

**THE PLUMED SERPENT
(QUETZALCOATL)**

D. H. LAWRENCE

EDITED BY
L. D. CLARK



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INTRODUCTION

Soon after beginning his Mexican novel in May 1923, Lawrence declared that he had wanted all his life to write this book.¹ A few weeks later, nearing the end of a first draft and confident of his achievement, he could say: 'I like my new novel best of all – much' and 'this is my real novel of America'.²

Even so, he was to hesitate over the work for more than two years, to rewrite it entirely, to revise through final proofs and still to dread how it would fare in print. Behind his apprehension that the public could not appreciate his achievement, doubts apparently lingered in Lawrence's mind as to whether he had really created in *The Plumed Serpent* the novel he envisaged. Yet he was still ready to maintain, till it was out of his hands, that this was his 'most important novel, so far'.³

During the four years of life remaining to him after the novel appeared, Lawrence spoke little of *The Plumed Serpent*. Plainly, he ceased before long to think of this novel as the crowning accomplishment of his career, the fulfilment of a long-held ambition to write a book about 'America'. He even came to believe, insofar as the work embodies a political ideal, that he had made a mistake.⁴

How far back the impulse behind his American novel went in Lawrence's life is difficult to ascertain. It can be traced at least to his disillusionment with Europe during the First World War and his fascination with America as a haven for the rebirth of self and society.⁵ In his wartime analysis of American literature (much revised, and published as

¹ *Letters*, iv. 446; MS unlocated but summarised in a House of Books, Ltd. catalogue (1970).

² Letters to Adele and Thomas Seltzer (*Letters*, iv. 455, 457). The Seltzers published DHL in America from the foundation of the firm (Thomas Seltzer, Inc.) in 1920, and did much to build his reputation. DHL left Seltzer for Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. in 1925. See Alexandra Lee Levin and Lawrence L. Levin, 'The Seltzers and D. H. Lawrence', in *D. H. Lawrence: Letters to Thomas and Adele Seltzer*, ed. Gerald M. Lacy (Santa Barbara, 1976), pp. 169–201.

³ Letter to Curtis Brown, 23 June 1925. See also letters to Edward D. McDonald, 29 June and 26 October 1925; to Martin Secker, 18 June and 16 October 1925.

⁴ Letter to Witter Bynner, 13 March 1928; see p. xlvi below.

⁵ George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton, eds., *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge, 1981), ii. 379, 420–1, 431–2, 436–8. All through the war and until the time of his departure from Europe in 1922, DHL's attitude toward America followed an attraction-repulsion rhythm. For America as a refuge both actual and symbolic, see *Twilight in Italy* (1916), in particular 'San Gaudenzio' and 'John'.

Studies in Classic American Literature in 1923), he found the 'perfect but untranslatable consciousness' of the blood ready to come to the surface of American society through the democratic overlay imported from Europe.⁶ From 1917, when he first undertook these essays, Lawrence's endeavours to discover 'a new science of psychology' always seemed in some way connected with America.⁷ In an epilogue addressed to American readers of *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922), for example, he wrote, 'I reckon this book of mine is a real American book. If there had been no America I should never have written it.'⁸

Aaron's Rod, over which Lawrence laboured for several years, often concurrently with the essays on American literature, is the first of his novels to touch upon concerns that emerge fully in *The Plumed Serpent*. Josephine Ford of *Aaron's Rod* is the earliest of his characters to claim aboriginal American blood, but her identity is familiar from distinctions already drawn in the American studies. Beneath 'a certain Parisian *chic* and minginess', she moves 'like some savage squaw' to threaten Aaron's aloofness and endanger his quest for self-possession.⁹ As the novel draws to a close, a dream of Aaron's culminates near 'a lake-city, like Mexico' in a vision of aboriginal deity both regenerative and dangerous: a 'roadside Astarte' with eggs 'in her open lap'.¹⁰ *Aaron's Rod* is also Lawrence's first novel to suggest the political dimension of blood-consciousness, in the charismatic power of leadership that Lilly exerts over Aaron.

The Lost Girl, dating from 1920 between revisions of *Aaron's Rod*, first presents sustained American Indian themes, though without political overtones. A company of European actors performs as 'strictly a Red Indian troupe', in a Midlands village, anticipating the ritual scenes of *The Plumed Serpent*. Alvina is captivated by Ciccio masquerading as an Indian, 'velvety and alive on horseback'.¹¹ In their marriage, Lawrence created the joining of dark race and light race he thought essential to the restoration of humanity. Arriving in Ciccio's native valley in Italy, Alvina stands enthralled, like Kate in the Valley of Mexico, by the 'grand, pagan twilight of the

⁶ 'The Two Principles' (*Symbolic Meaning* 187); Zytaruk and Boulton, *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ii. 469–71. (An earlier version of most of the essays was published in *English Review*, 1918–19 and reprinted in *Symbolic Meaning*.)

⁷ James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson, eds., *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge, 1984), iii. 400.

⁸ Harry T. Moore, *The Priest of Love*, revised edn (New York, 1974), p. 338.

⁹ Chap. vii.

¹⁰ Chap. xxi.

¹¹ *The Lost Girl*, ed. John Worthen (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 120, 140. See DHL's view of Cooper's Sioux Indians, who 'cleave close to their horses, almost in one flesh' (*Symbolic Meaning* 100).

valleys, savage, cold, with a sense of ancient gods who knew the right for human sacrifice'.¹²

In Italy in November 1921, when Lawrence received an invitation from Mabel Dodge Sterne to come and live on her estate in Taos, New Mexico, and to contribute by his writing to the preservation of American Indian culture, his immediate reaction was: 'I want to go. The Indian, the Aztec, old Mexico – all that fascinates me and has fascinated me for years.'¹³ Some months of wavering followed, however, and then a decision which led to a short stay in Ceylon and a longer one in Australia. His reason for taking this circuitous route was: 'I shall be fulfilling my real desire to approach America from the west, over the Pacific.'¹⁴ He looked upon his three months in Australia and the writing of *Kangaroo* as preparatory to the challenge of creating fiction about America. As he put it: 'I have learned a lot coming here', and 'I should like very much to write an American novel, after this Australian one: on something the same lines.'¹⁵ Then just as he was completing *Kangaroo*, he declared that he would like 'to write a New Mexico novel with Indians in it'.¹⁶

Kangaroo is Lawrence's first novel to take as a point of departure the politics of a nation. Like *The Plumed Serpent*, it explores magnetism and loyalty between men, most of all male leadership by blood authority. In *Kangaroo*, Richard Somers must finally reject what Australia offers: an incarnation of the Australian spirit of place, the man Kangaroo, who has in his make-up too much of that Old World abomination we call 'charity', which long ago usurped the primacy of 'the old dark gods, who had waited so long in the outer dark'.¹⁷ At the end of the novel Somers is ready to pursue his way over the Pacific to encounter these gods in America.

According to Mabel Sterne, Lawrence had scarcely arrived in Taos in September 1922, when he set out to realise his hope of writing an 'American novel'.¹⁸ He cannot have begun before 19 September, when he wrote to his American publisher, Thomas Seltzer: 'I wonder if I'll get a novel out of here? It would be interesting if I could.' Then on 6 October he informed his American agent Robert Mountsier: 'Am doing a M[abel] Sterne novel of *here*: with her Indian: she makes me notes. Wonder how we

¹² *The Lost Girl*, ed. Worthen, p. 315. At the end of the novel, Alvina expects to emigrate to America if her husband survives the First World War. Three poems from just after the war also express the magnetism of America: 'The Revolutionary', 'Turkey-Cock' and 'The Evening Land' (*Complete Poems*, i. 287–9, 369–72, 289–93).

¹³ *Letters*, iv. 125; see also pp. 110–12. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 225. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 260, 259.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁷ Chaps. xi, xiii and xvii.

¹⁸ Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos* (New York, 1932), p. 52.

shall get on with it. I don't let her see my stuff.'¹⁹ The story was to be based on her life, which appeared to fulfil Lawrence's requirements for a subject. The novel never got past an incomplete narration of her journey west, with a few notes indicating that once arrived in a village like Taos, she would become involved with an Indian lover.²⁰

After this abortive attempt, Lawrence's urge to write an American novel diminished for a time. His last revision of the American essays took precedence over fiction. On 18 November he thought that when he had finished these, he might 'try a Taos novel. I'll see.'²¹ He produced a few poems for *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, three essays on the Indians and his first essay on the art of the novel.²²

One of the Indian essays, 'Indians and an Englishman', recreates the bewilderment Lawrence felt on first contact with Indian ceremonial at an Apache festival. What he sees in the Indian now is not far from what he had imagined in the original essays on James Fenimore Cooper.²³ More surprisingly, the revolutionary who had seen from afar his destiny as 'Lord of the dark and moving hosts' now declines to 'cluster at the drum any more'.²⁴ Perplexity before a great force long contemplated from a distance is the prevalent emotion, along with another feeling prominent in the last revision of the Leatherstocking essay: in the sketch it is 'a jeering malevolent vibration' in the air around the Apache encampment, and in the essay 'a certain slightly devilish resistance in the American landscape'.²⁵ This resistance was still powerful shortly before Lawrence began his American novel: 'I should never be able to write on this continent – something in the spirit opposes one's going forth.'²⁶ He even thought of

¹⁹ *Letters*, iv. 298, 319. 'Her Indian' was Tony Luhan, eventually her husband.

²⁰ Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos*, pp. 65–6. The fragment is published as 'The Wilful Woman' in *St. Mawr and Other Stories*, ed. Brian Finney (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 197–203.

²¹ *Letters*, iv. 341.

²² 'Eagle in New Mexico', 'The Blue Jay', 'Bibles', etc. (*Complete Poems*, ii. 372–5, 394–414); 'Indians and an Englishman' and 'Taos' (*Phoenix* 92–103); 'The Future of the Novel' (*Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 151–5); 'Certain Americans and an Englishman' (*Phoenix II: Uncollected, Unpublished and Other Prose Works by D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore (1968), pp. 238–43). 'Certain Americans', first published in the *New York Times Magazine* (24 December 1922), was DHL's contribution to an effort to save Indian lands from seizure; see also *Letters*, iv. 331–2.

²³ DHL's refusal to cross the ages between his own 'stream of conscious human blood' and the 'frenzy of the old mystery' in the Apaches is like Deerslayer's acknowledging the mystery of the Indian while remaining true to the white race (*Phoenix* 99; *Symbolic Meaning* 100).

²⁴ 'The Revolutionary' (*Complete Poems*, ii. 289); *Phoenix* 99. ²⁵ *Phoenix* 96; *Studies* 81.

²⁶ *Letters*, iv. 426.

the modern American Indians as being 'up against a dead wall, even more than we are' – survivors of a culture beyond recovery.²⁷

During this period Lawrence wrote his first essay on the novel in general. Aware of the crisis that America imposed upon his own experiments in fiction, he now demanded that the novel should avoid Joyce's 'self-analytical stunts'.²⁸ The novelist must reach beyond the articulate individual ego into the 'primary human psyche', a theory which Lawrence had drawn up in the original American studies.²⁹ The novelist should 'go back to the Greek philosophers' to 'find a new impulse for new things in mankind', back before 'philosophy and fiction got split'.³⁰ He was plainly addressing his own next move in fiction. The first draft of *The Plumed Serpent* assimilates a great deal of the discussion present in his essays, and both it and the published novel incorporate much philosophical discourse.

In early December 1922, the Lawrences left Mabel Sterne's cottage in Taos for Del Monte Ranch in the mountains to the north. Thomas and Adele Seltzer came for a visit during the Christmas holidays. Lawrence talked with Seltzer about travelling to Mexico, though not necessarily about writing a novel there.³¹ He feared that he might be shirking a responsibility in abandoning his own continent for the New World, and spoke of going to Russia in the summer, or even to Greenland.³² But he had been studying Spanish and, from December onward, made increasingly definite plans for a trip to Mexico.³³ In a letter to Adele Seltzer in early February, Frieda wrote: 'Lawr wants to go to Mexico, he thinks he might write his American novel there – You know he would like to write a novel of each continent'.³⁴

'Quetzalcoatl'

The Lawrences arrived in Mexico City on 23 March 1923, where he wrote of this trip as the gratification of an old wish: 'Do you remember, during the war I always wanted to come to Mexico.'³⁵ Once there, he went through his usual alterations of attitude: the country was 'very pleasant, rather like South Italy' or else it put 'a strain on the temper' or, after a few

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 310.

²⁸ 'The Future of the Novel' (*Study of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Steele, p. 154). See also *Letters*, iv. 345, 340.

²⁹ *Symbolic Meaning* 176. See also Zytaruk and Boulton, *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ii. 182–4.

³⁰ 'The Future of the Novel' (*Study of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Steele, p. 154).

³¹ *Letters*, iv. 367.

³² *Ibid.*, 362, 361. ³³ *Ibid.*, 364, 383. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 385. ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 420.

weeks, it was at times unbearable.³⁶ He was nevertheless at the ‘solar plexus of North America’. He found the ‘gruesome Aztec carvings’ in the National Museum distasteful, but when he went out to San Juan Teotihuacán and observed the ‘huge gnashing heads’ of serpent deities, he was pleased that in Mexico ‘the gods bit’. North of the Border the gods were thought to be tamed, though in reality, underneath, ‘the same old American dragon’s blood’ flowed.³⁷

With Witter Bynner and Willard (‘Spud’) Johnson, friends from Santa Fe, the Lawrences explored the capital and other cities, while Lawrence vacillated between staying in Mexico and going back to the USA or to England. Zelia Nuttall, the American anthropologist, offered him a house in Coyoacán, a southern suburb of Mexico City, but that was too urban for Lawrence.³⁸ On 9 April he mentioned that he might look around Guadalajara and that he ‘would like to settle down and do a novel’.³⁹ Within a month the Lawrences had moved to a house in Chapala, on the lake, with Bynner and Johnson in a hotel nearby.⁴⁰

Lawrence at once launched into a novel, made ‘two false starts’ – neither, apparently, has survived – and then on 10 May began the first version of *The Plumed Serpent* (Roberts E313a), with a zeal evident in several letters.⁴¹ Lawrence chose ‘Quetzalcoatl’ as a title, and had later to be persuaded by his publishers to change it to *The Plumed Serpent*, which he thought sounded ‘a bit silly’.⁴² A recent hesitancy now overcome, his theme was the fruit of reflection maturing since his first preoccupation with America: the revival of the primordial spirit of the continent, now to be effected by religious and political revolution.⁴³

Frieda reports that her husband went out regularly to write under the trees at the lakeside.⁴⁴ There, in his precise script, he advanced at a pace averaging 2,500 words a day. He had 250 pages by 30 May, and 415 by 15 June. By late June he had about 480 pages – some 120,000 words – all in two bound notebooks except for the first 56 pages on loose sheets torn from a similar notebook. Lawrence called this manuscript ‘the first rough draft’.⁴⁵ By 27 June he had put it aside until a more propitious time: ‘The

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 414, 430; ‘Au Revoir, U.S.A.’ (*Phoenix* 104); see also Bynner 19–60.

³⁷ ‘Au Revoir, U.S.A.’ (*Phoenix* 105–6); *Letters*, iv. 416.

³⁸ *Letters*, iv. 422. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 419. ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 436. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 442; see p. xix.

⁴² Letter to Alfred Knopf, 4 May 1925; letter from Martin Secker to Curtis Brown, 23 February 1925 (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, hereafter UIll); letter to George Conway, 10 June 1925.

⁴³ *Letters*, iv. 429.

⁴⁴ “*Not I, But the Wind . . .*” (Santa Fe, 1934), p. 155. See also Johnson’s reminiscence in Nehls, ii. 236.

⁴⁵ *Letters*, iv. 450, 457, 454.

novel isn't finished – I must do it when my soul gets calmer.⁴⁶ Cautious now, after his initial exuberance, he needed time and the advantage of seeing this manuscript turned into typescript before he could proceed with assurance. This 'first complete sketch', as he called it elsewhere, turned out to be not a text for revision but a first version eventually rejected in favour of a total rewriting.⁴⁷ 'Quetzalcoatl' differs from *The Plumed Serpent* much as the three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* differ. The two works represent separate processes of creation, even though one is preliminary to the other. Comparisons made here and in the Explanatory notes relate the two processes within the whole of Lawrence's American experience.

Several aspects of Mexico gave Lawrence the stimulus to begin a novel. Lake Chapala provided a symbolic geography of rebirth in direct lineage from Cooper's Lake Glimmerglass, also appropriate in that the Aztecs had built a lake civilisation.⁴⁸ The Mexican gods had a power that could still be felt, and represented a tradition of the renewal of society through violence: the pre-Conquest human sacrifice. Lawrence responded at once to a degenerate form of blood ritual imported from Spain: the bull fight gave him an opening chapter that he changed little through the revisions that follow. The contemporary state of Mexican society was such that a radical upheaval of any sort was imaginable. The political turmoil of the Mexican Revolution going on since 1910 had in great part originated among the oppressed Indian majority.⁴⁹ But for Lawrence the struggle was mis-directed: the true revolution must be not economic and political, but religious. If a truly religious consciousness could be awakened by calling back the Mexican gods in a form appealing to moderns, then all other essential reshaping of society would follow. To make this point, the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 465. ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 451 ('erste volle Skizze'); see also pp. 446–7.

⁴⁸ Cf. the versions of 'Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels' in *Symbolic Meaning and Studies*. Cooper's symbolism is viewed with more scepticism in the later one, but DHL states that he first sensed in Cooper 'the myth of atonement' between the white man and the red.

⁴⁹ By this time DHL is known to have read the following works on Mexican history and culture: Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (first published in 1632; in Maudslay's five-volume translation, 1908–16); Frances Calderón de la Barca, *Life in Mexico* (1843); Hernán Cortés's letters to the Spanish emperor, of which the first complete publication in English was *Hernando Cortes: His Five Letters of Relation to the Emperor Charles V*, ed. and trans. by Francis Augustus MacNutt (1908); Charles Flandrau, *Viva Mexico!* (1908); L. Gutiérrez de Lara and Edgcomb Pinchon, *The Mexican People: Their Struggle for Freedom* (1914); William Hickling Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (New York, 1843). DHL also made considerable use of a guidebook popular at the time: T. Philip Terry, *Terry's Guide to Mexico*, rev. edn (New York, 1923). DHL intended to re-read Bernal Díaz in 1923, but apparently did not obtain the book (*Letters*, iv. 445). See William York Tindall, *D. H. Lawrence and Susan His Cow* (New York, 1939), pp. 114–16 and Clark 103–12. See also footnote 89 and appendixes I and III.

chapter called 'Conversion' in 'Quetzalcoatl' lays out Ramón's background – parallel in some ways with that of José Vasconcelos, the Minister of Education.⁵⁰ Ramón, disillusioned with politics and with Europe and the United States as sources of hope, has remained silent during the first decade of the Revolution, writing a history of modern Mexico, and watching. Now he seeks to put into effect his matured conviction: that only a revival of the primitive religious consciousness can save mankind.

In 'Quetzalcoatl' the revolution is truly indigenous. Both Ramón and Cipriano speak as Indians who would tear the heart out of the white race and offer it to the sun: Lawrence had said in 'Fenimore Cooper's Anglo-American Novels' that 'the Aztec lives unappeased and destructive within the Mexican'.⁵¹ But he is not specific about how Indian his chief characters are. Ramón looks and acts wholly like an Indian at Mrs Norris's tea party, but Kate can seriously ask him later whether he considers himself to be white. Cipriano is introduced in the first chapter as dark, but seeming 'Italian and friendly', yet near the end of the manuscript, when Kate sees him swimming in the lake at sunrise, he is 'nearly black like a negro'.⁵² The novelist's indecision is reflected in Kate's and is never resolved, indecision concerning not only the ethnic authenticity of the chief male characters but also the relative identities of male and female in the new society.

Kate sees a potential salvation for herself in this patriarchal country, where such men as Ramón claim the right to do the thinking, and where he and Cipriano intend to foster a religion of men, not priests and women. Cipriano can even state privately to Ramón that he must have Kate and will detain her in Mexico by force if necessary.⁵³ The *machismo* theme is developed in part by contrast. The fussy and jealous Owen, the North American male, makes a poor show at rivalry with his Mexican counterparts.⁵⁴ Yet masculine dominance must be tempered by a powerful goddess. The god Quetzalcoatl had left Mexico primarily to seek a wife 'in the watery countries'. Early in the story there are hints that Kate may fill this role.⁵⁵ When the deification offered her instead is that of consort to Cipriano as Huitzilopochtli, the reasoning is still that the heavy dark

⁵⁰ Moore, *Priest of Love*, p. 397; Clark 29, 31–2. See also Bynner 117–22 and José Vasconcelos, *A Mexican Ulysses* (Indiana, 1963).

⁵¹ *Symbolic Meaning* 80. ⁵² 'Q' 135; 19; 448.

⁵³ 'Q' 56, 107, 110, 168, 181; 175–7, 242.

⁵⁴ 'Q' 55–63, 80.

⁵⁵ 'Q' 95; 99, but see also p. 97, where DHL crossed out 'They say the wife is a *gringuita*, a foreigner' and p. 212, where a similar remark occurs.

maleness of Mexico suffers from want of a female balance.⁵⁶ And as the novel draws to a close, the male bravado diminishes. Cipriano, conditioned to feminine influence through the Englishwoman who saw to his education and treated him as a foster son – in *The Plumed Serpent* it is a bishop who does this – almost pleads with Kate to marry him and accept apotheosis in the new pantheon.⁵⁷ But in the first version Kate steadfastly refuses, also declining a love affair with Cipriano. She cannot yet bring herself to unite her white blood with the Indian blood of Mexico. She will make a firm decision on this in Europe – so she promises Cipriano – and in the final scene she packs up to sail away: much as Lawrence shut his notebooks near the end of June and shortly thereafter took a train for New York.⁵⁸

The key scene of Kate's resistance to male power in 'Quetzalcoatl' comes when Ramón all but forces her to take instruction in the occult lore of the new way, as well as the first step toward initiation.⁵⁹ Trying with help from Cipriano to teach Kate how the ancients thought in images, Ramón recounts in Neoplatonic terms the descent of the soul into the flesh. Ramón and Cipriano compel Kate to swirl wine in a glass into a vortex and drink it as a pledge to join them. She swallows the wine and almost faints into submission, but reacts at last by standing up and walking out of the room, throwing off their power. An authorial comment has it that she is left 'a miserable prisoner with all the appearance of freedom', but we are not allowed to forget that Ramón and Cipriano may be seen as 'mystical, life-destroying men, with their hateful abstraction and imagery'.⁶⁰ An instruction similar to the one just described, which Kate does not repudiate, forms the ending of her story in the second manuscript version of the novel, but Lawrence deleted it in the typescript.

'Quetzalcoatl' contains little invented myth and ceremony. When Lawrence acquired some of his eventually substantial knowledge of pre-Columbian American religion is difficult to determine, but what he used in the first version he could have constructed from reading Terry's guidebook or Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*.⁶¹

The Lawrences left Mexico in early July and went to New York, where

⁵⁶ 'Q' 313. ⁵⁷ 'Q' 58, 314; 370–3.

⁵⁸ 'Q' 449, 457, 459–60. DHL wrote on 27 June 1923 that his novel was 'nearly finished – near enough to leave' (*Letters*, iv, 462). He could not have worked on it more than a few days longer: according to Bynner (p. 167), a group including the Lawrences left on a *canoa* trip around Lake Chapala on 5 July, and the Lawrences left for the USA on 9 July.

⁵⁹ 'Q' 428–48. ⁶⁰ 'Q' 441, 446–8; 448, 462.

⁶¹ Pp. 42–3, 298–308, 496–7, 519–20; Book I, chap. III. See also Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Peru* (New York, 1847), Book I, chap. III, which DHL had read by 1919, perhaps earlier (Boulton and Robertson, *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, iii, 327 and James T. Boulton, ed., *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge, 1979), i, 86).

he delivered his manuscript to Thomas Seltzer to be typed. On the road again by 21 August – after a falling-out with Frieda that sent her off to England and him to California – Lawrence anxiously inquired from time to time whether the typing was done and what the Seltzers thought of the novel.⁶² After an arduous trip down the west coast of Mexico with a friend, Kai Götzsche, though he still did not have the typescript Lawrence wrote to the Seltzers from Guadalajara that he would spend the winter in Mexico and ‘finish “Quetzalcoatl”’, aware already that he ‘must go all over it again’, after the easier task of reshaping *The Boy in the Bush* (from the manuscript written by Mollie Skinner), because ‘this is much more important to me, my “Quetzalcoatl”’.⁶³

Frieda’s refusal to rejoin him decided Lawrence against staying in Mexico and proceeding with his American novel. To perform his heroic task in this ‘black land’ of Mexico ‘full of man-strength’, the presence and support of ‘woman’ was essential, not for love but for ‘strength, strength, strength’.⁶⁴ So Lawrence sailed to England on 22 November, to make peace with Frieda and to persuade her to accompany him again to America.⁶⁵ Before he left Mexico, thinking that Seltzer was soon to visit England, he asked him to bring along the ‘Quetzalcoatl’ manuscript. But Seltzer did not come, nor did he send the manuscript; he had a typescript (Roberts E313b) finished in New York and held both texts until Lawrence returned to the USA.⁶⁶ Seltzer was now nearing bankruptcy and began ignoring Lawrence’s letters; while in London, Lawrence made a contract with his literary agent Curtis Brown, to represent him in the USA, as he had since 1921 in England.⁶⁷ This arrangement led to a change of American publishers and to eventual publication of *The Plumed Serpent* by Knopf rather than by Seltzer.⁶⁸

The Plumed Serpent

The winter of 1923–4 in Europe was long, cold and dismal. Lawrence was glad to set out for America with Frieda in the spring.⁶⁹ The Lawrences landed in New York on 11 March, where he picked up the ‘Quetzalcoatl’

⁶² *Letters*, iv. 495, 517; 523. ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 517. ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 531–2. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 522.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 527, 544. ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 544, 588; 559.

⁶⁸ Letter to Curtis Brown, 10 January 1925.

⁶⁹ DHL wrote a ‘London Letter’ (to Willard Johnson, 9 January 1924; see *Letters*, iv. 555), which was published in Johnson’s little magazine, *The Laughing Horse*, in May 1924. DHL wrote also for this publication ‘Paris Letter’ and ‘A Letter from Germany’ (*Phoenix* 119–22, 107–10). In the latter he reports on the emerging forces that later solidified into Nazism; see also *Letters*, iv. 574.

draft manuscript and typescript. They then headed west, meaning to pause briefly in Taos and then proceed to Mexico in order to finish the novel by autumn,⁷⁰ but the stay in Taos lasted through the whole summer. For one thing, as Lawrence put it, 'I shan't get the "Quetzalcoatl" novel done this year. I don't feel much like working at anything just now. The winter was a bad one.'⁷¹ For another, the Lawrences acquired Kiowa Ranch from Mabel Luhan and went about establishing a home there.⁷² The new access to primitive America in Lawrence's closer contact with the Indians and his exposure to the spring and summer landscape around the mountain ranch were to have a deep influence on the rewriting of his novel. Lawrence still had not communicated with anyone who had an intimate knowledge of Mexican culture. This summer he exchanged letters with Manuel Gamio, a pioneer of Mexican anthropology and archaeology. Gamio sent one of his books, probably *Forjando Patria* (1916), and invited Lawrence to visit him in Mexico.⁷³

Lawrence attended dances at Santo Domingo, San Felipe, the Hopi village of Hotevilla and no doubt others at Taos Pueblo, observing as well the impromptu dances done in the evening by the Indians working on the ranch cabins. Out of all this he wrote four essays on primitive Indian rites.⁷⁴ In these essays Lawrence held as always to the 'vivid relatedness between the man and the living universe', only now he sought this in more definite expressive forms, in symbols such as Pan and in the drama of the sacred dance.⁷⁵ He had already written two stories centring on Pan, about the vengeance Pan wreaks on those who think him dead, and the futility of a world without him.⁷⁶ In the subconscious chant of one of the stories, 'The Overtone', which he seems to have finished in New Mexico, an attempt at mythical love poetry resembles that of the marriage ceremony in *The Plumed Serpent*.⁷⁷ In the essay 'Pan in America', first written in May 1924, Lawrence connects the god-urge of the Old World with that which he means to recreate in the New, sensing that Pan is more vividly alive

⁷⁰ *Letters*, iv, 591. ⁷¹ Letter to Seltzer, 10 April 1924.

⁷² Letter to Else Jaffe, 10 April 1924.

⁷³ Their correspondence is unlocated. See letters to Idella Purnell and Seltzer, 9 June and 18 May 1924.

⁷⁴ 'Pan in America' (*Phoenix* 22–31) and three essays later collected in *Mornings in Mexico* (1927): 'Indians and Entertainment', 'Dance of the Sprouting Corn' and 'The Hopi Snake Dance'.

⁷⁵ 'Pan in America' (*Phoenix* 27).

⁷⁶ In 'The Last Laugh' (collected in *The Woman Who Rode Away* (Secker, 1928)), Pan comes back to take vengeance on the modern male for his impiety against the chthonic powers.

⁷⁷ Cf. the marriage ceremony in chap. xx of *The Plumed Serpent* with Elsa's 'sing-song' invocation to a faun-like lover in *St. Mawr*, ed. Finney, pp. 15–17.

there than in Europe.⁷⁸ In 'Indians and Entertainment' he speculates on the drama of these dances, recollecting the hypothesis he had adopted after reading Jane Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* in 1913: that drama arose from 'religious yearning' through the old 'ceremonial dances'.⁷⁹ Modern men have spoiled their instincts by splitting their identities into selves of 'pure consciousness, pure spirit' who sit as gods at a play 'surveying those selves of clay who are so absurd or so tragic, below'. For primitive man there was 'no individual, isolated experience'; all experience came from the undifferentiated 'human bloodstream'. The 'little individual consciousness lording it' was outside his conception of the universe. In dance, primitive man was in fact asserting his isolated being, though in a manner unlike the modern. He was dancing 'the glory in power of the man of single existence'. The difference is that he was a whole self participating, not a half-self acting and a half-self observing. Fundamentally, Lawrence rejects the Aristotelian view of drama as 'imitation of an action'. The ceremonial dance is 'not representing something, not even playing. It is a soft, subtle *being* something'.⁸⁰

In speaking so of imaginative representation, of 'literature', Lawrence was still looking for a way to bring the 'primal consciousness' into his American fiction. But the descriptive sketches brought him up against the old dilemma. The first concession was simple: to admit that the Indian consciousness and the white are radically different, that 'one man can belong to one great way of consciousness only' and that 'acceptance of the great paradox of human consciousness is the first step to a new accomplishment'.⁸¹ This left him with the next step unresolved: how to find the common ground of the red consciousness and the white that might open the way to the new accomplishment.

The other two essays on Indian dance build on the same arguments. Through dance the Santo Domingos call down the universal energies that produce their corn, in a ritual of participation rather than invocation.⁸² The Hopis, conveying their message through the snakes they dance with, put themselves 'into relation with the vast living convulsions of rain and thunder and sun'.⁸³ The imagery of the Hopi piece is often near that of *The Plumed Serpent*: 'the earth's dark centre holds its dark sun, our source of isolated being, round which our world coils its folds like a great snake'.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ *Phoenix* 24-6. ⁷⁹ Zytaruk and Boulton, *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ii. 90, 114.

⁸⁰ 'Indians and Entertainment', *Mornings in Mexico*.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* ⁸² 'Dance of the Sprouting Corn', *Mornings in Mexico*.

⁸³ 'The Hopi Snake Dance', *Mornings in Mexico*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

The whole cycle of rain ceremonies in *The Plumed Serpent*, including the marriage ritual, issues directly out of these essays.

Of equal importance are three long American stories Lawrence was at last able to produce: 'The Woman Who Rode Away', *St. Mawr* and 'The Princess' serve as preliminary writings to Lawrence's last effort to grasp the meaning of 'America' in fiction.⁸⁵ All three heroines are variations on Kate Leslie. In *St. Mawr*, Lou Witt rejects the Indian as lover, and all other men too. She will become a hermit, cultivating union with the spirit of place about her mountain ranch, understanding all the while that this spirit may be devouring as well as sustaining. The 'princess', in her story, magnetised by the dark American lover and the genius of place, toys with both, courting destruction, and in retreating from it causes the death of the lover. In 'The Woman Who Rode Away' the unnamed woman goes to the farthest limit – she seeks out a wild Indian tribe in Mexico and submits as victim in a human sacrifice, a rite that may bring the native spirit of the continent into ascendancy once more.⁸⁶

Lawrence left Taos in mid-October 1924, with Frieda and the Hon. Dorothy Brett, an artist who had been the only one of his friends to accept his offer to join him in starting a new life together in New Mexico. He had already said he must go deeper into Mexico than Chapala, and before leaving England had mentioned Oaxaca, the land of the Mixtecs and the Zapotecs.⁸⁷ Within a month of setting out from New Mexico, spending a little time in Mexico City again, he and the two women had arrived in Oaxaca, the Lawrences had taken a house, with Brett at a hotel close by, and he was ready to resume work on his *Quetzalcoatl* novel, now untouched for over a year.

On 19 November, writing the date on a fly-leaf of the new copybook in which he began, Lawrence went back to his American novel. He had brought with him the manuscript and the typescript of 'Quetzalcoatl'. Either here or earlier in Taos, he made scattered revisions in the typescript, not many in the second half. But the extensive changes already contemplated could not be accomplished, he must have decided, without a

⁸⁵ 'The Woman Who Rode Away' dates from June 1924, *St. Mawr* from June to September and 'The Princess' from September and October (the first was collected in *The Woman Who Rode Away* and the latter two in *St. Mawr*, ed. Finney, pp. 21–155, 159–96).

⁸⁶ DHL originally thought of these three long stories as belonging naturally in one volume (letter to Curtis Brown, 8 October 1924), but 'The Woman Who Rode Away' has always been published with short stories, not in a novelette group.

⁸⁷ *Letters*, iv. 541, 545. (The revolution mentioned in the latter was the de la Huerta rebellion.)

total rewriting. Neither the typescript nor the manuscript of 'Quetzalcoatl' has any further place in the composition of the novel.⁸⁸

Changing little in the first two chapters but deepening his vision of Mexico greatly after these, Lawrence wrote his second version as rapidly as he had the first.⁸⁹ By 31 December he had filled the first notebook with twelve chapters and the beginning of what was then chapter XIII – 381 manuscript pages – and had begun a second notebook, on a fly-leaf of which he again wrote the date. When this notebook was full, nearing the end and perhaps having no other at hand, he turned the second notebook of 'Quetzalcoatl' upside down and wrote the last thirty-nine pages of the new version at the back. This version came to 806 manuscript pages (Roberts E313c, hereafter MS), compared with 479 for 'Quetzalcoatl'. The only interruption of any significance to the flow of work was four sketches on life around Oaxaca – later to be part of *Mornings in Mexico* – written in mid-December and touching on the character and cosmology of the Mexican Indian in ways closely paralleling Lawrence's pursuit of the same themes in *The Plumed Serpent*.⁹⁰

The date on which Lawrence finished the novel is difficult to determine. On 16 January 1925 he reported that he was 'nearly done' with it, only to repeat that statement on 22 January.⁹¹ Then on 29 January he wrote to Martin Secker, 'I have finished "Quetzalcoatl" – or at least am in the last chapter', and the same day informed Curtis Brown, 'I have done "Quetzal-

⁸⁸ This typescript is in the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁸⁹ At some time, besides the works he is known to have read by 1923 (see footnote 49), DHL acquainted himself with the following works, and perhaps others, dealing with the mythology he sought to reconstruct: 'several volumes' of the *Anales* of the National Museum of Mexico – these 'volumes' are monographs of a hundred pages or so; Adolph Bandelier, *The Delight Makers* (New York, 1890) and *The Gilded Man* (New York, 1893); Henry W. Bates, *The Naturalist in Nicaragua* (1863); Alexandre de Humboldt, *Vues des Cordillères et Monuments des Peuples Indigènes de l'Amérique* (Paris, 1810); Zelia Nuttall, *The Fundamental Principles of Old and New World Civilizations: A comparative research based on a study of the ancient Mexican religious, sociological and calendrical systems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1901); Lewis Spence, *The Gods of Mexico* (New York, 1923). DHL had long since read Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (1889) and a great deal of James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, 12 vols. (1890–1915). He probably gathered some ideas from Gilbert Murray, *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (1912) and John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 1907). Other works that DHL may have read are suggested in the Explanatory notes. DHL's use of mythology in *The Plumed Serpent* is best characterised by his own description (in 'Foreword' to *Fantasia of the Unconscious*) of how he proceeded in writing about 'cosmology': 'I have found hints, suggestions for what I say here in all kinds of scholarly books . . . I remember only hints – and I proceed by intuition'.

⁹⁰ 'Corasmin and the Parrots', 'Walk to Huayapa', 'The Mozo' and 'Market Day' are the 'Mornings in Mexico' as such. The volume that appeared under this title includes several sketches of the southwestern United States.

⁹¹ Letters to Amy Lowell, 16 January 1925 and to Carlo Linati, 22 January 1925.