

ISSN 0976-8165

# The Criterion

An International Journal in English

August 2015 Vol. 6, Issue-4



6th Year of Open Access

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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## The Fiction Criticism of F.R. Leavis

**K. Eswara Reddy**

Asst. Professor in English  
K.S.R.M College of Engineering  
Kadapa – 516003  
A.P, India

**&**

**K. Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy**

Asst. Professor in English  
K.S.R.M College of Engineering  
Kadapa – 516003  
A.P, India

### **Abstract:**

Leavis has included in his great tradition nine novelists, namely, Jane Austen, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad Henry James, Lawrence, Melville, Mark Twain and Hawthorne.<sup>1</sup> He admits that his list is not exhaustive. It is true that he does not close doors on the novelists, but he neither opens doors to them. He has obviously excluded from his tradition many great novelists. He gives Fielding a place of importance in literary history because he “made Jane Austen possible”. But he denies him “classical distinction”<sup>2</sup> He dismisses him from the great tradition without analyzing his work. He thinks that Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* is a classic in a minor way. But he dismisses Thackeray without analyzing his novels. He does not crown him with greatness, arguing that “his attitudes and the essential substance of interests”<sup>3</sup> are limited. He excludes Meredith without offering any comment. He depends for this exclusion on the view of E.M. Forster. James Joyce is his blind spot. The more Eliot praised Joyce and denigrated Lawrence the more Leavis denigrated Joyce and admired Lawrence. He endorses blindly Lawrence’s disparaging comment on Joyce : “My God, what a clumsy Ollapodrida J.J. Is!”<sup>4</sup>. He excludes Virginia Woolf because she hadn’t interests rich and active enough to justify what she was rejecting”<sup>5</sup>. He dismisses Hardy as “a provincial manufacturer of gauche and heavy fiction.”<sup>6</sup> But Hardy is not less profound than any novelists Leavis includes in his tradition. His great tradition is certainly narrow. His integrity seems to be suspect.

**Keywords: Tradition, Classical Distinction, Attitudes, Justify, Integrity.**

Leavis exalts Tolstoy, whom he excluded from the tradition, above all the novelists included in the great tradition<sup>7</sup>. This shows that his concept of tradition is meaningless. His drastic change in his views about Lawrence and Dickens without incantation is flimsy. This is volte-face about these novelists. A major change of view should be confessed. It should be accounted for and illuminated by some principles. But Leavis does not do anything of the sort. He has been guided only by his whims. If it is so, there is no guarantee then that had Leavis lived longer, he would not have included some more novelists in, and excluded some others from, the great tradition. He almost abandons the idea of tradition when he includes Blake among the novelists.<sup>8</sup> He calls the novelists the successors of Shakespeare.<sup>9</sup>

Leavis emphasizes in his great tradition the realization not of likeness but of unlikeness. He cares more for originality than for influence. He writes about Conrad that “we have to stress his foreignness”<sup>10</sup> pointing out that *The Rainbow* is in a line from George Eliot.

He writes: “that there are, of course, the profoundest unlikenesses between the two great novelists even where they come closest can be very forcibly illustrated from the opening of the first chapter”<sup>11</sup>. He thinks that Dickens’s development is “different from anything he could have learnt from Smollett or Fielding or Ben Jonson”<sup>12</sup>. He gives a fine account of the originality influence theme in the case of Jane Austen in the following words. “In fact, Jane Austen, in her indebtedness to others, provides an exceptionally illuminating study of the nature of originality, and she exemplifies excellently the relations of originality, and she exemplifies excellently the relations of the ‘individual talent’ to tradition. If the influence bearing on her had not comprised something fairly to be called tradition, she could not have found herself and her true tradition; but her relation to tradition is a creative one”<sup>13</sup>. What Leavis stresses is the unlikeness among the novelists. But what actually binds them together is their likeness. John Gross questions him “If tradition is not a matter of historical continuity, nor of indebtedness, then what exactly is it?”<sup>14</sup>. Bilan agrees with the views of Gross. He says that there is “some Justice in John Gross’s irritation with the whole concept”<sup>15</sup>. But he disagrees with him when he says that he is dismissing the entire concept and I donot intend to go that far.”<sup>16</sup>.

Leavis studies the literature of the past with the awareness of the literature of the present<sup>17</sup>. He discusses the past – present theme excellently in his study of Jane Austen: “She not only makes tradition for those coming after, but her achievement has for us a retrospective effect: as we look back beyond her we see in what goes before, and see because of her, potentialities and significances brought in such a way that, for us, she creates the tradition we see leading down to her. Her work, like the work of all great creative writers, gives a meaning to the past.”<sup>18</sup> Let us now study and examine Leavis’s criticism of novelist’s and their novels.

Leavis praises John Bunyan for his Pilgrim’s Progress. He believes that this novel is brilliant achievement. He thinks that the novel possesses “vividness and vigour”, “traditional wisdom”, rich poised mature humanity”<sup>19</sup>. He praises the novel, especially, for his soul-body synthesis. He seems in the novel wordly Joys blended with spiritual joys. Praising the novel he says that the creative power in it is so compelling that “one remains virtually unconscious at the particular theology”<sup>20</sup>. He writes in “Literature and Society” that “if the Pilgrim’s Progress is a humane masterpiece, that is in spite of the bigoted sectarian creed that Bunyan’s allegory, in detail as in sum, directs itself to enforcing.”<sup>21</sup>

Leavis had denounced Dickens in The Great Tradition. He wrote about him : “That Dickens was a great genius and is permanently among the classics is certain. But the genius was that of a great enteratainer.”<sup>22</sup> Later he exalted him very high above other novelists in Dickens the Novelists. The weakness of Leavis lies not in the fact that he calls Dickens an enteratainer, because he regards even Shakespeare as a popular entertrainer<sup>23</sup>. His weakness lies. In the fact that he finds Dickens lacking in sustained seriousness and profounder responsibility. His second weakness lies in the fact that he does not recant his earlier view. He criticizes other critics for calling Dickens an entertainer<sup>24</sup>.

George Watson, Ronald Hayman, Robert Boyers, Edward Greenwood, Eugene Goodheart and R.P. Bilan have criticized Leavis for not recanting.<sup>25</sup> In The Great Tradition (1948) Leavis had found Dickens lacking “intellectual edge” and “subtlety.” In Lectures in America (1969), he praised Dickens as a great novelist whose genius was in certain essential ways akin to Lawrence. In Literature in Our Time and the University (1969) he praised Dickens as a very great writer who created the modern novel, developed deep affinity with Blake and possessed the qualities of disinterestedness, spontaneity, creativeness and

intelligence. Now, in *Dickens the Novelist* (1970) he exalts him very high. He praises him for “rare maturity”<sup>26</sup>, “complexity”<sup>27</sup>, “vitality”<sup>28</sup> “affirmation of life,”<sup>29</sup> “religious depth,”<sup>30</sup> “profound and subtle thought”<sup>31</sup>, “impersonal intelligence”,<sup>32</sup> “creative spontaneity”,<sup>33</sup> “disinterestedness”<sup>34</sup> and “the happy fusion between art and life.”<sup>35</sup>

In *The Great Tradition* (1945) Leavis had exalted James above Dickens<sup>36</sup> Now, in *Dickens the Novelist* he exalts Dickens above James<sup>37</sup>. This is the complete change of view. This renders Leavis’s criticism of Dickens in *The Great Tradition* meaningless. Bilan Severely criticizes Leavis for this volte-face:

“It is particularly this kind of reversal of judgment – James up, Dickens down, then Dickens up and James down- that leads certain critics to see similarities. Between evaluative criticism and the stock market.”<sup>38</sup>

Though Bilan criticizes Leavis, he thinks that his admiration of Dickens in the later book is not surprising.<sup>39</sup> He states that even in 1948 Leavis thought highly of Dickens. His statement can be supported by the following words in *The Great Tradition*:

In ease and range there is surely no greater master of English except Shakespeare<sup>40</sup>.

But in *The Great Tradition* Leavis had praised Dickens only for his *Hard Times* which is merely a literary menu as compared with *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* and *Little Dorrit* which are literary feast. Moreover, he had ranked Dickens below James and Conrad in *The Great Tradition*. In *The Great Tradition* he had compare Dickens with Shakespeare not so favourably as he does now. He compares Dickens’s inwardness to Shakespeare, and remarks that “fullness” in Dickens is “the condition of the Shakespearian suppleness.”<sup>41</sup> In this light Bilan’s view does not seem to be convincing. He himself does not seem to be convinced with his own view when he writes that “Leavis definitely has the right to change his mind, but a change of this magnitude certainly demands a fuller explanation that Leavis ever offers.”<sup>42</sup>

Leavis has done a great service to Dickens. The credit for the present reputation of Dickens goes to Leavis. Leavis has established Dickens as a great poet, as one of the greatest dramatic poets, and as a poet-novelist.<sup>43</sup> Leavis’s treatment of Dickens’s novels, especially that of *Little Dorrit*, in *Dickens the Novelist*, is supremely marvelous. Leavis is surely one of the greatest critics on account of his analysis of *Four Quarters* and *Little Dorrit*. IN these analyses he himself is a poet because he does not state, but evokes. It is only when we study these analyses that we are acquainted with the full significance of Leavis’s remark that analysis is essentially creative.

Leavis believes that George Eliot is the central figure in the creative achievement of English fiction. He has discarded the conventional view with his remark that Eliot was spoiled by over-emotionalism rather than by over. Intellectualism. He finds in her earlier novels an excess of self indulgence and in her later novels a curious blend of maturity and immaturity. He thinks that her first novel *Scens of Clerical Life*(1857) is charming, charmin in bad sense. He believes that her novel *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) is a blend of maturity and immaturity, the emphasis falling on immaturity. He compares unfavourably the fairy-tale atmosphere of *Silas Marner* (1861), a moral fable with the bitter rality of Dickens’s moral fable, *Hard Times*. He thinks that *Felix Holt*(1866) is Eliot’s first great novel. He discovers in the novel, especially in the *Transome* theme, impersonality and intelligence. He admires *Middle March* (1875) as representing the mature genius of Eliot. He sees “emotion is

a disinterested response defined by its object, and hardly distinguishable from the play of the intelligence and self-knowledge that give it impersonality.”<sup>44</sup> But this praise is qualified. Leavis sees Dorothea as “a product of George Eliot’s own soul-hunger”, another day-dream ideal self”<sup>45</sup> Robert Speaight and Arnold Kettle express their disagreement with Leavis’s view that Dorothea represents an abeyance of intelligence.<sup>46</sup> Leavis’s criticism of the novel based on T.S. Eliot’s criterion “objective correlative”<sup>47</sup>, which he discards later, has now only historical importance. Leavis operates on *Daniel Deronda* (1867) in the manner his wife operated on *Wuthering Heights* (1847). He separates the good part of the novel from the rhetorically inflated bad part. He calls it *Gwendolen Harleth* which is a broken sequence of chapters. In this manner he pays no regard to the plurality of significance in a work of art, and violates the sacred integrity of the novel form. Though Boyers and Speaight<sup>48</sup> have raised their mild objection to the “operation” Leavis performs on the novel, no critic has pointed out that in doing so Leavis flings to the winds every sense of the organic unity, and exposes himself, at least here, as the rugged moralist. Leavis admires Eliot for specificity in this respect he places her higher than James.<sup>49</sup> He also admires her for moral insight<sup>50</sup> and the realization of her themes. He discards James’s criticism of Eliot that “her ‘figures and situation’ are ‘not seen in the irresponsible plastic way’,”<sup>51</sup> when he retorts: “Is there any great novelist whose preoccupation with ‘form is not a matter of his responsibility towards a rich human interest, or complexity of interests, profoundly realized?”<sup>52</sup>

But Leavis does not consider her the mechanistic side of Eliot’s moral seriousness<sup>53</sup>. Which James discerns. He admires Eliot for her psychological insight and psychological notation.<sup>54</sup> This then evidences that he is not the blatant moralist. Often he severely criticizes Eliot for her day-dreaming. But he admires her for impersonality. He has also praised her for her use of symbols, and has exalted her in this respect above James<sup>55</sup>.

The critics like Speaight have woven round her many cobwebs. Leavis has done her yeoman service by blowing away these cobwebs. He dismisses the view of Virginia Woolf that she was “too slow and cumbersome to lend itself to comedy.”<sup>56</sup> He offers his argument that she has great compassion for mankind, ‘and that she has strong sense of the real, to be a satirist.’<sup>57</sup> He dismisses the view of James that he could not achieve “a more consistent and graceful development.”<sup>58</sup> He believes that “she went on developing to the end.”<sup>59</sup> He dismisses Leslie Stephen’s view that she is depressing. He holds that she is wholesome in her humanity. He exalts her very high when he writes “Of George Eliot it can in turn be said that her best work has Tolstoyan depth and reality.”<sup>60</sup>

Leavis’s praise of Henry James is qualified. His discussion of the interplay of the American and European civilization in the novels of James is praiseworthy. He writes that James belongs neither to America nor to Europe because, he thought that neither of the two countries could offer any approximation to his ideal society. He remarks that James developed “into something like a paradoxical kind of recluse”.<sup>61</sup> Leavis finds the interplay of the culture of the two countries in all his novels. He finds in *Roderic Hudson* (1874) “the interplay of contrasted culture traditions”,<sup>62</sup> in *The American* (1876) and *Daisy Miller* (1878) “American stand on insufficient ground”,<sup>64</sup> and in *The Bostonians* (1885) the “New England conscience,”<sup>64</sup> and in *The Europeans* (1878) and *The Portrait of Lady* (1881) “an interplay in which discriminations for and against are made in respect of both sides, American and European”.<sup>65</sup> Leavis thinks that James felt uprooted because he “never developed any sense of society.”<sup>66</sup>

He sees the influence of Jane Austen and Hawthorne on James. He believes that George Eliot exerted great influence on him. He believes that *The Portrait of Lady* could



not have been created if James had not read *Denial Deronda*. He believes that *Denial Deronda* is greater novel than *The Portrait of a Lady*. He argues that the former “has not only the distinction of having come first; it is decidedly the greater.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore his view that *The Portrait of a Lady* is “one of the great novels of the English language”<sup>68</sup> seems to be unconvincing. That is why Hayman regards Leavis’s chapter on James as “unsatisfactory.”<sup>69</sup> Boyers remarks that “we can not feel we know what Leavis means when he calls *The Portrait* a great book... once we have been impressed by the view that it is deficient in the very ‘human nature’ it wishes to explore.”<sup>70</sup> He believes that “Leavis has never been able to make up his mind about Henry James.”<sup>71</sup> He quotes Leavis’s words, “the major novelists” are “significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life,”<sup>72</sup> and then comments that “this can be said of James only in a very qualified sense.”<sup>73</sup> This comment is only partially true. Leavis complains that the “moral fineness” of James is “so far beyond the perception of his critics that they can accuse him of the opposite.”<sup>74</sup>

He thinks that *The Europeans* is a moral fable. He believes that *The Portrait of a Lady* is also organized as a moral fable. He has established *What Meisie Knew* as a fine comedy but, instead of finding in it psychological complexity, he finds in it moral profundity. And yet Leavis’s praise of James on moral ground is not false. Though James inclines more towards artistic conscience, yet he believes in the moral awareness. He wrote to his brother. “The great thing is to be saturated with life.”<sup>75</sup> He believes in the blending of moral and formal elements in a work of art. Leavis praises James for “vitality,” “sustained maturity”<sup>76</sup> and magnificent intelligence.<sup>77</sup> though he denies him the term religious”. He calls him a poet novelist because he finds in him the deepest interest and profundity<sup>78</sup>.

This praise however, is withdrawn when he comes to the later novels of James, *The Wings of the Dove*(1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). He condemns these novels for “the hypertrophy of technique”, “life impoverishment”, “overdoing,” “the separation of his art from life”,<sup>79</sup> “over subtlety,” a lack of sureness in his moral touch<sup>80</sup> and an unhealthy vitality of under-nourishment and etiolation”.<sup>81</sup> According to him even *The Awkward age* (1898), which he regards as brilliant success, “represents a disproportionate amount of ‘doing’<sup>82</sup>.

According to Boyers Leavis has turned the conventional wisdom on its head.<sup>83</sup> But, as he says, he has reached this conclusion without analysing the late novels of James’s. He has not supported his condemnation by facts. He gives only one example from the style of James’s late novels “her vision of his vision of her vision.”<sup>84</sup> Harold Osborne has pointed out that Leavis’s criticism of the late novels is not supported with “objective grounds.”<sup>85</sup> Leavis admires the rich oeuvre of James:” Besides *The Europeans*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Bostonians*, *Washington Square*, *The Awkward Age* and *What Maisie Knew*, there is an impressive array of things – novels, nouvelles, short stories—that will stand permanently as classics”.<sup>86</sup> But he regards only *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Bostonians* “the two most brilliant novels in the language”.<sup>87</sup>

But his praise of *The Portrait of a Lady* is qualified.<sup>88</sup> There remains then only one novel *The Bostonians* which he praises profusely.

Leavis admires Conrad as one of the greatest novelists in the English language. He is greater than Scott, Thackeray, Hardy and Meredith.

He admires him for vitality, specificity, rich economy, naturalness and affirmation of life. He sees in his best novels a blend of formal pattern and moral perspective. He finds in his novels “the complex impersonalized whole”<sup>89</sup>. Though he exalts Dickens

above James, yet in his later criticism he does not do so. The highest praise he pays Conrad is that he calls him Elizabethan and his work Shakespearan.

Leavis thinks that *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is “a predominantly successful tale.”<sup>90</sup> He praises this novel for the evocation of the sinister and fantastic atmosphere. He regards *The Arrow of Gold* (1919) as the worst novel and *The Rescue* (1919) as boring. We find in *Typhoon* (1902) one of the greatest storm—scenes which can be favourably compared with the storm scene of *The Tempest*. But Leavis finds the strength of the novel not in the “description of the elemental frenzy” but in the presentment of captain Macwhirr<sup>91</sup>. He thinks that novel is “the work of a great novelist.... Whose interest is central in his human theme.”<sup>92</sup> He admires *The Shadow Line* (1916) as a supremely sinister and beautiful evocation of enchantment in tropic seas.<sup>93</sup> He admires *The Secret Sharer* (1912) for depth, complexity and human responsibility. He finds the importance of the novel in the moral pattern, not in the psychological insight. He regards *Youth* (1898) as glamorous. He does not grant *Lord Jim* (1900) “the position of pre-eminence among Conrad’s works often assigned it.”<sup>94</sup> He thinks that this novel is “neither the best of Conrad’s novels, nor among the best of his short stories.”<sup>95</sup> He dismisses *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) as full of wearying exoticism. His view of *Nostromo* (1904), Conrad’s greatest novel, is peculiar. In the beginning he admires it as a blend of moral significance and formal pattern.<sup>96</sup> Then he praises the formal aspect of the novel without denouncing it for lack of moral profundity<sup>97</sup>. Ultimately, he damns it. In the beginning he had condemned *The Portrait of a Lady* as an imitative work. Therefore his later praise of this novel does not seem to be convincing. In the beginning he had admired *Nostromo* so high that its later denunciation as empty<sup>98</sup> seems to be significant. He compares *The Secret Agent* (1912) favourably with *Nostromo*. He thinks that these two novels, though different in range, are “triumphs of the same art.”<sup>99</sup> He believes that *The Secret Agent* possesses moral perspective and maturity. He admires the final scene between Verloc and his wife as “one of the most astonishing triumphs of genius in fiction.”<sup>100</sup>

He admires *Under Western Eyes* (1911) and *Chance* (1912) as distinguished for vitality. He is guilty of exaggeration the note of affirmation in the novels of Conrad. Conrad does not protest against human nature. Unlike Hardy, he does not overdo the tragic effect. But he finds life lonely and bleak. Lawrence always found him sad. Bilan rightly remarks that “Leavis makes Conrad appear to be more of an affirmative writer than he actually is,”<sup>101</sup>

Yet Leavis has rendered Conrad a great service. He has removed cobwebs from the convention of his criticism. Conrad was known as the author of *Lord Jim*. Leavis has made him known as the author of *Nostromo*.

Leavis highly praises E.M. Forster. His review of Ross Macaulay’s “The Writing of E.M. Forster” was printed in *Scrutiny*. Later it was included in *The Common Pursuit*. Here Leavis offers a critical study of Forster’s novels. He tries to find out here the vices and virtues of Forster. He finds the strength of Forster in “the civilized personal relations.”<sup>102</sup> He praises his novels as socio-moral comedy. He blames him for his Bloomsbury ethos and for “a poetic communication about life.”<sup>103</sup> Forster’s pre-war novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room With a View* (1908) possess, according to him, restraint and control.

He praises these novels, because Forster has maintained here detachment and distance. He disapproves of *Howard’s End* (1910) and *The Longest Journey* (1907), because they are crude, and lack detachment. He thinks that the style of Forster is “personal”,<sup>104</sup> and

blames him for lacking intelligence and vitality<sup>105</sup>. He admires *A Passage to India* (1924) as “a most significant document of our age” and “a truly memorable work for literature.”<sup>106</sup> He believes that in this novel Forster achieves “disinterestedness”, “maturity” and “intelligence”.

This study shows that his criticism of Forster is thoughtful. Leavis’s critique of Forster’s work is perceptive. He discovers “the Lawrencian bent”<sup>107</sup> in Forster’s work as manifested in his radical dissatisfaction with civilization. In acknowledging this possible kinship between Forster and Lawrence, Leavis has opened up an interesting area of comparative study between the two writers, and paved the way for critics like Frank Kermode, Wilfred Stone and John Beer. His study of Forster’s liberalism has inspired Lionel Trilling’s *E.M. Forster* (1944).

Leavis regards D.H. Lawrence as a supremely great novelist. He admires him highly as “a great original genius, one of the greatest of creative writers”,<sup>108</sup> “a creative writer of the greatest kind,”<sup>109</sup> “the great creative genius of our age, and one of the greatest figures in English literature”<sup>110</sup> His admiration of him approximates almost to worship when he says that to appreciate him is “to revise one’s criteria of intelligence.”<sup>111</sup> He exalts him, except Shakespeare and Tolstoy, above all other writers. He compares him with Blake, and says that “Lawrence was much. The greater of the two.”<sup>112</sup> He lacks critical acumen when he exalts him above his writings. He says that “his best creative work was not fully representative of him.”<sup>113</sup>

The heart of the matter is that he admires Lawrence the man more than Lawrence the artist. He almost patronises him, and praises him at the cost of the other writers. Praising *The Rainbow* 1915 he comments that “we find ourselves asking whether that has ever been done so well by any other writer.”<sup>114</sup>

Praising *Women in Love*, he remarks his presentation of the twentieth century England of modern civilization as “beyond the powers of any other novelist he knows of”.<sup>115</sup> Writing about the range of this novel he says that “no other English novelist commands such a range”.<sup>116</sup> *The Captain’s Doll* is not a fully realized work of art. But still he praises it as a great novel when he says that “never was there a greater master of... the novelist’s distinctive gift: the power to register, to evoke, life and manners with convincing vividness.”<sup>117</sup> He shows his lack of critical alertness when he admires him as a hero, ejaculates instead of convincing, and keeps up a running fire against Lawrence’s critics.

In *After Strange Gods* (1934) Eliot had condemned Lawrence for snobbery and “an alarming strain of cruelty”. Leavis discards this view in his evaluation of *The Daughters of the Vicar*. He writes that the novel illustrates Lawrence’s concept of soul-body synthesis through Louisa’s view about Mary: “How could she be pure one can not be dirty in act and spiritual in being”.<sup>118</sup> Here Leavis speaks as a blatant moralist, never caring whether the morals are realized or not. In *D.H. Lawrence* (1930) Leavis had disapproved of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. In *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (1955) he exalts them very high. He, however, prefers *Women in Love* to *Rainbow*. But, in accordance with his own principles he should have preferred *The Rainbow* to *Women in Love*, because the former offers his vision of the organic community, whereas the latter presents the negative attitude to life.

Leavis sees *The Rainbow* as exploring the otherness of life in the moment of supreme fulfillment of the individual: “Either Lover is for the other a ‘door’.”<sup>119</sup> He also sees the novels as the transcendence of the ego. He finds in the novel impersonalizing intelligence and luminous impersonality. He claims that “the essential creative interest and the informing



conception"<sup>120</sup> in the novel confute the fallacy of the blood-intimacy and blood-togetherness. But "the Dark Gods" are congenial to Lawrence. Leavis minimizes their significance by emphasizing intelligence in Lawrence. The sudden seizing of Skrebensky by Ursula and kissing him fiercely like the beaked harpy, her frightening, almost phantasmagoric scene with the nurse, her quasi-homosexual love-affair with her teacher, Miss Inger, the dance by Anna in the triumph of her pregnancy, naked in her bedroom, and the phallic sex in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) point towards the Dark Gods.

Leavis regards *Women in Love* (1920) as the greatest novel of Lawrence. It offers a penetrating criticism of modern civilization. He praises in the novel the concept of polarized relation between men and women. He also subordinates love to individuality. This is symbolized by the shattering of the reflected moon on the water with stones thrown by Birkin. Leavis is here contradictory about the term "normative". At one place he writes that normative aspect is not fully realized<sup>121</sup>. But at another place he writes that strong normative preoccupation informs the life of *Women in Love*<sup>122</sup>. F.B. Pinion observes that "corruption and dissolution are inevitable forerunners of regeneration"<sup>123</sup>. But there is no regeneration at the end of *Women in Love* Gerald is dead, Gudrun is bewitched by the corrupt Loerke, and Birkin wants an eternal union with a man too. Birkin and Ursula have not achieved the freedom of star-equilibrium. Robert D. Wagner has aptly remarked that there is in Lawrence "no transformation of desire into love".<sup>124</sup>

Leavis has repudiated the charges Middleton Murry laid against *Women in Love* in his book *Son of Woman* (1931). Murry denounced the novel as personal. Leavis has observed that intelligence in the novels of Lawrence "transcends the personal plight that feed it."<sup>125</sup> He removes the charge of Murry that "Art was not his aim"<sup>126</sup> He quotes in his support the words of Lawrence, "Art speech is the only speech".<sup>127</sup> He admires *Women in Love* for "vivid dramatic creation",<sup>128</sup> "astonishing imaginative power",<sup>129</sup> "marvelous economy,"<sup>130</sup> "Dickens Creativeness",<sup>131</sup> organic unity<sup>132</sup> and "duality of popularization."<sup>133</sup>

Leavis trust the teller, not the tale when he admires *The Captain's Doll*. He doesn't convince the reader of its greatness. Instead, he ejaculates with words like "fresh wonder" and "full marvel". He prevents the reader from voicing his agreement by using words "beyond question". Bilan has disapproved of such rhetoric by calling it "inadequate substitute for the detailed, reasoned judgment".<sup>134</sup> There is in the novel the bullying dominance. But Leavis praises it as "Lawrence's profoundest insights into the relations between men and women"<sup>135</sup> Boyers condemns this hero-worship when he observes that "Leavis succumbs to the worst excesses of the Lawrencean life mystique", and "ceases to function as a critic when he gives himself over to Lawrence in a spirit of trusting discipleship."<sup>136</sup>

He unjustly exalts *St Mawr* above *Wast Land*. He himself doesn't regard the tale as great when he observes that "St Mawr, thought a classic and major art is only a minor thing in Lawrence's oeuvre."<sup>137</sup> He contradicts when he regards it as an "astonishing work of genius,"<sup>138</sup> "impersonal" in its "poised imaginative range"<sup>139</sup>. There are two things very obvious: first, he contradicts himself, and secondly, he exalts Lawrence above T.S. Eliot. He takes pains to prove that the best of Eliot is inferior to the minor thing of Lawrence. He wants to discard the common view that Lawrence is "more preoccupied with sex than then T.S. Eliot of *The Waste Land*".<sup>140</sup> Whereas Lawrence indulges in sexual description with a glow Eliot attacks the mechanical sex in *The Waste Land*. What Leavis has done here is literary politics, not literary criticism.

Leavis praises the tales of Lawrence for creative power, originality and astonishing maturity. He praises the tales for “a profound interest in human experience.”<sup>141</sup> It is true that the tales of Lawrence explore the profound interest. But they affirm the positive value of life. The tales like “You Touched Me”, “Mother and Daughter”, “The Fox”, “Two Blue Birds”, “Sun”, “Things” and “The Rocking Horse winner” deal with failure in life. They can be said to possess the affirmation of life only by implication. We do not, therefore, approve of the remark of Leavis that Lawrence “has an unfailingly sure sense of the difference between that which makes for life and that which makes against it.”<sup>142</sup> We do not find in Lawrence the normative bearings for which Leavis praises him. The tales and the novels of Lawrence challenge the normal ideas. But though Lawrence may not fully affirm life, the donee of his work is life. Of life, which is ego-free, there is hardly a greater writer than he. And it is this life that Leavis admires in Lawrence. Lawrence’s view of life as “spontaneous-creative fullness of being”<sup>143</sup> may not accord fully with Leavis’s concept of life, yet Leavis admires it.

Rene Wellek may complain the life as interpreted by Leavis is “ambiguous,”<sup>144</sup> but there is a very thin line which divides ambiguity from complexity and richness.

Leavis admires Lawrence for the religious life in his work. For both Leavis and Lawrence, life is significant at the religious level. Life, which serves as a moral responsibility for the artists, becomes, on an impersonal level, essentially religious. This becomes possible through the transcendence of ego. Leavis went on admiring Lawrence for religious life till the end. He praises Lawrence’s religious life through the words like “wonder”, “reverence”, “kinship”, “beyond”, “unknown”, “belonging”, “fulfillment”, “rootedness”, “intensity”, “serve”, “extrahuman”, and “communion”, which suggest religious depth.

There is in Leavis’s criticism of Lawrence a great development, almost a volte-face. In Lawrence (1930) Lawrence had praised Lawrence for intuition, not for intelligence. In D.H. Lawrence : Novelist he reversed this view. In the beginning he had praised Lawrence for experiencing, not for thinking. Later he praised him for both experiencing and thinking. But the view of “intelligence” of both the artists is different. Leavis’s intelligence is the recognition of the whole psyche. Whereas for Leavis intelligence is conscious, for Lawrence “the unconscious is the creative element.”<sup>145</sup>

It is praiseworthy on the part of Leavis to have established Lawrence as a great novelist. The reputation, which now Lawrence now enjoys, is boosted up by him. But Lawrence is not the hero Leavis has made him to be. Leavis’s fault is that he admires him at the cost of other writers, blindly approves of his views, and, instead of probing his claims through analysis, and convincing the readers of them by arguments, he protests, asserts and bullies.

#### Foot Notes:

1. D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.18
2. The Great Tradition, p.3
3. The Great Tradition, p.21
4. Scrutiny, II, 2(Sept.1933).197.
5. Ibid., X,3 (Jan-1942), 297
6. The Great Tradition, p.124

7. "The Americannes of American Leterature" in Anna Karenina and Other Essays, p.146.
8. "Eloot's 'axe to grind', and the nature of great criticism" in English Literature in Our Time and the University, p.107, and Dickens the Novelist, p.275
9. Anna Karenina and Other Essays, p.145. and D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.18
10. The Great Tradition, p.17
11. D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.98
12. Dickens the Novelist, p.29.
13. The Great Tradition, p.5
14. The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters, p.303.
15. The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis, p.144
16. Ibid., p.144
17. Scrutiny, I, 2 (Sept, 1932), 134, Education and the University, p.130, and Revaluation, pp.1-2.
18. The Great Tradition, p.5
19. The Common pursuit, p.206
20. Anna Karenina and Other Essays, p.17.
21. The Common pursuit, pp. 188-89
22. The Great Tradition, p.19
23. Dickens the Novelist, p.213 and English Literature in Our Time and the University, p.175
24. Dickens the Novelist, p.213 and English Literature in Our Time and the University, p.175
25. The Literary Critics, p.206, Leavis, p.15. F.R. Leavis, p.5, F.R.Leavis,pp.45-46, The Failure of Criticism, pp.80-81, and College English, p.340 respectively.
26. Dickens the Novelist, p.14.
27. Ibid., p.15
28. Ibid., pp. 25 and 210.
29. Ibid., p.224
30. Ibid., p.215
31. Ibid., p.217
32. Ibid., p.221
33. Ibid., p.222
34. Ibid., p.225
35. Ibid., p.215 and 216
36. The Great Tradition, pp.132,133 and 138
37. Dickens the Novelist, pp.245, 248
38. College English, p.341
39. The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis, pp.109 and 110.
40. The Great Tradition, p.247
41. Dickens the Novelist, p.248
42. College English, p.341
43. Dickens the Novelist, pp.251 and 250
44. The Great Tradition, p.79.
45. Ibid., p.75
46. George Eliot (London: Arthur Barker, 1954), p.94, and An Introduction to the English Novel (London: Hutchinson Uni-Library, 1953) p. 188-89 respectively.
47. Eliot's words in "Hamlet" in Selected Essays, p.145. quoted by Leavis in The Great Tradition, p.79.
48. F.R. Leavis, p.73 and George Eliot, p.120 representatively.

49. The Great Tradition, p.112
50. Ibid., pp.30,106 and 112
51. Quoted by Leavis in The Great Tradition, pp.28-29
52. The Great Tradition, p.29
53. An Introduction to the English Novel, ii, p.189.
54. The Great Tradition, pp.56 and 102.
55. Ibid., p.116
56. Quoted by Leavis in The Great Tradition, p.88
57. The Great Tradition, p.91
58. Quoted by Leavis in The Great Tradition, p.123
59. The Great Tradition, p.123
60. Ibid., p.125
61. Ibid., p.163
62. Ibid., p.130
63. Ibid., p.143
64. Ibid., p.137
65. The Common Pursuit, p.231
66. Ibid., p.228
67. The Great Tradition, p.85
68. Ibid., p.161
69. Leavis, p.77
70. F.R. Leavis, p.73.
71. Ibid., p.71
72. Leavis words in The Great Tradition, p.2 quoted by Boyers in F.R. Leavis, p.71
73. F.R. Leavis, p.71
74. Scrutiny, V,4 (March 1937), 401
75. Quoted by Michael Swan in Henry James (London: Aurthur Barker,1967), p.64.
76. The Great Tradition, pp.152 and 130 respectively.
77. Scrutiny, V,4 (March 1937), 402
78. The Great Tradition, pp.128 and 129
79. The Common Pursuit, p.228
80. The Great Tradition, p. 159
81. Ibid., p.165
82. Ibid., p.170
83. F.R. Leavis, p.72
84. Quoted by Leavis in The Great Tradition, p.165
85. Ibi'd.,
86. The Great Tradition, p.172
87. Ibid., p.153
88. Ibid., pp.85,111 and 172.
89. Ibid., p.32
90. Ibid., p.183
91. Ibid.
92. Anna Karenina and Other Essays, p.98.
93. The Great Tradition, p.187
94. Ibid., p.189
95. Ibid., p.190
96. Ibid., p.191
97. Ibid., p.195
98. Ibid., p.200

99. Ibid., p.210
100. Ibid., p.214
101. Novel, p.209
102. The Common Pursuit, p.262.
103. Ibid., p.261
104. Ibid., p.275
105. Ibid., p.276
106. Ibid., p.277
107. Ibid., p.262
108. Letters in Criticism, p.73.
109. Thought, Words and Creativity, p.19.
110. D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.303.
111. Ibid., p.27
112. Scrutiny, I, 3 (Dec. 1932), 291.
113. Scrutiny, I, 3 (Dec. 1932), 190.
114. D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.128.
115. Ibid., p.149
116. Ibid., p.173
117. Ibid., p.197
118. Lawrence's words quoted by Leavis in D.H. Lawrence : Novelist, p.83.
119. Ibid., p.115. Lawrence writes in The Rainbow (1949;rpt. Harmondsworth, I Middlesex: Penguin, 1 1961), p.96: "She was the doorway to him, her to her."
120. Ibid., p.99
121. Ibid., p.28
122. Ibid., p.167
123. A.D.H. Lawrence Companion (London: the Macmillan press, 1978), p.178.
124. Scrutiny, XVIII, 2 (Autumn 1951),139, n.1
125. D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.147.
126. Quoted by Leavis in D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.146.
127. D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.146.
128. Ibid., p.149
129. Ibid., p.155
130. Thought, Words and Creativity, p.63
131. D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.192.
132. Ibid., p.51
133. Lawrence's words quoted by Leavis in D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.179.
134. College English, p.339
135. D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.203.
136. F.R. Leavis, p.121. Leavis spells "Lawrencian" in The Common Pursuit, p.262. and "Laurention" in D.H. Lawrence : Novelist, p.39, whereas Boyers always spells "Lawrentian", Se his F.R. Leavis, pp. 105, 107 and 121.
137. D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.18.
138. Ibid., p.225
139. Ibid., p.147
140. Ibid., p.229
141. Ibid., p.296
142. Ibid., p.311.
143. Lawrence's words quoted by Leavis in D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, p.172.
144. "The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis" in Literary Views. P.189.



145. Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious. Essays (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1921), p.43.

## CONCLUSION

Leavis has been praised by critics both for his poetry- criticism and for his fiction-criticism. Ronald Hayman in his book Leavis exalts Leavis's poetry-criticism above his fiction-criticism. But, as we have seen, Leavis's inclination lies in fiction-criticism. He judges the poets especially by the principle of life, and, as a consequence, fiction above poetry. As he is a moral critic, he mostly exalts life above language. Moreover, he annihilates the distinction of genre when he praises the novelists as poets and their novels as dramatic poems. He regards the novels like *The Europeans*, *Silas Marner* and *Hard Times* as moral fables and the more complex novels like *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* as dramatic poems. This elimination of the distinction of genre is not a new thing in English criticism. Wordsworth had eliminated the difference between prose and poetry with the remark that "there neither is, nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition."

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