the interest. An inertia of indifference invading the soul, leaving the body healthy and, active, but wasting the soul, the living interest, quite away. (St. Mawr, pp. 144-145)

The malevolence that Lawrence writes of in St. Mawr is also present in the rest of the Americas, Mexico, of course, included. Lawrence sensed that the land, and the spirit behind the land, was especially destructive to the white races, who tried with all their energy to civilize the country. In his essay on James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, Lawrence wrote that "the American landscape has never been at one with the white man. Never. And white men have probably never felt so bitter anywhere, as here in America, where the very landscape, in its very beauty, seems a bit devilish and

grinning, opposed to us."[35]

In The Plumed Serpent Lawrence goes to great efforts to present, usually through Kate, the spirit of Mexico. To her the country is heavy with gloom, and she thinks of the spirit of the land as a huge serpent that is heavy, oppressive and down-grading. Also, the twin mountains of Mexico, Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, seemed to emit their own spirit, which Kate could almost feel. "Alien, ponderous, the white-hung mountains seemed to emit a deep purring sound, too deep for the ear to hear, and yet audible on the blood, a sound of dread." (p. 50)

It is the image of the serpent, however, more than that of the mountains, that truly characterizes the spirit of the country. In one instance Kate feels herself as a bird being slowly crushed by a serpent--the serpent that is Mexico. And at another time she feels that the surface gaity of the country could do nothing to off-set the true spirit, the "serpent-like fatality" of the land.

> Superficially, Mexico might be all right: with its suburbs of villas, its central fine streets, its thousands of motor-cars, its tennis and its bridge-parties. The sun shone brilliantly every day, and big bright flowers stood out from the trees. It was a holiday.

---

[35] D. H. Lawrence, "Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels," in Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 59.

> Until you were alone with it. And then the undertone was like the low angry, snarling purring of some jaguar spotted with night. There was a ponderous, down-pressing weight upon the spirit: the great folds of the dragon of the Aztecs, the dragon of the Toltecs winding around one and weighing down the soul. And on the bright sunshine was a dark stream of an angry, impotent blood, and the flowers seemed to have their roots in spilt blood. The spirit of the place was cruel, down-dragging, destructive. (p. 51)

One of the most potent qualities of the Quetzalcoatl religion is that it acknowledges the spirit of the serpent, and pays homage to it. Ramón tells the Men of Quetzalcoatl "at the heart of this earth sleeps a great serpent, in the midst of fire." (p. 216) And the great serpent, once acknowledged, is no longer an agent of gloom and destruction, but rather a life-force and a source of inner strength. The homage that Don Ramón pays to the spirit of the country is another example of the reverence for cosmic forces spoken of earlier. (Above, p. 18) He sees the Earth as more than a geological phenomenon, but rather as a great spirit--the spirit of the serpent.

In many other works Lawrence uses the serpent image not as a representation of evil, but of power, and even nobility. One example of this is the poem "Snake." In the poem the speaker sees a poisonous snake drinking at a trough. The voice of his education says that the snake should be killed; but still the man feels a certain compassion for the creature.

Finally, as the snake crawls away, back into the "burning bowels of the earth," the man throws a stick at it, and is immediately overcome with revulsion at his own act.

> And immediately I regretted it.
> I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!
> I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.
> And I thought of the albatross,
> And I wished he would come back, my snake.
>
> For he seemed to me again like a king,
> Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
> Now due to be crowned again.
>
> And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
> Of life.
> And I have something to expiate:
> A pettiness. [36]

As the snake in the poem is seen as kingly, so too is the serpent of Mexico in the eyes of the Men of Quetzalcoatl. The very name of the religion suggests the nobility of the reptile, since Coatl is the Indian name for serpent. Furthermore, to the ancient Mexicans the snake was a symbol for lightning and the rainbow, which suggests that at one time the Coatl was a deity of life-giving rains.[37]

The snake is, through the hymns of Don Ramón, looked upon as a power and a strength--a strength of the inner kind,

---

[36] D. H. Lawrence, "Snake," in The Mentor Book of Major British Poetry, ed. by Oscar Williams (New York: The New American Library, 1963), p. 452.

[37] Hartley Burr Alexander, Latin-America, Vol. XIII of The Mythology of All Races, ed. by Louis Herbert Gray (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1920), p. 68.

which is spoken of in terms of an internal flame.[38]

> The snake of my left-hand out of
> the darkness is hissing your
> feet with his mouth of caress-
> ive fire,
> And putting his strength in your
> heels and ankles, his flame
> in your knees and your legs
> and your loins, his circle
> of rest in your belly. (p. 378)

By acknowledging the spirit of the country, Don Ramón took a fundamental step in making his religion appeal to the blood of his followers. Still another example of the religion's appeal to the Mexicans comes with the sound of the drums, whose echoing seems to vibrate throughout the pages of the novel. The drums are first heard when Kate is in the plaza at Sayula. The Men of Quetzalcoatl have just begun their meeting, calling the people to hear the new hymn. "Among the crowd, men with naked shoulders were giving little leaflets to the onlookers. And all the time, high and pure, the queer clay flute was repeating a savage, rather difficult melody, and the drum was giving the blood-rhythm." (p. 129)

The rhythm of the drum is repeated throughout the novel, heralding the growth of the new religion. At one point, for example, Kate hears the drums "like something coming over the horizon." (p. 179) One of the most impressive and significant uses of the drum comes with the opening of the church at Sayula. Among the superficial sounds of the servants'

---

[38] The imagery of the flame was used by Lawrence also in his letter to Ernest Collings, where he spoke of the physical body as being "a kind of flame." (Above, p. 16 n.)

footsteps comes the slow, vibrant, impelling throb of the great drum.

> There was a running of bare feet, the children bringing cup and plate and sweet buns and sugar, the mother hastily limping with the coffee. Ezequiel came striding along the walk, lifting his hat. He went down to the servants' quarters.
>
> 'Ezequiel says--!' Juana came crying. When suddenly a soft, slack thud seemed to make a hole in the air, leaving a gap behind it. Thud!--Thud!--Thud!--rather slowly. It was the big drum, irrestistible. (p. 368)

Still a third appeal that the religion makes to the people of Mexico is a satisfaction of their blood-lust.[39] Such a lust could be one reason for the sacrificial, yet justifiable, executions in the public plaza. Death and blood are part of the heritage of the Mexicans, as exemplified by the countless sacrificial killings performed by the Aztecs.[40]

The lust for violence and blood is noticed by Kate soon after she begins living at Sayula. As she lay in her bed, she began thinking of the crushing spirit of Mexico, and the effect that that spirit had on the men of Mexico. "Then, the instriking thud of a heavy knife, stabbing into a living body,

---

[39] Keith Sagar, The Art of D. H. Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 165.

[40] In 1486, a large temple was dedicated to the Aztec sun god, Huitzilopochtli, with the sacrifice of something like 70,000 captives. The Aztecs believed each victim would become part of the god's army, and travel with him.

this is the best. No lust of women can equal that lust. The clutching throb of gratification as the knife strikes in and the blood spurts out!" (p. 148) It was up to Don Ramón to try and channel this impulsive violence into a more justified form than either murder or war. The executions, carried out by Cipriano, whose feeling of the lust for violence was very strong, served this end.

The religion of Quetzalcoatl helped to give a deeper hold on the Mexicans by appealing to their blood-felt instincts, instincts which Christianity could not obtain. The re-born religion looked to the Mexican past, to the Aztecs and Toltecs, whose heritage was still to be found in the 20th Century Mexican. In his essay "America, Listen to Your Own," first published in Phoenix, Lawrence advised the inhabitants of the new world to look for their own life-force in their own past, and not in the past of other races.

> Let Americans turn to America, and to the very America which has been rejected and almost annihilated. Do they want to draw sustenance for the future? They will never draw it from the lovely monuments of our European past. These have an almost fatal narcotic, dream-luxurious effect upon the soul. America must turn again to catch the spirit of her own dark, aboriginal continent.
>
> That which was abhorrent to the Pilgrim Fathers and to the Spanish, that which was called the Devil, the black Demon of savage America, this great aboriginal spirit the Americans must recognize again, recognize and embrace. The devil and anathema of our fore-fathers hides the

Godhead which we seek.[41]

Still more of what the religion of Quetzalcoatl signifies and how it helps to represent Lawrence's beliefs on the blood-knowledge theme can further be seen by studying the major characters of the novel. All three, Ramón, Cipriano and Kate, become gods in the Quetzalcoatl pantheon. But each of the three represents a different aspect of the religion, all of which should be considered. Also, the interaction of the three with each other helps to a deeper knowledge of both the novel and the religion itself.

---

[41] D. H. Lawrence, "America, Listen to Your Own," in Phoenix, p. 90.

CHAPTER III: THE PANTHEON OF QUETZALCOATL

In one of the legends of Quetzalcoatl, the deity is seen as a life-giving god. In this particular legend the god is seen as descending into the underworld, gathering the bones of past generations with which to make a new generation of man:

> The last time man was created ... Quetzalcoatl, the Mexican Prometheus, the beneficient god of all mankind, descended to the world of the dead to gather up the bones of past generations, and sprinkling them with his own blood, created a new humanity. [42]

Shedding his own blood, Quetzalcoatl began a new race of man. In the novel itself, Don Ramón, the founder of the re-born religion, shed his own blood when he was attacked at Jamiltepec. Ramón's identification with the god whose name he took is strengthened by his own "dying." Soon after the attack, when Kate saw him and another man lying in a pool of blood, Ramón was described as being dead. But he does revive, giving him a strong analogy to the god he restored from "the long sleep."

---

[42] Caso, p. 12.

Throughout the novel, Don Ramón is called on to defend the tenets of his religion. To his wife, who asks what all the "Quetzalcoatl nonsense amounts to," he answers that it "'is just a living word, for these people, no more.'" (p. 231) Ramón believes that the religion is expressly for his own country, for his people. He explicitly explained this to Cipriano, and the explanation he gives expresses the Lawrencian idea of the heritage-based religions--religions which could appeal to the blood-knowledge of different people.

> 'So if I want Mexicans to learn the name of Quetzalcoatl, it is because I want them to speak with the tongues of their own blood. I wish the Teutonic world would once more think in terms of Thor and Wotan,... And I wish the Druidic world would see, honestly, ... that they themselves are the Tuatha De Danaan, alive, but submerged. And a new Hermes should come back to the Mediterranean, and a new Ashtaroth to Tunis; and Mithras again to Persia, and Brahma unbroken to India, and the oldest of dragons to China.' (pp. 272-273)

Don Ramón exemplifies many facets of the religion he reinstates. Perhaps most outstanding is his role as a reconcilor. Kate, for example, feels that it is Ramón who makes Cipriano the fascinating man he is, serving as a link between Cipriano the soldier and Cipriano the god. In the same light, it is Ramón who links Cipriano with Kate--who, in his role as Quetzalcoatl, acts as the morning star for the other two. Throughout the novel Ramón is continually encouraging Cipriano and Kate to marry, and when they at last do it is he who

performs the ceremony.

His role as a reconcilor of opposites points to the god-in-man which Ramón represents.

> Only the man of a great star, a great divinity, can bring the opposites together again, in a new unison.
>
> And this was Ramón, and this was his great effort: to bring the great opposites into contact and into unison again. And this is the god-power in man. (pp. 458-459)

But Ramón was also a man, and his quest for a spontaneous religion led him into bitter conflict with the Catholic Church, the established order. In his essay on Hardy, Lawrence wrote of that author's characters in terms which are applicable to Ramón. "In the long run, the State, the Community, the established form of life remained, remained intact and impregnable, the individual, trying to break forth from it, died of fear, of exhaustion, or of exposure to attacks from all sides,..."[43]

Ramón was attacked from all sides. Still, he and his religion survived and became entrenched within the land. But his religious zeal, and the struggle to make Quetzalcoatl "a living word," weakened Ramón. As the novel draws to an end, the emphasis is no longer on Ramón's strengths, but rater on his weaknesses. The first foreshadowing of this comes when Ramón is described not as a Mexican, but as a European. This

---

[43] D. H. Lawrence, "Study of Thomas Hardy," in Selected Literary Criticism, p. 168.

would indicate that as a foreign blood Ramón would eventually be worn down by the Mexican spirit. Ramón's growing weak begins to prove true as the novel progresses. At one point, after his marriage to Teresa, Ramón is seen by Kate as soft and pasha-like. And at still another time Kate senses that Ramón would eventually be the target for the Indian machete--that he too would feel the "latent grudging" of the people. Yet Ramón did have one strong ally on which to depend, and that was Cipriano, whose army was feared and respected throughout the country. But even here there is evidence that Cipriano might turn against his friend. Ramón felt that "his people would betray him, he knew that. Cipriano would betray him. Given one little vulnerable chink, they would pierce him. They would leap at the place out of nowhere, like a tarantula, and bite in the poison." (p. 212)

The tarantula that would poison Ramón would be the spirit of Mexico, the dragon. Both he, the religious leader, and Montes, the political leader, were being drained of their power by the malevolent spirit that their country sent out against them.

> But Ramón and Montes suffered alike from the deep, devilish animosity the country sent out in silence against them. It was the same, whoever was in power: the Mexicans seemed to steam with invisible, grudging hate, the hate of demons foiled in their own souls, whose only motive is to foil everything, everybody, in the everlasting hell of cramped frustation.
>
> This was the dragon of Mexico, that Ramón had to fight. Montes,

> the President, had it to fight the same. And it shattered his health. Cipriano also had it up against him. But he succeeded best. With his drums, with his dances round the fire, with his soldiers kept keen as knives he drew real support from his men. He grew stronger and more brilliant. (p. 442)

So while Ramón grows weak, being drained by the very country he was trying to inspire, Cipriano grows stronger. But even before the general begins to emerge as the more powerful of the two men, there are signs which point to his being one of the mysterious males which Lawrence often wrote of. Like Christ in "The Man Who Died," Cipriano is remote and unconnected, seeming to pass through society without being part of it. And the general's eyes, which seem almost inhuman, portend a deep, inner strength. To Kate, Cipriano's eyes are the most fascinating aspect of his character, and she sees them as being "black, as black as jewels into which one could not look without a sensation of fear." (p. 71)

His eyes, of course, are just a symbol for the deep-rooted potency and mystery which Cipriano possesses. Very much like the country of Mexico itself, Cipriano's fascinating aspects lay beneath his superficial characteristics.

> Curious he was! With a sort of glaze of the ordinary world on top, and underneath a black volcano with hell knows what depths of lava. And talking half-abstractedly from his glazed, top self, the words came out small and quick, and he was always hesitating, was saying: No? It wasn't himself at all talking. (p. 339)

Cipriano's underlying potency comes, so he tells his soldiers, because he embraces the "second strength." Not the strength of oxen, machines or guns does Cipriano embrace, but the strength which comes from behind the sun, that engenders itself in the breast and in the loins. And the power which Cipriano has he passes on to his men, makes it radiate throughout their whole beings. In Apocalypse Lawrence wrote of the mysterious power in some men, and how this power passes along to others. The passage is descriptive of Cipriano's relationship to his men. "Accept it, recognise the natural power in the man, as men did in the past, and give it homage, then there is a great joy, an uplifting, and a potency passes from the powerful to the less powerful. There is a stream of power."[44]

Cipriano's natural power increases throughout the novel until he assumes a role in the religion of Quetzalcoatl which is even more significant than Ramón's. An early foreshadowing of Cipriano's impending importance comes in considering one of the hymns of Quetzalcoatl. The hymn is a celebration of the present, of the now, and throughout the lines there is the refrain "I am." These words, "I am," are the first words spoken by Cipriano in the novel, when he introduces himself to Kate. Yet Ramón's first words, also addressed to Kate, are "you are." This finding by itself proves little, but it

---

[44] D. H. Lawrence, Apocalypse, pp. 24-25.

does have meaning which is reflected in the growing strength of Cipriano and in his growing importance in the scheme of the novel as far as the religion is concerned.

When the novel closes, Cipriano stands for the religion of Quetzalcoatl. As a full-blooded Indian he can feel the religion much more powerfully than can Ramón, the European, who is more the religion's mentor than anything else. Pointing to Cipriano as a more important figure in the religion may appear invalid since the religion itself is a balance--a balance between the eagle (Ramón) and the serpent (Cipriano). Still, throughout the novel Lawrence places a greater stress on the serpent, as if to say that while the eagle was needed to bring the religion to the people, the spirit of those people, the serpent, was needed to make the religion manifest. So while Ramón knows the religion, Cipriano feels it; while Ramón explains the religion, Cipriano lives it.

The strength and potency which Cipriano finds through the religion is reflected also in his relationship with Kate. Early in their friendship, when Kate was more enthralled by Ramón than Cipriano, Cipriano hinted that Kate could not escape from Mexico nor from himself, because of some strange magnetism. But Kate thought to herself that this was not true. "In her mind she thought: And perhaps Ramón is the only one I couldn't quite escape from, because he really touches me somewhere inside. But from you, you little Cipriano, I should have no need even to escape, because I could not be caught by you." (p. 225)

But Kate's attitude toward Cipriano most definitely changes towards the end of the novel, and Kate's attachment to her husband turns out to be a strong one. She comes to realize this dependency on Cipriano after she becomes aware of the powers he stands for--powers of the blood.

> The mystery of the primeval world! She could feel it now in all its shadowy, furious magnificence. She knew now what was the black, glinting look in Cipriano's eyes. She could understand marrying him, now. In the shadowy world where men were visionless, and winds of fury rose up from the earth, Cipriano was still a power. Once you entered his mystery the scale of all things changed, and he became a living male power, undefined, and unconfined. The smallness, the limitations ceased to exist. In his black, glinting eyes the power was limitless, and it was as if, from him, from his body of blood could rise up that pillar of cloud which swayed and swung, like a rearing serpent or a rising tree, till it swept the zenith, and all the earth below was dark and prone, and consummated. (p.341)

The transition between the two attitude's of Kate toward her husband is paralled throughout the novel by other changes in her, the most impressive being her development from a European matron to a Mexican goddess. This change suggests a spiritual journey that Kate undergoes.[45] One critic has found Kate's journey to be in two parts, separation and

---

[45] Jascha Kessler, "Descent in Darkness: The Myth of The Plumed Serpent," in A D. H. Lawrence Miscellany, ed. by Harry T. Moore (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern University Press, 1959), p. 243.

initiation. Kate's separation in the first few chapters of the novel can be seen on many stages. Most obviously, she separates herself from the mob at the bull-fight. Also, she decides to stay in Mexico rather than return to either the United State or England, thus breaking with her family. Third, and perhaps most important, she is breaking with the first half of her life, her first forty years. On her fortieth birthday Kate realized that she was beginning something new and different.

> Kate woke up one morning, aged forty. She did not hide the fact from herself, but she kept it dark from the others.
> It was a blow, really. To be forty! One had to cross a dividing line. On this side there was youth and spontaneity and "happiness." On the other side something different: reserve, responsibility, a certain standing back from "fun." (p. 50)

Kate's initiation into her new world begins during the dinner at Don Ramón's house. Here Kate was first introduced to the Men of Quetzalcoatl, and their impact on her was powerful. "Here were men face to face not with death and self-sacrifice, but with the life-issue. She felt for the first time in her life a pang almost like fear, of men who were passing beyond what she knew, beyond her depth." (p. 70) The initiation is continued while Kate is crossing the lake at Sayula. The spermy waters, waters of re-birth and regeneration, portend that Kate will find, on the other side of the lake, a new life. The foreshadowing of a new life is underlined when the boatman, a follower of the new religion, gives

Kate an earthenware pot he fished out of the lake--a pot that was once a gift to the old gods is now a gift to the new goddess.

Kate's initiation into the new religion and into her new life is furthered through her participation in the dance in the plaza, and, more dramatically, through the attack at Jamiltepec. This adventure, which one critic labels Kate's "ordeal,"[46] binds her by blood to the new order. Her acceptance into her new life becomes complete when she agrees to marry Cipriano--not only marry him in the eyes of the law, but also in the eyes of the new religion.

Through the marriage Kate assumes the role of the goddess Malintzi, and through her new position she almost completely forgets her old self, almost completely abandons her old way of life. During one of the ceremonies she begins to consider what her new life has done for her, and what her relationship to Cipriano makes her feel.

> How else, she said to herself, is one to begin again, save by refinding one's virginity? And when one finds one's virginity, one realises one is among the gods. He (Cipriano) is of the gods, and so am I. Why should I judge him!
>
> So, when she thought of him and his soldiers, tales of swift cruelty she had heard of him: when she remembered his stabbing the three helpless peons, she thought: Why should I judge him? He is of the gods. And when he comes to me he

---

[46] Ibid., p. 250.

> lays his pure, quick flame to mine, and every time I am a young girl again, and every time he takes the flower of my virginity, and I his. It leaves me insouciant like a young girl. What do I care if he kills people? His flame is young and clean. He is Huitzilopochtli, and I am Malintzi. What do I care, what Cipriano Viedma does or doesn't do? Or even what Kate Leslie does or doesn't do! (p. 431)

As final and ultimate as Kate's transition to the new order sounds, there is some evidence that she is not wholeheartedly dedicated to the religion which she finds a part in. One critic has pointed out that her allegiance is not to the cult itself, but rather to Ramón and Cipriano.[47] Still another critic claims that her decision to stay in Mexico as the bride of Huitzilopochtli is not convincing.[48] It is also possible, however, that her decision to stay in Mexico was meant, by Lawrence, to be a decision she herself would always question. Kate finds a new life in Mexico, and is even, at times, completely a part of the life she discovers. Still, she never lives the life of the Indians, the life of mystery and deep-rooted potency. She realizes, after meeting Cipriano, what power and spirit the Indian is capable of, but she never accepts these qualities as her own. Her attitude towards the Mexican way of life can be made more explicit by seeing what Lawrence wrote

---

[47] Sagar, p. 160.

[48] Leavis, p. 72.

in his essay on James Fenimore Cooper.

> The white man's spirit can never become as the red man's spirit. It doesn't want to. But it can cease to be the opposite and the negative of the red man's spirit. It can open out a new great area of consciousness, in which there is room for the new spirit too. [49]

The spirit that Kate comes to realize in the Indians is a result of the blood-knowledge which Don Ramón imparted to his followers--a knowledge which takes into account not only the instincts of the people, but also the heritage of which they are a part. A recognition of the heritage, and an abiding of the instinctual voices within their own souls, is, for the Mexicans, a salvation. To Lawrence, it is also the salvation of the rest of humanity.

---

[49] D. H. Lawrence, "Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels," in Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 59.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexander, Hartley Burr. Latin-America. Vol. XIII of The Mythology of All Races. Edited by Louis Herbert Gray. Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1920.

Caso, Alfonso. The Aztecs: People of the Sun. Translated by Lowell Dunham. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958.

Ford, George H. Double Measure: A Study of the Novels and Stories of D. H. Lawrence. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.

Goodheart, Eugene. "Lawrence and Christ." Partisan Review, XXXI (Winter, 1964), 42-49.

_____. The Utopian Vision of D. H. Lawrence. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.

Kessler, Jascha. "Descent in Darkness: The Myth of The Plumed Serpent." A D. H. Lawrence Miscellany. Edited by Harry T. Moore. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern University Press, 1959.

Lawrence, D. H. Apocalypse. New York: The Viking Press, 1967.

_____. The Letters of D. H. Lawrence. Edited by Aldous Huxley. New York: The Viking Press, 1932.

_____. Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence. Edited by Edward D. McDonald. New York: The Viking Press, 1936.

_____. The Plumed Serpent. New York: Vintage Books, 1951.

_____. St. Mawr and The Man Who Died. New York: Vintage Books, 1953.

_____. Selected Literary Criticism. Edited by Anthony Beal. New York: The Viking Press, 1966.

_____. Studies in Classic American Literature. New York: The Viking Press, 1961.

_____. The Virgin and the Gipsy. New York: Bantam Books, 1968.

Leavis, F. R. D. H. Lawrence: Novelist. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956.

Moore, Harry T. The Intelligent Heart: The Life of D. H. Lawrence. New York: The Grove Press, Inc., 1962.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

_____. The Life and Works of D. H. Lawrence. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1951.

Moynahan, Julian. The Deed of Life: The Novels and Tales of D. H. Lawrence. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963.

Sagar, Keith. The Art of D. H. Lawrence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.

Weatherby, H. L. "Old Fashioned Gods: Eliot on Lawrence and Hardy." Sewanee Review, LXXV (Spring, 1967), 301-316.

West, Anthony. D. H. Lawrence. London: Morrison and Gibb Ltd., n.d.

Wilde, Alan. "The Illusion of St. Mawr: Technique and Vision in D. H. Lawrence's Novels." PMLA, LXXII (March, 1964), 164-170.

Williams, Oscar. ed. The Mentor Book of Major British Poetry. New York: The New American Library, 1963.

VITA

Steven Mark Schwartz was born in 1946 in New York City. After completing his elementary education in Brooklyn, he moved to Miami, Florida, where he attended secondary schools.

He began his college career at Miami-Dade Jr. College, graduating from that institution in May, 1966. Mr. Schwartz then attended Florida State University, where he received his B. A. in August, 1967.

Mr. Schwartz entered the University of Richmond in January, 1968. He completed the requirements for the Master's Degree in August, 1969.