

## D. H. Lawrence and the truth of literature

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### **Abstract:**

Having established that what D. H. Lawrence means by truth is moral truth, we delineate his view of the novel as the best vehicle to communicate with the 'subtle interrelatedness' without which *morality* is merely *moralism*. We then examine Lawrence's view that 'art speech is the only truth' and his distinction between the creating artist and the man, contrasting it with T. S. Eliot's. This is done with the help of F. R. Leavis's understanding of the artist as 'at once personal and impersonal' – that is as a great psychologist whose suppression of ego allows the deep and shared power of *reality-soaked language* to guide the creative flow. This is where art reclaims truth.

D. H. Lawrence famously wrote that 'art-speech is the only truth'. If we are to give credibility to these words, we must know what Lawrence means by 'truth'. Here is the passage in which this expression occurs:

Art-speech is the only truth. An artist is usually a damned liar, but his art, if it be art, will tell you the truth of his day. And that is all that matters. Away with eternal truth. Truth lives from day to day, and the marvellous Plato of yesterday is chiefly bosh today. [...] Two blankly opposing morals, the artist's and the tale's. Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.<sup>1</sup>

One thing is made clear by the passage: 'truth' here is not used in the sense of absolute truth, something that can never be falsified. This is close to Wittgenstein's deflationary conception of truth, which is internally linked to what people say or claim is true. For Wittgenstein, what it means to call a statement 'true' is that we currently judge it true, and so may later revise that claim. But nor is Lawrence talking about scientific truth; for even if, as Popper has made clear, science progresses through the falsification of its truths, it is not in the business of telling us what Lawrence calls *the truth of our day*; rather, it only wants to nail things down:

Philosophy, religion, science, they are all of them busy nailing things down, to get a stable equilibrium. Religion with its nailed down One God, who says Thou shalt, Thou shan't, and hammers home every time; philosophy, with its fixed ideas; science with its 'laws': they, all of them, want to nail us on to some tree or other.

But the novel, no. The novel is the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered. Everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and untrue outside of its own place, time circumstance. If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail.<sup>2</sup>

If, for Lawrence, artistic truth is not absolute, nor is it mere correspondence with reality. The mere mirroring of reality would coincide with Plato's degrading image of the artist holding

up a mirror to nature and passively capturing its reflections. Plato's notion of *mimesis* or imitation as literal copying, devoid of creativity, probably contributed to Nietzsche's view of him as 'the greatest enemy of art Europe has yet produced'<sup>3</sup>. It took Aristotle, as ever countering his master, to imbue the notion of *mimesis* with meaning, making it what Musil calls an 'enlightened mimetism'. For Aristotle, artistic truth is not mere factual accuracy: art says something about what it presents. It does this by drawing our attention to some aspects of reality rather than to others; thereby giving us what Wittgenstein would call a 'perspicuous presentation' of reality<sup>4</sup>. In her artistic presentation of reality, the artist enables us to see that which, though in front of our eyes, remains unnoticed. It is this structured representation – a representation through an artistic medium – that affects us in such a way that an exceptional kind of understanding, one rarely experienced without the mediation of literature, takes place. So that, as Amelie Rorty puts it: 'While there is sorrow, grief, loss, pain in life, there is tragedy only when the actions and events that compose a life are organized into a story, a structured representation of that life'<sup>5</sup>. It is in the tale – that is, in a *structured representation* of life – that truth about life shows itself.

It is important to note that Lawrence equates truth, as literature dispenses it, with morality. This is visible in his warning: 'Two blankly opposing morals, the artist's and the tale's. Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.' The tale's moral is its truth; the truth we must trust. For it is not a truth we can prove, nail down. Moral truth is not demonstrable; it is, however, 'monstrable', showable. The tale shows, or presents, or enacts moral truth. How it does this is what we'll now explore.

### **A balancing act**

Lawrentian morality would fall within the very broad range of concerns associated with the Aristotelian question of 'how to live'. Lawrence's summary answer to that question would be: 'in true relatedness'. For him, 'Morality is that delicate, for ever trembling and changing balance between me and my circumambient universe, which precedes and accompanies a true relatedness' (*PhI*, p. 528).

Morality is a balancing act. It is not achieved by juggling gross dichotomies of good/bad; right/wrong or one-size-fits-all principles, but by relating individuals to each other and to their world. There is no question for Lawrence that morality can be poised on anything but life, which is by definition relational. Morality is trembling and delicate precisely because poised on the relatedness inherent in all life. This is where, for Lawrence, the novel becomes incomparable: 'of all the art forms, the novel most of all demands the trembling and oscillating of the balance' (*PhI*, p. 529); 'The novel is the highest form of human expression so far attained' precisely '[b]ecause it is so incapable of the absolute'<sup>6</sup>, for 'only in the novel are *all* things given full play, or at least, they may be given full play' (*PhI*, pp. 537-38). A novel which does not deploy the vital, dynamic, interrelatedness whereby all things are given full play, balanced against each other, is not art. As Lawrence writes: 'In a novel, everything is relative to everything else, if that novel is art at all' (*PhII*, p. 416). And so, like morality, the novel admits of no absolutes. They are, it seems, made for each other.

'Morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance. When the novelist puts his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality'

(*PhI*, p. 528). What Lawrence means by 'immorality' is more clearly rendered by the term 'moralism' which, unlike 'immorality', includes the didactic, prescriptive stance he repeatedly condemns. If the novel does not tremble, it is because the thumb of didactic purpose, the authorial voice, is pinning it down. To prevent this, other voices must be given full play. A novel that does not do this falls prey to the 'stable equilibrium' of the treatise. Lawrence is clear: morality in the novel resides in the trembling instability of the balance; its dynamic interrelatedness. This amounts to saying that the novel's morality consists – not in its depiction of particular relations – but in its very deployment of interrelatedness; in its bringing into play, into situation or circumstance, varying and often opposing values, senses, needs, desires, feelings. Though it is *particulars* that are played off against one another in *particular* circumstances, the focus is not on these but on *the fact* that they are played off; on the relatedness inherent in life, on the context-dependence of truth. As Lawrence writes in 'Morality and the Novel': 'It is the *relation itself* which is the quick and central clue to life, not the man or the woman'; and again: 'If a novel reveals true and vivid relationships, it is a moral work, no matter what the relationships may consist in' (*PhI*, p. 531 original italics; p. 530).

Yet here Lawrence seems to be taking back with one hand what he is giving with the other: on one hand, all we want from the novel is that it present or convey relatedness; on the other, the relatedness has to be 'true and vivid'. But what of the relatedness, in *Anna Karenina*, between Anna and Karenin? It is not true and vivid; and yet it is essential to the novel's morality. Or does Lawrence mean, not that the relationship should itself be true and vivid, but that it should be truly and vividly conveyed? Well, it *is* that; but we think Lawrence would insist on there being at least one true and vivid relationship *between the characters themselves* – that is a 'real' or sincere relationship, albeit not unproblematic – in order for the novel to have what F. R. Leavis calls that 'certain symmetry of negative and positive'<sup>7</sup> which would make it a moral work. The relationship between Anna and Vronsky would fall into that category. A novel would need at least one such 'true and vivid' relationship, according to Lawrence, for it to be a moral work.

There is, however, no such relationship in *Madame Bovary*, whose heroine experiences only failed relationships and ends up committing suicide. And yet, *pace* Lawrence, we would say it is a profoundly moral novel – moral in the sense that it penetrates the question of how to live. That it does so mostly by showing us how *not* to live is probably why Lawrence regarded Flaubert, undeservedly we think, as standing 'away from life as from a leprosy' (*PhI*, p. 312), and 'all the modern stuff since Flaubert' failing to be the 'great kick at misery' that tragedy ought really to be<sup>8</sup>.

Emma Bovary's *ennui* may not be of the same calibre as Baudelaire's *spleen*, but it belongs to the same family: the family of feelings that are directly connected to existence; here, in the form of a *mal de vivre*, or an *ennui de vivre*. Flaubert gives us a perspicuous presentation of the occurrence of *ennui* in the life of a superficial bourgeois woman, incapable of Baudelairian reflection. But he, Flaubert, is not incapable of reflection; nor should he be diagnosed with a 'radical sickness of the spirit' – Leavis's diagnosis (*DHL*, p. 27) – because he depicts a spirit radically poisoned – poisoned with *ennui*. Leavis sees a 'defeat of intelligence' in Flaubert's 'restricting himself so much by the limitations of [Emma's] consciousness (which is 'really too small an affair')' – the same 'inner contradiction' he sees in T. S. Eliot between the 'slow meticulous labour of calculating judgement that clearly went to the doing; and... the sick

poverty, the triviality, and, finally, the nothingness, of the done – the human and spiritual nullity' (*DHL*, pp. 26-27).

We find two things wrong here with Leavis's judgment: he conflates the spirit of the author with that of his main character<sup>9</sup>; and he imposes the life-defeating nature of the character on the whole novel. Madame Bovary is not 'art-defeating because life-defeating', for it is not life-defeating at all, but *life-presenting*. It makes the most acutely sensitive 'presentment' of *ennui*, not in the life of a world-weary Faust or a splenetic poet, but in the life of a bourgeois woman. And why should *that* more mundane and common portrayal of a *mal de vivre* – which, remember, was the *mal du siècle* – not interest us, not make us more psychologically sensitive to and aware of our human condition? Great literature has magnified our understanding of ambition, hate, jealousy, envy, perversity – so why not *ennui*? Yes, these are life-defeating feelings, but in better understanding their poisonous infection of a human life, we better understand human life. Can we not say about *Madame Bovary* what Leavis says about *Anna Karenina*: 'the book gives the compelling constation of a truth about human life'<sup>10</sup>? And so what we would call a life-affirming novel is not only one which would 'present' the *defeat* of a life-defeating attitude such as Emma's *ennui*, but one which would *truly and vividly* present the attitude.

Even if we were to agree with Leavis that only affirmative art can be considered great, it would be a mistake to think that all affirmative art is written in the affirmative mode; or, indeed, that it should provide the answers to the questions it poses. Certainly, we should not judge a literary work according to whether or not it has solved the problems it analyses. *Madame Bovary* does not attain such resolution and, as Leavis concedes, nor does *Women in Love*: 'The un-Flaubertian spirit of Lawrence's work, while producing its characteristic vital perfections<sup>11</sup>, has of course its own tendencies to imperfection' (*DHL*, p. 28). One of these imperfections is the uncertainty we are left in at the end of *Women in Love*, which shows its author, writes Leavis: 'defeated by the difficulty of life: he hasn't solved the problems of civilization that he analyses' (*DHL*, p. 29). Should this really be seen as an imperfection in the work? Is this really what a novelist should do – solve the problems of civilization? This from Leavis who elsewhere affirms that literature is 'exploratory creation'<sup>12</sup>; 'an exploratory effort towards the definition of a norm' (*AK*, p. 12), and not the end or culmination of the exploration.

### **Subtle Interrelatedness**

Leavis shares Lawrence's view of the novel's inherent, vital and organic capacity for 'subtle interrelatedness'<sup>13</sup> as insuring that significance result from a 'balancing act', not from an absolute or subjective or single perspective. This reduces the possibilities of being seduced by the *wrong* voice. So, for instance, only a moralist or a stubbornly inattentive reader of *Anna Karenina* could maintain that Anna is nothing but an egotistical adulteress. For the voice in the novel: the 19<sup>th</sup> century societal, Christian, voice – which makes her out as that, and which also infects other voices, including Anna's herself – is intricately and variously *related* to and contradicted by other voices and by the dramatized description – the psychologically subtle description supported by imagery, symbolism etc. – of Anna's and other pertinent characters' feelings and actions. For, in order to be trustworthy, narration and dialogue must find subtle relatedness – that is, subtle reverberation and corroboration – in a diversity of nonverbal foils.

However, in their very attempts to spell out the novel's resources against authorial moralism, both Lawrence and Leavis betray their own tendentiousness: a demand that sententiousness, or conservatism or some moralistic or life-defeating attitude or other be condemned and finally drowned out in the novel by the novel. It is probably this absence of a clear opposition to what they see as a life-defeating attitude that fuels their objection to *Madame Bovary*. And what of Lawrence's affirmation that 'the great relationship, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child, will always be subsidiary' (*PhI*, p. 531). The obvious counterexample which comes to mind is the relation between Gerald and Birkin in *Women in Love*.

In *Ethics, Theory and the Novel*<sup>14</sup>, literary theorist David Parker offers a less dogmatic reading of Lawrence's 'dynamic interrelatedness' – one which does not see the novel as a successful suppression of the moralist stance, but as an equitable forum for both moral sides. As Charles Taylor argues, there is a *necessary* tension between two different sorts of incommensurable and only sometimes reconcilable moral demands: 'we are and cannot but be on both sides of the great intramural moral disputes' of our culture<sup>15</sup>. For Parker, 'this means that the novelist only apparently resolves the tension by attempting to suppress one sort of moral claim in the interests of the other. The drive to resolve all conflicts in this way is nothing but a will-to-master-narrative' (*ETN*, p. 57). For true balance and impersonality, the art must give full recognition to the *necessity* of both sorts of moral demand, writes Parker:

The real conflict in *Anna Karenina* is between a Judeo-Christian moral perspective that centres on the recognition of human continuities, and a Romantic-expressivist one that centres on the ethical demands flowing from the recognition of human uniqueness and difference. ... it is the realisation of the incommensurability and mutual antagonism of these two *necessary* perspectives that underlies our judgment that this [perennial] retelling of the story about adultery has the profoundest moral interest and relevance for us. ... both the Judeo-Christian and the Roman-expressivist perspectives are essential ones for modern selves constituted by these very traditions. Neither can be abandoned or subsumed by the other in an imaginative work, except at the price of the art itself either becoming perceptibly judgmental or evasive, failing to recognise the ethical legitimacy of certain unavoidable human needs and desires. (*ETN*, p. 70)

Ethical binary oppositions must be given full play in the novel in order, not to celebrate one at the expense of the other, but to acknowledge their necessary co-existence, however conflictual. Only then has ethical impersonality a chance. But, despite insisting on removing the thumb from the balance, Lawrence is, as Parker suggests, 'characteristically drawn to believe that the dilemma can be answered – simply by the woman following out the Romantic demands of self-realisation' (*ETN*, p. 73). Laudable as this might seem, it is *an answer* where there ought to be only be an exploratory question; and it is an answer that is *characteristic* of Lawrence rather than contextual. Moreover, it is an answer that Flaubert, true to the nature of Emma Bovary's situation, *cannot* give.

**Art-speech is the only truth**

But if Lawrence's predisposition to feel-good endings makes the balance of his novels not quite trembling with instability, the task he sets the novel is admirable. The master-narrative is but one voice amongst others – also subjected to the tale's constitutive self-critical apparatus – which precludes it from being a privileged, didactic, reference point. It expresses one of several moral possibilities that are, in the novel, *tested* against one another in what must remain, for both writer and reader, an *exploration* of moral possibilities. It is in the *coherence* of the whole that the *tale's* voice, the moral insight which has consistently and irresistibly evolved into a 'true and vital relation' – can be unerringly recognized: '[Novels] *in their wholeness* ... affect the whole man alive, which is the man himself, beyond any part of him. They set the whole tree trembling with a new access of life: they do not just stimulate growth in one direction' (*PhI*, p. 536; my italics). The tale's voice that we must trust in despite of the artist is that of the novel *as a whole*, the novel *in its wholeness*. It is, as Parker puts it, the 'countervailing force or will or imperative in the work of art itself (that is, the impersonal 'tale' rather than the teller), which, if it is strong enough, is able to get up and walk away with the artist's nail' (*ETN*, pp. 61-62)?

But for all of his mistrust of the artist, Lawrence does not see him only as 'a damned liar', not to be trusted; he also speaks of the 'deep, great artist'. For, in fact, Lawrence's distrust of the artist is a distrust of the artist as a man; the artist *qua* artist, *qua* teller is to be trusted. This is clear in the essay on Herman Melville:

The artist was so *much* greater than the man. The man is rather a tiresome New Englander of the ethical mystical-transcendentalist sort: Emerson, Longfellow, Hawthorne, etc. ... But he was a deep, great artist, even if he was rather a sententious man. He was a real American in that he always felt his audience in front of him. But when he ceases to be American, when he forgets his audience, and gives us his sheer apprehension of the world, then he is wonderful, his book commands a stillness in the soul, an awe.<sup>16</sup>

'In his "human" self, Melville is almost dead', continues Lawrence, but when the 'self' gives way to a 'sheer apprehension of the world' untrammelled by an overly cerebral consciousness, we have the 'deep, great artist'; the artist who is able to quieten his conscious aim, his metaphysics, so that the novel can have its voice. And so, writes Parker:

There is a desirable sort of unconsciousness in writing ... whereby the work itself seems to take over, following the directions it itself must take. Fidelity to this sort of unconsciousness, preparedness to pursue the ties of artistic purpose and 'sympathetic consciousness' into 'places unknown' constitutes the supreme moral imperative for the creator of any literary text. (*ETN*, p. 62)

Lawrence goes to great lengths, in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and many of his other works, to find the source of this artistic depth. He glimpses it in the right balance 'between the artist's *mind* and his *intuition* and *instinct*' (*PhI*, p. 573; original emphasis); but his calls for 'sentient non-knowledge' (*PhI*, p. 479) to counteract the tyranny of mind take an unnecessarily metaphysical turn. So we prefer leaving Lawrence for a moment and turning to Leavis's less metaphysical rendering of Lawrence on this matter –

that is, of how the tale, as the locus of reconciliation between the artist's conscious self and his passionate inspiration, gives us truth. We might readily accept that giving all things fair play goes a long way towards purveying moral truth, but how is *this* artist – *this* teller of a tale – better equipped than anyone – be it a philosopher, judge or scientist – to give all things fair play – or to write the tale that will?

### **Leavis: the artist as great psychologist**

Although Lawrence insisted on the vital aspect of intelligence in the human quest for moral truth, his most ardent efforts went toward the recognition and celebration of the *cognitive* value of the emotional, sensual and instinctive. This emphasis was necessary because he found the scale had already been too long and too heavily thumbed on the side of mind-knowledge; so that redressing it meant leaning more insistently on the neglected side. But Lawrence's crusade against the tyranny of mind must not be mistaken for one that would give full sway to the body. If he firmly believed that the 'mind as author and director of life is anathema'<sup>17</sup> his was an insurrection against the tyranny, not against the mind. What Lawrence sought was balance. However, his insistence that what was needed was a recalibration of mind-knowledge, and not its exclusion – 'we *must* know, if only in order to learn how not to know. ... At last, knowledge must be put into its true place in the living activity of man. And we must know deeply, in order even to do that' (*FU*, p. 76) – was drowned out by his more enflamed and radical exhortations – often rendered more radical through decontextualisation – to give oneself up 'to quivering uncertainty, to sentient non-knowledge' (*PhI*, p. 425). T. S. Eliot's pronouncement of what he deemed to be Lawrence's 'incapacity for what we ordinarily call thinking'<sup>18</sup> is but one of the feebler misinterpretations of Lawrence's extensive attempt to precisely revise 'what we ordinarily call thinking'. Like Nietzsche, Lawrence has often been misread and misused, but genius survives – it survives not only its own ideology, but also that of others.

In setting about the task of saving Lawrence from such myopic visions as Eliot's, Leavis had to tip the scale back from Lawrence's necessary but overemphatic insistence on intuition. It was 'thought' that Leavis brought back to the fore. But not that unidimensional thought against which Lawrence struggled; rather, the 'thought' which resulted from that struggle. The thought that he had imbued with 'blood-knowledge, instinct, intuition, all the vast vital flux of knowing that goes on in the dark, antecedent to the mind'; that thought 'with its own blood of emotion and instinct running in it like the fire in a fire opal' (*SCAL*, p. 91). To deny that *that* is thought; to restrict the use of 'thought' to a rational activity devoid of emotion and sensation would be to revert to the very dualism that Lawrence was, and we still are, attempting to dissolve. Thought is not a reductively cerebral activity – 'Thought is a man in his wholeness wholly attending'<sup>19</sup>. It is this kind of thought that Leavis attributes to the great creative writer, and which makes the great creative writer 'a great psychologist' – as indeed he finds Lawrence to be<sup>20</sup>: 'What we need to get recognition for is that major creative writers are concerned with thought, and such recognition entails the realization that the thought is of an essential kind'<sup>21</sup>.

Inspired by Lawrence's revision of the nature of thought and intelligence, Leavis re-establishes the intellectual status of the creative writer and argues that literature is a form of thought – *intuited* thought. This, however, does not dispense the creative writer from possessing the more common form of intelligence which Eliot thought Lawrence lacked,

thereby charging him with ignorance (*ASG*, pp. 58-59)<sup>22</sup>: intelligence as the combined fruit of education, 'ratiocinative powers' and experience. Leavis corrects Eliot by noting 'Lawrence's indebtedness to the specialist books he had read, and read critically', remarking that 'the extraordinary power Lawrence had of assimilating the abstruse books of distinguished professionals in various fields was an essential aspect of his genius'<sup>23</sup>. He insists on the importance of education and reading for Lawrence's creative genius (as for all major writers, including such 'visionaries' as Blake). Creative intelligence is not a spontaneous eruption; it must be rooted in education, analysis and experience. Only in this informed and exposed soil can it cultivate the receptiveness, sensitivity and understanding without which it will be incapable of what, for Leavis, are necessary components of a creative intelligence: 'sympathetic consciousness' and 'profound psychological insight' (*DHL*, pp. 259, 22). The great novelist is, for Leavis, 'a great psychologist'. This is not to say she is a cerebral delver into the cerebral. Leavis is quick to stress: 'I impose an anti-positivist, or an anti-pseudo-scientific, sense on the word 'psychology' (*CAP*, p. 19). And so: 'Lawrence the great novelist and critic *is* the great psychologist' (*TWC*, 32); 'the endless resource of [Lawrence's] art is profound psychological insight ... the insight he brings from life, from his experience and observation'<sup>24</sup> (*DHL*, p. 125; p. 138). This is the case for all great novelists, like George Eliot, whose 'radically reverent attitude towards life, a profound seriousness of the kind that is a first condition of any real intelligence, and ... interest in human nature ... made her a great psychologist'<sup>25</sup> (*GT*, p. 14).

The artist's 'supra-normally sensitive' (*DHL*, p. 259) perception gives him 'access to that comprehensive human experience without which he [would be] incapacitated for the imagining and producing of a great creative work' (*CAP*, p. 206). This extraordinary sensitivity to life stems from a 'richer human interest' (*DHL*, p. 259), and is inseparable from an attentiveness to language, both to the common language and to 'the fullest use of language' – that of literature: 'the education of [Blake's] powers of expression that went with his addiction to Shakespeare was, inseparably an education of his power to perceive, to recognize and to imagine'. Indeed, Blake 'had two starting-points: one in traditional popular culture and the other in Shakespeare. ... they are not altogether distinct from one another, they are not really separable' (*CAP*, pp. 143; 13; 11).

Leavis is clear: the writer's interest in words, language, speech is an interest in life; and the cultivation of his interest in language is a cultivation of his powers of observation, perception, empathy – and thus, of understanding. Moreover, first-hand living, observation and perception are not, in the case of the creative writer, mere extraneous advantages that can enhance her art: there is a 'supreme need for the *novelist*, the novelist as artist, to be intelligent about life' and 'a continuity from the inherent creativity of perception to the creativity, trained and conscious, of the artist' (*CAP*, pp. 114; 18). Intuition or inspiration are not enough: the artist's perception or sensitivity must be trained and conscious.

However, for all of the *man's* education, experience, perception and analysis, we must be clear that it is the *artist* – not the man – who is the great psychologist. The *artist's* thought – not the man's thought – is inseparable from his art. Here, Leavis echoes Lawrence – 'the creative product of the artist' does not have its source in ego and will – but in 'something other', a 'deep-lying source' (*TWC*, pp. 72-3) – but he also clarifies the source of that deep-lying source: it is language. And of course we know that language, for Leavis (as it was for

Wittgenstein), is not a mere vehicle for thought; not a means of expressing thought but the *sine qua non* manifestation of thought:

Without the English language waiting quick and ready for him, Lawrence couldn't have communicated his thought: that is obvious enough. But it is also the case that he couldn't have thought it. English as he found it was a product of an immemorial *sui generis* collaboration on the part of its speakers and writers. It is alive with promptings and potentialities, and the great creative writer shows his genius in the way he responds. (*TWC*, p. 26)

Like that of all great creative writers, his creativity manifests itself in new shades of suggestion, new felicities of force, got out of the common language – in (we feel) an inspired way, rather than by calculating intention. (*TWC*, p. 67)

There is no thought (other than in a derived sense of 'thought') that is not linguistic. So that to go to the 'common language' for inspiration is to go to the common source of thought – what Leavis also called 'the third realm' and / or 'the living principle': that 'apprehended totality of what, as registered in the language, has been won or established in immemorial human living' (*LP*, p. 68). It is in the act of creation, in her intense and unimpeded head-to-head with language, her strenuous delving into its resources and potency for expression, that the artist produces the intuitive thought that would not be possible outside this confrontation. It is the artist and the language brought together in a creative enterprise that produces the creative work. In this 'interplay – as Leavis puts it – between the living language and the creativity of individual genius' (*LP*, p. 49), the writer finds not only the source of creativity but also what Bernard Harrison calls 'the limits of authorial licence':

... the need to put down some words on a blank page, marks not the point at which the writer enters into the full play of authorial licence, but, paradoxically, the point at which authorial licence begins to encounter limits. Neither language nor the vast web of practices which supply roles, and hence meanings, to its words are, after all, either the property or the inventions of the author. They are public property: the framework of a culture and a world – or, better, system of worlds – which he found ready-made when he entered it at birth, and which will long outlast him. Plot, genre, local colour, choice of characters and relationships, all these are in the unimpeded gift of the author. But ultimately characters must be made to speak, words must be deployed upon a page. It is then that the going begins to get sticky; then that human reality begins to reclaim her own.<sup>26</sup>

This is why Leavis speaks of 'the impersonality of genius' (*GT*, p. 32); and says 'great art is necessarily impersonal'; well, 'at once personal and impersonal' (*CAP*, pp. 147; 32). Although Leavis sees the quality of genius as distinctive and intensely individual, his view of language as 'collaborative creativity' (*LP*, p. 36) is what makes the work of art 'the creative product of something other than ego and will' (*TWC*, pp. 72-3). Here, Leavis makes non-metaphysical sense of Lawrence's crusade against the ego. Because of the reality-soaked nature of language, the artist's thought, though of necessity grounded in the personal, transcends it – in the tale, through the tale – to become greater than the man. Through the tale, the personal

reaches the impersonal or objective – what Lawrence calls truth. It is the art that gives the thought its force, its truth.

Lawrence calls for a suppression of 'the human self' to allow the artistic apprehension to emerge. This is a variant of the Romantic notion of poet as a passive Aeolian harp through which the wind of inspiration blows: 'Not I, but the wind that blows through me'<sup>27</sup>. In the same vein, Leavis speaks of 'the claim that is genuinely a disclaimer' that every significant artist can make of the creative works he produces: 'Though I call them mine, I know that they are not mine' (*LP*, p. 44; *TWC*, p. 86). However, impersonality does not trump personality to the extent that we lose sight of the author altogether. This is not the post-modernist 'death of the author'. It is difficult, but necessary, to boldly underline the difference between the 'escape from personality' advocated by Eliot and the suppression of ego and will advocated by Lawrence and Leavis. Eliot's call for the artist's 'continual surrender of himself ... to something which is more valuable', making his progress 'a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality' is, as he says himself, 'a process of depersonalization' in which 'art may be said to approach the condition of science'<sup>28</sup>. His separation between 'the man who suffers and the mind which creates'<sup>29</sup> is a call for the suppression of personal emotion 'in order to express feelings which are not ... emotions at all' (*ibid.* 57-58). This is indeed a *depersonalisation* whose goal is to make art more objective in the way of science. It does not resemble the *impersonality* acknowledged by Lawrence and Leavis whose goal is to draw from the 'deep-lying source' the truth; 'the truth that concerns us' (*SCAL*, p. 8).

What is it about Tolstoy that makes him the genius he is – a genius so different from Dostoevsky whose language, country and epoch he shares? Genius is individual because it resides in an individual – a historically- and socially-situated individual – but an individual who is more attuned to the wind that blows through him than self-focused. That wind may have its specific time and geography but – as Gadamer, *pace* Lawrence, reminds us – art is timeless and beyond geography. Something happens when an artist creates – even if in another age or geography – that transcends time and space and speaks to us directly. This, Lawrence the artist also understood, and voices it through Birkin in *Women in Love*, with respect to the African statuette about which Birkin thinks: 'There are centuries and hundreds of centuries of development in a straight line, behind that carving', and then says to Gerald: 'It conveys a complete truth. It contains the whole truth of that state, whatever you feel about it'<sup>30</sup>. 'Art-speech is the only truth' – be it literature or any other art, Lawrence is clear: 'The work of art is only the truth about the real world, that's all' (*WL*, p. 485).

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- <sup>1</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 8; hereafter abbreviated *SCAL*.
- <sup>2</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix I: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence*. Ed. E.D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1961), p. 528; hereafter abbreviated *PhI*.
- <sup>3</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), §24
- <sup>4</sup> On this, see Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, 'Wittgenstein and Leavis: Literature and the Enactment of the Ethical', *Philosophy and Literature* 40:1, 2016: 24-64.
- <sup>5</sup> Amelie Rorty, 'The Psychology of Aristotelian Tragedy' in *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. A. Rorty (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 3-4.
- <sup>6</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix II: Uncollected, Unpublished and Other Prose Works by D. H. Lawrence*. Ed. W. Roberts and H.T. Moore (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 416; hereafter abbreviated *PhII*.
- <sup>7</sup> F. R. Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence Novelist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1955), p. 29; hereafter abbreviated *DHL*.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence I*, ed. J. T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 459.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Eliot's attitude to life is, not less than Flaubert's, one of distaste and disgust. His art, consequently, is involved in the contradiction of which Flaubert is the greatest example. For it is, surely, a contradiction that Flaubert's case presents classically – all that would-be creative intensity, that intensity of 'doing', devoted to expressing attitudes in which distaste, disgust, and boredom have so decisive a part; a cult of art that amounts to a religion, and the directing spirit of it a rejection of life. I am thinking of the Flaubert the stultifying nature of whose inner self-contradiction – art defeating because life-defeating – exposes itself so dismally in *L'Education sentimentale*' (*DHL*, pp. 25-26).
- <sup>10</sup> F. R. Leavis, *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p. 23; hereafter abbreviated as *AK*.
- <sup>11</sup> 'There is no profound emotional disorder in Lawrence [in contrast to Eliot & Flaubert], no obdurate major disharmony; intelligence in him can be, as it is, the servant of the whole integrated psyche. It is the representative in consciousness of the complex need of the whole being, and is not thwarted or disabled by inner contradictions in him, whether we have him as artist, critic, or expositor. It is intensely active in his creative writing: we have on the one hand the technical originality of his creations, and on the other their organic wholeness and vitality.' (*DHL*, pp. 27-28)
- <sup>12</sup> F. R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), p. 198; hereafter abbreviated as *CP*.
- <sup>13</sup> '... the novel inherently is and must be [...] interrelated in all its parts, vitally, organically' (*PhII*, p. 422).
- <sup>14</sup> David Parker, *Ethics, Theory and the Novel*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); hereafter abbreviated *ETN*.
- <sup>15</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 105.
- <sup>16</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1964), pp. 137-8; hereafter abbreviated as *SCAL*.
- <sup>17</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious & Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*. (London: Penguin, 1923; rpt 1971), p. 249; hereafter abbreviated as *FU*.
- <sup>18</sup> T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber & Faber: 1933), p. 58; hereafter abbreviated as *ASG*.

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<sup>19</sup> D. H. Lawrence, 'Thought' in *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence*. (London: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1994), p. 563; hereafter abbreviated as *CPDHL*.

<sup>20</sup> F. R. Leavis, *Thought, Words and Creativity: Art and Thought in Lawrence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), p. 32; hereafter abbreviated *TWC*.

<sup>21</sup> F. R. Leavis, *The Living Principle: 'English' as a Discipline of Thought* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975; hereafter abbreviated *LP*).

<sup>22</sup> See also Eliot's Preface to Fr Tiverton's *D. H. Lawrence and Human Existence* (London: Rockliff, 1951).

<sup>23</sup> F. R. Leavis, *The Critic as Anti-Philosopher* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), p. 194; hereafter abbreviated *CAP*.

<sup>24</sup> 'The vitality of Lawrence's thought is one with his extraordinary power of living – the gift of being receptively open and unafraid in the multifarious human world, and of spontaneously (always with penetrating insight) taking a delicate, truly delicate, interest in an immense variety of human beings of individuals as such, and that is, of life' (*TWC*, p. 28). '[George Eliot's] radically reverent attitude towards life, a profound seriousness of the kind that is a first condition of any real intelligence, and an interest in human nature that made her a great psychologist' (F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 14; hereafter abbreviated *GT*). 'It was Blake's genius to be ... a great psychologist' (*CAP*, p. 19)

<sup>25</sup> In fact, all great creative writers: 'It was Blake's genius to be ... a great psychologist' (*CAP*, p. 19).

<sup>26</sup> Bernard Harrison, *What Is Fiction For? Literary Humanism Restored* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 276.

<sup>27</sup> In 'Song of a Man Who Has Come Through' (*CPDHL*, p. 195)

<sup>28</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1928), p. 53; hereafter abbreviated *TT*.

<sup>29</sup> '... the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates' (*TT*, p. 54).

<sup>30</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 87; hereafter abbreviated *WL*.