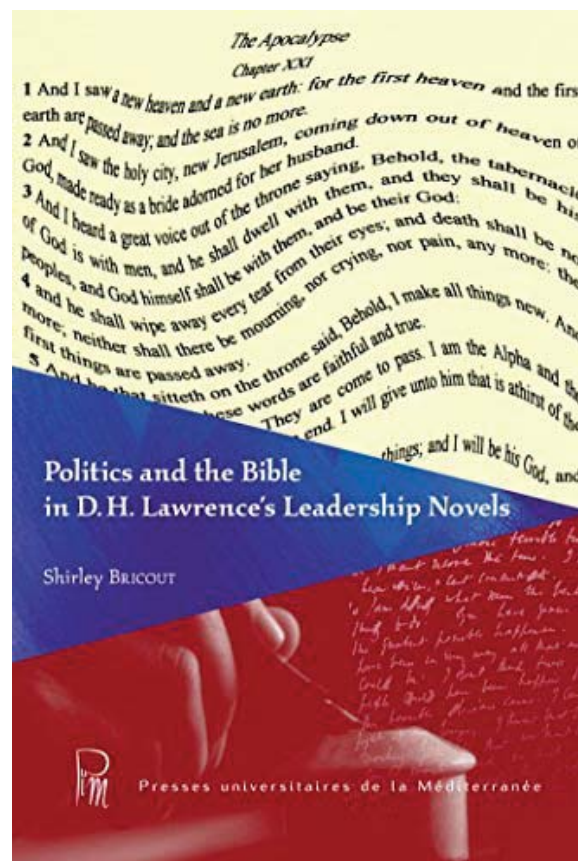


**Shirley Bricout, *Politics and the Bible in D.H. Lawrence's Leadership Novels.***

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Shirley Bricout's *Politics and the Bible in D.H. Lawrence's Leadership Novels*, written originally in French and translated into English by the author herself, is a significant contribution to Lawrence studies. The work is not only scholarly but deeply engaging as well. Apart from 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' there are four chapters in the book which bear the titles like "The Genesis of the Written Word", "The Break from Europe", "The Quest in Exile: A Second Creation" and "The New Alliance: Exploring Political Thought". These chapters, however, are neatly divided into sections bearing titles like "Text and Tissue", "Intertextuality in Motion", "Biblical Resonances" etc., to cite a few examples from the first chapter of the book.

In the 'Introduction' Bricout, first of all, gives us an understanding of how Lawrence was "brought up on the Bible", to quote Lawrence's own words. As we proceed further we gather how the two great men of the nineteenth century in particular gave a shape to Lawrence's vision: one is Walt Whitman, a great American poet and another is Friedrich Nietzsche, the great German philosopher and prophet whom Eugene Goodheart in *The Utopian Vision of D.H. Lawrence* (1963) described as a "Tablet-breaker" (an expression that the author uses time and again in order to bring home her central argument). To the author Lawrence was a "wandering prophet" who from 1919 onwards travelled around the world (22). The question may arise: what did he search for in his travels? The observation of Graham Hough in *The Dark Sun* (1956) sounds persuasive in this context, "Lawrence moves to a new country because he is developing new ideas and needs a landscape and a society to match them" (117). Quite interestingly, as Bricout succinctly observes, the novels including *Aaron's Rod* (1921), *Kangaroo* (1923), *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) "bear witness to the progress of Lawrence's quest" (23). Lawrence's observation on *Kangaroo* is noteworthy at this point: "It's an Australian novel with no women in it: more political . . . more a thought adventure . . ." (*Letters IV*, 353). Bricout argues that Lawrence's "political thought is an essential component in his quest for cosmic connections". By using the Bible as a text Bricout, as she asserts, intends to explore how the political issues become an integral part of the textual fabric of the three leadership novels (31).

The first chapter titled "The Genesis of the Written Word" is strongly grounded in the theories of text propounded by Barthes, Kristeva and Genette. Bricout, however, mostly dwells on Genette's concepts of hypotext (source text) and hypertext (resulting text) and the relationships between them (36). With innumerable illustrations she shows how Lawrence takes recourse to different rhetorical and artistic devices including

inversion, burlesque travesty, parody and pastiche “when he grafts biblical borrowings onto his texts”. The brief sentence in *The Plumed Serpent*, “Man creates a god in his own image” is thus an inversion of the terms of a verse in *Genesis* (I.27): “So God created man in his own image” (47). The ‘Tables of Biblical resonances’ covering forty pages of the book are very much useful in this regard. They show Lawrence’s intimate acquaintance with the Bible as well as his personal responses to the sacred text. One may remember Lawrence’s words in his letter to Reverend Robert Reid, dated 27 March, 1911: “For me, flesh and blood are the Scriptures” (Letters I, 244). These tables considerably contribute to the strength of the book and at the same time constitute “the starting point of the discussion” on the dialogic relation between the Bible and the three novels under study (55). After giving the exhaustive tables Bricout offers the discussion on the features of Biblical resonances and concludes the chapter showing how Lawrence emerges as a “weaver of texts” by engaging in an intertextual relationship with the Bible.

In the second chapter Bricout explores “how intertextual relationships are contrived to describe Europe” (106). The chapter is divided into various sections titled “The Travellers’ Religious Bearings”, “The War”, “Woman” etc. In my opinion, the first section is the strongest. Here Bricout analyses the religious bearings of the protagonists of the three novels under concern with a reference to “three moments in Christ’s life” (108). The analysis of the opening scene of *Aaron’s Rod* in “Two Births: Christmas and Easter” is brilliant. One may feel tempted to quote an insightful observation of Bricout in this context: “the detailed description of the Christmas preparations brings to light Aaron’s alienation from the religious traditions he was brought up in, and underscores his desire for purification” (108). The section on “The War” where Bricout takes into account the relation between an individual and the State, as portrayed in these novels, is also immensely engaging. Bricout’s careful analysis of the use of biblical hypotext in the scene where Somers undergoes humiliating medical examinations illumines our reading of *Kangaroo*.

The Bible is not merely a book of reference to Lawrence. In his celebrated essay “Why the Novel Matters” Lawrence writes, “The novel is the book of life. In this sense, the Bible is a great confused novel”. It is to the credit of Bricout that she breathes fresh insights into the reading of Lawrence’s novels by taking cues from the Bible. I would like to refer to the subsection titled “The Fallen Babel” (1.2) in the third chapter of the book. The tower of Babel symbolizes among other things a noisy

confusion of voices or a chaotic mixture of languages. Bricout, thanks to her critical perception, shows here how Kate who aspires for the dark god is overcome by the Babel when one evening the Indians sing and dance in honour of Quetzalcoatl on the village square (173). The analysis of the impact of the Aztec song on Kate is indeed fascinating. The third chapter has some other important sections like “The Burden of Colonial Empires”, “Thy Neighbour” etc. I would like to refer to the subsection (3.2) “From Communion to Community” in “Thy Neighbour” in order to show that the argument of Bricout is always forceful. She, first of all, gives the Lawrentian idea of utopian community (‘Rananim’) taking a cue from Lawrence’s letter to William Hopkin, dated 18 January, 1915. Then she analyses the words in the letter arguing that they throw light on Lawrence’s preference for “a small choice population”, and as the argument proceeds she explores the issue of the Lawrentian characters’ “rejection of the masses” in the leadership novels. It is certainly interesting to note that in an early novel like *Sons and Lovers* (1913) the protagonist Paul Morel shows his aversion to the colliery people when he is ridiculed by them during his collection of his father’s wages. He describes them as “hateful” and “common” to his mother when he comes back home (“The Young Life of Paul”).

The conclusion that Bricout draws in this context is crucially significant: “by positing individuals in a hierarchy Lawrence goes against the democratic stance taken before him by Walt Whitman” (204-205). At this point one may remember the appraisal of Whitman by Lawrence: “Whitman is like a human document, or a wonderful treatise in human self-revelation. It is neither art nor religion nor truth” (Letters II, 130).

The fourth chapter (“The New Alliance: Exploring Political Thought”) that has sections like “Fascism”, “Marxism”, “The Apocalypse” etc., constitutes one of the focal points of the book. The sections in which Bricout discusses “Fascism” and “The Apocalypse” are particularly engaging to me. Before taking up Bricout’s discourse on Fascism I would like to read a couple of Lawrence’s observations on revolutions available in his letters written during 1923-1926. In a letter written in 1923 Lawrence wrote, “Here in Mexico too there is Bolshevism and Fascism and all such. But it’s all the same to me. I don’t belong” (Letters IV, 433). Three years later he even described the Fascist movement as “queer” and wrote, “one wonders what the end will be” (Letters V, 433). It is true that Lawrence did not identify himself with any political movement and it is compelling to agree with Bricout when she states that “in none of the novels under study is the main character a political leader”. The observation of

Bricout indeed compels conviction as we read:

The features and the mission of the rising saviours are strategically depicted through the eyes of Aaron, Somers and Kate as they travel around, in order that the author may elaborate on the leader's charisma and message while hiding behind the mask of the visiting character. (231)

Let us now look at "The Apocalypse" where Bricout discusses how in the leadership novels of Lawrence "the apocalyptic can be seen in the symbols disseminated throughout the descriptions of politically related riot scenes in which the characters are more or less involved." The analysis of the riot scenes in the novels under study particularly the riot scene in *Aaron's Rod* where a bomb goes off smashing Aaron's flute to pieces is fascinating (285). Bricout's "chromatic reading" of the scenes of riot where Lawrence "makes recurrent use of the four colours of the Horses of the Apocalypse" (287) is fascinating as well. The readers of *Kangaroo* will certainly be enlightened when they read in Bricout's book: "In *Kangaroo*, the Marxists' red flag 'suddenly flashing like blood. . .' (K 314) heralds the blood to be shed during the clash with the Diggers" (292).

In the 'Conclusion' Bricout defines different functions of intertextuality with reference to her study of the leadership novels and shows how the appropriation of the Bible as a hypotext enables Lawrence to fashion his own mythology in his writings (317-319). In the final analysis, Lawrence is an apocalypticist who prophesizes "the fall of political regimes and the emergence of a cosmic revival". Before concluding the discussion Bricout draws our attention to the necessity of a critical investigation regarding "the function of biblical intertextuality" in the author's poems, essays and short stories (320).

Shirley Bricout's *Politics and the Bible in D.H. Lawrence's Leadership Novels* is an authoritative work on D.H. Lawrence and, I am sure, it will always be cited by scholars who attempt to make political readings of Lawrence's writings and explore the intertextual relationships between Lawrence's leadership narratives and the sacred text. The work has a sound theoretical orientation. In order to bring home the arguments it deploys the theories of Genette, Barthes, Kristeva, Bakhtin, Ricoeur, Derrida and others but Bricout's theoretical analysis of the issues she covers in her book is always lucid. One may cite in this context how Bricout elucidates the fire metaphor implicit in the "battle of tongues over *agape* love staged between Kangaroo and his guest" with

reference to the Derridean statement, “a text is consumed by another”. In the analysis of Bricout, thanks to her wonderful critical imagination, the dialogue between Kangaroo and his guest “which broaches the feasibility of an Australian society founded on love” is the site in which “quotations and allusions are consumed, a new creation rising from their ashes” (257). This kind of theoretical insight enriches the readers’ understanding of Lawrentian texts.

The last word on the book should be devoted to its Bibliography. It is comprehensive and well planned, and it goes without saying that it will act as a guide to the scholars who will engage in this area of research in future.