

Lawrence and the Creative

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When I wrote my book *Lawrence and Psychoanalysis*, I rehearsed the familiar contrast that Lawrence drew between Freud's theoretical, scientific determinism and the creativity that he himself valued so highly – 'the gift', as David Eder described it in his Jungian phase, 'of creating something in the morrow which is quite unlike to-day', a gift which Lawrence understood not only as characteristic of human life but of all living processes in general. But I made no sustained attempt to explore what Lawrence understood by creative living, to offer it as a standard against which to judge the sterility of the whole psychoanalytic enterprise. Part of the reason for this, of course, is that Lawrence offers no sustained theoretical definition; he takes what we might call a creative approach to the nature of creativity, and his emphasis falls differently at different stages of his career. In 'Study of Thomas Hardy' the emphasis falls on self-fulfilment through the intrapsychic marriage of male and female elements, sometimes complete, more usually not: religion is its surrogate completion, art its current reckoning. In the first version of *Studies in Classic American Literature* it falls on the capacity to achieve spontaneity, to release impulse from the domination of the will. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious* the emphasis falls, very differently from 'Study of Thomas Hardy' on the creative impulse as the primary motivation of the human male, outweighing the sexual motive and in perennial conflict with it – 'the desire of the human male to build a world ... to build out of his own self and his own belief and his own effort something wonderful.' In the later writings of the 1920s it falls increasingly on the capacity to live according to the promptings of the Dark Gods. What unites all these positions is the belief that creative living springs from impulses within the self as opposed to compliance with external pressure; and especially is this true in human relationships. In particular Lawrence speaks of relationship as a 'third thing' created between people by the individuals involved; and in my book I speculated that this was a language he had learned, through Frieda, from Otto Gross. At this point I should add a correction to what I wrote in the book, when I dated Frieda's affair with Gross to a single period in the spring of 1907. In fact they also met the following spring, in March 1908, when Else lent them her house for a period of four weeks. This information, which was new to me, has implications for the sequencing of the letters and, more importantly, it underlines the significance of the affair for Frieda, and increases the likelihood that she absorbed some of Gross's most characteristic language. Certainly Lawrence throughout his post-Frieda writing life drew upon the idea of *das Dritte*, the 'third thing' of a relationship, as one component of his thinking about creativity; and what I want to do here is to explore how he did this in the 1920s, and to compare it, as I tried to do in my book, to the thinking of the English psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott in the same area.

I start with the letter Lawrence wrote Trigant Burrow on 3 August 1927 acknowledging receipt of *The Social Basis of Consciousness*, which he had now read. It is a letter in which Lawrence reveals himself quite openly; and although he was always quick to try out new terms of self-analysis, he confesses to two difficulties which had been longstanding problems for him. More importantly, he says, 'I suffer badly from being so cut off ... One has no real human relations – that is so devastating' (6L 113). He had already declared three weeks earlier: 'What

ails me is the absolute frustration of my primeval social instinct ... I think societal instinct much deeper than sex instinct – and societal repression much more devastating. There is no repression of the sexual individual comparable to the repression of the societal man in me, by the individual ego, my own and everybody else's. I am weary of my own individuality, and simply nauseated by other people's' (6L 99). It was, of course, a sick man, in bed with what he called 'bronchials' who wrote these letters, and we should not forget that; but they also express much of what we find in the novels from *Women in Love* to (particularly) *Kangaroo*. Behind the satire of the novels, and the misanthropy of so many letters, Lawrence is aware of something wrong in himself, something seriously lacking that deformed his social relationships. One symptom of this, mentioned in novel after novel, is the tendency of Lawrentian heroes to form what Jack in *The Boy in the Bush* calls 'his casual intimacies and his casual bosom-friendships' (383), idealised relationships that seduce people into feeling special until a sudden disillusion casts them off and leaves them baffled and betrayed. Such a pattern, described but not really fictionally substantiated in *The Boy in the Bush*, forms the entire subject-matter of *Kangaroo*; and it is a pattern that in real life troubled Frieda almost as much as Lawrence himself.

There is something else too, a second thing that troubled Lawrence, about which he was hesitant and which would have felt wrong to Burrow, a matter of not only societal but also sexual repression. 'I'm not sure', he wrote, 'if a mental relation with a woman doesn't make it impossible to love her. To know the *mind* of a woman is to end up hating her. – Love means the pre-cognitive flow – neither strictly has a mind – it is the honest state before the apple' (6L 114). This is a very different formulation from anything in 'Study of Thomas Hardy' where the union of male and female, both within the individual as well as within relationships, is seen as the source of all creative living. There is something disillusioned, disintegrated, about this surmise, reminiscent of Freud's famous description of men who are impotent as a result of the split between affectionate and erotic love: 'Where they love they cannot desire and where they desire they cannot love' (XI: 183). When Lawrence writes that 'to know the *mind* of a woman is to end up hating her', his generalisation conceals a personal predicament grounded once again in the problems caused by idealisation – in particular by the supposedly therapeutic idealisation of desire as something separable, split-off, from the rest of the personality. What is at issue is how we understand desire. We may think of it as a physiologically determined event self-born within the person, which no doubt it sometimes is – a dark god, if you like. But even so, it is an event within the person and, as such, an expression of all that a person has been and become. More commonly, however, desire is desire of another person, an expression of relationship belonging to that third thing of which both Lawrence and Winnicott wrote – and in that relationship, in any number of ways, mind will play a part. How else may a body speak to body, if not through the dress of cultural experience?

If Burrow's book offered Lawrence a way to formulate these difficulties in social and sexual relationships, it also provoked an unforgettable formulation of the fundamental problem in living that underlay these difficulties. 'How to regain the naïve or innocent soul – how to make it the man within the man – your "societal": and at the same time keep the cognitive mode for defences and adjustments and "work" – voilà!' This sentence summarises in a nutshell Lawrence's understanding in the 1920s of the problem of how to live a creative life; and the interesting word is 'regain'. I think Lawrence, like so many contemporary writers, is thinking in both anthropological and biographical terms here. Something of value has been

lost, to the race and to the individual, during the process of acculturation; there has been what Burrow calls a fall into self-consciousness or, as Lawrence puts it, a loss of pre-cognitive innocence through eating the apple of the Tree of Knowledge. Experience has robbed us of the the 'naïve soul', which belongs to the first days of the human race and to the first days of the individual human child. Lawrence, like Burrow, sometimes writes as though this is a necessary split caused by the evolution of human self-consciousness; at other times he writes as though it is caused by a compliance with the demands of others that leads to the loss of individual authenticity. As he puts it in his essay on Galsworthy, the individual, in being loyal to the objective world, disregards the subjective reality of his own inner world of impulse and desire; he becomes a social being and, in so doing, the integrity of the relationship between outer and inner collapses. The third thing becomes deformed; the outer world dies into sterility, the inner world collapses into perversity and the person becomes riven: 'the core of his identity splits, his nucleus collapses, his innocence or his naïveté perishes, and he becomes only a subjective-objective reality, a divided thing hinged together but not strictly individual' (211).

If we ask what naïveté means in this sentence, we should have to link it, as Lawrence does, with innocence, and other words out of the Romantic lexicon such as spontaneity and wonder – words which belong to the unmediated seeing and doing that belong to childhood. These are all words that are commonly left to stand alone in Lawrence, as though their meaning is self-evident and in no need of further definition. As he wrote in the essay on Galsworthy, only partly under the influence of Burrow: 'When a man remains a man, a true human individual, there is at the core of him a certain innocence or naïveté which defies all analysis, and which you cannot bargain with, you can only deal with it, in good faith, from your own corresponding innocence or naïveté' (210-11). Such 'essential innocence and naïveté', he proclaims, is a characteristic of all great men and is marked by 'the sense of being at one with the great universe-continuum of space-time-life' (211). It is, in other words, the quality that lies at the root of his religious sense of the universe, of that third thing which is relationship with the world and all its creatures, including people. In such seeing the gap between subject and object is closed, the dehiscence is sealed over, and the separated individual receives communion at the hands of the living world. But on other occasions he looks more closely into them, and that perhaps is when they become most interesting.

This sense of at-oneness with the world originates, in all of Lawrence's writing, in the subjectivity of childhood seeing, and is something that adults may retain in some degree amidst the objectivity of their later seeing. At its heart, in the scheme of *Fantasia*, is the primary sympathetic nervous system, 'the dark pre-mind centre of the solar plexus' (77) – or, in more accessible language, the child's happy instinctive belief that 'the world is all yours, and all is goodly' (75). The world to the child, and everything in it, is perceived as a subjective object over which the child has power: 'I am I, the clue to the whole. All is one with me. It is the one identity' (80). This is what Lawrence calls innocence, or naïveté, and it is a question of power, derived from the child's sense of oneness with the mother. There is much more to be added to this in *Fantasia*, of course; the workings of the mind are much richer and more varied than this. But this is the primary quality, the starting-point; and this sense of the world as an internal phenomenon, to be disposed of as we will, is, Lawrence tells us in 1927, 'a characteristic of all great men.' It is the characteristic of dream, reverie, fantasy, myth, religion, imagination, in all those areas of mental life that are not preoccupied with the objective perception of a world

irredeemably apart. It is the characteristic of what Winnicott called ‘apperception’, the subjective appropriation of the external world to one’s own particular mental interests, the superimposition of one’s own semi-transparent mental map on the Ordnance Survey grid of everyday perception.

Another way to put this is to say that creativity belongs to the third thing of relationship, to the in-between area in which love – and hatred – lends a special seeing to the eye. It is this area that Winnicott calls ‘potential space’ and that Lawrence writes about in terms of a general theory of human relativity. This is the play-area in which, according to Winnicott, the infant creates what it is given, the area in which lovers love and artists create, the area in which the boundaries between inside and outside become permeable, are licensed to become permeable. It is the area of relationship. Van Goch’s sunflowers are neither botany nor dream, neither an objective visualisation nor a subjective dream, but a third thing momentarily created between the two: ‘The vision on the canvas is a third thing, utterly intangible and inexplicable, the offspring of the sunflower itself and Van Goch himself’ (171). It is, he says, ‘in-between everything’; and it is something that will always change as the seeing eye feels differently day to day. ‘Hence art, which reveals or attains to another perfect relationship, will be forever new. (171). It is in this ‘trance’ of this creation, to use the language of *Studies in Classic American Literature*, that Lawrence writes his novels; and it is to celebrate its power that, in work after work, he develops – like some latter-day God – his own creation myths, celebrating the way in which each person creates the world afresh. They are myths that we are not to take literally but as though listening to another man recount his dream. As Lawrence asked of the *Studies*, we are to read them to see what we can find in them.

What I miss from Lawrence’s account of the special state of mind that belongs to play and creativity is a recognition of its place within the overall economy of the mind. When T.S. Eliot wrote that ‘human kind / Cannot bear very much reality’, he was acknowledging that the demands of living in the real world are strenuous and need the relaxation of an in-between area that is comparatively free from the challenge of other people. Play, in other words, has a defensive aspect and is always next-door neighbour to anxiety. ‘The Rocking-Horse Winner’ shows Lawrence recognised this in his fiction, though he seems not to have recognised it in his theorisations about creativity. To Winnicott, the inherent precariousness of play ‘belongs to the interplay in the child’s mind of that which is subjective (near-hallucination) and that which is objectively perceived (actual, or shared reality)’ (8:312); and this sense of a contained anxiety – ‘hidden excitedly’ as Eliot might have put it – is necessary to complete the picture of creativity that Lawrence gives us. It brings within the frame of his discourse the tensions that he always acknowledged as a function of being alive in the objective world. They were tensions insoluble in the terms that Lawrence conceived of them, and lend weight to Winnicott’s view that one can never imagine the completion of an artist’s work – a view, incidentally, confirmed by the sheer volume of Lawrence’s writing and the compulsiveness to which it testifies. The sense of a hidden, even paranoid anxiety originating in the conflict between the impingements of a hostile reality and the search for a lost at-oneness with the world, between a world materially dead and one religiously alive, is everywhere in his late writing. There always remained, we might say, a young Paul Morel who wept compulsively in desolation, and another who was driven to recapture at-oneness with his mother by revitalising her. Lawrence’s fiction is perhaps best read as an interminable series of responses to the painful friction between reality

and illusion; and this same friction provides the clue to the oscillations between overheated idealisation and misanthropic disillusion in his social relationships, and the religious idealisation of male desire and creativity at the expense of women in his sexual relationships. Idealisation is a defence against an anxiety that brings about the very thing of which it is most afraid; it is a resource that reminds us that the man most hostile to idealism is also the man who is most susceptible to it.