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ASPECTS OF D. H. LAWRENCE'S STRUGGLE WITH CHRISTIANITY

An important characteristic of Lawrence's writings is his struggle with the Biblical vision of life.¹ Motifs in his novels are often variations on Biblical themes. In *The Rainbow* he plays upon ideas related to a covenant between God and Man; in *Aaron's Rod* he examines relationships between which refer back explicitly to David and Jonathan, Christ and Judas; in *The Plumed Serpent* he portrays the dangers of founding a new church based on pagan belief and ritual. Such variations on a Biblical theme are not incidental reflections within Lawrence's work; they are central to the preoccupations that create it. In part Lawrence is involved in a struggle to free himself from what he understood as Christianity. The sequence of his works gives expression to the anxiety, adventurousness and oscillation incurred by his search for a fresh set of non-Christian, sometimes un-Christian, values.

Lawrence had a gift for rendering conflicts between the mind and the flesh in other people,² often finding himself in sympathy with the demands of the body. He came to reject the repression of instinctive life, notably sexuality, that he felt was implicit in Christian teaching. However, he also felt that Christianity had made a positive contribution to the world by making marriage so important because of a moralistic *Weltanschauung*. Laws such as "Thou shalt not commit adultery" left him uncertain about his own position. Was he to condemn the law as too absolute, or approve it because it belonged to a system of values that had defined marriage as a focus of worthwhile life for individuals? He turns this question over in his mind in the essay "Apropos of 'Lady Chatterley's Lover'", but the earlier novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had gone some way to resolving the paradoxes of his thought. There he had

granted a healing power to the tenderness of an intimate physical relationship. He saw it as charitable to redeem the individual from the "Thou shalt not" severity of the commandment when a specific marriage lacked the physical dimension. This solution to the divisions which a contemplation of Christianity set up in him is highly individualistic. In consequence the result of reading through Lawrence's attempts to extricate himself from the net of West European Christianity is confusion or dismay for the average reader, rather than enlightenment.

Lawrence's mother was a strict chapel-goer, a Non Conformist. The chapel, as most biographies testify, notably *D.H. Lawrence—A Personal Record* by E.T.,³ was very important in the early education of the novelist. His own essay "Hymns in a Man's Life"⁴ makes his debt explicit, as do many references to the Bible in his discursive prose.⁵ As he matured he found it necessary to break away from the dominance of his mother and from the teaching of the chapel. He came under new intellectual influences offered by Schopenhauer, whose essay "On the Metaphysic of (Sexual) Love" he was engrossed by.⁶ Reading Hardy's novels made him conscious of the destructive power of ethics based on social acceptability. This ethic, he felt, clouded the vividness of Hardy's vision.⁷ His own friendship with Jesse Chambers appears to have made him conscious of the vitalizing potential of sexual relations, though, if one believes the account implicit in *Sons and Lovers*, this was because of restraint rather than licence. Under such influences a Christian upbringing appeared to have many weaknesses. For Lawrence the body was the focus of instinctive life and of the spirit. Schopenhauer's idea that the will to live, a form of the life force, was manifest in the body and specifically in the genitals⁸ influenced him considerably. Since the body was such a positive power for health and life, it had to be accorded adequate respect to ensure individual fulfilment and satisfaction.

The moral doctrine of the Christian chapel was "Thou shalt not". It appeared to conceal a desire to suppress and confine the experiences of the flesh. Christianity appeared to brainwash people into ideological reflections in which the delight of living in this world was to be usurped by a hope of living in the next. Like Nietzsche before him,⁹ Lawrence regretted Christ's decision to go on to Calvary and saw in the ascension

an absurd and misleading denial of life. In his short work "The Man Who Died" Lawrence writes his own gospel in which Christ arises from the dead, wanders away and finds an Egyptian priestess to minister to his body and permit him a life in the flesh. The ideal implicit in the story expresses Lawrence's predicament. He perceived that pre-Christian sentiment conceived of sexuality as godly. The inner mysteries of early Greek and Egyptian religion laid emphasis on the health and power of the instincts of generation without repressing them. The story of Christ's ascension denied the godhead of sexuality. Lawrence felt that Christianity ought to come to terms with pre-Christian descriptions of life more positively. Much of his work concerns that feeling. How was he to establish a way of life based on the contradictory emphases of the Christian Bible and pre-Christian religion?

Figures such as David, and Christ were central to many of Lawrence's reflections. However, the Bible as an instrument to uphold those values of Christianity Lawrence could not accept. The story of the ascension, the glorification of the crucifixion, the teaching of St. Paul he rejected. The Biblical bias against women, as it is found in Genesis, did not coincide with Lawrence's experience and perception of female temperament and power. In reading the Bible Lawrence seems often to have found himself referring back to the Greeks in a search for deities who would make sacred those values which he found most needed in his life. Just as Nietzsche had done,¹⁰ he turned to Dionysus and the phallic mysteries as a source of inspiration and consolation. Lawrence's experience of the Bible led to a polarization of his moral sentiments which grouped themselves around the Bible and Dionysus.

The attempt to examine Christianity thoroughly by immersing oneself in a pre-Christian religion is understandable. A thinker seriously committed to caring about how he or she lives is almost bound to turn from one established religious precedent to another in a search for a personally acceptable faith. One can no more step outside of religion than one can step outside of language. Lawrence's explorations of life and Christianity committed him to a spiral of rejection and assertion, assertion and rejection which characterizes all his work. When he found a way to undermine Biblical values, he substituted his own but found these lacking too, so he took fresh recourse to the Bible or to Dionysus

to start again and test his reflections in the face of his life. So exciting and adventurous an experience was this continual sallying forth that it began to appear to Lawrence as being the matter of life itself. After all, the process of spiralling between ever changing polarities produced *élan* not just vertigo. It implied constant intellectual and emotional mobility. Lawrence did not believe in Christ or Dionysus as much as in the excitement of moving between them in a world of relative moral values.

Lawrence's attitude to the starting point of his religious experience, the Bible, can be described as one of continuous rebellion. He saw himself committed to find a new form of religious devotion. Such a view of life makes one's self the focal point of all new life and is invigorating and challenging. However, the sequence of Lawrence's novels shows that he was too much aware of what living actually did to him and others for him to sustain such an attitude or belief forever. *The Plumed Serpent* marks the end of Lawrence's exuberance and his youthfulness. The presence of sickness, death, horror and aging is more powerful in that novel than in the earlier ones. Death in *Women in Love* did not come to Birkin, the Lawrentian figure, but to outsiders, the Criches. In *Aaron's Rod* violent death is only seen as having been experienced in a soldier who is not a protagonist in the work. In *The Plumed Serpent*, however, the main character feels old, is sickened by physical brutality, and senses the presence of death and despair. The notion that the matter of life is a dynamic of continuous spiralling is no consolation to people once they face flagging powers. Such a notion leaves aging and the necessary loss of energy out of account. Montaigne said, "You do not die because you are sick but because you are alive."¹¹ This Renaissance intelligence was not included in the novels before *The Plumed Serpent*. Inevitably the new religion in this novel, which was to celebrate the dynamic of life, becomes specious and false, as well as violent and ugly. The key-note of the novel is despair. In that despair Lawrence's sallying forth on a post-Christian adventure suffered its severest set-back. Neither Christ nor Dionysus was adequate.

For many readers Lawrence's writing career might seem as if it should have ended with *The Plumed Serpent*. For Lawrence, it did not end. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* he resigned himself both to age and delapidation in a way that made it possible for him to find people

interesting again rather than reject them as "dead". He evolved a highly personal type of charity based on "tenderness" and the consolation of touch. This permitted his last novel a serene tone much ignored by critics concentrating on sexual encounters in the work. Lawrence's thought is cyclic: one might recognize a type of *caritas* in his tenderness and assume that he found his way back to a commitment close to one of the major commitments of Christianity. The beginning of his voyage had been the Bible and the end of it is not remote from the Gospels' version of compassion. Nevertheless, whatever he accepted from Christianity he had to fight for against himself. *The Rainbow*, an early novel, could be described as anti-Christian: certainly its inspiration grew from a desire to establish a conclusion that the Biblical account of life was superseded.

Lawrence's dislike of Biblical versions of life is first manifested by Biblical parody. His narrative prose imitates Biblical rhythms and phraseology. Whilst doing so, it undermines their authority, insinuating Lawrentian values. This can be seen in the opening chapter of *The Rainbow*. The reader recognizes the prose rhythms of Genesis. Moreover, in Lawrence's description of English rural life, we recognize a world order similar to that implied in Genesis. Man dominates in the plant and animal world. He lives within a universe created with secure, step-by-step deliberation. When Lawrence describes the farmers at their milking, he does so in rhythms strongly reminiscent of Genesis:

They took the udder of the cows, the cows yielded milk and pulse against the hands of the men, the pulse of the blood of the teats of the cows beat into the pulse of the hands of the men. ¹²

The repetitive surge in the rhythm, enforced by genitival phrases, conveys the same impression of accumulated strength as the Biblical creation story. Lawrence employs it to describe a slow way of life consolidating a narrow range of relationships in the way that the translators of *Genesis* exploited the coordinating "and" to make a list of imperatives sound like a step-by-step survey and establishment of similarly ordered rural life:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon earth. 13

Lawrence's prose might appear to be mere pastiche were it not for his challenge of the account of Eve found in the Bible. He approves of the Biblical insistence that the female intelligence is outward looking and disruptive, but he had doctored his imitation of Genesis in such a way that "the spirit of God" is left out, thus robbing "Paradise" of mobility, and leaving it only with deliberately constructed security. Lawrence's prose uses Biblical language to create an atmosphere of claustrophobia. Thus he sets the scene for the appearance of a disruptive spirit that will liberate rural man from his paradisaical confines and usher him into a wider, free world in which "knowledge" is approved of rather than forbidden. The difference of emphasis is evident when we place the prose of Genesis side by side with Lawrence's:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.¹⁴

Lawrence writes:

Looking out, as she must, from the front of her house towards the activity of man in the world at large . . . she strained her eyes to see what man had done in fighting outwards to knowledge. . . her deepest desire hung on the battle that she heard far off, being waged on the edge of the unknown. She also wanted to know, and be of the fighting host.¹⁵

Lawrence introduces the feminine presence into the novel as a dynamic force and creates women characters whose Eve-spirit is reminiscent of the ruthless Clytemnestra. *The Rainbow* is largely about women: Lydia, her daughter Anna, and Anna's daughter, Ursula. It is as though Lawrence had decided to re-examine the Bible by telling the story of the women in it rather than of the men. The starting point of the novel is in contradiction to the starting point of the Bible.

The prose of *The Rainbow* comments *sotto-voce* on Biblical values throughout. At the outset it permits Lawrence to discover an approval of disruption. He committed himself to examine the operation of womanly intelligence through the course of life as the main thrust of his struggle with the Bible. Rather than write a moral tract designing substitute values for the Bible, he took on the complex task of attempting to describe life while searching for fresh or liberating values.

Lydia is the first woman in *The Rainbow* who brings with her an air of not belonging to a rural, religious world. She is Polish and has a daughter, Anna, who is blessed with a powerful and wilful personality against which her stepfather struggles with difficulty. Anna's personality is vital rather than spoilt, and vivacious rather than destructive. Once married, she maintains the innovating impact on life that her mother had before her. Her daughter, Ursula, faces life with bright irreverence and intelligent restlessness. Her spirit brings to the reader the awareness that the rural and ecclesiastical past is changing in the face of a fiery scepticism and an uglier environment. The woman represents an effective spirit of change.

The details of Anna's innovating power can be represented by referring to Lawrence's description of her marriage. Anna marries Will Brangwen, who is described as an intense, severe man with little intellectual ability. He has considerable artistic talent rooted in mysticism. For him God was manifest in religious art and architecture. One of the pillars of his religious devotion is Lincoln cathedral, another his carving, another his wife. Will's finest carving is of Adam and Eve, expressing his delight in the religious sanction of a man-dominated world order. However, Anna does not accept his beliefs and fights against his imposition of them in their marriage. He finally destroys his carving, renouncing his art because the force of Anna's personality wears away his confidence in the values he had lived by. Anna is a more vital figure than Will so that the reader is persuaded that her victory over him is deserved.

Anna's vitality expresses itself in religious and Biblical terms, but she is quite unlike Will. She admires David, not Adam. She exploits the pride in Old Testament language to justify her defiance of her husband to herself after their quarrels. Her pride expresses itself in dancing before the Lord, like David in the Old Testament, in the presence of her

husband so that the man seems insignificant even to himself. She attacks the aesthetic dimension of her husband's mysticism. When Will admires the Gothic inspiration of the cathedral she sneers at him, reminding him of its gargoyles which point to earthy, common or vulgar observations about the outside world. By persistently challenging Will's religious feelings through the intimacies of his relationship with her, she robs him of security and spoils his beliefs. Finally *she* manages the family and expresses her sense of doing this in terms of the Bible. Though Biblical, her victory is un-Christian, expressing an egocentric joy in her own significance as a mother figure under the covenant of the rainbow. She has the stature of a Biblical figure from the Old Testament and has a Hebraic spirit rather than a Christian one: "Thou comest to me with a sword and a spear and a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord".¹⁶

Through Anna, who sees herself as a threshold for a new soul,¹⁷ Ursula comes into the novel with many of her mother's characteristics. Ursula is the spearhead of Lawrence's decisive thrust against the Biblical world order. She is part of the world of industrial pollution and mechanisation and part of the spirit that helped to reject the rural world of established values. Ursula is convincing because Lawrence's presentation of her youthful forcefulness is so vivid. As an adolescent she explores algebra, French and the Bible with the same enthusiasm. Her rejections of people and ideas alike are youthfully irreverent. Her imagination creates a fantasy world in which her fast-growing being can find further inspiration and consolation. Looking for a purpose in her life and a companion to it, she overhauls the Bible, her education and all the people she meets. She is shown to go through a complex procedure of multiple rejection while doing so, involving herself in the revaluations, confusions and fresh discoveries that one might expect in an adolescent girl or young woman.

In her search through Biblical literature she finds some hope that she could find a companion as emotionally and imaginatively alive as she felt herself to be. In the process, the religion of Church practice fades into the background:

On Sundays this visionary world came to pass. . . .
 In church, the Voice sounded, re-echoing not from
 This world, as if the church itself were a shell
 That still spoke the language of creation. . . .
 Still it was there, even if it were faint and
 inadequate. The cycle of creation still wheeled
 in the church year.¹⁸

She belongs essentially to the "cycle of creation" and moves through *The Rainbow* as a cleansing force, in antithesis to everything she meets. She reinterprets the text of the Bible to suit her own romantic yearnings and invests the figure of Christ with the significance of an intimate male friend who might be a mate for her. As Lawrence recounts this development in her, he puts a degree of emphasis on it which suggests that the novel itself rejects the asceticism and other worldliness associated with Christianity. Ursula rejects the resurrection and ascension because she values the life of the flesh.¹⁹

Ursula's sexual force has great play in the novel partly as a consequence of her rejection of Christian asceticism. Part of her life force, her "will to live", is rendered in Schopenhauerian terms. The unfolding of her instinctive life predetermines many of the adventures she embarks upon and the rejections she visits upon others. Her first sexual adventure, part of her search for an exciting relationship, is a Lesbian affair she enters into with her teacher Winifred. Finally, however, Winifred is rejected by Ursula because she belongs to the world of the industrial bourgeoisie and because, for Ursula's awakening sensitivities, she is simply not a man. She is replaced as the novel progresses by a soldier, Skrebensky, whose physicality is his most powerful attraction. Ursula becomes engaged to him in the belief that she has found a "son of God", although it is quite clear that Skrebensky does not have this Old Testament pride and power. Despite the sexual intimacy of their relationship, Ursula rejects him. In rejecting him she challenges an English version of manhood in which maleness (in the novel) is celebrated by horse-riding and soldierliness. Skrebensky is no "Son of God".²⁰ By permitting Ursula to express the acuteness of her womanly sexuality in terms of Biblical language, Lawrence suggests that Ursula's vitality has to undermine Biblical language in order to permit her full instinctive growth. Her instincts appear more important than the accepted conventions of Christian morality. She moves in

opposition to a *status quo* based on tired religious practice and worn roles of behaviour. Her character performs a dual function. She is the most forcefully disruptive power in the novel, rejecting her parents, their way of life, the local church (despite its entertainments), the local men and women, and even the accepted canons of Christianity. At the same time she is the spirit of the new creation and helps to usher in the fresh world at the end of the novel.

The end of the novel does not suggest that Lawrence found profitable his search for fresh values through his women characters. There is no delight or optimism. The rainbow, which is Biblical too and gives the novel its title, still appears at the end of the novel. It is a weak presence, almost non-existent: "Steadily the colour gathered, mysteriously, from nowhere, it took presence upon itself, there was a faint, vast rainbow."²¹ Ursula, who sees this sign, is deeply depressed. She also sees the material reality of the industrial Midlands: spiritual and material ugliness and squalor.²² The end of the novel shows the covenant between man and God on the verge of extinction. Ursula's search for freshness leads her to see two features of life: the viciousness of post-rural industrialisation and the very much weakened covenant between man and God. The end of the novel is indecisive and disturbing: neither squalid industry, nor faint rainbows promise anything for the future.

The novel illustrates a swing in Lawrence's reflections. It undermines the impact of the Bible by using Biblical language against the Bible. It gives expression to a surge of Lawrence's confidence that a Schopenhauerian will to live and not religious inspiration organizes the instinctive life of the individual. The will to live is at its most dominant and powerful in women. They liberate men from the Biblical vision of an absolute binding morality and one authoritative God. However, the accomplished revolution in emotion and commitment that this novel momentarily effected for Lawrence is not felt as being victory or liberation at the end. Tom Brangwen, the father and Adam of the life cycle within the novel, found meaning, consolation and the rest in the terms of his life as it was. Ursula, in contrast, a modern, independent, sensitive young woman is faced with an unresolvable depression at the end of the novel far more corrosive than anything her grandfather had faced.

Through the complex medium of *The Rainbow* Lawrence describes an attack on and movement away from Biblical values followed by the creation of a potentially fresh set of norms based on the "will to live". But the new edifice wavers in the face of a pendulum-like swing in the writer's feelings. The alternative to a set of apparently absolute values is not another set of absolute values but a flux of ever fresh values. The result is a depressed sense of confusion.

The assertion that the loss of absolutes in faith and morality leads to flux in both is well borne out by Lawrence's later novels and by his own overall development. "Flux" can be an empty term, but here it consists of a continuous process of assertion and rejection in accordance with a scrutiny of the way new and old values work in life. Having questioned the massive structure and influence of Christianity, both Lawrence and his readers become involved in the task of direction finding. This involves great nervous and emotional strains for the writer and for his impressionable readers. Lawrence not only has to find a way to cope with the incidental burdens of life such as age and disappointment, but he has to do so in unique circumstances created for himself. He had overthrown the accepted patterns of religious thought and emotional response as they had been strained through many generations of Christian teaching. Whenever he himself met the problems of unhappy moments in his marriage, the strains of the first world war, the absence of interest in relationships between men, the exhaustion of middle-age and illness, he had to discover his own terms of consolation and adjustment. He could no longer rely upon the edifice of Christian absolutes that he had so powerfully challenged in his novels.

Lawrence did cope with the strains of being isolated from moral and religious security by seeing in his own struggle with a Christian vision of life the outlines of what he felt to be an inner dynamic of all living things, a life-force, in which he could believe. The characteristic of his attitude to the Bible was ambivalence. He asserted but destroyed Biblical values, setting up the assertion and destruction as the polarities of his development. Life, he felt, consisted of and was ideally enhanced by a process of cumulative polarization in which the great polarities were Love and Power. Love, for him, represented much of that set of sentiments, emotions and thoughts that had proceeded from Christian

doctrines and enhanced much of human life. Power was antithetic to Love, and was associated with the fierce grandeur of the Old Testament heroes, the phallic mysteries, the characters of Greek drama and the Greek god Dionysus. Love and Power in interaction were the basis of life, and life was often conceived by him as being that mobility produced by this interaction:

Love, as we see it, is not the only dynamic. Taking love in its greatest sense, and making it embrace every form of sympathy, every flow from the great sympathetic centres of the human body, still it is not the whole of the dynamic flow, it is only the one-half. There is always the other voluntary flow to reckon with, the intense motion of independence and singleness of self. . . the profound fulfilment through power. . . We know that life issues spontaneously at the great nodes of the psyche, the great nerve centres. At first there are four only: then, after puberty, they may become eight: later there may be an extension of the dynamic consciousness, a further polarization.²³

Aaron's Rod describes the interaction between the male protagonists in such terms: "Love" and "Power" are the words Lilly uses in the last chapter of the novel.²³ The novel shows Aaron engendering desirable toughness through such a polarization in his relationships presented in the novel. Lawrence appears to have believed in the life-giving effect of the dynamics of polarization. This belief penetrated his whole theory of his art:

Artistic form is a revelation of the two principles of Love and the Law in a state of conflict and yet reconciled: pure motion struggling against and yet reconciled with the spirit; active force meeting and overcoming and yet not overcoming inertia.²⁴

His language is that of an artist who has brought to light two great absolutes and seen them as interdependent, thus denying them their absolute power. His vision much like Luther's has dualistic characteristics which accumulate until they suggest that life consists of many conflicting absolutes. The dualistic qualities in Luther's thought are noted by two quite different commentators—Professor Pelikan and Professor McDonough—but Professor McDonough's comments relate to characteristics both find:

The first point opens our eyes to the fact that the Law, for Luther, is sacrosanct, and every bit as important to the Christian's righteousness as the Gospel; the second point concerns, mainly, the role of the Law as a mirror of sin and a preparation to the advent of the Gospel promise of forgiveness.²⁵

The language is very similar to Lawrence's in the extracts above. This implies that Lawrence's examination of absolutes, like Luther's, leads him to the notion that interacting forces dominated life. Similar reflections characterize Milton's understanding of the Bible in *Paradise Lost*:

... Dies he or justice must; unless for him
Some other able, and or willing, pay
The rigid satisfaction, death for death,
Say, heavenly powers, where shall we find such love
...
Dwells in all heaven charity so dear?²⁶

Milton's polarities of "justice" and "charity" recall Lawrence's "Law" and "Love". Perhaps it is an inevitability of Protestant thought that the process of polarization appears necessary in philosophy and art. Anyway Lawrence's thinking goes so far as to suggest that the process is the substance of his life and the goal of his art at this stage.

The late novel, *The Plumed Serpent*, shows what happens when Lawrence's polarizations are interrupted by middle-age, weariness and the pervasive sense of personal death. The work illustrates Lawrence's discovery of a central flaw in his own postulation of two great dynamics of polarization in living things. His previous novels had taken too little account of the fact that human energy can stop altogether and that weariness, despair and self-distrust are powerful human experiences. *The Plumed Serpent* does take this into account. The novel enacts an earlier Lawrentian desire to found a religious community based on fresh assumptions about morality and religion. The attempt to found a substitute religion for Christianity in the novel is explicit. It clearly fails. With that failure, Lawrence's belief in his own dynamic vision can be felt to disintegrate. Neither Love nor Power are adequate. The first chapters of the novel contain a reflection and a question which relate as much to Lawrence himself as to the character voicing them:

She was forty: the first half of her life was over. The bright page with its flowers and its love and its stations of the Cross ended with a grave. The first half of her life had been written on the bright, smooth vellum of hope, with initial letters all gorgeous upon a field of gold. But the glamour had gone from station to station of the Cross, and the last illumination was the tomb. Now the bright page was turned, and the dark page lay before her. How could one write on a page so profoundly black?²⁷

The question brings to mind the whole of Lawrence's career up to the time it was penned. This is intentional, as can be deduced from imagery of pilgrimage and writing in the extract above. The passage asks whether yet another surge of energy can be engendered to cope with the perception that even the author and prophet grows old and tired. How can Lawrence celebrate powerful vitality now as a religious goal? The attempt to find an answer to the question is disconsolate. Disillusioned by the apathy in Mexico—two Mexicans, Ramon and Cipriano, set themselves up as ancient Aztec gods with Dionysian qualities. Their diagnosis of the sickness of Mexico is that Christianity has destroyed maleness and feminity and brought everyone to a desire for extinction. Therefore, they reason, a fresh deity is to be found. They return to ancient forms, have mysterious figures (themselves) arise from lakes and have hymns written in praise of the deities they represent. They write narrative songs in which the new god, Quetzalcoatl, is described as passing Christ in the sky: Christ is tired and on his way to sleep, Quetzalcoatl is vibrant with energy and on his way to a re-birth to replace Christ. They write litanies reminiscent of the psalms and Zarathustra's songs in Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*. The god they thus create, however, is violent and deadly. His worship leads to spurious ceremonies with green candles, gongs and human sacrifice. The presence of death is not overcome in the novel by such rituals. Indeed, the rituals intensify hatred—men are simply eliminated as "grey dogs". The operation of human squeamishness and scruple is withheld for the sake of rituals reminiscent of a pagan Mass. The intelligence of the female protagonist, Kate, who participates in such rites, is too weak to contain Lawrence's fear, disgust, despair and failure. These negative emotions are central to the main thrust of the novel which leads the reader to reject any idea of substitute religion. They do not reveal any description of a dynamic powerful enough to console the reader, the writer or the protagonists for the event of death and violence.

Lawrence's process of continuous revolution appears to lead him to disaster in *The Plumed Serpent*. His struggle to establish his own religious version of life appears to have ended in discord and dismay.²⁸ However, his last novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, is quite different. When it is closely examined, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* reveals new developments in Lawrence's art. He has relinquished the desire to delineate absolutes and dynamic forces. There are no phoney substitute religions in the work. There is little attempt to challenge either the Bible or Christianity as such. In addition to this it can be seen that the writer's role as commentator has changed. There are no "grey dogs" to be killed as in *The Plumed Serpent*. Lawrence finds sympathy for everyone in his novel. He sees all the people in it as damaged and torn by the course of their lives, subjected to salvaging what graces they can from the limitations of their existence. The word Lawrence uses insistently, for the first time, is "tenderness" when earlier one had read "power". This "tenderness" is manifest as what one might best describe as *caritas*, though it is a Lawrentian *caritas*, not Pauline.

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Lawrence escapes the despair of *The Plumed Serpent* by discovering a change in his reflections about other people. Because the process of continuous adventuring and continuous rebellion had reached an impasse in *The Plumed Serpent*—one cannot finally rebel against the fact of death and age—Lawrence had lost himself in gloom. He found it easy to condemn. Necessarily his belief in a life-sustaining dynamic of polarization failed him. How was he to find a wisdom to cope with this? His answer was in his power of resignation and his decision to rediscover consolation in the effort to understand the lives of other people.

The last novel centres on adultery. Lady Chatterley is married to an impotent cripple whose insensitivity to her dampens her personal vitality. She finds her game-keeper attractive and sleeps with him. The game-keeper himself, an educated man, deliberately speaks dialect to protect himself from his own scrutiny. He has also suffered an unhappy marriage. Lord Chatterley, emasculated in the war, is bound by his limitations. He strives for worldly success to make up for his emotional and instinctive losses. There is no one in the novel who has not been injured by the courses of his or her life. The game-keeper hates Connie's husband and ridicules him for his impotence. Clifford Chatterley hates

Connie for her betrayal and attacks both her and the game-keeper. Behind them all, however, stands the commentary of the novelist, and at every twist and turn of the narrative the reader meets comprehension rather than condemnation. Clifford is permitted the salvation of sensuous indulgence when Mrs. Bolton, a servant, shaves him, stroking his face as she does so. He achieves the limited goals of his life. Connie experiences the scandal and the sordidness of divorce, but her relationship with Mellors produces the game-keeper's discovery of "chastity". The reader is made to feel that the adultery is something of a betrayal, but the feeling is balanced by a perception that all people are casualties of the way they live. The grimness of this perception is relieved because Lawrence makes it the reason for his attempt to understand types of people whom elsewhere he hates and rejects. The novel embodies a spirit of compassionate awareness rare in Lawrence's work and this spirit is exemplified in the opening paragraph, the tone of which pervades the whole work. "We" all share in the life of the work:

Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen.²⁹

In *The Plumed Serpent* Lawrence came close to creating a chaos to replace Christianity. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, he achieved a poise made up of compassion and resignation with which he could face the despairs of the earlier work. Although Connie finds her way to tenderness through the flesh, the sexuality of most of the characters is subordinate to their desire for and need of understanding. Unlike Ursula in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, Connie is a woman all but overwhelmed by weariness. She seeks consolations, not challenges. The angry Eve-spirit in Lawrence relents in favour of a more saddened and circumspect vision of the world. People are not cast off like moral cripples because the attempt to understand them is itself consoling to author and reader alike.

III

The remarkable resilience that made it possible for Lawrence to live through the writing of all his novels up to *The Plumed Serpent* and still

write *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is very rare. His undermining of Biblical values and his setting out to navigate a way through the chaos thus created are both challenging thought adventures. Reading him, however, stirs discomfort about doubt and rejection of Western Christianity's interpretation of the Bible. The Scriptures seem to stand astride the known world of Western values like the Colossus at Rhodes. In fact, Lawrence suggests that Christianity is less vulnerable than a Colossus because it has a web of roots which have found their way into our pattern of thought and feeling. Lawrence did not find a way round or through Christianity. The feeling of the pressure of Christian teaching is acute in Lawrence's most intense anti-Christian stories as it is in his relaxed works. Although Lawrence seems to live through his explorations and discovers consolation for many of his perceptions, the reader is left confused by the massiveness of his wrestle with Christianity.

Notes and References

1. Lawrence has often been compared with Nietzsche in his struggles against Christianity. The two best known studies are mentioned below:
Eric Bentley, *The Cult of the Superman* (London, 1947) R. Hale.
Ernest Scillie, *D.H. Lawrence et les recentes ideologies allemandes* (Paris, 1936) Boivin et Cie.
See also R. Gray, *The German Tradition in Literature* (Cambridge, 1967) C.U.P., pp. 344-354.
The work most concerned with Lawrence's Christianity is G. Hough's *The Dark Sun* (London, 1956) Duckworth.
2. Cf. F. R. Leavis, 'Lawrence Scholarship and Lawrence' from *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (London, 1967), Chatto and Windus (paperback) p. 172: "Lawrence's genius manifested itself in sympathetic insight and an accompanying diagnostic intelligence. . ."
3. E.T., *D.H. Lawrence-a Personal Record* (London, 1935) Jonathan Cape, p. 85.
4. D.H. Lawrence, 'Hymns in a Man's Life', available in *Phoenix II, Uncollected, Unpublished and Other Prose Work by D. H. Lawrence*, coll. and ed. by Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore (New York, 1970) The Viking Press, p. 597.
5. *Vide*: D.H. Lawrence, *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*, available in *Phoenix II* (see above), pp. 365-484. This work can be regarded as the longest single discursive work that Lawrence wrote. A commentary on the Bible and Christian doctrine runs through it.
6. Schopenhauer, *Saemmtliche Werke* (Leipzig, 1891), Brockhaus, 6 volumes, III, 607 (*Metaphysik der Geschlechtsliebe*). E.T. mentions Lawrence's acquaintance with Schopenhauer's essay in her memoir, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99; p. 111; pp. 132-137.
7. D.H. Lawrence, 'Study of Thomas Hardy', *Phoenix*, p. 398.
8. Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, III, p. 588 (Leben der Gattung): "The sexual instinct is the kernel of the will to live, the concentration of all will, for this reason, in the main text, I called the genitals the focus of the will to live..." (trans. my own)
9. Cf. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra, Werke in drei Baenden*, edited Karl Schlechta, (Muenchen, 1960) Karl Hanser Verlag, 3 volumes, II, 335. 'If only he (Jesus) had stayed in the desert, far from the just and righteous, perhaps he would have learned to live and love the earth and laughing too...'

10. Although differing from each other Nietzsche and Lawrence now appear to have had similar problems and sought similar solutions to them in their struggles with west European Christianity.
11. Montaigne, *Essais* (Paris, 1958), edited Maurice Rat, 3 volumes, Editions Garnier Frères, III, 334: Mais tu ne meurs pas de ce que tu es malade: tu meurs de ce que tu es vivant. (from De L'Experience).
12. D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (Harmondsworth, 1949) Penguin Books (reprint 1965), p. 8.
13. *The Holy Bible*, (1611) King James First Authorized Version, O.U.P., 1944. *Genesis* I, xxviii.
14. *Ibid.*, *Genesis* III, vi.
15. D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, ed. cit., p. 9.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 275 and p. 280.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 281-282.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 495.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 495.
23. D.H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, (London, Melbourne and Toronto, 1961) Phoenix edition, William Heineman Ltd., p. 127.
Cf. *Aaron's Rod* (Harmondsworth, 1950) reprint 1968, Penguin Books, pp. 345-346.
24. D.H. Lawrence, 'Study of Thomas Hardy', *Phoenix* (London, 1961) ed. Edward D. McDonald, Heineman, p. 477.
25. Thomas M. McDonough, O.P., *The Law and the Gospel in Luther* (Oxford, 1963) O.U.P., p. 6.
Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Spirit Versus Structure: Luther and the Institution of the Church* (New York, 1968) Harper and Row, p. 11.
26. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, 210-216 from *Milton's Poetical Works* (Oxford and London, 1966) edited Douglas Bush, Paperback edition, 1969, pp. 261-262.
27. D.H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent* (Harmondsworth, 1950) Penguin Books edition, third reprint 1966, pp. 56-57.
28. Cf. Graham Hough, *The Dark Sun* (London, 1956) Duckworth.
J. Middleton Murry, *Love, Freedom and Society* (London, 1957) Jonathan Cape, p. 57; p. 103.
But Cf. Colin Clarke, *River of Dissolution*, (London, 1969) Routledge, Kegan Paul, p. 13: 'It is a crippling deficiency in Graham Hough's discussion of Lawrence's 'Quarrel with Christianity' ... that it should be exclusively concerned...with Lawrence's notion that Christianity is an attempt to "live from the love motive alone". For this is to fail to respond to the inner dialectic whereby Christianity worship of the flesh-in-reduction, a diseased and hectic functioning of the senses.
29. D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Harmondsworth, 1960) Penguin Books, first authorized English edition, p. 5.
My attention was first drawn to the special tone of this passage by a conversational observation made by Professor Parkin of St. Mary's University English Dept.