D. H. Lawrence

A Study of Literary Fascism

Abdulla Al-Dabbagh

Studies in Twentieth-Century
British Literature

This book is an analysis of the social and political outlook of D.H. Lawrence as determined by the development and conflict of the social forces of his time. It discusses, specifically, the relationship between Lawrence's ideas, as an essayist and novelist, and the ruling ideology of imperialism, reaching the conclusion that Lawrence refused to face and oppose capitalist reality. He either escaped into an imaginary, anarchic utopia, or, more frequently, "criticized" capitalist relationships from the standpoint of a fascist, militaristic division into rulers and mob, aristocrats and plebeians. Lawrence's letters during the First World War provide the documents that reveal the genesis of his fascist outlook. The book also traces Lawrence's attitude towards socialism throughout his literary career and concludes that anti-socialism, with varying intensity, remained an essential part of his outlook. Certain assumptions, like a contempt for man as a social being and the existential division of human beings into higher and lower creatures—into the "average" and the "exceptional"—that were basic to his outlook, are shown to be the determining factors in the writing of Lawrence's novels. The book ends with an analysis of the historical roots of the reactionary intelligentsia and discusses Lawrence's relationships with the various cultural and ideological trends of his time, dealing also with the different tactics used by the critics to hide the true nature of his political ideas.

Abdulla Al-Dabbagh is Professor of English Literature at the United Arab Emirates University. He holds a B.A. from Wesleyan University, an M.Litt. from Cambridge University, and a Ph.D. from Essex University. He has taught English, American, and world literatures, literary criticism, comparative literature, and translation at universities in Iraq, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates. He is the author of *Literary Orientalism, Postcolonialism, and Universalism* and *Shakespeare, the Orient, and the Critics*.

D. H. Lawrence

Studies in Twentieth-Century British Literature

Karen Marguerite Radell
General Editor

Vol. 9

PETER LANG
New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

Abdulla Al-Dabbagh

D. H. Lawrence

A Study of Literary Fascism

PETER LANG
New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Al-Dabbagh, Abdulla.
D.H. Lawrence: a study of literary fascism / Abdulla Al-Dabbagh.
p. cm. — (Studies in twentieth-century British literature; v. 9)
Includes bibliographical references.
1. Lawrence, D. H. (David Herbert), 1885-1930—Political and social views.
2. Imperialism in literature. 3. Fascism in literature. 4. Society in literature.
5. Working class in literature. 6. Elite (Social sciences) in literature.
7. Social classes in literature. 8. Politics and literature—Great Britain—History—20th century.
I. Title. II. Title: Literary fascism.
PR6023.A93Z5397 823'.912—dc22 2011013038
ISBN 978-1-4331-1397-0
ISSN 1091-8574
E-ISBN 978-1-4539-0797-9

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**.
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the "Deutsche Nationalbibliografie"; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de/.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council of Library Resources.

Printed in Germany

CONTENTS

PREFACE

This study is an analysis of the social and political outlook of D.H. Lawrence as determined by the development and conflict of the social forces of his time. The first chapter analyzes the transformation of the British ruling class into an imperialist ruling class, and the rise of British socialism from the eighteen-eighties to the First World War. The isolation of the literary intellectuals, who formed a crystallized social group in this period, from the workers' movement was the basis for their division into social-imperialists on the one hand, and reactionaries and potential fascists on the other.

The second chapter examines specifically the relationship of Lawrence's outlook, as an essayist and novelist, to the ruling ideology of imperialism. It reaches the conclusion that Lawrence refused to face and oppose capitalist reality. He either escaped into an imaginary, anarchic utopia, or, more frequently, he "criticized" capitalist relationships from the standpoint of a fascist, militaristic division into rulers and mob, aristocrats and plebeians. Lawrence's letters during the First World War provide the documents that reveal the genesis of his fascist outlook.

The third chapter traces Lawrence's attitude towards socialism throughout his literary career. It examines the novels and essays which provide the best ground for such an investigation—from the *White Peacock* to the first draft of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It concludes that anti-socialism, with varying intensi-

ty, remained an essential part of Lawrence's outlook. Particular emphasis is placed on his most political novels like *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent* in which Lawrence openly advocated fascism.

In the fourth chapter, certain assumptions like the contempt for man as a social being, the existential division of human beings into higher and lower creatures, into the "average" and the "exceptional," and so on, that were basic to his outlook are shown to be the determining factors in the writing of the novels. Lawrence rejected not only socialist realism, but also any kind of critical realism. The final disintegration of his novels into a mixture of fantasy and allegory followed from the suppression, in his works, of the very material of the novel: the changing social reality. The hatred for socialism, which is the ideology that comprehensively opposes decaying capitalism and imperialism, led Lawrence in his final years to the writing of openly fascist novels. Lawrence's literary outlook was determined by his political outlook. His literary and aesthetic theory is based essentially on the fascist principle of the inferiority of the masses to the "élite."

The dominance of the reactionary group of writers to which Lawrence belonged was a manifestation of the decay of imperialist culture that continues to the present day. This is the theme of the fifth chapter. It begins with the analysis of the historical roots of the fascist intelligentsia and discusses Lawrence's relationships with the various cultural and ideological trends of his time. The chapter investigates, in particular, Lawrence's relationship with the generation of writers that preceded him, like Hardy, Galsworthy, Wells, and Shaw, with the contemporary group of Cambridge/Bloomsbury liberal writers and intellectuals, and with such relevant intellectual developments in his time as psychoanalytic theory and modern anthropology. It argues, finally, that an analysis of the cultural attitudes of writers like Lawrence, Eliot, Leavis, and others in this modernist reactionary group, must have a clear socio-historical perspective, and must be set within the framework of the development of British society, literature and culture.

The sixth chapter deals with the various tactics used by the critics to hide Lawrence's political ideas. The failure to discuss these ideas, even when admitting his affinity to fascism, is the characteristic of nearly all of these critics. Only an exceptional writer like Christopher Caudwell has been able to define Lawrence's fascist outlook accurately. On the other hand, the works of Lawrence's fascist disciple, Rolf Gardiner, should silence those apologists who try to dress him up as a democrat or even, as some have astonishingly attempted, a socialist.

The final chapter, entitled "Lawrence and the Contemporary Scene," examines the ways in which contemporary writers and critics have dealt with Lawrence. While there has developed, in recent decades, an increasing awareness of Lawrence's fascism and racism, a strong tendency has also remained to whitewash him and to insist on his permanent presence in the canon of great modern literature. The chapter concludes by examining how the recognition of Lawrence's fascist outlook has been modified in contemporary postmodernist and deconstructionist approaches.

I would like to thank the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in the United Arab Emirates University for its generous support toward the publication of this book.

· 1 ·

THE AGE OF IMPERIALISM

The Epoch of Imperialism

Ideas do not arise out of nowhere. They serve to hold a particular social system together in adjustment to certain material conditions. In other words, human beings, involved in the production of their lives, the production of the means to satisfy the needs of human existence, enter into certain relationships with each other. The ideas that they produce are determined by this complex process, and cannot be outside it.

When there is a change in the material conditions of existence there is the necessity for a corresponding change in the state of society. Former ties and relationships no longer hold. The ideas of the old world lose their meaning, and new ideas inevitably replace them. But these cannot carry anything out until they take hold of men and women directly involved in the process of production, i.e. the majority of the working population. Only then will they become a material force.

In any historical epoch the class that has the most to gain from the existing conditions is the ruling class. It, therefore, wants its ideas to prevail. To continue to rule materially, it must rule ideologically as well.

The ideology of the British ruling class in the period we are considering-from the 1880's until the end of First World War-was: Imperialism.

The economic structure of Britain, until the middle of the nineteenth century, rested on a large number of small-scale industrial enterprises and a vast empire the wealth of which was accumulated with the minimum of expense and organization. British capital easily overcame all the obstacles that hindered its drive for colonies. No planning was needed. Free Competition, Free Trade and Free Industry were the dogma of the day. They had abolished all the ties and privileges of the feudal past, only to endow the community with the new bond of universal struggle. They abstracted the competitive individual from the social whole, and, at the same time, declared his interests to be congruent with the interests of Society at large.

The ruling bourgeoisie declared that politics was subordinate to economics, to the struggle for acquisition. The focus of the new ideology was civil society, the battleground of Free Competition, and not the State. Nineteenth century liberalism, in fact, reversed the relationship between the two by imagining that social life was held together by the state. Thus, it reduced the state, theoretically, to a legal abstraction interfering only to assure the permanent existence of an economic order. In practice, it only helped to conceal the locus of political power, leaving it more securely in the hands of its actual holders.

The Franchise extensions of 1867 and 1884 made drastic, though not immediately perceptible changes, in the political system. The working class movement, dormant for twenty-five years since Chartism, was beginning to awake. It only gained momentum, however, after the agricultural depression of the nineteen-seventies which reduced hundreds of thousands to slum-dwelling proletariat and forced nearly a million to emigrate. The increasing impoverishment of the workers caught in the system of anarchic production and competition, led to the revival of British Socialism. The Social Democratic Federation was formed in 1882, the Fabian Society in 1883 and the Independent Labour Party in 1893. At the same time the main body of the working class was imbued with the spirit of internationalism, drawn from the socialist conviction in world-wide solidarity against capitalism, and from the cosmopolitan outlook of the Radical wing of the Liberal party to which it was long affiliated.

Any new social movement is a reflection of the changes in the process of production. The revival of socialism and internationalism in England coincided with the displacement of free competition capitalism by monopoly capitalism. This involved the concentration of industry into large-scale enterprises that demanded expanding markets for its products. Trusts, cartels and monopolistic combines began to play a key role in economic life. The irrational accumulation of capital led to glutted markets in conjunction with the increasing

impoverishment of the working classes. Due to international competition, the constant demand of the industrialists was for high tariffs to secure the home market. Once protected from underselling by foreign capitalists, they could concentrate their efforts on acquiring new markets to "dump" their surplus goods at low prices. Only here again they had to face foreign rivals. Monopoly at home meant ruthless competition abroad. By the end of the century the entire world was conquered and divided among the biggest capitalist powers. The exhaustion of new markets laid the foundation for the series of conflicts that led to the First World War.

At the same time, capital investment was no longer as profitable because of the increasing use of machinery. The cheapness of land, labour, and raw materials created the conditions for its export abroad in search of more satisfactory returns. The export of capital followed its concentration in the hands of the big bankers and financiers. Free Trade was no longer a profitable slogan for them; it was soon to be replaced by "Our National Interest." Thus, the liberal economist J.A. Hobson, who accurately observed these changes in the economic structure, argued, against the traditional economists, that the prime motive behind Protectionism was not trade but investment:

> A surplus of exports over imports is sought as the most profitable mode of investment, and when a nation, or more strictly its investing classes, is bent on becoming a creditor or parasitic nation to an indefinite extent, there is no reason why its imports and exports should balance even over a long term of years. The whole struggle of so-called Imperialism upon its economic side is towards a growing parasitism, and the classes engaged in this struggle require Protection as their most serviceable instrument.[1]

There was, in general, no lack of understanding of the purely economic roots of imperialism. Hobson himself attributed them unhesitatingly to "the desire of strong organized industrial and financial interests to secure and develop at the public expense and by public force private markets for their surplus capital."[2] Imperialism, he argued, benefited chiefly the owners of capital. It was the direct result of the misdistribution of income that divided the nation into capitalists with huge surpluses, on the one hand, and mass impoverishment on the other. Surplus, whether of goods or capital, always found its way abroad, only to return with bigger profits and thus widen the gulf of inequality. It was for this reason that imperialism conducted a vicious campaign against socialists who threatened to take away the surplus and thus destroy its economic power.

Hobson's analysis lacked a historical dimension which accounts for its reformist conclusions. In spite of this, it was an accurate and irrefutable indict-

ment of imperialism. Its equivalent in Europe could only be found in the works of Hilferding, Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin. (In fact, Lenin's own study, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, drew extensively on Hobson's observations). That a liberal economist should have undertaken the tasks of European Marxism was thoroughly characteristic of the situation in England. The main body of the English working class was cut off from the "intelligentsia" and remained loyal to its traditional sources of inspiration: The nonconformist chapel and Cobdenite Radicalism. Also, from the start, the Independent Labour Party had strong affiliations with the trade unions. Its Leadership was solidly anti-Marxist, and soon confirmed Lenin's description that it was independent only of socialism and very dependent on liberalism. In short, the English working class due to its strength in numbers and organization presented an economic threat to the ruling class. It failed to challenge it politically because it never transcended the trade union, and because its leadership sold out to the liberals. Nineteenth-century liberalism, as pointed out earlier, had completely subordinated politics to economics, and political struggle to economic struggle. The virus of this philosophy had infected the working class. Its leadership replaced the struggle for socialism by demands for wage increases and better working hours.

The isolation of the workers was not, however, just their own. The only group who could have provided them with a revolutionary theory, the Fabians, remained deliberately aloof. These were basically well-educated, middle-class careerists who, wielding no political power on their own, were ready to attach themselves to anyone who could execute their ideas. That meant serving either the financial or the industrial interests. Nothing illustrates better, in fact, than the history of the Fabian Society that the choices open to intellectuals in this period were revolutionary socialism or the service of the imperialists. In fact, as they went farther along the second road they even ceased to describe themselves as socialists, thus emphasizing their detachment from the working class movement. To be called socialist in the first place was, of course, a historical accident and a revealing peculiarity of the political situation in England. As long as *laissez-faire* capitalism reigned supreme, liberal theory regarded all arguments for state interference as socialism. The development of monopolies that needed the protection of tariff walls, and the international challenge of Germany and the U.S, called for a new theory. The Fabians, in providing one, acquired the label as a relic from a previous age.

The liberal historian Halévy, accurately characterized the Fabians as "convinced imperialists and, looking to a national and militarist state to realize their

programme of moderate collectivism, they had never felt anything but contempt for every formula of Liberalism and free trade."[2] At first, however, they attached themselves to Lord Roseberry, the liberal leader, who represented the interests of Big Finance in spite of his advocacy of free trade at the time. They hoped to provide his pseudo-Darwinist vision of building an "imperial Race"[3] with their well-thought-out social program. Now generally the development of monopoly capitalism in industry and finance, throughout Europe, was not along separate lines. English finance capital, due to its virtual hegemony in the capitalist world, was in less need to ally itself with Industrial capital. This divergence of interest among the ruling groups soon led to the emergence of a rivaling imperialist school, centered on Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform League. It consisted chiefly of industrialists, but it also received the support of the land-owning and military groups traditionally polarized around the conservative party. The new protectionism was built then, on the class fusion of such economic interests as cartels, monopoly prices, low taxes and an aggressive foreign policy. They determined its "feudal," collectivist and militarist ideology that soon displaced the liberal arguments and became the dominant form of imperialism.

Imperialist ideology

The tariff reformers began an active campaign to convert the working class to the new ideology. All available forms of propaganda were used, from the press to lectures to music hall ditties. The nation's welfare, the worker was told, depended upon victory over its rivals. Chamberlain shouted the battle-cry against the foreign competitors: "The Empire is being attacked on all sides and, in our isolation, we must look to ourselves." The whole atmosphere was polluted by chauvinism and militarism. The rejuvenated cult of the monarchy was exploited to the full by the imperialists. They used medieval sentiments to reinforce the class structure of the society, as is illustrated, rather unwittingly, in this passage by the historian of the period:

> Besides these displays (celebrating Victoria's first jubilee) every locality in the land had its festival. In the cities these were on an imposing scale; and often great works were undertaken as permanent memorials. At the other end, some thousands of country parishes each organized a free tea, at which all the separate elements in the old hierarchized life of rural England-gentry, farmers, shopkeepers, labourers, rich and poor, church and chapel sat down for once in equality together. It was the swan-song of that life before its final break-up[4].