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## D.H. Lawrence's "Leadership" novels: failure of vision or technique

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**D. H. Lawrence's "Leadership" Novels:  
Failure of Vision or Technique?**

Powieści polityczne D. H. Lawrence'a:  
nieudana technika czy fałszywy obraz świata?

Политические романы Давида Герберта Лоренса: неудачная техника или  
искаженная картина мира?

David Herbert Lawrence (1885—1930) is a writer whose high rank in twentieth-century English literature is generally acknowledged. There may be some disagreement about the greatness of his poetry but as a novelist he has been but in the same class with Joseph Conrad and James Joyce, at least since the epoch-making study of his fiction was published by F. R. Leavis in 1955. This may be regarded as evidence of somewhat unusual judgement of the English critics, because — unlike Conrad or Joyce — Lawrence never revealed a specially keen interest in the form of the novel and never undertook technical experiments on a large scale. True, one of his novels, *Women in Love* (1920), now often regarded as his finest achievement in fiction, departs radically from the conventions of nineteenth-century realism, to which he had, by and large, remained faithful in his earlier works, but even this mature novel cannot be compared in the originality of form to Joyce's *Ulysses*. On the contrary, it fits easily in the modernist tradition of the novel as a series of scenes<sup>1</sup>

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\* Page references to the three novels discussed are to the following editions: *Aaron's Rod*, A Guild Paperback, n.d. London, *Kangaroo*, Penguin Books 1950, reprinted 1972, *The Plumed Serpent*, Penguin Books 1950, reprinted 1963.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Głowiński: *Powieść młodopolska. Studium z poetyki historycznej*, Wrocław—Warszawa—Kraków 1969, ch. V.

which replaced, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the older model with its regular plot developing from the *Vorgeschichte* through a series of chronologically arranged episodes to reach a climax and a resolution.

Clearly, even a casual reading of Lawrence's novel makes it plain that he is not remembered principally as a formal innovator. His aesthetic concerns were never sufficiently strong for that. His achievement rests rather on the imaginative power of his vision of the modern world as one heading for a catastrophe, a vision that has had a remarkable appeal in this century. Criticism of social values was often encountered in the novel of his time but his denunciation of industrialized society for its neglect of instinct and its exclusive stress on the rational faculty in man was uncompromising indeed and it stamped his novels with a mark of originality.

Yet the highest imaginative intensity lent to his fiction by the apocalyptic vision of the future of humanity occurred during the war years and went into the making of *Women in Love*. After that Lawrence was not any more merely a prophet of the catastrophe; he also became an advocate of the faith in a powerful individual who was to save humanity. This was a belief that he shared with fascism which was gaining influence in Europe at the same time. The affinity between Lawrence and fascism in this respect has been pointed out and he cannot be quite cleared of the charge notwithstanding numerous differences between him and fascism.<sup>2</sup> But an admission of certain similarities does not necessarily help to understand what Lawrence wanted to achieve in the "leadership" novels nor why they are imperfect as fiction. In order to assess their artistic merit it is necessary to examine both the theme and the structure of each of these novels.

The first thing that the three novels have in common is that the theme is stated in all with ambiguity. The ambiguity seems largely due to the fact that Lawrence, while retaining his belief in the approaching crisis of the Western civilization wanted at the same time to show in his novels a way of averting this crisis. Hence the fictional world in each of the so-called "leadership" novels contains both elements of criticism and glimpses of a new order postulated by the author. The mutual proportion of criticism and postulated changes varies; the first two novels are

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<sup>2</sup> For admission of certain similarities between fascism and Lawrence's post-war ideas see Harry T. Moore: *The Plumed Serpent: Vision and Language* [in:] *D. H. Lawrence A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by M. Spilka, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1963, p. 61, also J. I. M. Stewart: *Eight Modern Writers*, London—Oxford—New York 1963, p. 519. When Lawrence is defended against the charge, the religio-mystic character of his political convictions is emphasized.

mostly critical in tone, whereas the last one also proposes remedies. In order to accommodate both elements Lawrence adapted to his purpose the old conventions of the travel novel and repeatedly made his protagonists undertake a journey to a foreign country. Such is the plot in *Aaron's Rod* (1922), in *Kangaroo* (1923) and in *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), but whereas the first two novels in this group criticize Europe, propose an ideal that Europe should adopt and show the protagonist's unsuccessful search for a country that would embody this ideal in its social and political institutions, the last one comes close to a literary utopia as it presents much more fully the ideal order proposed by the author.<sup>3</sup>

*Aaron's Rod* and *Kangaroo* were evidently written while Lawrence was only exploring the implications of his newly acquired faith in individual leadership and in the willing submission of the masses to a born leader. This is why both novels have inconclusive endings and the postulated new order is not presented fully in either novel. Yet the first one is the more important of the two, because it at least states its main problem clearly through its episodic plot in which the most important part is played by two male characters. One of them is Aaron Sisson, a secretary of the Miners' Union who, after abandoning his family in a fit of disgust with his existence goes to live in London and then to Italy. The other is Rawdon Lilly, a writer and the authorial *porte-parole* who preaches the need of submission of the masses to a superior leader. After initial misunderstandings the two men meet again in Italy, which is plunged in the political turmoil preceding Mussolini's coming to power. Emerging from an unsatisfactory love affair Aaron comes to realize that love no longer has any saving power either for the individual or for humanity and, shaken by a bomb explosion in a café, where his flute has been broken he listens again to Lilly's offer of a relationship in which the writer would be the dominant partner. Whether he will accept the offer this time is not revealed, because the novel closes on an inconclusive conversation about Aaron and Lilly about human relationships in general. But it is at least implied by the narrator in his description of Aaron's response to Lilly's fiery speech that the weaker of the two men feels a strong fascination for the powerful personality of the writer:

"All men say they want a leader. Then let them in their souls submit to some greater soul than theirs. At present when they say they want a leader, they mean they want an instrument, like Lloyd George [...] But it's more than that. It's the reverse. It's the deep, fathomless submission to the heroic soul in a greater man.

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<sup>3</sup> Harry T. Moore stressed the radical character of Lawrence's attack on Western civilization as something that distinguishes it from the earlier novels of the same period (*op. cit.*, p. 65).

You, Aaron, you too have the need to submit. You, too, have the need livingly to yield to a more heroic soul, to give yourself [...] And you know it isn't love. It is a life-submission." (p. 6)

The only clue given by the narrator about the response of Aaron to this is a terse statement that when he looked at the face of his friend it seemed to him "like a Byzantine eikon". As one of the meanings of this word in the *OED* is: "a representation of some sacred personage, itself regarded as sacred, and honoured with a relative worship", it can be concluded that the image carries with it some suggestion of Aaron's readiness to accept the words of Lilly as an almost religious truth. In view of this, the last words of Lilly, telling his friend that his own soul will tell him to whom he ought to submit are, perhaps, not really open to many interpretations. For the plot of the novel has already shown the bankruptcy of Aaron's marriage, then of his love affair and even of his music, when his flute is broken in the bomb explosion at a café. He is evidently the character in need of guidance and Lilly's superiority as a fictional character was earlier suggested by the narrator in a description of his appearance:

"His dark eyes were quick, his dark hair was untidy, there was something silent and withheld about him. People could never approach him quite ordinarily." (p. 86)

The mutual relationship of the two main characters one of whom discovers his need to submit to the other, who has the qualities of a born leader, is of great importance in the novel. It is through this relationship that the main theme of the novel is presented. The novel is an open rejection of the democratic notion that all men are equal. When Lilly consistently asserts that this notion is false he merely expresses a belief that Lawrence formulated directly in one of the letters written in the year when the novel was published. There he wrote:

"I don't believe either in liberty or in democracy. I believe in actual, sacred, inspired authority: divine right of natural kings [...]" (*Collected Letters*, p. 700)

*Aaron's Rod* is thus a fairly accurate statement of the conviction which Lawrence formulated for himself fully in the 'twenties and which assumed that the weakness of twentieth-century Western civilization had its source in the belief in equality. It is this belief that is shown in the novel to be utterly wrong and what is postulated instead is a relationship in which the superiority of one individual is acknowledged, as is also the need for submission of others to him.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Yudhishtar argued that Lilly's views are merely reported and do not receive narratorial support (*Conflict in the Novels of D. H. Lawrence*, Edinburgh 1969, p. 225), but this opinion was not substantiated by any evidence from the text.

It should be stressed, however, that in this earliest "leadership" novel Lawrence restricted the postulatory aspect of the fictional world very much. What is proposed comes only at the end and merely in the form of an indication that the protagonist has adopted a new system of values. This can be concluded from his long meditation on submission reported by the narrator in the closing chapter:

"If he had to give in to something: if he really had to give in, and it seemed he had: then he would rather give in to the devilish little Lilly than to the beastly people of the world. If he had to give, then it should be to no woman, and to no social idea, and to no social institution [...] he would rather give himself to the little, individual *man* than to any of the rest." (p. 336)

The decision to accept Lilly as his guide and leader is the consequence of Aaron's sudden realization that "All the time, freak and outsider as he was, Lilly *knew*. He knew, and his soul was against the world". (p. 336) What is it that Lilly knew can only be inferred from the next sentence stressing his rebellion against all the world, of whose rottenness he has probably become aware. This conclusion which the protagonist reaches at the end, is meant to be valid for the Western man; for Aaron is consistently shown as representative of his time by virtue of his sensitiveness and his readiness to seek new values. Yet the novel ends when he has just made his discovery and there is nothing in it to show how his ultimate acceptance of the relationship founded on submission transforms him or makes his life richer. Nor is Italy shown as a promised land. On the contrary, Italy is as bad as England: plunged in disorder and materialism, torn by political dissent, with no leader and no sense of direction. All in all, there is little in the fictional world of *Aaron's Rod* that can be regarded as a proposed norm; most of the novel is bitterly critical in tone and the only thing that emerges at the end on the positive side is a proposed change in the system of values accepted within the Western civilization. Equality as a social and political ideal is rejected and is to be replaced by the acknowledgment of the superiority of born leaders.

The next novel in order of composition, *Kangaroo*, is thematically related to *Aaron's Rod* and continues the critical examination of the ideals which have become the heritage of Western civilization. Unfortunately, because of its excessive length it presents its criticisms in a very ambiguous manner. The main character here is Richard Lovat Somers, an English writer coming to Australia with the hope that in a country with a small population society might be more open to his reforming ideas. However, what he sees of its political life, having met both a socialist and a fascist leader, makes him disillusioned about the chances of forming a model community on that continent and he leaves Australia for America. His search for a place in which he might find or help to establish a new

political and social order is accompanied by the marital strife that he and his wife Harriet conduct throughout the novel. Possibly, Lawrence considered the problem of supremacy in marriage to be closely related to the problem of re-introducing hierarchy and obedience in society, but this is by no means made clear in the novel, which is a curious mixture of the monologues of the protagonist on world problems, his memories of the war, descriptions of Australia, and intrusions by the narrator reaching almost the length of independent essays.

Even in the case of a novel so ambiguous because of its faults of composition it is worth trying to understand its main idea and the best clue to it can be found in the remarks of the narrator, who plays an important role in it. As was the case in *Aaron's Rod*, the narrator in the later novel hardly ever speaks in support of the opinions of the fictional characters limiting himself to interpreting and elaborating their thoughts and utterances. But as Somers is both the protagonist and the author's *porte-parole*, as the narrative is conducted mostly from his point of view, his ideas are also presented at greatest length and they convey the real message of the novel by their sheer dominance over any other view expressed in dialogue.<sup>5</sup> Somers is really the hero of the novel, and as he is presented only with very slight irony that does not essentially diminish the implied approval given to him by the narrator, his ideas must be regarded as coming closest to the norm proposed by the author. True, the novel contains mostly criticism of Western civilization and hardly any suggestion as to what should replace it, yet a few positive postulates can be found even there. They can mostly be found in fragments of Somers' reflections which are only amplified here and there by the narrator. The essence of Somers' message is this: whatever is wrong with the modern world results from its persisting in the service of a dead ideal. This dead ideal is the Christian ideal of love and an escape away from it is not a denial of the existence of God, but an acceptance of a totally different idea of God, the God of darkness that affirms man's right to the hatred of one's neighbour.<sup>6</sup>

As *Aaron's Rod* postulated the replacement of the ideal of equality, so the next novel wants to see the ideal of brotherly love supplanted by

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<sup>5</sup> S. Eile stressed that the very fact of presenting a theme shows its significance writing: „W sensie najogólniejszym znaczy już coś sam dobór tematyki, o ile nie ma charakteru pretekstowego, gdyż wyodrębnienie jej z nieskończonego szeregu innych możliwości akcentuje implicity jakąś wagę ukazanych zagadnień.” (*Światopogląd powieści*, Wrocław—Warszawa 1973, p. 173).

<sup>6</sup> In his discussion of *Aaron's Rod* Eliseo Vivas argued that already in the early 'twenties Lawrence was formulating an ethical system which was unacceptable, because it glorified selfishness' (*D. H. Lawrence, The Failure and the Triumph of Art*, London 1961, p. 45).

an open admission that there is a desire for evil in the human nature and that it must finally be permitted to reveal itself. This is stressed in a speculation by the narrator on the denial of the power of evil in humanity in chapter XV:

"The Lord thy God is the invisible stranger at the gate in the night, knocking. He is the mysterious life-suggestion, tapping for admission. And the wondrous Victorian Age managed to fasten the door so tight, and light up the compound so brilliantly with electric light, that really there was no outside, it was all in. The unknown became a joke [...]" (p. 313)

The chapter that follows this speculation of the narrator presents an eruption of violence at a political meeting in which people get killed. This is exactly as Somers foretold in an earlier chapter, "Revenge! Timotheus cries", where he claimed that the ideals of "Love, Self-sacrifice, and Humanity united in love" are the dead ideals still preserved and that, once people discover the deadness of these ideals, they will feel betrayed and will seek revenge. This argument is supported with examples in Somers' reflection on history:

"Men revenged themselves on Athens, when they felt sold. When Rome, persisting in an old, defunct ideal, gradually made her subjects feel sold, they were revenged on her, no matter how. Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire the same. And now our turn." (p. 292)

The looseness or rather vagueness of Somers' interpretation of history is evident but then this fragment is only used here as a starting point for his reflections on the ways in which human conduct ought to be guided. And in this respect the protagonist concludes that man can be freed from the tyranny of his own mind only when he becomes a part of the mass and when his action is directed by the collective subconsciousness. Yet it is characteristic of this novel that no conviction of the protagonist is presented as ultimate truth, because the narrator's support is never given to any statement either directly, or through the manipulation of the events of the plot. On the contrary, the dialectic pattern is evident throughout and as soon as the condemnation of the mind has been formulated by the protagonist there follows a dramatic presentation of the power of the mind: Somers becomes involved in a disturbance at a political meeting and feels a sudden urge "to let go" — to become part of the violence and madness around him — but even then the guidance of his mind persists and the next sentence contains brief information that "since he didn't really *know* whom he wanted to let go at, he was not quite carried away." (p. 347)

As this important scene goes on, it reveals the final reaction to the collective madness that Somers had witnessed: he felt "a kind of grief, a bitter, agonized grief for his fellow-men." (p. 348) Eventually, he decides



to disentangle himself from the chaotic Australian politics and to leave the continent, even though he admires it for its "emptiness", its "natural" state uncorrupted by the old architecture of Europe which he regards as mere "encumbrances of stone and steel and brick, weighing on the surface of the earth." (p. 380) In a statement that he makes immediately before departing he again asserts:

"I'm the enemy of the machine civilization [...] But I'm not the enemy of the deep, self-responsible consciousness in man which is what I mean by civilization. In that sense of civilization I'd fight for ever for the flag and try to carry it on into deeper, darker places." (p. 383)

There is evidence that Lawrence professed at the time the same beliefs as Somers expresses in *Kangaroo* and it led him to a paradox: he attacked the Western civilization in the novel for upholding dead values but simultaneously affirmed, through the protagonist who is in essence supported by the authorial narrator, that one ought to remain faithful to the "self-responsible consciousness" which is the heritage of that civilization. Naturally, with these contradictory statements of the main character, accompanied by sudden turns in the plot, the overall meaning of *Kangaroo* is puzzling and the author remains uncommitted on the problem of what precisely ought to be abandoned and what ought to be retained in the civilization to which he belonged. In *Aaron's Rod* he already rejected the idea of equality as false, in *Kangaroo* he condemned with equal vigour the Christian ideal of love. But the implications of this rejection of the ideal of love are not followed to their logical conclusion in this later novel: the acceptance of hatred is not shown as desirable. Somers is allowed to have merely a glimpse of mass violence and the violence is certainly not shown as a postulated beginning of a better order. It is rather presented as a warning that that may be the line that humanity will follow if a long overdue revision of values is not made.

In this way the ending of the novel brings out its tentative or hypothetical quality. It is not a story of what *happens* to Somers, but what he *feels* is going to happen to the world. The role that Australia plays in this speculation of the main character is minor: he simply comes to it with a hope that this is the country where the Western civilization may be reborn but finds that it is as corrupted as the European continent and past saving. Yet, apart from this discovery, little of what happens in the novel confirms Somers' premonition of the catastrophe that is to happen to the West. Nor does the fictional world reflect with any clarity the new order postulated by the author. Indeed the novel can be said to cover the same ground, in problems, as did the second part of *Women in Love*, where the abstract ideas were much more firmly a part of the fictional world. In *Kangaroo* they are just a series of hypotheses that the main character

formulates. Nothing really happens to him and he remains throughout merely a "thought-adventurer" toying with the possibility of joining one political party or the other and remaining a critical outsider. The plot is thus restricted mostly to the presentation of the ideas of the main character. What is more, these ideas are largely negative: condemnation of egalitarian democracy, rejection of the Christian ideal of love, fear of the consequences of the suppression of man's subconscious needs. Nothing really positive emerges, as J. I. M. Stewart stresses in his brief analysis of the novel.<sup>7</sup> But equally nothing like a total condemnation of Western civilization is made, since Somers ultimately stresses his loyalty to the "self-responsible consciousness" that is an integral part of the Western tradition.

It was only in the next novel, *The Plumed Serpent*, that Lawrence created a fictional world which was both an uncompromising condemnation of the Western civilization and an embodiment of a proposed norm. In one stroke the novelist replaced there Western egalitarian democracy with theocratic totalitarianism eliminating Christianity and installing in its place a primitive religion that reverts to human sacrifices. Finally, machine economy was replaced in that novel by work of the human hands in a manner truly reminiscent of Morris' *News from Nowhere*. Lawrence himself thought highly about his intellectual achievement in the novel, but his critics have rarely shared his enthusiasm. Indeed, the reverse is true: of all his works of fiction this is the one that has most often been condemned for its ideology<sup>8</sup>.

The plot of this last "leadership" novel follows essentially the pattern used earlier used in *Aaron's Rod* and in *Kangaroo*: the main character, this time a woman, Kate Leslie, sets out on a journey in search of spiritual values that have been lost in Europe. While staying in Mexico, she comes under the influence of Don Ramon Carrasco, leader of a revolutionary movement, and his Indian-born general Don Cipriano Viedma. The two men start a revolution which is to be not a mere political movement but also a religious revival aiming at discarding Christianity and going back to the old Aztec religion. Though Kate has earlier been disillusioned with politics and though she is at first repelled by acts of cruelty committed by both men, she eventually decides to marry Cipriano and stay in Mexico. This is because her experience in the country helps her to shed her predominantly intellectual attitude to life and adopt a new one which consists in abandonig her desire for individual freedom and in trying to satisfy her unconscioous needs. The transformation of Kate from a civ-

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 550.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Moore: *op. cit.*, p. 67.

ilized woman living by intellect into a primitive one living by instinct is not a completed process even at the end of the novel. Nevertheless it is clear to her by then that she has discovered a way to a meaningful life which she was unable to achieve in Europe.<sup>9</sup>

That this is in essence the change that Kate undergoes in Mexico is conveyed by different devices: by recurrent images, by the titles of the three final chapters and by a straightforward narratorial comment. The recurrent images which intimate that Kate gradually achieves a state of union with nature are those of the tree and of the serpent. When she feels that she is giving up her former ambitions and aspirations because Mexico is "pulling her down" Don Ramon, largely acting as the authorial *porte-parole* in the novel, explains to her:

"Mexico pulls you down, the people pull you down like a great weight! But it may be they pull you down as the earth's pull of gravitation does, that you can balance on your feet. Maybe they draw you down as the earth draws down the roots of a tree, so that it may be clinched deep in soil. Men are still part of the Tree of Life, and the roots go down to the centre of the earth." (p. 87)

The image of the tree is to show that human life needs stability more than it needs liberty and Kate soon realizes it. Gradually she ceases to miss her former "soaring sense of liberty" (p. 79) and at the end of the novel she accepts as true Don Ramon's words: "There is no such thing as liberty" (p. 79). The full realization of the truth of these words comes to her in figurative form at the end of the penultimate chapter when she sees a snake and asks herself if it is "disappointed at not being able to rise higher in creation" and, after a moment of doubt, answers herself: "Perhaps not. Perhaps it 'had its own peace.'" To make the analogy between the heroine's condition and that of the snake even more emphatic the narrator then adds: "she felt a certain reconciliation between herself and it" (p. 414). The heroine's acceptance of the humble reptilian condition marks the opening of a new stage of her consciousness. As has been seen, it is Don Ramon who formulates the author's postulates and Kate gradually discovers their truth. The philosophy of life that he teaches her is fairly simple and could be conveyed in direct language but the imagery gives it a poetic dimension.

However, to make his meaning more explicit Lawrence expressed it also through the titles of the closing chapters. One of these is "Teresa" and it is devoted entirely to the presentation of the portrait of Ramon's second wife. Her sole function in the novel is to show what a perfect wife should be like: loving, unselfish, submissive. Kate is shown as finally acknowledging Teresa's superiority and in the next chapter, entitled "Kate

<sup>9</sup> It is stated explicitly in one of the early chapters that "the flow of her life was broken and she knew she could not re-start it in Europe." (p. 85).

is a Wife", she makes a conscious effort to come close to the ideal. She comes a step closer to her complete transformation when she gives up her critical faculty and refuses to judge her husband for his acts of cruelty. On that occasion her thinking is reported by the narrator without any comment:

"Why should I judge him? He is of the gods. And when he comes to me he lays his pure, quick flame to mine, and every time I am a young girl again... What do I care if he kills people?" (pp. 409—410)

This brief passage shows that when it came to ethical problems the novelist found it convenient to present only the subjective view of the main character. Her complete ethical indifference is never explicitly endorsed by the narrator. But neither is it any way contradicted or at least provided with a contrast which could be regarded as an oblique expression of an opposed point of view. In addition the context makes it plain that Kate, transformed into a passive, uncritical specimen of womanhood, is presented as a desired norm by the narrator. Indeed, the last chapter has only a brief exclamation in the title: "Here!" Surely this title can be understood as indicating the heroine's resolution to stay in Mexico and though again the narrator does not openly express his approval of her decision he does it with only a slight disguise in a passage describing the success of her return to the primitive condition of humanity:

"Sometimes, in America, the shadow of the old pre-Flood world was so strong, that the day of historic humanity would melt out of Kate's consciousness, and she would begin to approximate to the old mode of consciousness, the old, dark will, the unconcern for death, the subtle, dark consciousness, non-cerebral but vertebrate." (p. 431)

These are not sentences that are meant to simulate the thinking of the main character, either in syntax or in vocabulary. It is the narrator speaking for the author. Lawrence evidently endowed Kate with his own American experience which he revealed, among others in an essay *New Mexico* where he wrote: "[...] it was New Mexico that liberated me from the present era of civilization [...]"<sup>10</sup> and added that in Taos "you will feel the old, old roots of human consciousness still reaching down to depths we know nothing of..."<sup>11</sup> (p. 185).

These two quotations indicate, it is hoped, that it was Lawrence's intention to show, through the experience given to Kate, his own attitude of rejecting, at least temporarily, the European civilization which he had criticized with sufficient sharpness already in the two earlier "leadership" novels. However, if the criticism of Europe is something that all

<sup>10</sup> Essay reprinted in *Selected Essays*, Penguin Books, 1968, p. 181.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

the three novels have in common, *The Plumed Serpent* stands alone by virtue of the full presentation of a fictional world which shows the proposed changes.

There can be no doubt that Kate has full narratorial approval. There is also ample evidence in the novel that after she becomes transformed by her Mexican experience she becomes a model character and exemplifies the changes proposed by the author, through the intermediacy of Don Ramon, as a cure for modern humanity. True, initially she is shown as overintellectualized and arrogant in her trust in intellect, but even then she is a character keenly aware of her own limitations as well as possessing a sense of the crisis of the Western civilization. Her individualism is also stressed early by the narrator who says of her already in chapter II that she "was never in any society: too Irish, too wise." (p. 48). In the closing chapter she is also described by the narrator as a person able to learn from experience: "Kate was a wise woman, wise enough to take a lesson." (p. 456). But this direct form of narratorial approval is not frequent. More often Kate's role in expressing the author's ideas, along with Don Ramon, becomes evident simply because her point of view dominates in the novel.

The shaping of the character of Kate is the result of her function in the novel, which is to go through a series of experiences illustrating Lawrence's ideas. This is why F. R. Leavis' remark that "she is the one character of major intrinsic interest"<sup>12</sup> seems wide off the mark, because it suggests that *The Plumed Serpent* could be regarded as a psychological novel. Nothing could be further from truth; it is no more a psychological novel than *Aaron's Rod* or *Kangaroo*. J. I. M. Stewart is nearer the truth when he calls it a "fable"<sup>13</sup>. If it differs from a fable it is mostly in its intended lack of clarity in the presentation of ideas, but this was, very possibly, the consequence of Lawrence's theory of fiction. As J. Paterson pointed out, Lawrence assumed that the artistic process must be unconscious and if it was that, it also had to be spontaneous.<sup>14</sup> As long as he was interested in the drama of human relationships this trust in spontaneous writing served him well, but when, after the war, he became interested in ideas rather than in character, reliance on spontaneity in their presentation made the fictional world in these novels confusing. As John R. Harrison put it, "the difficulty of interpreting Lawrence's

<sup>12</sup> *Thoughts, Words and Creativity. Art and Thought in Lawrence*, London 1976, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 557.

<sup>14</sup> *The Novel as Faith*, Boston 1973, p. 174.

work is that he was trying to communicate something to the intellect which, he was always stressing, was beyond the intellect."<sup>15</sup>

The weakness of the three "leadership" novels is largely due to the fact that, as Lawrence's ideas about history, politics, religion were increasingly complicated, he became impatient with the requirements of the form of the novel<sup>16</sup> and adopted a pattern almost crude in its simplicity, with a protagonist undertaking a journey in the course of which he (or, in the case of the third novel, she) was making discoveries about the causes of the decline of Western civilization and about the ways of saving humanity from catastrophe. Not only was the main character monotonously the same in the different novels, but the narrator is given as great prerogatives as he had in early Victorian fiction and can interrupt the story to discuss any subject of interest to the author; finally, any problem that is not discussed by the narrator, may be presented instead by the authorial *porte-parole*. As a result direct discussion or speculation dominates in the three novels, but ideas are never presented with clarity.

The last but also the most important flaw of Lawrence's three post-war novels is the violently negative character of the ideas themselves, the uncompromising rejection of all the European heritage and an attempt to replace liberty, love, equality by submission, right to hatred and a relationship between the born leader and those who obey him. The attack on the European heritage reached its highest point in the last novel which presents as desirable everything that runs counter to the tradition of European civilization. It is in this novel that the postulated order has the largest share in the fictional world, but because this fictional world is so radically different from everything accepted in Europe, it implies the novelist's harshest criticism of his own civilization. It is difficult to agree with the opinion of F. R. Leavis that the book fails as a novel but contains redeeming "felicities of thought formulation".<sup>17</sup> If it fails as a novel, it is because its ideas are inadequate and are often expressed by means of inadequate novelistic devices. This is by and large true of the earlier novels of this group, too; they all offer some very pertinent criticism of twentieth-century Western civilization, but they do not stop at that and when Lawrence proposes remedies, the remedies are as bad as the evils which they are meant to cure. In a novel criticism cannot be separated from postulates because together they form the fictional world and this is why, once Lawrence's vision of the salvation of the world turned out

<sup>15</sup> *The Reactionaries*, London 1966, p. 187.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Stewart: *op. cit.*, p. 538.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

to be both naive and expressed through inadequate novelistic means, the novels could not become successful. Critics of Lawrence's novels often pointed out the naivete or perversion of Lawrence's ideas<sup>18</sup>; they also remarked on the careless and simplified form of these novels but it is worth while to emphasize that the two are inseparably connected: when Lawrence became a prophet more than an artist, his novels degenerated into something like thinly disguised political pamphlets.

#### STRESZCZENIE

Dawid Herbert Lawrence (1885—1930), uważany obecnie za jednego z czołowych powieściopisarzy angielskich okresu I wojny światowej i dziesięciolecia powojennego, zawdzięcza swoją pozycję bardziej katastroficznej wizji świata, zawartej w jego utworach, niż eksperymentom formalnym. Już w powieściach z lat 1915—20 dał się poznać jako bezkompromisowy krytyk cywilizacji europejskiej. Jego powieści późniejsze, pod wieloma względami podobne tematycznie, są jednakże uważane za utwory słabsze, przez jednych ze względu na uproszczoną kompozycję, przez innych zaś z racji wyrażonych tam poglądów politycznych i moralnych.

W artykule wysunięto tezę, że artystyczna słabość trzech powieści z okresu 1920—26 wynika nie tyle z ich uproszczonej kompozycji, ile z celowo niejasnego wyrażenia tam światopoglądu pisarza przez fabułę i ukształtowanie postaci. Świat przedstawiony każdej z tych powieści dzieli się wyraźnie na część krytykowaną i część postulowaną. Dwie pierwsze powieści odznaczają się jasnością w części krytycznej, podczas gdy postulaty autora, dość jeszcze nieliczne, przedstawione są niejasno, najczęściej przez spekulacje postaci fikcyjnych, które nie zawsze otrzymują wyraźne poparcie autora. W powieści ostatniej utrzymana jest równowaga pomiędzy krytyką a postulatami, jednakże i tam ze względu na radykalny charakter postulatów przedstawione są one często jako wynik subiektywnych doświadczeń postaci fikcyjnych, które autor aprobuje jedynie pośrednio przez metaforykę i tytuły rozdziałów, rzadziej zaś przez wypowiedzi narratora. Tak więc niejasności we wszystkich trzech utworach są następstwem zabiegów pisarskich, nie zaś braków warsztatu.

#### РЕЗЮМЕ

Давид Герберт Лоренс (1885—1930), который в настоящее время считается одним из ведущих английских романистов периода I мировой войны и послевоенного десятилетия, своей позицией в литературе обязан не столько формальным экспериментам, сколько катастрофической картине мира в своих произведениях. Уже в романах 1915—1920 гг. писатель выступил как бескомпромиссный критик европейской цивилизации. Его позднейшие романы, тематически связанные с предыдущими, считаются критиками более слабыми произведениями из-за своей упрощенной композиции, по мнению одних, и из-за выраженных там политических и моральных взглядов, по мнению других.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. Moynahan: *The Deed of Life. The Novels and Tales of D. H. Lawrence*, Princeton, New Jersey—Oxford 1963, pp. 112—113, *Viva: op. cit.*, Part I.

В статье выдвигается тезис, что художественные недостатки трех романов Лоренса периода 1920—1926 гг. вытекают не только из их упрощенной композиции, но из их намеренно неясного мировоззрения писателя, выраженного фавбулой и формированием образов. Мир, представленный в этих романах, делится на 2 части: критикуемую и постулируемую. Два первых романа характеризуются ясностью критической части, хотя пока еще немногочисленные постулаты автора туманны, а их выразителями являются фиктивные герои, которые не всегда находят у автора поддержку. В последнем романе писателя равновесие между критикой и постулатами сохраняется, хотя и здесь они представлены как результат субъективных опытов фактивных героев, которых автор апробирует лишь посредственно — через метафорику и названия разделов, редко через высказывания повествователя. Следовательно, неясности, выступающие во всех трех произведениях, являются литературным приемом, а не отсутствием у писателя художественного мастерства.