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Recension de Shirley Bricout, *Politics and the Bible in the Leadership Novels*

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Shirley Bricout, *Politics and the Bible in the Leadership Novels*

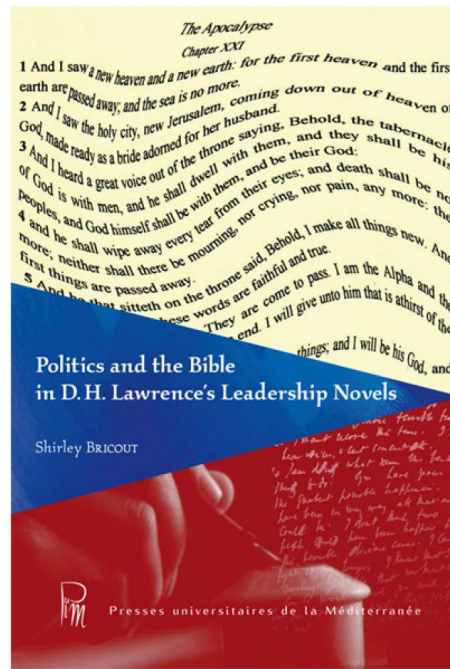
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- 1 In this study Shirley Bricout explores the imaginary world of D.H. Lawrence and comments on his prophetic quest. In the introduction the author underlines the importance of the Bible for Lawrence, quoting from his “Introduction to *The Dragon of the Apocalypse*, by Frederick Carter”: “I was brought up on the Bible, and seem to have it in my bones. From early childhood I have been familiar with Apocalyptic language and Apocalyptic image” (18). The Bible appears as “the archetype of literary texts” (19). The book sheds new light on the “Leadership Novels” (*Aaron’s Rod*, *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent*). Shirley Bricout studies the intertextual relationship between the trilogy and the Bible—a subversive relationship. The novels are analysed through Biblical references. Lawrence was both a writer and a traveller. The author shows that the three novels, with their associations with Italy, Australia and Mexico, abound in biblical symbolism.
- 2 Chapter one (“The Genesis of the Written Word”) deals with methodological considerations and contemporary critical theory: the names of Bakhtin, Barthes, Kristeva, Genette, Derrida, Ricoeur are mentioned. The critical approach is based on narratology and semiotics. The author underlines Lawrence’s use of parody, pastiche and burlesque travesty. The impressive forty-page tables of biblical resonances that take this first part to a close reveal the complex notions of dissemination and graft.
- 3 Chapter two (“The Break from Europe”) considers the narrative function of the biblical borrowings. Shirley Bricout comments on the hermeneutic process of Lawrence’s writing and its connections with the “displacement of the sacred text” (107). Evoking the main moments in Christ’s life, she offers a new interpretation of crucifixion, making seminal comments on the cross symbolism. She also convincingly analyses the dialogic relations between the biblical hypotext and the Lawrentian hypertext in the passages dealing with the issue of war in the three novels, especially the proleptic dimension of the “Nightmare” chapter in *Kangaroo*. Biblical intertextual allusions allow Lawrence to create different representations of women: the priestess in *Aaron’s Rod*; the prophetess in *Kangaroo*; “the archetypal Woman before the Fall” (153) in *The Plumed Serpent*.
- 4 In chapter three (“The Quest in Exile: a Second Creation”), Shirley Bricout focuses on the evolution of the linguistic quest of the characters from one novel to the next. The protagonists of *Aaron’s Rod* question the political power of the “Word”. In *Kangaroo*, the profusion of different tongues evokes the Tower of Babel of Genesis. In *The Plumed Serpent* language is a non-verbal experience in which “Kate unlearns the Word” (178). In this chapter Shirley Bricout also addresses Lawrence’s geopolitical vision through the themes of ethnocentrism and logocentrism. According to her, Lawrence’s rejection of colonialism appears in his subversion of the biblical hypotext. Shirley Bricout evokes the social perspective of the Lawrentian quest, illustrated by Rananim, the ideal community that



Lawrence wished to establish. In the trilogy, this social concern is illustrated by the Parable of the Good Samaritan - the biblical episode being revealed through pastiche in *Aaron's Rod*, diversion and dissemination in *Kangaroo*, and burlesque travesty in *The Plumed Serpent*. Shirley Bricout implies that, in the Mexican novel, Lawrence resorts to primitive myths to develop his cosmic quest, associating Indian and Celtic mythologies through the character of Kate. Social deconstruction is thus achieved through biblical borrowings.

- 5 The last chapter ("the New Alliance: Exploring Political Thought") explores Lawrence's political thought, placing Fascism and Marxism in relation with the trilogy, and considering the apocalyptic dimension of his writings. According to Shirley Bricout, the study of the biblical hypotext reveals Lawrence's answer to Fascist ideology. In *Kangaroo*, the elitist mission of the new saviour, "the fictitious Fascist leader" (233) is caricatured, "the kangaroo of Judah... being substituted for the lion of Judah" (237). In the same way, the emblems of the primitive god Quetzalcoatl in *The Plumed Serpent* (the serpent and the eagle) might suggest a Fascist influence; yet they more probably evoke the phoenix (the great Lawrentian symbol) and the Ouroboros, which, in Lawrence's interpretation, are "grounded in a cosmic understanding of human relationships" (254). Commenting on the connections between Lawrence's use of biblical metaphors in the Leadership Novels and Marxist theories, Shirley Bricout convincingly analyses Engels's and Marx's visions of Christianity, and compares the three novels with Marx's *Capital*, seeing in *Kangaroo*, for instance, "clear echoes of a complex palimpsest" (274). The last part of the chapter deals with the apocalyptic trend in Lawrence's works. The author suggests a chromatic reading of the riot scenes in the novels, with reference to the four colours of the Horses of the Apocalypse (white, red, black and "pale"). She notes a return to the primitive symbolism of the colour white in *The Plumed Serpent*. Shirley Bricout finally considers two emblematic Lawrentian symbols: the serpent and the rainbow. The serpent of Genesis—another version of the Dragon of the Apocalypse—undergoes several changes in the trilogy: the "swollen head" (297) of the dragon figure in *Aaron's Rod* is transformed into an inner dragon in *Kangaroo*, and eventually becomes Quetzalcoatl, the symbol of the primitive centres in *The Plumed Serpent*. The rainbow is considered in all its complexity. An eschatological symbol in *Aaron's Rod*, it is linked with the theme of water and with the flood motif in *Kangaroo*. In *The Plumed Serpent*, Shirley Bricout remarks, the rainbow is replaced by the Morning Star, a symbol of cosmic harmony.
- 6 Through biblical intertextuality, she concludes, Lawrence cleverly deconstructs political connections and endows his writing with an apocalyptic vision of destruction-creation: "The cyclic progression evidences that the working of intertextuality leads to one text being consumed by another only to rise from its ashes, just like the phoenix, the Lawrentian symbol of life" (319).
- 7 Published with a preface by Keith Cushman, this impressive work, which is a brilliant translation by the author of an earlier work in French, is clear and accurate. It contains relevant examples, quotations and notes, as well as an exhaustive bibliography. Revealing Shirley Bricout's passionate interest in Lawrence's writings, it will undoubtedly be a valuable resource for English-speaking Lawrence scholars.

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