Literary Criticism (From Plato to Leavis)
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F.R. Leavis's "The Great Tradition" (Session 3)

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ness of *The Portrait of a Lady*. In that book, and in its successor, *The Bostonians*, his art is at its most concrete, and least subject to the weakness attendant on his subtlety. It is not derivativeness that is in question, but the relation between two original geniuses. 'We cannot attempt to trace,' says Mr. Van Wyck Brooks in *The Pilgrimage of Henry James*, 'the astonishing development of a creative faculty which, in the course of a dozen years, transcended the simple plot-maker's art of *The American*, the factitious local-colourism of *Roderick Hudson*, and rendered itself capable of the serene beauty of *The Portrait of a Lady*, the masterly assurance of *The Bostonians*, the mature perfection of *Washington Square*.'—It is more than a guess that, in that development, George Eliot had some part.

The reader is likely to comment, I suppose, on the degree in which my treatment of James is taken up with discussing his limitations and the regrettable aspects of his later development. Since it will also be noted that, of my three novelists, he, in terms of space, gets least attention, it might be concluded that a corresponding relative valuation is implied. I had, then, perhaps better say that there is no such relation intended between valuation and length of treatment. I will not, however, deny that, of the three, James seems to me to give decidedly most cause for dissatisfaction and qualification. He is, all the same, one of the great. His registration of sophisticated human consciousness is one of the classical creative achievements: it *added* something as only genius can. And when he is at his best that something is seen to be of great human significance. He creates an ideal civilized sensibility; a humanity capable of communicating by the finest shades of inflection and implication: a nuance may engage a whole complex moral economy and the perceptive response be the index of a major valuation or choice. Even *The Awkward Age*, in which the extremely developed subtlety of treatment is not as remote as one would wish from the hypertrophy that finally overcame him, seems to me a classic; in no other work can

a tacit conspiracy to admire some of the works that fall, partly, at any rate (wholly, one must conclude, for the admirers who risk explanatory comment on them), under this description. And here is sufficient reason why an attempt to promote a due appreciation of James's genius should give a good deal of discriminatory attention to the tendencies that, as they develop, turn vital subtlety into something else.

When we come to Conrad we can't, by way of insisting that he is indeed significantly 'in' the tradition—in and of it, neatly and conclusively relate him to any one English novelist. Rather, we have to stress his foreignness—that he was a Pole, whose first other language was French.[1] I remember remarking to André Chevrillon how surprising a choice it was on Conrad's part to write in English, especially seeing he was so clearly a student of the French masters. And I remember the reply, to the effect that it wasn't at all surprising, since Conrad's work couldn't have been written in French. M. Chevrillon, with the authority of a perfect bilingual, went on to explain in terms of the characteristics of the two languages why it had to be English. Conrad's themes and interests demanded the concreteness and action—the dramatic energy—of English. We might go further and say that Conrad chose to write his novels in English for the reasons that led him to become a British Master Mariner.

I am not, in making this point, concurring in the emphasis gener-

[1] 'The politeness of Conrad to James and of James to Conrad were of the most impressive kind. Even if they had been addressing each other from the tribunal of the Académie Française their phrases could not have been more elaborate or delivered more *ore rotundo*. James always addressed Conrad as "Mon cher confrère", Conrad almost bleated with the peculiar tone that the Marseillais get into their compliments "Mon cher maître" . . . Every thirty seconds. When James spoke of me to Conrad he always said: "Votre ami, le jeune homme modeste". They always spoke French together, James using an admirably pronounced, correct and rather stilted idiom such as prevailed in Paris in the 'seventies. Conrad spoke with extraordinary speed,

Hello and welcome to yet another session of this course literary criticism. We continue our discussion of F.R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition.* It is useful to keep in mind that F.R. Leavis at that point of time (this is the work written in 1948, it is the post-war period) is addressing a new audience, a new English audience, a new educated English public. He is also challenging the prevalent literary traditions, the prevalent moral traditions which were more in vogue before the war. There is a kind of newness that he wants to bring in to this idea of literature, to this idea of evaluation, which is why he also says at the outset of this work, that what he intends to do is a reassessment or re-evaluation of this entire oeuvre of fiction. He is also seeking to do something which poetry could never do, poetry was never able to challenge any kind of literary tradition, because the categories were always quite fixed, the traditions, the yardsticks, were always quite fixed.

And in terms of drama, there is already a sort of a hierarchy in place with Shakespeare as the most supreme author, most supreme dramatic genius. So, there is a way in which no kind of readymade tradition was available for fiction. Or the only kind of discussion which was possible about fiction was to arrange it and a chronological order, which is what until that point of time

any discussion of fiction also entailed. Here we find F.R. Leavis trying to go against that grain and to establish an English tradition. And there is something interesting here when he is trying to challenge this prevalent cultural ethos, and when he is trying to reinstate a very evidently English tradition, we also understand that it is not entirely a set of English writers that he is roping in.

If we take a look at the set of writers that he has in mind, the way he also locates the great tradition, we find that most of them were tangent to the English society. For instance, George Eliot is a woman trying to make her way in a man's world. And Henry James is an American who is making his home in England, and also trying to write fiction in an alien land, in that sense. And Joseph Conrad, of course, he is a Pole. He is writing in an acquired language. He is writing in a language in which he has trained himself very self-consciously.

D.H Lawrence is not one of those mainstream cultural leaders of his time, on the other hand, he was a miner's son, and he was profoundly opposed to be metropolitan world that England was soon emerging to be. And if you look at F.R. Leavis himself, he is a tradesman's son, and he is working in an ancient university. He is working in Cambridge at the time of the composition of this work. And there are multiple ways in which we find that outsiders are becoming insiders over here. There is a new tradition being forged. And this tradition is being emphasized in such a way that outsiders also become insiders. And it is with supreme magisterial authority that Leavis also dictates these terms about what constitutes a tradition.

We would find throughout his work that he is very categorical, he is very authoritative in stating that this is the English tradition—therein lies the English tradition. And there is no way in which he is willing to compromise on the kind of people that he is bringing together, or the kind of yardsticks that he is using. And it is also useful to remember that he is continuing the moralistic and humanistic tradition that Matthew Arnold had propounded. There is a certain way in which we find a continuity with T.S. Eliot as well. It is within these moralistic and humanistic impulses that we find F.R. Leavis locating his idea of the tradition, it is in such a way that he is bringing together these five novelists as part of the great tradition. Another important thing in terms of his critical outlook is that he encourages the critics; he encourages their readers to look beyond the words on a page.

Literature cannot be seen merely as a social document. On the other hand, it needs to be about an intimate study of the complexities, the potentialities and the essential conditions of human nature

itself. Here we find the moral compass, the humanistic compass, taking a higher standard as compared to any other thing which is associated with the novel. Of course, realist fiction was the kind of fiction which was being written, from the earliest times onwards, and there was an increasing tendency the form of the novel as a social document. Leavis encourages us to go beyond that to look at novel as literature, as pure literature. And only when you look at novel as a form of literature with a particular kind of a tradition, with a certain kind of a yardstick, only then will it become available for other kinds of scrutiny as well, for other kinds of purposes which are largely related to social consciousness.

We will very briefly take a look at how he tries to locate Conrad in this, because Conrad seems to be a misfit in many other ways. And here is Leavis, trying to locate Conrad as part of this great English tradition. "When we come to Conrad, we cannot by way of insisting that he is indeed significantly 'in' the tradition— in and of it, neatly and conclusively relate him to any one English novelist. Rather, we have to stress his foreignness." There is a peculiar way of looking at tradition. It need not be always part of the native continuity. It can also have a certain kind of foreignness and blend into whatever is seen as the native. This is unlike the way in which he had tried to position Jane Austen. Conrad and Jane Austen might look like they are at two ends of the spectrum.

But we see the continuity being built, largely on account of the moralistic and the humanistic impulses that Leavis continues to reiterate. "Rather, we have to stress his foreignness—that he was Pole whose first other language was French. I remember remarking to Andre Chevrillon how surprising a choice it was on Conrad's part to write in English, especially seeing he was so clearly a student of the French masters. And I remember the reply, to the effect that it was not at all surprising, since Conrad's work could not have been written in French".

This is another aspect of the language coming into a very direct dialogue with the form that is fiction. "Mr. Chevrillon, with the authority of a perfect bilingual, went on to explain in terms of the characteristics of the two languages why it had to be in English. Conrad's themes and interests demanded the concreteness and action—the dramatic energy—of English." Look at interesting ways in which he is locating the root of the tradition, the root of Englishness. "We might go further and say that Conrad chose to write his novels in English for the reasons that led him to become a British Master Mariner."

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Merchant Service is for him both a spiritual fact and a spiritual symbol, and the interests that made it so for him control and animate his art everywhere. Here, then, we have a master of the English language, who chose it for its distinctive qualities and because of the moral tradition associated with it, and whose concern with art—he being like Jane Austen and George Eliot and Henry James an innovator in 'form' and method—is the servant of a profoundly serious interest in life. To justify our speaking of such a novelist as in the tradition, that represented by those three, we are not called on to establish particular relations with any one of them. Like James, he brought a great deal from outside, but it was of the utmost importance to him that he found a serious art of fiction there in English, and that there *were*, in English, great novelists to study. He drew from English literature what he needed, and learnt in that peculiar way of genius which is so different from imitation. And for us, who have *him* as well as the others, there he is, unquestionably a constitutive part of the tradition, belonging in the full sense.

As being technically sophisticated he may be supposed to have found fortifying stimulus in James, whom he is quite unlike (though James, in his old age, was able to take a connoisseur's interest in *Chance* and appreciate with a professional eye the sophistication of the 'doing').[1] But actually, the one influence at all obvious is that of a writer at the other end of the scale from sophistication, Dickens. As I point out in my discussion of him, Conrad is in certain respects so like Dickens that it is difficult to say for just how much influence

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muted into Conrad. This co-presence of obvious influence with assimilation suggests that Dickens may have counted for more in Conrad's mature art (we don't find much to suggest Dickens in the early adjectival phase) than seems at first probable: it suggests that Dickens may have encouraged the development in Conrad's art of that extraordinary energy of vision and registration in which they are akin. ('When people say that Dickens exaggerates', says Mr. Santayana, 'it seems to me that they can have no eyes and no ears. They probably have only *notions* of what things and people are; they accept them conventionally, at their diplomatic value.') We may reasonably, too, in the same way see some Dickensian influence, closely related and of the same order, in Conrad's use of melodrama, or what would have been melodrama in Dickens; for in Conrad the end is a total significance of a profoundly serious kind.

The reason for not including Dickens in the line of great novelists is implicit in this last phrase. The kind of greatness in question has been sufficiently defined. That Dickens was a great genius and is permanently among the classics is certain. But the genius was that of a great entertainer, and he had for the most part no profounder responsibility as a creative artist than this description suggests. Praising him magnificently in a very fine critique,[1] Mr. Santayana, in concluding, says: 'In every English-speaking home, in the f quarters of the globe, parents and children would do well t Dickens aloud of a winter's evening.' This note is right an ficant. The adult mind doesn't as a rule find in Dickens a ch to an unusual and sustained seriousness. I can think of only his books in which his distinctive creative genius is con throughout to a unifying and organizing significance, and *Hard Times*, which seems, because of its unusualness and comp tively small scale, to have escaped recognition for the great thin is. Conrad's views on it, supposing it to have caught his atte would have been interesting; he was qualified to h

Also, he is able to praise what comes from outside. And remember what we mentioned at the outset of this lecture, that this entire exercise of re-evaluating this tradition is also about making the outsiders insiders, like he himself says very directly. "Like James, he brought a great deal from outside, but it was of the utmost importance to him that he found a serious art of fiction there in English, and that there *were,* in English, great novelists to study. He drew from English literature what he needed, and learnt in that peculiar way of genius which is so different from imitation."

Tradition here is not entirely about imitation. In fact, it is more about imbibing what is rooted in the tradition, but also contributing to it in a significant way. And here, it does not really matter whether one's origin is native or foreign. Regardless of that, he is very interestingly looking at the work. And this is what makes Leavis very interesting for us as a critic. He also lays down a different kind of a standard for us by not looking at the ethnicity of the writer, by not looking at the biography of the writer. On the other hand, he is focusing on the work that each writer has produced, which is what gives him a great deal of authority as well. He is very well versed in the works, in this body of work produced by these five great writers, whom he identifies. This familiarity with the work gives him the kind of mastery, the kind of authority, to pronounce judgments about what tradition they are part of, even to the extent of saying they are the tradition and there is nothing outside of them.

“And for us, who have *him* as well as the others, there he is, unquestionably a constitutive part of the tradition, belonging in the full sense.” Just like Eliot, who had to become part of a culture, part of a nation, that he was originally not part of, we find Leavis trying to become an insider also by making others a part of this tradition. Here, the idea of the tradition is not constituted by what one originally is. But on the basis of what one has produced creatively by way of writing fiction. And now we come to this part where Leavis is also trying to tell us why he has not been able to include Dickens. Dickens, who has been seen as one of the most formidable storytellers of the 19th century, one of the greatest storytellers of English literature. We find Leavis excluding Dickens entirely from his discussion of the great tradition.

While comparing Dickens with Joseph Conrad, this is what Leavis has to say: “We may reasonably, too, in the same way see some Dickensian influence, closely related and of the same order, in Conrad’s use of melodrama, or what would have been melodrama in Dickens; for in Conrad the end is a total significance of a profoundly serious kind.” We find this emphasis on seriousness, on morality, on this moral compass, on this high sense of investment on the idea of the morality, the moralistic and the humanistic cause very significantly being foregrounded. “The reason for not including Dickens in the line of great novelist is implicit in this last phrase. The kind of greatness in question has been sufficiently defined. That Dickens was a great genius and is permanently among the classics is certain.”

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It has a kind of perfection as a work of art that we don't associate

[1] See *Soliloquies in England*.

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Look at the way in which he is also differentiating between great storytellers, between classics, as well as this great tradition that he is trying to delineate. "That Dickens was a great genius, and is permanently among the classics is certain, but the genius was that of a great entertainer." That does not constitute great tradition, "and he had, for the most part, no profounder responsibility as a creative artist than this description suggests. Praising him magnificently in a very fine critique, Mr. Santayana, in concluding says: 'In every English-speaking home, in the four quarters of the globe, parents and children would do well to read Dickens aloud of a winter's evening.'

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Conrad is being seen as the successor of Dickens in a certain way. But at the same time we find Leavis giving Dickens the credit only for writings classic short stories, only for being a master genius in his art of storytelling. But the kind of profound seriousness that he would associate with Conrad is entirely missing in Dickens. And this is very interesting because it is just like

Jane Austen who has imbibed a lot from the writers who have been before her. But the other writers assume significance only on account of the greatness of Jane Austen. In the same way here, only on a count of Conrad's greatness, his profound seriousness, we find Dickens entering this discussion.

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at once, yield fresh subtleties as the action develops naturally in its convincing historical way.

In Gradgrind and Bounderby we have, in significant relation, two aspects of Victorian Utilitarianism. In Gradgrind it is a serious creed, devoutly held, and so, if repellent (as the name conveys), not wholly unrespectable; but we are shown Gradgrind as on the most intimate and uncritical terms with Josiah Bounderby, in whom we have the grossest and crassest, the most utterly unspiritual egotism, and the most blatant thrusting and bullying, to which a period of 'rugged individualism' gave scope. Gradgrind, in fact, marries his daughter to Bounderby. Yet he is represented as a kind of James Mill; an intellectual who gives his children, on theory, an education that reminds us in a very significant way of the *Autobiography* of the younger Mill. And it is hardly possible to question the justice of this vision of the tendency of James Mill's kind of Utilitarianism, so blind in its onesidedness, so unaware of its bent and its blindness. The generous uncalculating spontaneity, the warm flow of life, towards which Gradgrindery, practical and intellectual, must be hostile, is symbolized by Sleary's Horse-riding.

The richness in symbolic significance of *Hard Times* is far from adequately suggested by this account. The prose is that of one of the greatest masters of English, and the dialogue—very much a test in such an undertaking—is consummate; beautifully natural in its stylization. But there is only one *Hard Times* in the Dickensian *œuvre*.

Though the greatness of *Hard Times* passed unnoticed, Dickens

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quite otherwise with his rival. 'It is usual', says Mr. Santayana, 'to compare Dickens with Thackeray, which is like comparing the grape with the gooseberry; there are obvious points of resemblance, and the gooseberry has some superior qualities of its own; but you can't make red wine of it.' It seems to me that Thackeray's place is fairly enough indicated, even if his peculiar quality isn't precisely defined, by inverting a phrase I found the other day on an examination-paper: 'Trollope is a lesser Thackeray'. Thackeray is a greater Trollope; that is, he has (apart from some social history) nothing to offer the reader whose demand goes beyond the 'creation of characters' and so on. His attitudes, and the essential substance of interest, are so limited that (though, of course, he provides incident and plot) for the reader it is merely a matter of going on and on; nothing has been done by the close to justify the space taken—except, of course, that time has been killed (which seems to be all that even some academic critics demand of a novel). It will be fair enough to Thackeray if *Vanity Fair* is kept current as, in a minor way, a classic: the conventional estimate that puts him among the great won't stand the touch of criticism. The kind of thing that Thackeray is credited with is done at a mature level by James's friend, Howard Sturgis, in *Belchamber*, a novel about Edwardian society (it is, with an appropriateness not always observed in that series, included in *The World's Classics*).

To come back to Conrad and his major quality: he is one of those creative geniuses whose distinction is manifested in their being

[1] See pp. 130-140 below

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peculiarly alive in their time—peculiarly alive *to* it; not 'in the vanguard' in the manner of Shaw and Wells and Aldous Huxley, but sensitive to the stresses of the changing spiritual climate as they begin to be registered by the most conscious. His interest in the tradition of the Merchant Service as a constructive triumph of the human spirit is correlative with his intense consciousness of the dependence, not only of the distinctive humanities at all levels, but of sanity itself and our sense of a normal outer world, on an analogous creative collaboration. His Robinson Crusoe cannot bear a few days alone on his island, and blows out his brains. We are a long way from Jane Austen, for whom the problem was not to rescue the highly conscious individual from his isolation, but much the contrary. Conrad, of course, was a *déraciné*, which no doubt counts for a good deal in the intensity with which he renders his favourite theme of isolation. But then a state of something like deracination is common to-day among those to whom the question of who the great novelists are is likely to matter. Conrad is representative in the way genius is, which is not the way of those writers in whom journalist-critics acclaim the Zeitgeist. (It is relevant to note here that in the early hey-day of Wells and Shaw Conrad wrote *Nostromo* —a great creative masterpiece which, among other things, is essentially an implicit comment on their preoccupations, made from a very much profounder level of preoccupation than theirs. And it is also relevant to venture that in Mr. Arthur Koestler's very distinguished novel, *Darkness at Noon*, we have the work of a writer—also, we note, not born to the language—who knows and admires Conrad, especially the Conrad of *Nostromo* and *Under Western Eyes*.

Conrad is incomparably closer to us to-day than Hardy and Meredith are. So, for that matter, is George Eliot. I specify Hardy and Meredith because they are both offered to us among the great

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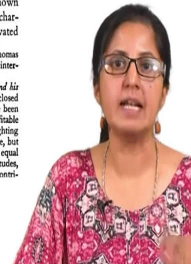
of all Hardy's works of a major philosophic-tragic ambition, comes nearer to sustaining it, and, in its clumsy way—which hasn't the rightness with which the great novelists show their profound sureness of their essential purpose—is impressive.[1] It is all the same a little comic that Hardy should have been taken in the early nineteen-twenties—the Chekhov period—as pre-eminently the representative of the 'modern consciousness' or the modern 'sense of the human situation'. As for Meredith, I needn't add anything to what is said about him by Mr. E. M. Forster,[2] who, having belonged to the original *milieu* in which Meredith was erected into a great master, enjoys peculiar advantages for the necessary demolition-work.

Is there no name later than Conrad's to be included in the great tradition? There is, I am convinced, one: D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence, in the English language, was the great genius of our time (I mean the age, or climatic phase, following Conrad's). It would be difficult to separate the novelist off for consideration, but it was in the novel that he committed himself to the hardest and most sustained creative labour, and he was, as a novelist, the representative of vital and significant development. He might, he has shown conclusively, have gone on writing novels with the kind of 'character creation' and psychology that the conventional cultivated

[1] Arthur Mizener's essay, '*Jude the Obscure* as a Tragedy', in the Thomas Hardy Centennial Issue of *The Southern Review* (Summer 1940), puts interestingly the case for a serious estimate of the book.

[2] See *Aspects of the Novel*. And here is James on *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*: 'Moreover, I have vowed not to open *Lourdes* till I shall have closed with a furious final bang the unspeakable *Lord Ormont*, which I have been reading at the maximum rate of ten pages—ten insufferable and unprofitable pages—a day. It fills me with a critical rage, an artistic fury, utterly blighting in me the indispensable principle of *respect*. I have finished, at this rate, but the first volume—whereof I am moved to declare that I doubt if any equal quantity of extravagant verbiage, of airs and graces, of phrases and attitudes,



It is a very extensive discussion that Leavis carries out in this entire work, and in most of these things we find that his authority also comes from this vast discussion that he and that he partakes in. These are not loose statements that he makes, he also tries to very succinctly support them with definitive arguments from the readings that he has done. And he continues: To come back to

Conrad and his major quality: he is one of those creative geniuses whose distinction is manifested in their being peculiarly alive in their time--peculiarly alive *to* it; not 'in the vanguard' in the manner of Shaw and Wells and Aldous Huxley, but sensitive to the stresses of the changing spiritual climate as they begin to be registered by the most conscious."

We find the moral compass continuing to dominate. It is about being alive to the times which are being presented in the fiction. It does not about the kind of ethnicity that one possesses. It is all about the kind of involvement that one has as a person. It is more about what comes through in that work of art, how the aliveness to certain times is being manifested.

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in Love he says: 'It is *very* different from *Sons and Lovers*: written in another language almost. I shall be sorry if you don't like it, but am prepared. I shan't write in the same manner as *Sons and Lovers* again, I think—in that hard, violent style full of sensation and presentation.'[1]

Describing at length what he is trying to do he says:

'You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable *ego* of the character. There is another *ego*, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure simple element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond—but I say, "Diamond, what! This is carbon". And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.) You must not say my novel is shaky—it is not perfect, because I am not expert in what I want to do. But it is the real thing, say what you like. And I shall get my reception, if not now, then before long. Again I say, don't look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle-bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, the sand takes lines unknown.'[2]

He is a most daring and radical innovator in 'form', method, technique. And his innovations and experiments are dictated by the most serious and urgent kind of interest in life. This is the spirit of it:

'Do you know Cassandra in Aeschylus and Homer? She is

[1] *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, p. 172. [2] *Letters*, p. 198.

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something which is unrecognizable and frustrated and destroyed.'[1]

It is a spirit that, for all the unlikeness, relates Lawrence closely to George Eliot.[2] He writes, again, to Edward Garnett[3]:

'You see—you tell me I am half a Frenchman and one-eighth a Cockney. But that isn't it. I have very often the vulgarity and disagreeableness of the common people, as you say Cockney, and I may be a Frenchman. But primarily I am a passionately religious man, and my novels must be written from the depth of my religious experience. That I must keep to, because I can only work like that. And my Cockneyism and commonness are only when the deep feeling doesn't find its way out, and a sort of jeer comes instead, and sentimentality and purplism. But you should see the religious, earnest, suffering man in me first, and then the flippant or common things after. Mrs. Garnett says I have no true nobility—with all my cleverness and charm. But that is not true. It is there, in spite of all the littlenesses and commonnesses.'

It is this spirit, by virtue of which he can truly say that what he writes must be written from the depth of his religious experience, that makes him, in my opinion, so much more significant in relation to the past and future, so much more truly creative as a technical inventor, an innovator, a master of language, than James Joyce. I know that Mr. T. S. Eliot has found in Joyce's work something that recommends Joyce to him as positively religious in tendency (see *After Strange Gods*). But it seems plain to me that there is no organic principle determining, informing, and controlling into a vital whole, the elaborate analogical structure, the extraordinary variety of

[1] *Letters*, p. 232. [2] Lawrence too has been called a Puritan.
[3] *Letters*, p. 190.

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technical devices, the attempts at an exhaustive rendering of consciousness, for which *Ulysses* is remarkable, and which got it accepted by a cosmopolitan literary world as a new start. It is rather, I think, a dead end, or at least a pointer to disintegration—a view strengthened by Joyce's own development (for I think it significant and appropriate that *Work in Progress—Finnegans Wake*, as it became—should have engaged the interest of the inventor of Basic English).

It is true that we can point to the influence of Joyce in a line of writers to which there is no parallel issuing from Lawrence. But I find here further confirmation of my view. For I think that in these writers, in whom a regrettable (if minor) strain of Mr. Eliot's influence seems to me to join with that of Joyce, we have, in so far as we have anything significant, the wrong kind of reaction against liberal idealism.[1] I have in mind writers in whom Mr. Eliot has expressed an interest in strongly favourable terms: Djuna Barnes of *Nightwood*, Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell of *The Black Book*. In these writers—at any rate in the last two (and the first seems to me insignificant)—the spirit of what we are offered affects me as being essentially a desire, in Laurentian phrase, to 'do dirt' on life. It seems to me important that one should, in all modesty, bear one's witness in these matters. 'One must speak for life and growth, amid all this mass of destruction and disintegration.'[2] This is Lawrence, and it is the spirit of all his work. It is the spirit of the originality that gives his novels their disconcerting quality, and gives them the significance of works of genius.

I am not contending that he isn't, as a novelist, open to a great deal of criticism, or that his achievement is as a whole satisfactory

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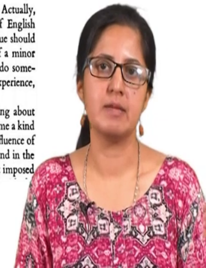
I read them (say) fifteen years ago. I still think that *The Rainbow* doesn't build up sufficiently into a whole. But I shouldn't be quick to offer my criticism of *Women in Love*, being pretty sure that I should in any case have once more to convict myself of stupidity and habit-blindness on later re-reading. And after these novels there comes, written, perhaps, with an ease earned by this hard work done, a large body of short stories and *nouvelles* that are as indubitably successful works of genius as any the world has to show.

I have, then, given my hostages. What I think and judge I have stated as responsibly and clearly as I can. Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Conrad, and D. H. Lawrence: the great tradition of the English novel is *there*.

NOTE: 'THE BRONTËS'

It is tempting to retort that there is only one Brontë. Actually, Charlotte, though claiming no part in the great line of English fiction (it is significant that she couldn't see why any value should be attached to Jane Austen), has a permanent interest of a minor kind. She had a remarkable talent that enabled her to do something firsthand and new in the rendering of personal experience, above all in *Villette*.

The genius, of course, was Emily. I have said nothing about *Wuthering Heights* because that astonishing work seems to me a kind of sport. It may, all the same, very well have had some influence of an essentially undetectable kind: she broke completely, and in the most challenging way, both with the Scott tradition that imposed



And finally, he comes to DH Lawrence: "Is there no name later than Conrad's to be included in the great tradition? There is, I am convinced, one." Look at the authority with which he is bringing in names, and look at the uncompromising way in which he is placing them side-by-side, as part of this great tradition. "D.H. Lawrence. Lawrence, in the English language, was the great genius of our time. It would be difficult to separate the novelist off for consideration, but it was in the novel that he committed himself to the hardest and most sustained creative labour, and he was, as a novelist, the representative of vital and significant development."

There is a kind of selection that here Leavis has very evidently made from Jane Austen to D.H. Lawrence, picking on the kind of artist whom he thinks has imbibed the English tradition in its real sense, which is also an extension of the moralistic and humanistic tradition. Leavis is beginning to look at literature as some kind of a religion. And there is a certain sort of rigidity which is part of his tenets, as we can see.

But at the same time, there is a certain abstractness. Though he is very authoritatively stating the yardsticks, we realize that there is a certain abstractness which one could attribute to the religious frameworks as well. Here he is more direct in that sense where he talks about: "It is this spirit, by virtue of which he can truly say that what he writes must be written from the depth of his religious experience, that makes him, in my opinion, so much more significant in relation to the

past and future, so much more truly creative as a technical inventor, an innovator, a master of language, than James Joyce.

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There is a personal investment here when he is making these evaluations. And of course, he is very widely read, and that sort of adds to this mastery, adds this authority with which he is able to compare and contrast these different writers. He is in no way demeaning the other writers. He is in no way saying that the others are not master storytellers. On the other hand, he is quite well-versed in the style, in the craft that the other writers such as James Joyce or Dickens, the way they bring in their own genius into their art of storytelling. But what makes him very distinctive is this continued focus on something profound, something serious, something very personal, something very intense, which only certain writers, he believes, are able to bring into their fiction.

Coming to the end of this first chapter, we find that he is further reiterating his claim. One may choose to agree or disagree with the many yardsticks, sort of tenets that Leavis proposes. It is also perhaps difficult to corroborate many of the things that he says because it is also based on his individual reading. It is also part of what he thinks is morally profound, what he thinks is deeply serious and what he thinks is morally enriching. The intensity that he identifies in these works, perhaps it is also personal. It is also about how, just like Leavis, they also could become insiders of a tradition which was exclusively dominated by English literary writers. Coming back to the final passage, he reiterates what he claims, right at the outset of this work: "I have, then, given my hostages. What I think and judge, I have stated as responsibly and clearly as I can. Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James Conrad, and D.H. Lawrence: the great tradition of the English novel is *there."*

This is a very conclusive statement. There is no compromise. This is a very categorical statement about what he thinks is English literary critical tradition. What brings all of these people together

is the myriad ways in which they have been able to become part of this tradition, which was exclusively based on a lot of other things, including ethnicity. And here, we find that none of these things are important when one is talking about tradition. It is entirely about the kind of work that one produces. Becoming part of a literary tradition is also becoming part of the spirit, part of the profound intensity that certain kinds of literature, certain kind of literary tradition has always been giving out; and he is able achieve two things here.

One, he is able to identify an English literary critical tradition which is essentially very different from the way in which it has been traditionally seen. He is able to give a new definition, a new kind of understanding, a new trajectory to tradition, a new yardstick to look at literary critical tradition. And on the other hand, he has been able to give a certain kind of a baggage of tradition to novel, in rescuing it from the state that it was before where anything written as fiction could be part of this larger oeuvre. There is no way to find out what is good fiction, what is part of the tradition, what is not part of the tradition, because it was not like poetry, not like drama. There was not any set sort of template on which one could draw, or based on which one could compare.

Here we find Leavis being able to do two things; one, to redefine and to reinstate tradition in a different way altogether. And secondly, to give novel a tradition, especially in the light of it never having a tradition in the first place. Having said that, many of his notions, many of his standards have been challenged in the later decades; and many find it very difficult to come to terms with his very imperialistic notions about how to locate tradition, how to identify insiders and outsiders, how to identify something which is a classic, and how that is essentially very different from what goes on to make the tradition.

Many of these notions have been found to be very problematic. But what needs to be remembered, at the end of the day, is that, Leavis has contributed immensely to this discipline, to this entire formation of criticism as a separate and distinct discipline, and to this formalized study of English literature and English criticism in a very novel sense. With that we come to the end of this work. I encourage you to read the remaining parts of this work for your own understanding, to see how he has taken this argument of moralistic judgment about a humanistic tradition, how this argument has been taken forward to read particular works in greater detail. With this I thank you for your time and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.