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The Humble Touch of the Good Samaritan in D. H. Lawrence's *Aaron's Rod*

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This paper argues that by aestheticizing the humble in his novel *Aaron's Rod*, D. H. Lawrence revisits the parable of the Good Samaritan in order to question the vulnerability human relationships entail. Mapping out Lawrence's appropriation of the pattern of orientation, disorientation and reorientation Paul Ricœur identifies in the dynamics of parables will also highlight shifts in reading protocols. Though Lawrence delineates a practice of care that reinstates the cosmic man he so strongly believed in, its political achievement is hampered by his view that the humble should submit to an aristocracy of a Nietzschean type.

The injunction to love one's neighbour as oneself, first enunciated in Leviticus XIX, 18 and later elaborated on by Jesus, is widely discussed in D. H. Lawrence's essays, in particular in *Study of Thomas Hardy* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*.¹ Indeed, the author addresses with Nietzschean echoes the ethical question 'And who is my neighbour?' that Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan sought to answer according to the Gospel of Luke X, 27–36. Discussing what is known as 'The Golden Rule,' Lawrence was trying to formulate a philosophy that would satisfy both his epistemological and prescriptive stances.

However since the author posits in his 'Foreword' to *Fantasia of the Unconscious* that 'this pseudo-philosophy of [his . . .] is deduced from the novels and poems, not the reverse' (Lawrence 2004, 65), I will

1. D. H. LAWRENCE, *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, ed. Bruce STEELE (Cambridge: CUP, 2002) 17–18; *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious*, ed. Bruce STEELE (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) 112–114.

rely on his fiction, and in particular on *Aaron's Rod*, to show that by aestheticising the humble—to be understood as the ordinary, the needy and the weak—Lawrence revisits the parable of the Good Samaritan in order to come to terms with ‘the desire for social commitment and the fear of commitment,’ ‘the desire for community and the fear of anonymity.’¹

The study will confront the Lawrentian appropriation of the parable to the pattern of orientation, disorientation and reorientation Paul Ricœur identifies in the ethical dynamics of this narrative form.² Indeed, though the Lawrentian characters are not cast as exact matches to the biblical ones, the narrative not only thematises issues raised in the parable, it also aestheticizes them. I hope therefore to assess the ethical and political responses the singularity of Lawrence's modernist text manages or fails to kindle.

Within the Lawrentian canon *Aaron's Rod* is often rated as a ‘Lesser Novel’ or even in Eliseo Vivas' view a fitting item for his chapter on ‘The Failure of Art.’³ The first of the so-called ‘Leadership Novels,’ it was written in 1922 around the same time as *Mr Noon* which, as Noëlle Cuny has shown, addresses the issue of the ‘new reader’ Lawrence tries to build within the text after the devastating reception of *Women in Love*.⁴ *Aaron's Rod* revolves around issues of submission and commitment and can be read as a political statement against Western industrialism. The eponymous character suddenly leaves home and family to set out for London, then Italy, where he hopes to regain his authentic self. Living off his gift as a flautist, Aaron is taken care of by the people he chances to meet and in particular by Lilly who comes to his rescue when he falls ill with influenza and faints in the street.

To begin, I intend to show how the Lawrentian text builds orientation strategies in order to ultimately induce the reader to alter his reading protocols.

1. Scott SANDERS, *D. H. Lawrence: The World of the Five Major Novels* (New York: Viking, 1973) 166.

2. Paul RICŒUR, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics,’ *Semeia* 4 (1975) 27–148.

3. Eliseo VIVAS, *The Failure and the Triumph of Art* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1960).

4. Noëlle CUNY, ‘D. H. Lawrence's *Mr Noon*, its Significant Other, and the Physioethics of Reading,’ *Ethics of Alterity, Confrontation and Responsibility in 19th- to 21st-Century British Literature*, eds. Christine REYNIER and Jean-Michel GANTEAU (Montpellier: Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2013) 83–95; 86.

Orientation

Bible studies foreground that a parable sets to work ethical responses thanks to tensions between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Indeed, in his essay 'Biblical Hermeneutics' Ricœur defines parables as heuristic fictions which redescribe human experience; they are ordinary stories with extraordinary conclusions (1975, 32–35, 96–106). In this way, the form meets an ethical agenda as 'the parables raise questions, unsettle the complacent and challenge the hearers to reflection and inquiry.'¹

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the orientation phase conjures up the hearers' ordinary way of life in that, on the one hand, they were familiar with the treacherous road leading from Jerusalem to Jericho and, on the other hand, they would agree that the injured man needed assistance. A parable—a Greek term to translate the Hebrew *marshal* meaning both enigma and proverb—was also a familiar didactic form at the time.

Similarly foregrounding features related to the familiar, Daniel Marguerat's study of the orientation of the Gospels shows that, since in Luke's gospel the audiences are deeply rooted in Judaism, the parables aim at giving specifications about the Mosaic Law; therefore, the parable of the Good Samaritan discusses issues the familiar text from Leviticus raises. Conversely Mark's account, for instance, focuses on alterity, on the novel and baffling idea of the Kingdom of God epitomised by Jesus' elusiveness which is staged in the gospel.²

Luke being a physician and his audience Jewish can account for the fact that the parable of the Good Samaritan is only mentioned in the one gospel. Moreover Luke quotes the Golden Rule from the Greek translation of the Pentateuch known as the Septuagint, familiar to the Greek speaking Jewish community of his time (Marguerat 23).

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, three features of the orientation phase related to the humble as a category can be highlighted for the purpose of the study. To begin, the polysemy of the term 'humble' is called upon, since the weak, the needy as well as the ordinary are aesthetically topicalized in order to trigger an ethical response which itself is expressed in Christian thought by yet another shade of meaning,

1. Joel B. GREEN *et al.*, *The Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) 577.

2. Daniel MARGUERAT, *La Bible en récits: l'exégèse biblique à l'heure du lecteur* (Geneva: Labor & Fides, 2003) 23, 27.

that of the meek. The second feature of the parable is related to the wounded man whose very anonymity turns him into an 'Everyman' character. Indeed, the parable of the Good Samaritan opens with 'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves' (Luke X, 30). Various studies attempt to suggest plausible identifications of the man left half dead in the ditch, however the focal point of the parable is rather the opposition due to contingency between the Samaritan and the Jewish audience, the latter perceiving the Samaritans to adhere to a rival cult. As Bible scholar Greg Forbes puts it in his study,

Faced with the unlikely scenario of identifying with a hero who is schismatic, the original audience must then shift its identification to the injured man. Therefore the audience encounters neighbourliness which, in turn, enables it better to appreciate the definition of the idea [. . .]. This could not be achieved if the Samaritan was the one in the ditch.¹

Thus, the humble as a category builds within the text the hearer, or subsequent reader, who is led to topicalise his set of values on assistance to the needy—the body experienced as vulnerability, in the Levinasian meaning of the term, being the *locus* of a call for responsibility.² Consequently, thanks to this third feature the hearer will adjust his understanding of the idea of the neighbour.

In Lawrence's novel, orientation is similarly founded on the ordinary, however it has become 'the unspeakably familiar'³ that Aaron is attempting to escape from and which, recalling Lawrence's own humble background, is compounded in the burden of family ties, of the miners' union and of religious constraints. Evoking Kierkegaard's reading of the ordinary as the fallen world leading to inauthentic existence in his essay *The Present Age*,⁴ Aaron speaks of 'the acute familiarity of this house, which he had built for his marriage twelve years ago, the changeless pleasantness of it all seemed unthinkable. It prevented his thinking' (12). Such stifling ties and the general indictment of industrialism as an attitude of mind also echo Thomas Carlyle's

1. Greg FORBES, *The God of Old: The Role of the Lukan Parables in the Purpose of Luke's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield AP, 2000) 67.

2. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (1961; Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1991).

3. D. H. LAWRENCE, *Aaron's Rod*, ed. Mara KALNINS (Cambridge: CUP, 1988) 11.

4. Søren KIERKEGAARD, *The Present Age: on the Death of Rebellion*, trans. Alexander Dru (1846; New York: HarperCollins, 2010).

attack on industrialization which Lawrence had equally read about. As Raymond Williams puts it, in his study of the parallels between the two thinkers, Lawrence's 'first social responses' were those of a man caught himself in the processes of industrialization and 'destined, in the normal course, to be enlisted in their regiments.'¹ Similarly, according to the novel, Aaron is 'not moving towards anything; he was moving almost violently away from everything' (178).

Aaron's modest background is also conveyed through language and education. Indeed, he is described as being 'illiterate' referring to his desire not to rise in high intellectual circles. The text reads: 'On purpose he kept the midland accent in his speech. He understood perfectly what a personification was—and an allegory. But he preferred to be illiterate' (65).

The Midland accent mentioned here recalls Lawrence's humbler tasks as a translator namely of novels by Giovanni Verga whose Italian was rooted in Sicilian peasant speech. Indeed in their arresting studies, Avrom Fleishman and George Hyde highlight how Lawrence resolved to translate these mannerisms into his Nottingham dialect in order to create the same sense of defamiliarisation for the English readers of Verga's narratives.² He then worked his native dialect into his own novels, the resulting polyphonic text providing to a certain extent the humble with a voice while each language embodies an epistemological outlook on the world.

Therefore Aaron is carved out to be the 'available' character, a sort of 'Everyman' character around whom disorientation and reorientation will be set to work throughout the novel.³ Once Aaron becomes estranged from the ordinary and sets out on his adventurous quest, he stands as the needy character that relies on the philanthropy, and even on the care, of members of higher social classes. Shifts in points of view when Aaron is repeatedly called 'the stranger' then 'the newcomer' (35) on entering wealthy homes unsettle the very conventions of narrative. Even after introducing himself, Aaron's position as an outsider persists: 'It's a name I don't know,' says the host. 'Then he named all the

1. Raymond WILLIAMS, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 202.

2. Avrom FLEISHMAN, 'He Do the Polis in Different Voices: Lawrence's Later Style,' *D. H. Lawrence: A Centenary Consideration*, ed. Peter BALBERT and Phillip L. MARCUS (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 162–179; George Hyde, *D.H. Lawrence and the Art of Translation* (London: Macmillan, 1981) 36–59.

3. Claude NEGRIOLLI, *La Symbolique de D. H. Lawrence* (Paris: PUF, 1970) 104.

party present. But *the stranger* hardly heeded' (35; my emphasis). The modernist technique sets the welcome Aaron gets in the limelight while the range of neighbourly or un-neighbourly responses from the characters he meets offers the reader a variety of attitudes to choose from. As Daniel Marguerat writes 'The constellation of characters in a gospel is a multiple choice offer' (*La constellation des personnages d'un évangile est une offre à choix multiple* 29). Lilly, whom I am assimilating to the Good Samaritan, will turn out to offer yet another unsettling choice as will be shown.

Furthermore, the reader's knowledge of Aaron's origins tricks him into believing that he is on an equal footing with the author. When Aaron faints in the street for example, the possessive 'our' in '[Lilly] saw our acquaintance Aaron, very pale in the face and a little dishevelled' (87) reinforces the privileged position, the apparent complicity. To the same purpose, the author further engages in a dialogue with the reader about Aaron's humble capacities:

Don't grumble at me then, gentle reader, and swear at me that this damned fellow wasn't half clever enough to think all these smart things and realise all these fine-drawn-out subtleties. You are quite right, he wasn't, yet it all resolved itself in him as I say, and it is for you to prove that it didn't. (164)

'Gentle reader' here is rather patronizing, but not as derogatory or as ironic as in *Mr Noon* (see Cuny 87). Thus, thanks to Aaron's humble condition the text traps the reader into doubting his judgment while setting him limits, 'pre-empting all interpretations' (Cuny 88), and paves the way for the disorientation phase.

Disorientation

The parable of the Good Samaritan confounds the hearers' expectations because of the odd sequence of travellers who come down the road. As Greg Forbes has shown in his study of Bible audiences' expectations, in the parable the second passer-by is a Levite inferior in status to the first—the priest—preparing the hearers to expect a layman in third position and thereby 'an anti-clerical twist' in Jesus' story (64). However, the 'use of the Samaritan figure typifies the shock element' and gives this particular parable 'its cutting edge' since a Jewish audience would perceive the Samaritans to be schismatic (Forbes 64).

If we turn to *Aaron's Rod*, on a thematic level parallels can be drawn between the assistance Lilly provides Aaron with when he is taken ill in the street and the Good Samaritan's practice of care. The parable features liberal spending and soothing oils as Apostle Luke recounts:

And [a certain Samaritan] went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. (Luke X, 34–35)

Similarly, in *Aaron's Rod*, obliging care given to a man in need, including hospitality, money spent on a doctor's call, and ultimately a soothing massage leads the reader to topicalise the concept of responsibility for the Other, touch epitomising commitment (90–96). In this scene, which can be read as a stylistic expansion of Luke's account, the ethics of care summon the ordinary as Lilly feeds Aaron some soup, washes him, helps him change into pajamas and puts him to bed, Aaron's corporeity, experienced as vulnerability being the locus of Lilly's exposure to the Other. Busying himself with menial and intimate tasks to provide care, Lilly humbles himself in the act, though neither man is humiliated.

However, Aaron's body also turns out to be the locus of Lilly's doubts and questions as he simultaneously resents the inescapable call for the Other. Indeed, after having rubbed Aaron with ointment, Lilly displays the other face of ambivalence when he regrets his hospitality. Subverting the words Jesus—the archetypal figure of sacrifice—uttered during the last supper recorded by Matthew (XXVI, 26), the Lawrentian character expostulates, 'Last time I break my bread for anybody, this is' (98). Such a reversal woven into the text fosters disorientation and invites the reader to ponder his own beliefs.

Intertextual subversions challenge the reader to adjust his reading protocols. Indeed, while providing Aaron with care and resenting such responsibility stand as 'multiple choice offers' of how to respond to the call of the Other (Marguerat 29), a new choice, consisting in putting sacrifice into focus, is introduced. The issue 'The Golden Rule' raises here is indeed 'the incessant conflict between self-interest and self-sacrifice' responsibility for the Other entails, as Ricœur points out

in his 'Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule.'¹ Therefore, disorientation conveyed through the doubts Lilly entertains about his own vulnerability urges the reader to notice both a departure from what is commonly expected from caring for one's neighbour and an authorial form of humility as the author seemingly lets go of certainties and surrenders his need to be sure. By kindling the tensions ambivalence brings on, Lawrence resolutely distances himself from what he dismissively defines as early as 1913 as the 'will of the writer to be greater than and undisputedly lord over the stuff he writes.'² Thus, the modernist novel, just like Aaron's body, becomes an ethical space where, thanks to multiple voices, questions and doubts are formulated to trigger the same debates in the reader's mind. In Wayne Booth's words, 'Lawrence's overlapping narrative voices give us a steady stream of dramatized invitations to converse.'³ I am suggesting then that, throughout *Aaron's Rod*, the chorus of voices springs from meeting the humble, namely when Aaron is taken care of or invited to wealthy homes. The plurality of voices renders the reader vulnerable to the claims and challenges of the characters.

The issue of sacrifice raised by personal involvement in a community is a modernist one at a time when the authentic self is believed to have collapsed. In Lawrentian thought, the conflict between the self and the Other can nevertheless flourish into a balanced relationship

1. Paul RICŒUR, 'Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule,' *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. WALLACE (1987; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 293–302; 301. In this essay Ricœur sets out to show that 'the golden rule can legitimately be held to be the supreme principle of morality' (293). In an earlier text dated 1954 and entitled 'The Socius and the Neighbour,' Ricœur discusses the Samaritan's compassion for the neighbour as 'a gesture over and above roles, personages, and functions. It innovates a hyper-sociological mutuality between one person and another' for 'the neighbour is the personal way in which I encounter another, over and above all social mediation' (*History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley, Evanston, Northwestern UP, 1965; 100–101). He further stresses the contiguity between the neighbour and the humble writing that 'to give to eat and to drink, to take in the stranger, to clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit those in prison, these are so many basic and simple gestures that are feebly formulated by the social institution; therein the man is shown to be tormented by limiting situations, socially stripped, reduced to distress of the mere human condition. The object of this primordial behavior is called one of the "least", the man who has no leading role in history' (100).

2. D.H. LAWRENCE, *Introductions and Reviews*, ed. N.H. REEVE and John WORTHEN (Cambridge: CUP, 2005) 207.

3. Wayne BOOTH, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 451.

if the sacrifice is understood as a conversion to a cosmic vision of man (and woman). Though fraught with esoteric beliefs among which on-going attraction and repulsion play a crucial part, such acceptance of the inherent issues of interrelatedness ensures a new vision of the self suspended between the poles of integrity and vulnerability. Lilly's ambivalence, which is also Lawrence's, illustrates his attempt, and his subsequent failure, to surrender to the social and political commitments vulnerability entails and that Slavoj Žižek depicts when he writes

I am irreducibly vulnerable, exposed to the Other(s). And far from limiting my ethical status (autonomy), this primordial vulnerability due to my constitutive exposure to the Other *grounds* it: what makes an individual *human* and thus something for which we are responsible, toward whom we have a duty to help, is his/ her very finitude and vulnerability.¹

To tie up the various strands of arguments expounded on here, the humble as a category is the aesthetic means by which the author can induce his reader to probe various trends of thought; thus, it is turned into an aesthetic foil. The very presence of Aaron—both the humble character and the Everyman character—in wealthier homes triggers conversations about care and philanthropy, and about the destitute. As in *Aaron's Rod*, the poor are further portrayed as parasites in a capitalist system, remains to be assessed whether the humble as social category are actually granted a voice.

Reorientation

While the parable of the Good Samaritan urged the hearers to adjust their understanding of the identity of the neighbour and thereby qualify as the meek once they had converted to Christ's teachings, in Lawrence's narrative, the category of the humble draws the attention of the reader to the complexity of human relationships and to a new vision of the self within a cosmic whole.

It should be noted that the parable ends with the question 'Which of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?' (Luke X, 36), thereby also applying the term 'neighbour' to the one who rescued the wounded man and depicting for the hearer

1. Slavoj ŽIŽEK, 'Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence,' *The Neighbour: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*, eds. Slavoj ŽIŽEK, Eric L. SANTNER and Kenneth REINHARD (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005) 134–237; 138.

a new vision of himself. This is what Bible scholar John Crossan, whose work Ricœur often points to, calls a ‘parable of reversal.’¹ The twist fosters the idea of reciprocity and implies treating the Other with respect within moral norms that check the ‘power’ one acquires ‘over the Other’ and the violence it can bring about (Ricœur 1995, 100). Ricœur’s extensive discussion of this idea which he hinges onto solicitude brings into focus reciprocity as *reflexivity*, a move Gaëlle Fiasse explains as follows, ‘As in a mirror, I look at the reciprocated image of my behaviour. In this sense, I am not concerned only with my primary advantages; rather, I am able to take into consideration the person who will be affected by my actions.’²

I would suggest that this is just what Lilly fails to do. Indeed, in his view the person affected by his actions is himself. The tensions fostered by his ambivalence expose the complexity of the Golden Rule while commitment is set on a par with sacrifice. Consequently, the political *praxis* of care is mapped out around this new vision of the self.

In *Aaron’s Rod*, the practice of care entails massages which are in Lawrentian thought ‘a gateway to a somatic knowledge,’³ a belief the author expands on in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, where he explains that the regeneration of the self can only be achieved through the stimulation of the circuit of flux. I would contend that, in the absence of a new common language to express this cosmic experience, such novel practices hinge on the humble, on the ordinary or the menial. *The Plumed Serpent*—the last of the so-called ‘Leadership Novels’—stages a similar instance when don Ramón and don Cipriano, two stately prominent characters, humbly provide each other with care as they engage in a cosmic ritual to regenerate bodily centers, touch epitomising commitment.⁴

Indeed, Lawrence held high the regeneration of the self and summons the reader to take his creed seriously in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, where his bullying tone recalls that of *Mr Noon*:

1. John D. CROSSAN, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1992) 53–54.

2. Gaëlle FIASSE, ed., *Paul Ricœur: de l’homme faillible à l’homme capable* (Paris, PUF, 2008) 80–81.

3. Kenneth ASHER, ‘Emotions and the Ethical Life in D. H. Lawrence,’ *Cambridge Quarterly* 40.2 (2011): 101–120; 115.

4. D. H. LAWRENCE, *The Plumed Serpent*, ed. L. D. CLARK (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) 369.

There's more in you, dear reader, than meets the eye [. . .]. You've got a solar plexus under your navel, and a lumbar ganglion not far from your liver, and I'm going to tell everybody. Nothing brings a man home to himself like telling everybody. And I will drive you home to yourself, do you hear?
(Lawrence 2004, 73)

However, in the 'Leadership Novels' political *praxis* is hampered by the issue of sacrifice for the Other that haunts the characters. In fact, the relation between the self and the community reaches a stalemate unless the humble, *i.e.* the poor, the weak, submit to an 'aristocracy' of a Nietzschean type composed of superior beings. The self and aristocracy are issues which led Lawrence to fall out with his friend Bertrand Russell. *Principles of Social Reconstruction* published in 1916, ends on a chapter entitled 'What We Can Do,' where Russell argues that two principles are always applicable: '1. The growth and vitality of individuals and communities is to be promoted as far as possible. 2. The growth of one individual or one community is to be as little possible at the expense of the other.'¹ This contrasts with *Aaron's Rod* where sustained conversations about the humble as a social category come to a deadlock, while violence and anti-democratic means are propounded as the end justifies the means. Lilly hints at a return to slavery specifying that 'ultimately [people] will be brought to agree—after sufficient extermination—and then they will elect for themselves a proper and healthy and energetic slavery' meaning 'a real committal of the life-issue of inferior beings to the responsibility of a superior being' (281). As he reads horror at the idea on his acquaintances' faces, he attempts to withdraw his words and laugh the incident away, saying colloquially 'Do you take this as my gospel?' (282).

Lawrence may be discussing here Mill's answer to the debate as to whether for utilitarian ends a general rule should allow to remove men who are a cause of no good. Mill believed that people should follow the rule not to kill other humans because the general observance of this rule tends to promote the happiness of all.² Lawrence will nevertheless stage murders in *The Plumed Serpent*, the watching crowd of submitted Mexican peasants silently assenting (375–380).

1. Bertrand RUSSELL, *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1916) 227.

2. John Stuart MILL, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* vol. X, ed. John M. ROBSON (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1977–1985), 181–182, Online Library of Liberty, n.d.

Decisions then are left to an aristocracy, ‘a small choice population, not a horde of hopeless units,’¹ as in *Kangaroo*—the second of the so-called ‘Leadership Novels’—where the eponymous leader plans to provide the poor with soup-kitchens but bars them from receiving an education as he firmly believes ‘in sixty percent of the people it is useless. But [he does] want those sixty percent none the less to have full, substantial lives’ (originally the manuscript read ‘ninety percent’²). Coincidentally, those belonging to this aristocracy are generally middle class, whereas the submitting mass is poor. Aaron definitely belonging to the latter is further branded a parasite by his wealthy host, Sir William, who, as they discuss capitalism, claims Aaron speculates on the charity and philanthropy of the wealthy (143–144). The accusation comes as a reversal of segments from the Lord’s Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount, when Sir William states: ‘You believe in a Providence that does not compel you to earn your daily bread, and make provision’ (143). I would suggest that, since the voice of the wealthy crushes the voice of the poor, from a narrative standpoint the humble is merely an aesthetic foil against which political views can be articulated. The reader then is compelled to acknowledge the debate as well as the consequences of the various stances.

Again Lawrence’s translation work can shed light on these issues. Indeed, reorientation toward new reading protocols is just what Lawrence claimed was lacking in Dostoevsky’s work, for instance. In his introduction to Samuel Koteliensky’s translation of *The Grand Inquisitor*, he attacked the author’s moralising tone, his lack of authorial humility, though he shared the character’s benevolent disdain for the masses (Lawrence 2005, 127–129).

Conversely, though rejoicing in Giovanni Verga’s dialogic writing that he had undertaken to translate, Lawrence inveighs against him for giving a voice to the poor. ‘There is,’ he writes in his introduction to the English version of *Mastro—don Gesualdo* dated 1923, ‘too much, too much of the tragic fate of the poor, in it. There is a sort of wallowing in tragedy: the tragedy of the humble. It belongs to a date when the “humble” were almost the most fashionable thing’ (Lawrence 2005, 373).

1. David H. LAWRENCE, ‘Education of the People,’ *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, ed. Michael HERBERT (Cambridge: CUP, 1988) 87–166; 106.

2. David H. LAWRENCE, *Kangaroo*, ed. Bruce STEELE (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) 112, 427.

Thus, while freely rewriting the parable of the Good Samaritan to stage the call *of* and *for* the Other, the author resists giving a voice to the poor, just as Lilly resents the vulnerability epitomised by Aaron's body. Indeed, despite a form of authorial humility which gives voice to various epistemological and political stances, repression and violence check a universal and reciprocal understanding of the *praxis* of care. The humble as a social category are submitted to an aristocracy, while fitting the aesthetic needs of an author who seeks to define his personal vision of the world thanks to this foil.

What the singularity of the text does manage to achieve though is to invite the 'gentle reader' to appreciate literature as a site of questions and doubts and not of answers and certainties.