

F.R. LEAVIS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CRITICAL VOCABULARY

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I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own, that it was composed by me and that no portion of it has been presented in fulfilment of any other degree.

Kevin Keys

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ABSTRACT

This thesis demonstrates the development of F.R. Leavis's critical vocabulary through an examination of his critical practice. The social and political dimension of his critical orientation is examined by means of a reading of his own early pamphlets and articles, and of Q.D. Leavis's Fiction and the Reading Public (1932). This chapter indicates the nature of Leavis's approach to literature and criticism. An analysis of Leavis's preliminary considerations on poetry illustrates the gradual advancement of his critical terminology under the influence of T.S. Eliot. The judgements produced are examined and their value and reasoning are accounted for. Leavis's work on the novel is examined, showing how the critical terminology was transferred from criticism of the poetry to criticism of the novel. The source and function of Leavis's categories of 'tradition' and 'morality' are analysed. The ensuing critical judgements are assessed to show how and why such judgements were of ambiguous value. Leavis's study of Lawrence demonstrates centrally the advantages and disadvantages of Leavis's critical method. A discussion of the 'two cultures' debate illustrates Leavis's continuing polemical engagements and how this affects his critical priorities. Finally, an examination of Leavis's later work on Dickens and T.S. Eliot shows how Leavis's critical vocabulary matured a metaphysical, almost 'religious', dimension in its striving to maintain a connection between his concepts of 'art' and 'life'. Throughout this thesis, Leavis's criticism is examined by means of a rehearsal of his major arguments. This is combined with a discussion and assessment of the integrity of and sources for those arguments and an analysis of their resultant literary judgements. The thesis presents an objective account of the nature and function of Leavis's critical vocabulary, with a demonstration of its sources and an assessment of its achievements.

PREFACE

Many academic writers have defended Leavis's views: many more have reiterated them wittingly or not in countless variations: and still more have criticized him on a scale of dissent ranging from journalistic aside to full-scale assault. But even the best products of the last category have been no more than partial: and none, in any category, could credibly claim to be a systematic reconstitution and assessment of Leavis's aesthetics, literary criticism and cultural analysis.¹

Since his death in 1978 there have been several books published dealing with the work of F.R. Leavis. Before 1978, the subject of Leavis had been discussed typically in the course of wider studies: for example, by Vincent Buckley in Poetry and Morality (1959) and John Casey in The Language of Criticism (1966). Both of these examinations aimed to place Leavis's critical practice in a wider comparative intellectual and historical context. Neither of them represent a detailed inquiry into the nature of Leavis's literary criticism.

The progress of the criticism of Leavis has been unsatisfactory. A reasonably objective account of the criticism in any detail is not available. The worst excesses of partiality are represented by Professor Walsh in his F.R. Leavis (1980). In a recent article² Bernard Bergonzi called Walsh's book 'hagiographic'. In Walsh's book, critical judgement has been, effectively, suspended. For the reader who requires

1. Francis Mulhern, The Moment of 'Scrutiny' (1979), p viii.

2. Cf Bernard Bergonzi, 'Leavis and Eliot: the long road to rejection' Critical Quarterly, 26 1 & 2 (1984) pp 21-43.

an introduction to the development and substance of Leavis's criticism. Professor Walsh's study provides no assistance. Its excessive tolerance and its failure to examine the implications of any of Leavis's ideas means that the study can be no more than an outline of and an apologia for Leavis's criticism. The comprehensive acceptance by Walsh of all of Leavis's positions makes the study impossible to criticize directly; one may as well return to the Leavis canon and engage in direct debate with the critic himself.

Other studies of Leavis are more useful, albeit in limited ways. Two brief guides in which a critical stance is maintained are Edward Greenwood, F.R. Leavis (1978)³ and Robert Boyers, F.R. Leavis: Judgement and the Discipline of Thought (1978). Neither of these studies aspires to the status of a comprehensive survey. They are both introductory guides which aim to give an outline to Leavis's intellectual career and a résumé of his social, critical and educational position.

Neither of these two studies approach the deeper problems of Leavis's critical method. Greenwood, in fact, borrows a major insight from another source, which is not acknowledged. The technique is characteristic of Greenwood's book. He says that

it can reasonably be claimed that what Leavis provided was a way of grappling with moral problems without

3. Greenwood's book is part of the 'Writers and their work, a critical and bibliographical series' supported by the British Council (general editor Ian Scott-Kilvert).

commitment to discarded substantive ideologies on the one hand, and without the vacuousness of the meta-ethical approaches which had begun to engross the moral philosophy itself on the other. In short, it filled the gap left for the ethical sensibility by Positivists like Ramsey and Ayer.⁴

It is contradictory for an essay in the guise of an introduction to the subject of F.R. Leavis to evoke, obliquely and obscurely, such an amount of another line of British intellectual history. Since Greenwood does not develop this point to indicate what bearing it may have on an understanding of Leavis's work, the evocation is redundant and confusing. Restrictions of space have clearly forced Greenwood to compromise his desire for setting out a fuller social, cultural and historical context for Leavis's work in favour of the oblique gesture towards larger matters. A readier compromise would have been to refer the reader to Perry Anderson's article in the New Left Review of 1968⁵ which gives the fuller picture from this point of view and which was the probable source for this part of Greenwood's argument.⁶

4. Greenwood, op. cit. p 26.

5. Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', New Left Review, 50 (1968).

6. Anderson's is a long and complex argument, and a Marxist analysis. He claims that there was a failure in Britain to develop a 'classical sociology' or to generate a response to the challenge of Marxism. These two disciplines, sociology and Marxism, were 'a synthesis designed to capture the "structure of structures" - the social totality as such'. Britain has 'lacked any form whatever of such thought' and this has led to British culture being 'determined - and dislocated' by an 'absent centre'. Leavis's ambitions for literary criticism - that they should be central to the humanities and the university - was 'a symptom of the objective vacuum at the centre of culture':

Elsewhere, Greenwood's account of Leavis focuses more intently on the criticism itself. Brief passages of summarisation encapsulate complex themes readily and clearly.⁷ However, the discussion is predominantly superficial. The account of The Great Tradition and Leavis's achievement in general with regard to the novel is extremely abbreviated.⁸ It takes the form of a synopsis of the main themes of Leavis's novel criticism and is marked by an almost complete lack of critical analysis. Critical commentary is in fact largely confined to the expression of 'reservations':

[Leavis] was undoubtedly too dismissive of both Proust and Mann. One suspects he was too much influenced by the fact that the first was taken up by Clive Bell and Bloomsbury, and that both were treated somewhat critically by D.H. Lawrence.⁹

On the whole, Greenwood's study maintains a balance between the extremes of excessive tolerance of and partisan hostility towards

A preliminary definition would be to say that when philosophy became 'technical', a displacement occurred and literary criticism became 'ethical.' (Cf. Anderson, loc. cit. pp 11-12; 50-51)

Greenwood echoes distinctly the point made here by Anderson.

7. See for example Greenwood's outline of Leavis's discussion of 'modernism', op. cit. p 31.

8. Cf. pp 45-46.

9. Ibid p 45.

Leavis's work, but at the expense of making firm conclusive judgements. By and large, Greenwood propagates conventional wisdoms about Leavis: that it was 'disingenuous' not to be more open about the change of position on Dickens;¹⁰ that in his attitude towards Lawrence he allowed assertion to replace analysis.¹¹ Yet the deeper significances of these issues are not dealt with. However, as a general introduction to the subject, Greenwood's guide is not superfluous.

The same is true for Boyers' F.R. Leavis: Judgement and the Discipline of Thought (1978), although this study does aim to provide a critical rather than merely synoptic account of Leavis's criticism. To this end, Boyers focuses closely on particular areas of the criticism which are seen as representative of the whole. This means that Leavis's poetry criticism is approached by a discussion of his attitude towards Auden and Milton; his criticism of the novel is dealt with by an analysis of Leavis's position with regard to James and Lawrence.

However, the 'Milton controversy' was in a sense peripheral to Leavis's poetry criticism: his critical method with regard to poetry can only be defined negatively through his comments on Milton, which represent the obverse of his position. T.S. Eliot remained the central poetic challenge to Leavis until as late as 1975 and the publication of The Living Principle. Any discussion of Leavis's poetry criticism which does not acknowledge this fact by concentrating on the developing

10. Ibid p 46.

11. Ibid p 47.

relationship between Leavis and Eliot cannot do that criticism justice. Perversely, Boyers presents an extended discussion of Leavis's attitude towards Auden. Leavis wrote little on Auden, almost all of it dismissive. Boyers at one point is even forced to introduce into the argument comments from reviews by other Scrutiny contributors, as if they represented Leavis's own position.¹² Boyers, in fact, is engaged in a defence of Auden against the general Scrutiny rejection. This approach does not yield many rewarding insights into Leavis's critical method as regards poetry and the space might have been better occupied with an analysis of Leavis's developing interest in Eliot, the permanent central feature of Leavis's criticism of poetry. Such a discussion would necessarily focus attention on Leavis's fundamental principles in a way that a defence of Auden against Leavisian strictures cannot.

At other places, Boyers study is both frustrating and uncritical. This is apparent in the discussion of James's What Maisie Knew and Leavis's critique of that novel. It is not certain whether Boyers is more interested in illuminating Leavis's position with regard to the novel or his own.¹³ Certainly, the narrowing of the focus in this way limits Boyers's ability to give a broad and coherent account of Leavis's novel criticism. The Great Tradition and Dickens the Novelist are not touched upon in Boyers's study. The arguments are

12. Boyers quotes R.G.Lienhardt, 'Auden's Inverted Development', Scrutiny XIII (1945) and Robin Mayhead, 'The Latest Auden', Scrutiny XVIII (1952)

13. Cf op. cit. pp 89-99.

more in the nature of polemical dissent than objective critical analysis.

A large part of Boyers's book is given over to Leavis's relationship with Lawrence.¹⁴ This discussion is a mixture of irrelevant speculation, undeveloped insights, the uncritical acceptance of Leavis's terms, and the occasional misreading.

In an unnecessary speculative digression, Boyers wonders why Leavis had such strong positive feelings for Lawrence.¹⁵ The parallels between the respective careers of Lawrence and Leavis - hostility and ostracism - which Boyers cites, are only superficial.¹⁶ They cannot be seriously considered as reasons for assuming a sentimental self-identification with Lawrence by Leavis. Yet Boyers posits them as a key to Leavis's criticism of Lawrence.

Boyers's commentary is similarly casual throughout and fails everywhere to be specific. He states that

Where [Leavis's] readings fail, they are too avid to make Lawrence stand for something that cannot be effectively

14. 22 pages out of 122, or one-sixth; this compares with 24 pages given over to the Auden problem.

15. Cf. Ibid pp 101-102.

16. As George Steiner points out, some of the 'hostility' towards Leavis was a myth Leavis himself encouraged for strategic purposes

Cf. 'F.R.Leavis' in Language and Silence (1967)

communicated by the critic outside of his active engagement with the Lawrentian text.¹⁷

This may point to a significant truth about Leavis's Lawrence criticism but it would need to be demonstrated rather than merely asserted in order to be substantiated and convincing. The same is true of the following statement:

Leavis is so good on Women in Love because the novel so clearly mistrusts its own willed conclusions, because it puts one constantly in mind of the terrible resistances built into the fabric of its own unfolding design.¹⁸

What does it mean to be 'good on Women in Love'? in what particulars of critical insight does this achievement inhere? is it Leavis or Boyers who insists that the novel 'mistrusts its own willed conclusions'? what does this last phrase mean? do the final phrases of the sentence mean anything at all? These questions all throw Boyer's critical judgement into doubt and diminish the value of his commentary. In other places,¹⁹ this commentary is indistinguishable from gloss, analysis, paraphrase or original speculations on the part of the author. The study is at certain points confusing and directionless. This weakness is compounded by Boyer's tendency to adopt.

17. Ibid p 104.

18. Ibid p 109.

19. Cf. for example pp 116-117.

without defining his usage or the critic's, Leavis terminology.²⁰

Moreover, the inadequacy of Boyer's critical appreciation of Lawrence and of Leavis leads him to a simplistic misreading of 'The Captain's Doll' and of Leavis's exposition of that tale. The tale, difficult and imperfect, requires a more subtle reading than Boyers seems inclined to pursue; Leavis's claims for the work are defensible in a way that his claims for St Mawr are not. For Boyers to characterise Leavis's essays²¹ on 'The Captain's Doll' as a plain 'failure'²² is to trivialise Leavis's involvement with the tale and reflects poorly on Boyers's personal critical abilities. Moreover, Boyers goes on to say that this 'failure' was 'unfortunate, and eminently forgivable', which is to crown his lack of critical acumen with pusillanimity.

Professor R.P.Bilan's The Literary Criticism of F.R.Leavis (1979) is on a larger scale altogether than the brief introductions of Greenwood and Boyers. Bergonzi, in the article cited above, describes Professor Bilan's style as 'limp' and the commentary as disinclined toward making conclusive judgements.²³ This is generally the case throughout the book and such characteristics commonly weaken the force of any interpretative or analytical line. There are other general features

20. Cf. the two complete sentences of the first paragraph on p 117.

21. Boyers refers to essays on 'The Captain's Doll' in both DH Lawrence: Novelist (1955) and Thought, Words, Creativity(1976)

22. Boyers op. cit. p 122.

23. Cf. Bergonzi, art. cit. p 4ln.

of this study which are significant.

Bilan's commentary on Leavis's criticism of poetry is not extensive. The emphasis is instead placed on Leavis's social and cultural analysis, his general principles with regard to criticism of the novel and his work on Lawrence. Appended to the study is a brief chapter entitled 'The Religious Spirit' in which Bilan attempts to make sense of Leavis's late metaphysical adumbrations. In fact, Bilan attempts to summarise his whole case in this final chapter. He seems to feel that the metaphysical tendencies of Leavis's late period were the rational outcome of the developments of the preceding years. The first section of Part Three, 'Leavis on Lawrence', is entitled 'The Early Religious Concern'. Clearly, Bilan feels that the 'religious' element or dimension of Leavis's writings was present from the beginning.

The bias in Bilan's book is away from the poetry criticism in favour of criticism of the novel. In discussing Leavis's 'religious spirit' Bilan prefers to concentrate on themes predominant in D.H. Lawrence: Novelist and Dickens the Novelist, rather than those of The Living Principle. In the third section of this latter work, Leavis engages more explicitly than elsewhere with metaphysical and theological problems. His metaphysics, indeed, develop as a direct result of the years spent grappling with the significances of Four Quartets. In the light of this, Bilan's emphasis is surprising.

Bilan's account is necessarily in a large degree a matter of paraphrasing. This is as unavoidable in an analysis of the work of a

literary critic as is the exposition of narrative plot to a critique of the novel. Yet too much of Bilan's commentary is of the nature of synoptic outline; too often he fails to provide a conclusive critical judgement on the matters in hand. For example, after a résumé of the arguments surrounding Leavis's refusal to involve himself in 'theoretical' or 'abstract' discussions, Bilan says

Leavis himself only presents a general proposition about literature in terms of his own immediate response to a text. It is only by maintaining a fidelity to the concrete, Leavis believes, that criticism, as opposed to philosophy, shows its distinctive concern with fundamentals.²⁴

This is a bit lame. It is not untrue; it is a bare statement of fact that is contentious only in its glib generalisation, 'as opposed to philosophy'. However, Bilan's discussion is concluded precisely at the point where the questions become most interesting. If the reader wants to know the principal arguments forwarded by Leavis to oppose the consideration of theoretical matters, Bilan's summary is admirable. He provides a useful synopsis of the debates in which Leavis was involved on this issue. However, the deeper aspects of the question are not engaged. Leavis's reluctance to embark on theoretical discussions meant that he was unwilling to define his evaluative terms and values in the abstract. His critical vocabulary

24. R.P.Bilan, op. cit. p 79.

thus became self-referring, defined, Leavis said, by its context. This is a complex problem. What implications are there for a criticism that defines its scheme of values in the act of deploying them in a critical analysis? What rewards or disadvantages might this have for the critic, or his reader? Bilan, to the detriment of his inquiry, does not address himself to these questions.

Nonetheless, there is a place for a coherent synopsis of the basic tenets of Leavis's criticism. Bilan's account of the preliminary cultural analysis, its terms and their sources, is valuable. So too are his observations on the change from poetry to novel criticism, and on Leavis's concept of 'morality'. His account of 'the basic concepts of Leavis's novel criticism' is also useful. In none of these areas does Bilan explore the deeper ramifying implications of Leavis's ideas and positions, but as an introduction to these matters, his book supercedes those of Greenwood and Boyers.

Bilan devotes almost one third of his book to Leavis's critical writings on Lawrence. Such a distribution of emphasis is justifiable, given the nature of Leavis's enthusiasm for Lawrence. Leavis's criticism of Lawrence is mixed in its achievements. His writings on the novels range from the brilliant exegeses of The Rainbow and Women in Love to his perversely exaggerated valuation of St Mawr and some of the tales. Bilan notes these extremes and points to some of the causes of Leavis's misreadings. For instance, Bilan feels that with regard to The Rainbow

Leavis has a greater belief in culture and education than Lawrence has and he reads this into the novel 25

and that he is over tolerant of Lawrence's excesses in Fantasia of the Unconscious. Bilan also feels that Leavis's interpretation of County Dionys in The Ladybird is mistaken. Clearly, all these points are valid. Yet Bilan's concluding comment is that

in these cases Leavis can praise Lawrence only by misrepresenting him, by making it appear that Lawrence considers the critical intelligence as important as he himself does.²⁶

Something stronger and more searching than this is needed. It is possible to inquire further into the relationship between Leavis and Lawrence and identify the sources and methods behind Leavis's critical successes and failures. It is possible to relate these findings to the general methods of Leavis's criticism and in this way come to a better understanding of that method, its strengths and weaknesses. Bilan does not involve himself in such an inquiry.

Bilan's treatment of Leavis's essays on Four Quartets is also symptomatic of the incompleteness of his inquiry. Bilan disputes the

25. Ibid p 233.

26. Ibid p 234.

level of attention Leavis gives to 'East Coker' as compared to 'Burnt Norton'. In a passage of superficial poetic analysis, Bilan attempts to controvert Leavis's opinion that the close of 'East Coker' shows Eliot's 'negative attitude to human time'. The characteristic 'limpness' of style noticed by Bergonzi appears in this statement:

The ending of 'East Coker' is clearly quite different from that of 'Burnt Norton' and certainly deserves more attention than Leavis gives it.²⁷

Underlying all of Leavis's critical judgements there is a system of reasoning which gave rise to those judgements. All of Leavis's criticism depends upon a specialised vocabulary for the presentation of his evaluative commentary. Bilan does not explore these aspects of Leavis's criticism. His account remains determinedly superficial.

This superficiality is more apparent in Bilan's closing essay, 'The Religious Spirit'. On the one hand, he provides a coherent and illuminating account of Leavis's concept of 'religion', dealing with Bunyan, Dickens and Blake. Yet on the other hand, Bilan attempts to place Leavis in a collocation with 'modern theologians' such as Martin Buber, John A.T. Robinson and Ivan Tillich. Bilan forgets that Leavis's metaphysics were an intrinsic part of his literary criticism. An explicit metaphysical and theological statement was urged out of

27. Cf. Ibid p 279.

Leavis in his grappling with the challenge of Four Quartets. This struggle was sustained for the best part of forty years. Leavis's essays on Four Quartets in The Living Principle represents the culmination of that developing engagement. The essays are nonetheless literary critical; the metaphysical element cannot be regarded, in the manner of Bilan, as extrinsic. To place Leavis's idiosyncratic metaphysics in whatever kind of relation with contemporary theology is to generate no valuable insight into the nature of his literary criticism.²⁸ Bilan's book is marred throughout by these characteristics of misdirection and superficiality.

PJM Robertson's The Leavises on Fiction (1981) is another work which suffers from too great a partiality towards the Leavis cause. With regard to F.R.Leavis particularly, Robertson's exclusive concentration on the novel is a mistake. F.R.Leavis's attitude towards the novel, unlike that of Q.D.Leavis, cannot be adequately understood apart from the poetry criticism. Bilan's book, in fact, is most valuable in the section where he discusses the transition in Leavis's criticism from poetry to the novel and the interconnectedness of the types of critical endeavour. Robertson's thesis is therefore limited from the outset.

28 The final sentence of Bilan's book reads: 'And in pointing us towards Blake, Dickens and Lawrence as the source of wisdom, health and life that our civilisation needs, Leavis shows a compelling centrality of judgement'.
 Bilan op. cit. p 80.
 Statements like this do not mean very much.

A representative consequence of the omission of consideration of Leavis's poetry occurs in the context of Robertson's explanation for Leavis's rejection of Joyce. Robertson summarises Leavis's position as: 'Shakespeare "realises" while Joyce "contrives".'²⁹ Nowhere does Robertson closely examine what Leavis means by these terms. He assumes, in the manner characteristic of the partial Leavis observer that they are self-explanatory. Yet the whole concept of 'realisation' was developed by Leavis in his criticism of poetry ^{and} translated from there into the criticism of the novel. For it to mean anything in relation to Joyce, Robertson would have to show this development and explain the appropriateness, if any, of employing such a concept in an incomparable genre.

Robertson concludes these few pages on the essay 'Joyce and "the revolution of the word"'³⁰ thus:

this early essay . . . shows that Leavis had tackled Joyce and not arbitrarily dismissed him. He had in fact examined him according to the highest standard, Shakespeare: a compliment to Joyce.³¹

In what way is Joyce comparable to Shakespeare? Such a comparison

29. Robertson op. cit. p 80.

30. Scrutiny II (1933); reprinted in For Continuity (1933)

31. Op. cit. p 81.

makes sense only given an understanding of the grounding of Leavis's novel criticism in his criticism of poetry. Robertson's whole study is marked by a similar superficiality and partiality throughout; it accepts too many of Leavis's ideas and positions too readily and too uncritically:

For Leavis, Eliot fails to reach the highest creativity because he fails to recognise Blake's distinction between 'selfhood' and 'identity' and remains imprisoned in his 'selfhood'.³²

This kind of commentary is clearly inadequate. The vocabulary Leavis is employing needs to be examined in greater detail and the significances of his usages accounted for. This absence of close analytical attention to the substance of Leavis's criticism, his vocabulary of evaluative terms, is the undermining characteristic of Robertson's study.

Other studies dealing with Leavis or the Leavises include Francis Mulhern, The Moment of 'Scrutiny' (1979) and Chris Baldick, The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932 (1983). The latter work contains a chapter entitled 'The Leavises: Armed against the herd'.

32. Ibid p 91.

It is a Marxist account of the Leavises' social and cultural analysis. Its strongest passages include the summarisation and critique of Q.D. Leavis's Fiction and the Reading Public. Baldick's critique constitutes the first seriously political response to the implications of Q.D. Leavis's thesis. Baldick also deals intelligently with the conceptual problems associated with F.R. Leavis's equation of politics with economics, to the exclusion of other considerations. Baldick also demonstrates some of the naivety and ill-informedness of the Leavises' early political positions. This book constitutes an interesting ancillary study of the Leavises' social and cultural analysis which attempts to place that analysis in a historical context.

Mulhern's book is a study also ancillary to an inquiry into the literary criticism of the Leavises, but it is essential reading. It is a Marxist account of the history of Scrutiny and is extremely detailed. The historical account of the journal and its politics cannot be divorced from the polemical ideological line that Mulhern takes in his summary. Such a separation is not essential, however, since the Marxist interpretation of the politics of Scrutiny provides some insights into the nature of Leavis's cultural analysis, literary criticism and educational programme. In common with Baldick's essay, though, Leavis's actual literary criticism is not the primary focus of Mulhern's attention.

The present study is designed to trace the development of Leavis's critical vocabulary and his grammar of evaluative terms. This is

done by means of a close analytical and critical commentary, concentrating for the most part on Leavis's literary criticism. Such a study involves the type of paraphrase which is in effect a practice of the 'reconstitution' of Leavis's arguments. By this means it is possible to understand the processes through which Leavis's critical vocabulary develops and operates.

'Reconstitution' represents something more than simple paraphrase. It is necessarily a selective process. In the choices governing the selection, the problems of where the emphasis is to be placed, a certain evaluation is implicit; but this would not be adequate to the requirements of a full critical inquiry. The major aspect, 'assessment' of Leavis's criticism, is contained in the demonstrations of the ways in which Leavis's terminology is shown to work and in the analysis of the judgements which Leavis's criticism produces.

By concentrating in this way on Leavis's specific literary critical judgements and the vocabulary which allows for their expression, it is possible to produce an impartial account of Leavis's achievement. That achievement was mixed. The different elements which make up the body of Leavis's criticism need to be distinguished. Broad historical synopsis, the close analysis of a particular poem or novel, the polemical insistence on the centrality of literature and literary criticism are all features of Leavis's work. The unifying element throughout is the critical language - the vocabulary - Leavis employs. The source, nature and operation of that vocabulary are the subjects of this study.

1. Diagnosis and Remedy: cultural analysis and critical principles
(1930-32)

F.R. Leavis's early writings serve as a prologue to the whole of his subsequent intellectual career. We can identify in them the sources and preliminary considerations of themes which were to be central to his literary criticism. Out of the main arguments of these polemical sketches and critiques there developed the basic tenets of Leavis's critical method. They contain the initial formulations of what was to develop gradually into a comprehensive critical terminology. A résumé of these early ideas makes possible an analysis of Leavis's fundamental principles to see how they develop into the particular kinds of critical practice which Leavis pursued.

A certain amount of paraphrase is necessary in reconstituting the main arguments and clarifying their essential elements from an objective point of view. Much of Leavis's early writing took the form of a kind of literary journalism. Occasional articles and reviews involved him in the frequentation of recurrent problems of contemporary culture. This involvement only gradually emerged as a formulated account of the nature of those problems and a practical strategy for combating them. This early material was disparate and repetitive, calling on the same evidence in different places and making the same points in different contexts. In order to gain a clearer sense of the fundamental positions it is necessary to highlight points of reference in the pamphlets and articles that

are representative of the main elements of Leavis's critical discourse. Leavis collected these writings in For Continuity (1933) and this volume, which includes the first articles for Scrutiny, together with New Bearings in English Poetry (1932), represent Leavis's developed intellectual position for the first phase of his career.

There were two main elements in Leavis's account of contemporary culture. The first was analytical or diagnostic of current cultural formulations and ranged over varied material; and the second was corrective or remedial, proposing organisations and strategies for ameliorating the diagnosed 'crisis', centring on the 'function of criticism'. The relations between the two approaches were complex and interactive. The diagnostic perspective, for example, utilised in its analysis of cultural phenomena - the Book Societies, say, or Arnold Bennett's journalism - an implicit set of critical values that only had their concrete formulation in the remedial sections of the discourse. 'Remedy', in fact, was implicit in the diagnosis. It was clearly futile to mount a sustained attack on contemporary culture without accompanying this attack with optimistic proposals that were generated by the positive impulse that induced the initial critique. If the critique had a basis in a set of alternative values, rather than being merely negative, then it ought to be possible to elaborate those values in the realm of action. The other course was descent into a resigned fatalism, or the 'proud, philosophical indifference' sanctioned

by Spengler.¹ The diagnostic element, for its part, was organised with the remedial strategy in mind. This meant that there was a correspondence between the kinds of material Leavis deprecated as inconducive to cultural 'health' and the potential areas of adjustment or focus that were central to the 'remedy'.²

Leavis's pamphlet, Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture (1930) grew out of the work Q.D. Leavis was doing towards Fiction and the Reading Public (1932). The argument of the concluding section of the latter concerned the relative decline in 'reading capacity' and its consequences in the present age. This theme was developed along more general lines in F.R. Leavis's pamphlet. Similar sources were used as evidence for the decline, and in support of the assertion that great literature is essential to the well-being of the culture; and parallel conclusions were drawn in both works. Where Q.D. Leavis confined her observations to the novel, F.R. Leavis extended the discussion to include wider social issues, utilising

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1. 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture' in For Continuity (1933) p 16.

Leavis's early commentaries were collected in For Continuity, which comprises a volume of remarkable radical polemicism. Leavis wrote that these articles and reviews 'all illustrate, develop and enforce, in ways more or less obvious, the same preoccupation and the same argument - that of Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture'. Hence the publication in a single volume, which constituted, he felt, 'more than a collection'. (See 'Prefatory: Marxism and Cultural Continuity', For Continuity, p 1.) Page references to these articles, pamphlets and reviews are to For Continuity throughout this chapter.

2. 'Health' and 'vitality' were part of Leavis's vocabulary with regard to contemporary culture, but he did not use the terms 'diagnosis' or 'remedy' extensively himself.

many non-literary examples to further his case.

The pattern of the argument of the thesis and of the pamphlet was broadly similar. It consisted of generalised observations on 'the contemporary situation'³ derived from representative materials exploited to illustrate the age's component weaknesses and the collapse of critical standards. This argument was supplemented by a kind of historical analysis which purported to show that standards and values and the whole nature of cultural relations had, in the pre-industrial past, been substantially different. Out of the contrast thus drawn, an analysis of the present could be staged which involved judgements of value.⁴ The conditions of the past and the present could be used to demonstrate a qualitative change - that is, a decline. Leavis's pamphlet was less rigidly structured than this, but the same three types of argument interpose themselves, and similar conclusions were drawn.

Two premises were central to Q.D. Leavis's argument: that of the existence of the guardian 'minority': and that which held that great literature is essential to cultural health. The concept of the minority was not new, but the Leavises were involved in making

3. 'The Contemporary Situation' is the heading for part I of Fiction and the Reading Public.

4. Q.D. Leavis postponed the introduction of values: 'discussion of values has as far as possible been suspended till the last section of the book was reached, since it could not conveniently be carried on until a body of evidence was placed before the reader to which reference could be made.'

new demands of what slender minority still existed with the aim of revitalising its function. The operation of this function in society had been indicated by Matthew Arnold:

The mass of mankind will never have any ardent zeal for seeing things as they are; very inadequate ideas will always satisfy them. On these inadequate ideas repose, and must repose, the general practice of the world. That is as much as saying that whoever sets himself to see things as they are will find himself one of a very small circle; but it is only by this small circle resolutely doing its own work that adequate ideas will ever get current at all.⁵

This is the historical antecedent to F.R. Leavis's version of the same principle, which is also quoted in Fiction and the Reading Public⁶:

In any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is, (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgement.⁷

5. Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time'. The National Review. I (November 1864) pp 230-51. Cf The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold (ed R.H.Super), III: Lectures and Essays in Criticism (Michigan 1962) p 274.

6. Fiction and the Reading Public p 202.

7. For Continuity pp 13-14

Sources for the premise regarding the importance of literature are manifold, but the Leavises referred specifically to I.A.Richards's statements around the issue, on several occasions. The main point of these references was encapsulated in the quotation from Richards given by F.R. Leavis in the pamphlet:

If we do not live in consonance with good poetry, we must live in consonance with bad poetry . . . On the whole evidence, I do not see how we can avoid the conclusion that a general insensitivity to poetry does witness a low level of general imaginative life.⁸

This principle was fundamental to the ideas of the Leavises. Q.D.Leavis was preoccupied with the significance of the apparent decline in sensitivity to all forms of literature that had taken place with the growth of the advanced industrial society: 'The novel's effect . . . is cumulative, and such a form demands from the reader a prolonged expenditure of effort. To be equal to this demand is the first requisite in a reader'⁹. The 'reading capacity' of various ages can therefore be gauged by the demands made on the reader by popular fiction. In assessing historical variations in 'reading capacity' Q.D.Leavis contrasted the relative qualities of the Elizabethan Thomas Nashe (1567-1601), the eighteenth century

8. For Continuity p 24. Cf Richards, Practical Criticism (1929) pp 319-20

9. Fiction and the Reading Public p 214.

Laurence Sterne (1713-68) and the modern, Virginia Woolf: all writers considered 'difficult' in some way. Leavis's interest was focused on each writer's 'technique' and its relation to the expectations and abilities of the reader. Nashe's¹⁰ 'incoherence' and 'complete absence of consideration for the reader' makes his prose hard going for the twentieth century reader who 'is accustomed to writers who take pains to make their line of thought apparent'¹¹. For his contemporary audience, however, this would have presented no problems, 'sermon, drama, and music [having] accustomed it to follow attentively and alertly'¹². The difficulties in Nashe have to do with sense obscured by the haphazard prose style. In Sterne they are more cryptic: his technique 'depends on the establishment of a social tone, . . . his progress, like Byron's in Don Juan, is not structural but consists in rapid variations in the scale of feeling, in unexpected changes in the emotional pressure'. This technique required 'a far more subtle understanding between author and public'¹³ than had been possible in an earlier period. This understanding had been made available by virtue of the existence of

a social literature . . . equally removed from the naive humour and full-bodied tragic passion of the Elizabethan

10. Leavis quoted from The Unfortunate Traveller (1549). (See Fiction and the Reading Public pp 87; 216)

11. Ibid p 217.

12. Ibid pp 217-218.

13. Ibid p 220.

audience on the one side and from the indiscriminating surrender to bursts of laughter and storms of tears of Dickens's public on the other.¹⁴

The reading public who enjoyed Sterne's virtuosity were reading for more than mere amusement. Both Nashe and Sterne achieved a popular status because 'the conditions of the age made them accessible to the common reader.' In contrast, To the Lighthouse 'is especially calculated to baffle the general public of the twentieth century', that public which was 'accustomed to nothing more ambitious than the elementary prose of the journalist'.¹⁵

Q.D.Leavis inquired into the causes of this change in reading capacity to find why the twentieth century reader - 'whose ancestors have been competent readers of Sterne and Nashe'¹⁶ - no longer exhibited the same degree of mental attentiveness or 'athleticism'. The blame was found to lie in the prevailing cultural environment:

The training of the reader who spends his leisure in cinemas, looking through magazines and newspapers, listening to jazz music, does not merely fail to help him, it prevents him from normal development . . . partly by providing him with a set of habits inimical to mental effort. . . . We have no practice in making the effort necessary to master a work that presents some surface difficulty or offers no immediate payment.¹⁷

14. Ibid pp 220-21.

15. Ibid p 222.

16. Ibid p 223.

17. Ibid pp 224: 226.

Such reading activity as is still pursued has the aim not of self-advancement and the acquisition of knowledge, but of escape: Leavis's final chapter is entitled 'Living at the novelist's expense'. In the pre-industrial and immediately post-industrial ages - 'as long as the Puritan tradition survived' - the working classes¹⁸ read 'to qualify themselves to live to more purpose'. In the modern period, major changes in the social environment - in working conditions, in the nature of printed matter (books and the press¹⁹), in the kind of alternative amusements available - had undermined this ambition. The widespread commercialisation of literary production meant 'reading' had become an antithetical activity to what it had been in the past: 'It is only a world run by Big Business that has produced a civilisation whose workers must have recourse to substitute living'.²⁰ Q.D. Leavis's central argument was augmented by a profusion of detail and a series of complex analyses, critical and historical, of novels, novelists and readers. Fiction and the Reading Public gave F.R. Leavis initial material and additional support for his assertion of the fact of 'cultural crisis' and its potential significance. It provided him with a model for the practice of a diagnostic analysis of the present combined with a comparative historical inquiry.

18. ' . . . the journeyman, peasants, and tradesmen . . .'
Ibid p 206.

19. 'Northcliffe's interference with reading habits alone has effectively put literature out of the reach of the average man'.
Ibid. p 224.

20. Ibid pp 206-7.

The present condition of contemporary culture can only be determined by a comparison with the perceived condition of culture in the past. Historical analysis is rarely objective or unbiased since the selection of material relevant to the particular argument will be determined by the ideological bias germane to the rationale that saw the argument as initially significant. When the prevailing line of the rationale is towards a comparative critique, the observations on the past will be attuned to the tenor of the criticism that is to be made on the present. The analysis of the past and the diagnosis of the present are not discrete activities. In the same way that the 'diagnostic' and the 'remedial' aspects of the Leavises' discourse were reciprocally related, so are the two elements of the historical comparison. The ideological predisposition that governs the selection of historical materials and the light in which they are projected has its source in the underlying set of values that are pre-existent to the main analysis; these are the values that, by creating the ideological bias, organise the comparative critique along its specific lines.

It was F.R. Leavis's contention that the consequences of the industrial revolution had interposed a disruptive effect in the process of 'normal' historical development; his concern was 'for continuity'. Continuity between the past and the present, and the present and the future, guaranteed the vitality of the culture because transmission of cultural values is dependent on the language employed in their expression and that language must adapt idiomatically to its successive historical contexts.

Upon [the] minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past: they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition. Upon them depend the implicit standards that order the finer living of an age, the sense that this is worth more than that, this rather than that is the direction in which to go. . . . In their keeping . . . is the language, the changing idiom, upon which fine living depends, and without which distinction of spirit is thwarted and incoherent. By 'culture' I mean the use of such a language.²¹

Since 'culture' scarcely exists without language, this can be seen as a highly refined definition of 'culture'. Even so, narrowing of the focus to 'language' facilitated Leavis in his exposition of the paramouncy of cultural values, their transmission and preservation, and the 'breach in continuity' that threatened their existence.

The minority was a conscious élite, guardians of the cultural heritage which was embodied in the idiom of the language at its highest pitch of excellence, in its literary manifestations. The crisis that Leavis perceived was not merely the dwindling numbers of the minority so much as the collapse of its influence on the contemporary culture. This is where F.R. Leavis's pamphlet made its closest connections with Fiction and the Reading Public. The reader capable of profiting from To the Lighthouse belonged implicitly to the minority because the operation of the industrial culture had excluded the 'common reader' from these forms of heightened expression. 'Mass production and standardisation' were

21. For Continuity p 15.

invariably accompanied, for example in the Press, by 'a process of levelling-down'²². The cinema and broadcasting were 'passive' forms of entertainment not calculated to stimulate 'active re-creation'²³. Contemporary civilisation was characterised by the 'deliberate exploitation of the cheap response'²⁴. These factors all contributed to the alienation of the minority from any serious influence on standards and meant that 'the living subtlety of the finest idiom', as embodied in literature, was becoming the exclusive property of the minority. If, then, the 'idiom' was in the preserve of an élite impotent to exert an influence on the prevailing culture, what was to be the fate of the 'cultural heritage'?

The immediate prospect was 'a breach in continuity', a loss of contact with the values of the past. The 'machine . . . has brought about change in habit and the circumstances of life at a rate for which we have no parallel'.²⁵ The nature of the current historical period - 'the modern phase of human history' - was unique in this respect, the Spenglerian theory of 'inexorable cycles' failing to account for this major shift in the pace of historical change. Leavis saw this rate of change as 'catastrophic' and painted a bleak picture of current events: 'the generations find it hard to adjust themselves to each other, and parents are helpless to deal with

22. Ibid p 18.

23. Ibid p 21.

24. Ibid p 22.

25. Ibid p 16.

their children'²⁶. The advent of the 'machine age' both contributed to the loss of potency of the minority and simultaneously made its function more crucial. The problem Leavis faced was how to escape this dilemma.

In one sense, Leavis's diagnosis was idealist and atavistic. It proposed a version of the past in which the relations between society and culture had attained a status in which there was no separation between the literature that embodied 'the finest idiom' and the general 'reading public': the literary tradition was 'in living relation with a real culture, shared by the people at large'²⁷. This ideal past was captured by Leavis in the concept of the 'organic community', representing an ordering of social and cultural relations that served as a positive contrast to the present situation. The present had been arrived at by a process of gradual decay: the emergence of an advanced industrial society in England had induced an irresistible state of disintegration in those relations. The old rural order ('a national culture rooted in the soil'²⁸) was gradually supplanted by a suburban, mechanical organisation and a population disorientated by the traumatic interruptions of 'constant rapid change'²⁹. In this context, 'improvisation' is forced to replace 'the mature, inherited codes of habit and

26. Ibid p 17.

27. "'Under Which King, Bezonian?'" For Continuity p 165.

28. 'Joyce and "the revolution of the word"'. For Continuity p 216.

29. Ibid p 218.

valuation'³⁰. The relation between 'tradition' and 'culture' is thereby undermined. The commercialisation of literary production³¹ actively discouraged the mental habits necessary for resistance to the prevailing disintegration - it immunised the reading public against challenges, originating with the minority, to its complacent acceptance of the second-rate.³² Of these elements, one was generated in the process of change in the material structure of industrial society; the other deliberately exploited the changes thus engendered. They both contributed to the 'loss of the organic community' and threatened a 'breach in continuity'.³³

Whether or not the 'organic community' ever actually existed

30. 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', For Continuity p 17.

31. 'Book Clubs . . . are instruments not for improving taste but for standardising it at the middlebrow level, thus preventing the natural progression of taste that in the later eighteenth century, for instance, was assisted.'

Fiction and the Reading Public p 229.

Cf. 'The Supply of Reading Matter' in Leavis & Thompson, Culture and Environment (1933) pp 38-45.

32. Cf. Q.D.Leavis: ' [the popular novels of the age] substitute an emotional code which . . . is actually inferior to the traditional code of the illiterate and which helps to make a social atmosphere unfavourable to the aspirations of the minority. They actually get in the way of genuine feeling and responsible thinking by creating cheap mechanical responses and by throwing their weight on the side of social, national, and herd prejudices.'

Fiction and the Reading Public p 74.

Cf. Chris Baldick, The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932 (1983) for a discussion of the sources for Q.D.Leavis's concept of the 'herd'.

33. Cf. 'The Loss of the Organic Community' in Culture and Environment pp 93-98.

in the form outlined by Leavis, or whether positive gains in the material condition of human life have been made with the advancement of the sciences, or whether evidence can be made available to show that a yearning for a lost 'golden age' is manifested in every historical period, are not the relevant criticisms to be levelled at the Leavises' version of the past. The idealism and atavism of their historical analysis reside in specific areas of the critical discourse. The social and cultural relations that were said to have existed in the pre-industrial age was a system of relations that can only properly be said to exist in the terminology of Leavis's exposition. The idealist tendency of this exposition derived from the circumstances that generated it. The diagnosis of present conditions could only be given a qualitative substance by setting it in the context of a comparative analysis. It was evident that radical change was manifested in the 'modern phase of human history': what was not so obvious was that the change was necessarily for the worse, that industrial advance should be equated automatically with cultural decline. It was the burden of Leavis's historical exposition to demonstrate that this equation should be made. Hence the earlier phases of human history were presented as embodying a structure of social and cultural relations that was 'ideal', in a relative and an absolute sense. It was ideal relative to the present because of the forms of literature that were produced (eg. Pilgrim's Progress (1678)) and the reading capacity of the society that made such literature popular and of central significance to the consciousness of the age, its culture, where "culture" 'is a sense of relative value and a memory - such wisdom as constitutes

the residuum of the general experience'.³⁴ It was ideal in an absolute sense because of the way this structure of relations operated to perpetuate and transmit 'the living subtlety of the finest idiom' and because to live in 'a homogeneous culture is to move among signals of limited variety, illustrating one predominant ethos, grammar and idiom . . . and to acquire discrimination as one moves'.³⁵ So the old rural order, the 'organic community', was the 'ideal' order and one which had been supervened by the mechanical industrial society. Industrialism was incapable of attending to the problems and needs of the 'culture' and the 'cultural heritage'. This incapacity manifested in the loss of potency of the minority, the 'decay of the common reader'³⁶ and the threat to cultural continuity, the transmission of 'inherited codes of habit and valuation'. Industrialisation must be interpreted therefore as a process of decline, a crisis involving loss, the negation of positive values and the disruption of consciousness.

The 'organic community' was an ideal that operated as an essential component in the Leavises' discourse on the contemporary cultural crisis and as such it cannot be read as an analysis of historical fact. The atavistic tendency of the analysis took a narrow form, in the sense that what was stipulated was not a reversion to the

34. 'The Literary Mind', For Continuity p 64.

35. How to Teach Reading: a Primer for Ezra Pound (1932) p 3.

36. Ibid pp 3-4.

pre-industrial agrarian code,³⁷ but to a cultural formation that was capable of existing outside the prevailing social order, resistant to its corruptive influence. The solution offered to the 'up-rooting' of the 'national culture' was not to attempt to replant it in alien soil, but to pursue the dislocation to its logical extreme, to develop a culture that was permanently and consciously 'root-less'.

The diagnostic analysis had these historical and social forms; it also concentrated attention in the field of literary criticism. The polemical guise of much of Leavis's early articles for Scrutiny was the result of his responses to various items in the current of critical discussion that he saw as symptomatic in particular ways of the general process of decline. This polemicism was where the diagnostic approach had its concrete formation. The direction of this polemic is indicated in the attitudes to the material Leavis undertook to review. An author's work was described as 'too naive and muddled in its complacent philistinism to be seriously discussed' but the author did 'indeed witness most impressively to the decay of literary culture'.³⁸ In another case, a book was described as

37. 'We must realise that there can be no mere going back: it is useless to think of emulating the Erewhonians and scrapping the machine in the hope of restoring the old order. Even if agriculture were revived, that would not bring back the organic community'.

Culture and Environment p 96.

38. 'The Literary Mind', For Continuity p 47.

'a document of unusual interest' because 'its badness is an essential part of its documentary value'.³⁹ Desmond MacCarthy, a 'journalist-middleman of cultivated talk', at least testified to the existence of a 'cultivated milieu', but his interest for Leavis lay in his 'lonely eminence': 'in a healthy state we should have at least twenty journalist-critics of his quality',⁴⁰ but they do not exist. 'What's Wrong With Criticism?' continued with detailed attacks on the Royal Society, the English Association and the BBC.⁴¹ Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture had pointed to the inadequacies of contemporary literary journals (a theme which recurred in the 'manifesto' for Scrutiny).⁴² The comments, ironies and polemical attacks of Leavis's literary reviewing were all designed to enforce the same claim: that the 'literary tradition' had 'dissolved':

the centre - Arnold's "centre of intelligent and urbane spirit", which, in spite of his complaints [sic]. we can see by comparison to have existed in his day - has vanished. Instead we have the Book Society Ltd., recommending "worthwhile" books with the psychological resources of modern publicity.⁴³

39. 'Arnold Bennett: American Version' [review of Dorothy Dudley, Dreiser and the Land of the Free (1933)] For Continuity p 97.

40. 'What's Wrong With Criticism?', For Continuity p 77.

41. See For Continuity pp 78-88

42. Ibid p 32.

43. Ibid p 77.

Leavis's interest in John Dos Passos (1897-1970) 'an unusually serious artist' - developed out of his perception that this writer related his individuals 'to the society and civilisation that make the individual life possible'.⁴⁴ But the problems of industrialism that Nineteen-nineteen (1932) deals with also lead to the 'artistic shortcomings' of the novel, which cannot be excused on the grounds of 'propaganda' - the claim that the weaknesses 'are necessary to a work that exhibits the decay of capitalist society'. Dos Passos's proposed solution - 'revolution' - is also inadequate: it 'shows nothing like an adequate awareness of - or concern for - what has been lost'.⁴⁵ Again, in a résumé of recent poetry magazines, Leavis found that they showed 'that there is not in any serious sense a public for poetry' and 'the absence of such a public is the most conclusive evidence of the absence of an effective contemporary sensibility'.⁴⁶

Leavis's diagnosis of the main features of contemporary culture, its 'historical' background and its present form, had its reflection in these more specific commentaries on particular details of the 'literary tradition'. These comments were intended to substantiate the claim that the modern movements of civilisation were organised against the interests of this tradition by illustrating the symp-

44. 'John Dos Passos'. review of Manhattan Transfer (1924). The 42nd Parallel (1930), Nineteen-nineteen (1932). For Continuity pp 102-3.

45. Ibid pp 105-7.

46. 'This Poetical Renaissance', For Continuity pp 191, 194.

omatic effects that the dissolution of the tradition had had on contemporary literary manifestations. The criticism, the fiction, the poetry of the age were disabled from a high intellectual or artistic attainment as a result of the advance of literary commercialism and the obstruction of the transmission of 'inherited codes of habit and valuation' that had been brought about by expanding industrialism. Evidence in literary terms for the decline in cultural values that had been foreshadowed in the reduction of 'reading capacity' and the supervention of the values of 'community' by the commercial ethic was presented by F.R.Leavis in these reviews and articles. The generalised social and historical commentary had its specific concrete counterpart in this detailed literary critical survey.

Leavis's diagnosis was far-reaching and its conclusions were extreme. The problem for the Leavises was not confined to establishing the historical comparison and revealing the contemporary cultural condition. There was the further difficulty presented by the fact that with the increasing insularity of the minority went the disappearance of 'an educated public' and the 'abeyance' of the function of criticism. In such circumstances, 'it becomes impossible even to get the plight recognised'.⁴⁷ This problem provided another motive for the polemical effort of these early writings. The Leavises were determined to mount a full-scale campaign of enlighten-

47. Ibid pp 71-72

ment about, and resistance to, these potentially disastrous elements in industrial civilisation. In the context of the diagnosis of such an extreme condition,⁴⁸ the remedial resources available to the Leavises and their colleagues that would be capable of halting a collapse into a Spenglerian fatalism would of necessity partake of a commensurate extremity: the nature of the case dictated radical treatment.

Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture ended on a last-minute, optimistic upward note, but it was more in the nature of an appeal to attitudes than a formulated plan:

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48. 'The prospects of culture, then, are very dark. There is the less room for hope in that a standardised civilisation is rapidly enveloping the whole world. . . . It is vain to resist the triumph of the machine. It is equally vain to console us with the promise of a "mass culture" that shall be utterly new. It would, no doubt, be possible to argue that such a "mass culture" might be better than the culture we are losing, but it would be futile: the "utterly new" surrenders everything that can interest us'.

'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', For Continuity pp 44-45.

The pessimistic tone of the pamphlet was sustained virtually to the final paragraph. This imbalance of detail between the diagnostic and the remedial elements in Leavis is not wholly compensated for in writings that followed the pamphlet. This is, in part, due to the fact that the diagnosis deals with the present and the past and remedy projects an adjusted present (adjusted by the remedial interventions) into the future, where faith and optimism take the place of detail. But this effect is also exacerbated by the fact that Leavis's remedial proposals have their ultimate sanction only in the realm of abstract values.

Ridiculous, priggish and presumptuous as it may be, if we care at all about the issues we cannot help believing that, for the immediate future, at any rate, we have some responsibility. 49

Q.D.Leavis outlined the direction that a remedial programme ought to take and her conclusion to Fiction and the Reading Public was emphatic - 'All that can be done, it must be realised, must take the form of resistance by an armed and conscious minority',⁵⁰ - and was concerned with details. The minority thus constituted would be active on two fronts: that of education and that of the organisation of a 'public' and the dissemination of ideas that could be achieved by a periodical and a 'non-commercial Press'. The educational effort would be directed towards research: 'a fully documented presentment of the history of the reading public' would be 'essential' to expand the awareness of the changes that have taken and are taking place; and, in schools and universities, it would be directed towards cultivating a resistance to 'such appeals as those made by the journalist, the middleman, the bestseller, the cinema and advertising' since 'some education of this kind is an essential part of the training of taste'.⁵¹ The periodical and

49. For Continuity p 46.

50. Fiction and the Reading Public p 270.

51. Ibid pp 270-71.

the Press⁵² would be looked to by the minority 'to register and sum up progress, to assist in creating awareness, and to provide organisation'.⁵³

The practicality of these proposals is less important than the spirit in which they were presented, as revealed in Q.D.Leavis's outline and in the 'manifesto' in the first number of Scrutiny in 1932. F.R.Leavis was not an official member of the editorial board⁵⁴ but the phraseology and tone of the 'manifesto' reveal his influence. Denys Thompson and F.R.Leavis collaborated to produce Culture and Environment: the training of critical awareness (1933), which used material that overlapped with that of Fiction and the Reading Public and was designed as a teaching aid for use in schools and universities.⁵⁵ F.R.Leavis also edited a collection of essays and reviews from The Calendar of Modern Letters - the journal which served as a model and a caution to the editors of Scrutiny - called Towards Standards of Criticism (1933). In all these writings the same essential theme was apparent: this theme was characterised by the complete conviction of the fact of prevailing 'crisis' and a sense of urgency regarding the necessity for action: and an equally un-

52. Gordon Fraser's Minority Press was established in 1930, 'publishing pamphlets [including two by F.R.Leavis] which without any publicity have paid their way'.
Ibid p 272.

53. Ibid p 273.

54. The board consisted of L.C.Knights and Donald Culver. Denys Thompson and F.R.Leavis joined for I,3 (Dec. 1932).

55. 'The earlier the age at which the kind of work [this book] deals with is begun the better; but all its topics are capable of a subtlety and a depth of development demanding the maturest approach.'
'Uses for which this book is intended'. Culture and Environment p vii.

shakeable belief that it was only in the field of literary criticism that the problems could be forced into recognition and the remedial programme instigated: 'Scrutiny . . . will be seriously preoccupied with the movement of modern civilisation'.⁵⁶

This preoccupation was what had been at the heart of the Leavises' diagnostic concerns in the years preceding the establishment of Scrutiny. The question now was to do with maintaining the diagnostic habit and engaging in a critical practice that performed in a way that potentiated the acts of 'resistance by an armed and conscious minority' to the dominant forms of cultural expression. There was in existence a minority who perceived the 'necessary relationship between the quality of the individual's response to art and his general fitness for a humane existence', but they were 'scattered and unorganised'.⁵⁷ This was a state of affairs that Scrutiny aimed to remedy:

A review is necessary that combines criticism of literature with criticism of extra-literary activities. We take it as axiomatic that concern for standards of living implies concern for standards in the arts.⁵⁸

The practice of literary criticism was the activity that would generate and sustain all the remedial priorities concerning education.

56. 'Manifesto', Scrutiny I, 1 (1932) p 3.

57. Ibid p 5.

58. Ibid p 2.

the organisation of the minority and the assertion of values and standards antithetical to the current commercial-industrial order. The practice of literary criticism - conducted according to the stipulations and conditions insisted on by Leavis - should contain within itself all the implicit values that were necessary to these acts of 'resistance' and assertion. There was to be no reference to a higher evaluative sanction: literary criticism was the intellectual process that was capable of recovering a previous system of cultural relations to set against the depredations of the industrial code.

This programme was a radical version of the function of criticism in more than one sense. It was an extension of the Arnoldian concept of criticism into the sphere of active political struggle. Moreover, it was also radical in its refusal to adopt any larger or more abstract system of values to which 'literary criticism' could be referred: on the contrary, 'literary criticism' constituted the whole field of reference. F.R. Leavis asserted this autonomy in a rejection of the claims of the Anglo-Catholic creed or of Marxism to answer to the needs of contemporary culture. The key elements are Leavis's definition of the practice of criticism and the inescapable emergence of terms of value that were essential components of that criticism. These terms had their ultimate definition only in the realm of the abstract that Leavis was determined to avoid: this was the unavoidable paradox of the function of criticism in Leavis's interpretation.

T.S. Eliot's criticism in the period following his conversion to Anglicanism (1927) provoked an ambiguous response in Leavis, since Eliot had

been a major influence in Leavis's early career and was still to exercise that influence over his criticism of poetry. Yet, from the point of view of discharging responsibilities in the world of concrete problems, of attacking the dominant cultural forms, Eliot had, in Leavis's view, defaulted. The orthodoxy of the Anglo-Catholic creed which Eliot had adopted militated against the possibility of asserting practical critical values against the general drift into decline and discontinuity. Revealingly, Leavis was sympathetic to the moral aspect: 'the recovery of religious sanctions in some form seems necessary to the health of the world'. But he found that in the practical sphere of constructive action the Anglo-Catholic creed did not involve 'an effective attitude towards the problems. The impressive statement, in the abstract, of a coherent position is not enough'.⁵⁹ The evidence for the inadequacies of the orthodox creed was found by Leavis in the Criterion, which showed 'no signs of coming any nearer than before to effective particularity', and it was a matter of 'general regret that the name of the Criterion has become so dismal an irony and that the Editor is so far from applying to his contributors the standards we have learnt from him'.⁶⁰

59. '"Under Which King, Bezonian?"', For Continuity p 173.

60. Ibid p 174. See also : '[The Criterion's] high price, a certain tendency to substitute solemnity for seriousness, and, during the last two years, a narrowing of its interests, prevent it from influencing more than a small proportion of the reading public. It is necessary, but not the unum necessarium'.

'Manifesto', Scrutiny I, 1 p 3n.

This dissatisfaction with Eliot's orthodoxy was in essence a rejection on Leavis's part of the process whereby any system of beliefs that aims to make 'values' operative in the actual social world, in the realm of active social relations, must have access to a set of referents that are not contingent upon the changing circumstances of the everyday, but which have an applicability that is absolute; the relativism of quotidian, temporary ad hoc valuations limits their efficacy. However much Leavis protested against the operation of this process, it was inescapable if the proposed system of values was to have a real effect. Leavis's predominant concern was with making an effective intervention in the contemporary cultural order and so his attention was concentrated primarily in the arena of concrete action. His intention was to create an intellectual subversion of the prevailing conditions by nurturing an enclave (the minority) that would resist the prevailing currencies and disseminate an alternative cultural attitude. Q.D. Leavis had discussed the educational priority as being one of cultivating a resistance to the appeals of the commercial world⁶¹ and this general habit of

61. See p 15 above. L.C. Knights's later formulation represented the educational principle: 'It is precisely by unfitting his pupils for the environment . . . that the educator can hope to change it, and to change it more radically than if he concentrates on "political" issues only'.

'The Modern Universities: a Post-script', Scrutiny VII, 1 (June 1938) p 3.

In other words, it was only by concentrating on the whole social/cultural formation, rather than inculcating a specific theoretical political radicalism, that qualitative change could be effected. Focusing on particular 'political issues' implied a concession to the permanence of the status of the prevailing social order.

of active political struggle permeated the Scrutiny enterprise. If 'use of language' is the final measure of the state of culture, and is dependent upon the economic and social order, then an attack on the social-economic order must proceed by attending to the use of language.⁶² This concentration of attention involved gaining recognition of the current habits of linguistic usage and their significance, as well as a campaign to improve and expand that usage through the encouragement of the production and reception of literary work: these were the responsibilities of practical literary criticism.

Leavis was not immune to the problems that existed outside the literary sphere of society: 'Of course the economic maladjustments, inequities and oppressions demand direct attention and demand it urgently, and of course there is a sense in which economic problems are prior'.⁶³ The question was how to tackle these problems without simply fulfilling the 'cultural process of capitalism'.⁶⁴ Scrutiny,

62. 'It is only by acquiring access to good poetry, great drama, and the best novels, the forms of art that, since they achieve their effects through language, most readily improve the quality of living, that the atmosphere in which we live may be oxygenated'.

Fiction and the Reading Public p 211.

63. 'Marxism and Cultural Continuity', For Continuity p 6. See also: 'A serious interest in literature cannot be merely literary; indeed not only must the seriousness involve, it is likely to derive from, a perception of - which must be a preoccupation with - the problems of social equity and order and cultural health'.

'Introduction', Determinations (ed. Leavis)(1933) p 2.

64. 'Marxism and Cultural Continuity', For Continuity p 6.

Leavis said, did not demand an apolitical stance from its supporters nor did it prohibit them from seeing 'some kind of communism as the solution of the economic problem'.⁶⁵

However:

to identify Scrutiny with a social, economic or political creed or platform would be to compromise and impede its special function. This, in its bearing on the challenge now in view, has already been glossed by: "the free play of intelligence on the underlying issues".⁶⁶

An alternative challenge in the field of major social and economic change came from Marxism, which claimed to be as radical and revolutionary in its political analysis and its vision of future possibilities as Scrutiny was. Leavis rejected the claims of Marxism to two grounds: first, that the dialectic of its analysis interfered with "the free play of intelligence upon the underlying issues": and second, that by failing to rise above the social and economic system it could only assist in its consummation at a material level: the 'culture', as represented by language - 'the finest idiom' - was unassimilable into the Marxian analysis and therefore remained untouched by it. The 'radicalism' of Marxism resided, in Leavis's view, in the narrow area of

65. "'Under Which King, Bezonian?'" , For Continuity p 6.

66. Ibid pp 160-61.

of the declaration of the claims of the proletariat:⁶⁷ as a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the large matters of the 'cultural crisis' this radicalism was limited by Marxism's fundamental materialism.

The function of literary criticism as a means to active political struggle depended on the definition of the literary criticism that undertook these responsibilities. Leavis's definition was plainly stated: 'To be concerned, as Scrutiny is, for literary criticism is to be vigilant and scrupulous about the relation between words and the concrete'.⁶⁸ This principle was more fully defined and demonstrated in Leavis's criticism of poetry. It reflects once more a determined avoidance of an abstract terminology of judgement. In the first instances of critical appraisal, at the level of linguistic and metrical analysis and comparative evaluation, Leavis was determined to stick as closely as possible to the actual poetic material. Therefore, any commentary thus generated has the advantage of being more convincingly provable, by reference to the actual words and phrases of the poetry. Complex questions are raised, however, when it comes to legitimising judgements of value in the broader extra-literary plane, away from exact comments on particular texts. As Leavis saw it, these judgements could not be valid at

67. The humanitarian impulse of this aspect of Marxism was undermined by its emergence in the practical sphere as incitement to Class War, which ultimately could only be 'effective, if at all, in precipitating some Fascist coup d'état, with the attendant advance of brutalisation'.

Ibid p 12.

68. Ibid p 171.

the general level without some previous response having been generated at the level of the particular:

where judgement is in question, the criterion is, what are the standards? The values of intelligence, tradition and orthodox Christianity?⁶⁹ But judgement is not a matter of abstractions; it involves particular immediate acts of choice, and these do not advance the business of judgement in any serious sense unless there has been a real and appropriate responsiveness to the thing offered. Without a free and delicate receptivity to fresh experience, whatever the criterion alleged, there is no judging, but merely negation.⁷⁰

Leavis's complaint against Marxism was that its attitude to literature militated against this kind of responsiveness. This form of approach was visible in the vocabulary of Marxist criticism. This, Leavis said, was a vocabulary that escaped definition in its eagerness to enforce the ideological points; and its judgements discriminated not along lines of artistic achievement but of ideological persuasion. Dmitri Mirsky and Edmund Wilson were deprecated by Leavis for writing about 'les valeurs vivants [qui] sont du côté de la classe ouvrière',⁷¹ because 'values' is irretrievably vague

69. Leavis was replying to criticism of Scrutiny that stated that, in contrast to the Criterion, the journal was 'uncommitted' (the reviewer complained that no marked preference was shown for either Lawrence or Eliot). See The New English Weekly January 5 1933.

70. 'Restatement for Critics - (editorial)', For Continuity p 177.

71. See For Continuity p 169. Mirsky's essay, 'T.S.Eliot et la fin de la poésie bourgeoise', appeared in Échanges (Paris) (Dec. 1931).

in meaning; and for acceding to such collocations as "Dostoevsky, Cervantes, Defoe, E.E. Cummings, . . ."72 which is self-condemning. Leavis rejected the attempt to realise a Marxian analysis in the field of creative art because, distracted by the requirements of its radical ideology and political bias, it failed to produce either an adequate critical vocabulary or a respectable capacity for making discriminations of value:

the Marxist dialectic, with its appearance of algebraic rigour, stern realism and contemptuous practicality, has great advantages - in dialectic - over those who are pusillanimous enough to let themselves be bothered by the duty and difficulty of using words precisely. The rigour, of course, is illusory, and, consequently, so are the realism and the practicality.73

A further reason that Leavis elaborated for dissenting from the Marxist analysis had to do with its relentless materialism. By concentrating on the 'Class War' - the resolution of fundamental inequities in the modes and relations of production and contradictions in the distribution of labour and wealth - Marxism, as an egalitarian political doctrine, was itself contributing to the greater expansion of the capitalist economy. 'Mass-production' and 'standardisation', though erosive of the cultural tradition, have nevertheless facilitated the eradication of 'the cultural

72. Ibid p 170. (Wilson's comments appeared in the New Statesman and Nation Autumn Books Supp. (Oct. 15 1932) p v-vi.

73. Ibid pp 168-69.



differences between the "classes": it has made it 'inessential'. The differences that persist are largely 'financial', and superficial rather than systemic. To propose solutions of the present crisis in terms of 'class war' consummates the capitalist process and renders class relations in terms of commodities, productivity and labour. The elimination of inequalities at a material level predicates the wider availability of those commodities and the greater control of the individual over his labour, which must in turn guarantee the expansion of productivity to meet the demands of the growth in consumption. The machinery of the capitalist economy is thus expanded and developed: 'the work of capitalism, the cheap car, the wireless, the cinema',⁷⁴ is thus completed.

Leavis rejected 'the dogma of the priority of economic conditions' as representing a 'hostility towards the function represented by Scrutiny'.⁷⁵ It was only by escaping from the confines of the mechanics of economic relations that a real assault could be made on those elements of contemporary culture that were responsible for the prevailing 'crisis'. The development of a critical practice that was capable of performing the tasks that Leavis set it could only be achieved 'outside' the general cultural structure. This 'outside' was represented by an attitude, a search for an independence and an orientation which were 'hostile' to the dominant order. This hostility was represented in Leavis's criticism, which extended its perceptions of qualitative differences in art into a discussion

74. Ibid p 172.

75. Ibid p 162.

of the 'symptomatic' implications of those judgements. The principle of diagnosis itself implies a distancing from the thing diagnosed, an approach to the organism that is sick undertaken by one that is healthy, that exists separately and in isolation from its subject. The problems of the contemporary cultural crisis could not be attacked from within: the dominant values and the diminished authority of the minority - the group capable of seeing through the surface valuations to their underlying significance - meant that it was difficult even to gain recognition amongst an influential proportion of people that the problems existed. The 'minority', the 'function of criticism', both had to be set apart from the main system of values and relations to assert a separate and autonomous system capable of generating a criticism which was immune to the corruptive influence of the commercial-industrial order. Only by means of this radical alienation was it possible for the function of criticism as Leavis perceived it to operate, uncontaminated by the pressures of the profit motive or anti-*élitist* populism. It was necessary to develop a culture 'independent of any economic, technical or social system as none has been before'.⁷⁶ 'a rootless culture' that, in its isolation from the commercial-industrial environment, could sustain genuine creative achievement.

The crux of Leavis's conception of the function of criticism lies in this expansion from observations on the particular text to extra-literary judgements of value. The practical criticism was based on a simple principle: 'to be vigilant and scrupulous

76. For Continuity p 168.

about the relation between words and the concrete'.⁷⁷ But on what basis did Leavis universalise judgements made at this level into a critique that was capable of involving a system of values which represented a fundamental antithesis to that of the prevailing cultural ethos? On what grounds did the literary criticism extend itself into an essentially supra-literary discourse on morality and ideology? For Leavis, criticism and art were alike in having parallel responsibilities for the 'contemporary sensibility': each had an equal part in the approach to 'those conditions which it rests with the poet and the critic to modify':⁷⁸ 'Criticism, when it performs its function, not merely expresses and defines the "contemporary sensibility"; it helps to form it'.⁷⁹ If criticism was performing this function from a position 'outside', detached from, the main system of social relations and values (which it sees as antipathetic), the difficulty was to establish a set of referents capable of validating the judgements of value either at the level of a close textual analysis or a generalised extra-literary discourse. 'Criticism' for Leavis was not a passive activity wholly dependent on the priority of art for its existence: it had an active, interventionist function. It interposed itself between text and reader, in a manner that involved the exploration of an independent system of values not subordinate to the contingent demands of the individual text but which sought in its intervention in each creative work confirmation or substantiation of its own

77. Ibid p 171.

78. New Bearings in English Poetry (1932) p 7.

79. 'Restatement for Critics', For Continuity p 183.

established literary and human values. Such an approach denies the passive subordination of criticism, insisting that the critical act inevitably involves the reflection of prior values: it is in the nature of reading. What Leavis did was to make this normal reader/text relation conscious, by means of a set of referents consisting of Leavis's a priori values, existing in an extra-literary realm, 'outside' the prevailing system of cultural values. The substance of this set of referents resided entirely in its terms of value, since in its isolation from the social-economic environment anything more concrete was prohibited, the values of the dominant order having been undermined by the commercial ethos. Leavis believed that collaborative debate would engender the sense of 'value':

Out of agreement and disagreement with particular judgements, of value a sense of relative value in the concrete will define itself, and, without this, no amount of talk about "values" in the abstract is worth anything.⁸⁰

Yet this 'sense of relative value in the concrete' must establish itself in isolation from the prevailing cultural order, as a 'rootless culture' is developed in opposition to it. This meant that the judgements of value were necessarily dependent on a set of essentially abstract terms of value which could lay claim to no definitive relations with 'the concrete'. In the following analyses of Leavis's discussion of poetry and his development of the idea of 'the great tradition' this dependency will be seen to manifest itself as a

80. Ibid p 184.

reliance upon a vocabulary of value-terms ('intelligence', 'sincerity') and a structure of concepts ('tradition', 'morality') which had no essential or objectifiable significance except that generated by the dependence of Leavis's discourse upon them. These 'terms of value' will gradually be seen to become fundamental to Leavis's critical discourse: they developed inevitably out of the formulation of a remedial programme capable of answering to the demands implicit in the Leavises' social and cultural diagnosis.

2. The Criticism of Poetry (1932-43)

1. 'Poetry and the Modern World': the influence of T.S.Eliot

The critical and poetic example of T.S.Eliot is at the centre of Leavis's discussion of modern poetry. In New Bearings in English Poetry Leavis confronted the problem of literature and its place in a culture that was in a state of disintegration and decline. The sociology of the 'present crisis' outlined above was to be applied to the present condition of modern poetry. The pessimism of Leavis's account of contemporary society was also manifested in his impressions of modern poetry - 'Poetry matters little to the modern world'(5)¹ - but was similarly modified by a determination to find evidence of possibilities for arresting the decline and changing the prevailing order. The main witness to the potential of poetry to persist in a mass technology society was Eliot. In New Bearings in English Poetry Leavis intended to assert Eliot's pre-eminent significance in the context of current poetic achievement and thus to develop and establish a 'revised tradition' of the English poetry that was more than a simple escape from the problems of contemporary life. In the process of elaborating these ideas Leavis discovered a vocabulary of critical terms and an emerging sense of the past history of English poetry that was to be expanded in Revaluation. (1936)

1. Figures in parentheses refer to page numbers in New Bearings in English Poetry (1932)

Leavis adapted and expanded Eliot's ideas in a manner that is not as straightforward as has been supposed. R.P. Bilan, describing Leavis's borrowings from Eliot, makes the following paraphrase of a passage in Leavis: 'Leavis describes nineteenth century poetry as pre-occupied with the creation of a dream-world and acknowledges that it was Eliot who had pointed this out in Homage to John Dryden'.² The passage in New Bearings in English Poetry is as follows:

There is something further to be noted of the 'poetical' in the nineteenth century. It comes out if one considers these half-dozen poems: La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Mariana, The Lady of Shalott, The Blessed Damozel, Morris's The Nymph's Song to Hylas, A Forsaken Garden, O'Shaughnessy's Ode. Nineteenth century poetry, we realised, was characteristically preoccupied with the creation of a dream-world.(10)

This is supplemented by a footnote which states that 'Eliot has pointed this out in Homage to John Dryden'. Significantly, Leavis developed the point as if from a perusal of the named poems, acknowledging his source only tangentially, rather than using the formulation, in the main text, 'As Eliot has shown . . . ' It appears that Leavis was reluctant to allow Eliot full credit for the observation. Furthermore, Eliot's comments on the 'dream-world' in nineteenth century poetry were made with characteristic brevity and with little substantiating evidence (Eliot refers to Morris's 'day-dreamy feeling'):

2. Bilan, R.P., The Literary Criticism of F.R.Leavis (Cambridge 1979) p. 87.

The effort to construct a dream-world, which alters English poetry so greatly in the nineteenth century, a dream-world utterly different from the visionary realities of the Vita Nuova or of the poetry of Dante's contemporaries, is a problem of which various explanations may no doubt be found; in any case, the result makes a poet of the nineteenth century, of the same size as Marvell, a more trivial and less serious figure.³

Whatever the 'explanations' might be, Eliot clearly was not much interested in them. His comment was characteristically unelaborated, suggestive rather than constituting an interpretation of literary history; it was opinion elevated to assertion for the purposes of the argument, with no ancillary evidence to support it. This fact perhaps explains why Leavis consigned his reference to Eliot to a footnote. The supporting evidence was provided by Leavis. He provided the list of examples and investigated the question with a practical analysis of specific poetry which aimed to demonstrate the validity of Eliot's suggestion.

Leavis's 'indebtedness'⁴ to Eliot was manifested typically in this way. However, the process does not end with Leavis simply finding evidence to support Eliot's propositions. The suggestions and ideas were developed and expanded and Leavis's original perceptions regarding the relationship between literature and society, and his considerations on the current social and political climate, provided the means for

3. 'Andrew Marvell', Selected Essays (1951) p 301.

4. See the preface to New Bearings in English Poetry: 'This book . . . is largely an acknowledgement to a certain critic and poet'.(1)

Leavis to extend his criticism away from any servile adherence to Eliot's view. Leavis recreated Eliot's arguments in a wider context with the intention of establishing therein positions of his own.

The process was one of synthesis. In a key passage in this first chapter ('Poetry and the modern world'), Leavis used Eliot's dictum regarding the conventions of a clichéd vocabulary of nineteenth century poetry alongside I.A.Richards's notion of the identity of the poet as one who exhibits the most significant expressive capacity of anyone of his generation. Richards described the poet of significant achievement as a representative organic sport out of, the main body of the collective consciousness of society: 'he is the point at which the growth of the mind shows itself. His experiences, those at least which give value to his work, represent conciliations of impulses which in most minds are still confused, intertrammelled and conflicting'.⁵ A similar idea occurred in Eliot: 'When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary'.⁶ Leavis acceded to these conceptual generalities - 'the poet', and 'the growth of the mind', where 'the mind' indicates a vague sense of the collective cultural awareness of the rest of society: 'Poetry matters because of the kind of poet who is more alive than other people, more alive in his own age. He is, as it

5. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (1925): the first sentence of this passage is quoted by Leavis, p 16.

6. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', Selected Essays (1951) p 287: cf. Coleridge: ' . . . a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order.' Biographia Literaria . II, XIV.

were at the most conscious point of the race in his time.'(13) The formulations were altogether too loose to be of specific practical value. Yet it was this lack of definition that appealed to Leavis. Eliot was concerned with understanding the 'mechanism of sensibility' that produced the poetry of Donne, Marvell and the Metaphysicals. This sensibility, 'which could devour any kind of experience',⁷ had diminished in its powers of aggregation as language and sensibility were gradually 'dissociated'. This, again, as Eliot himself acknowledged,⁸ was an insight that he did not analyse very closely and one that supplied the minimum of assistance in the effort to understand even the obvious changes in English poetry since the seventeenth century. Richards, on the other hand, was dealing with the problems of 'Art and Morals',⁹ of defining 'a morality which will explain . . . the place and value of the arts in human affairs.'¹⁰ The artist, preoccupied with 'minute particulars of response and attitude', was thus better placed to make judgements of value, 'since the fine conduct of life springs only from fine ordering of responses far too subtle to be touched by any general ethical maxims.'¹¹ Richards and Eliot were applying the general terms ('the poet', 'the mind') of their respective conceptions of poetry in specific ways, to augment the particular thesis they each proposed. The cogency of their terms was transient and dependent upon the particular context.

7. Eliot loc. cit. p 287.

8. '. . . this brief exposition of a theory - too brief, perhaps, to carry conviction.' loc. cit. p 288.

9. 'Art and Morals' is the heading of the chapter in which this discussion takes place in Principles of Literary Criticism.

10. Principles of Literary Criticism, p 58.

11. Richards, loc. cit. pp 61-62.

Leavis, however, attempted to fashion a concrete critical principle out of the raw material of this loosely defined vocabulary of concepts. The difference with his development of the concepts is first that he elicited from them a putative theoretical principle, rather than leaving them as ideas dependent on a contingent discursive logic; and secondly that he combined this theoretical position with his polemical thesis regarding the 'present crisis'. For Leavis,

the potentialities of human experience in any age are realised only by a tiny minority, and the important poet is important because he belongs to this (and he has also, of course, the power of communication). Indeed, his capacity for experiencing and his power of communicating are indistinguishable; not merely because we should not know of the one without the other, but because his power of making words express what he feels is indistinguishable from his awareness of what he feels. He is unusually sensitive, unusually aware, more sincere and more himself than the ordinary man can be.(13)

These are straightforward assertions comparable to those of Richards and Eliot. Large claims are made, in an appropriately impressive language and the impressiveness is substituted for detailed argument. Leavis followed the same line as his predecessors in insisting on the expressionist doctrine that makes the poet incapable of knowing his experiences if he cannot describe or express them: 'his power of making words express what he feels is indistinguishable from his awareness of what he feels'. This was an extension of themes in Richards and Eliot into a more comprehensive and schematic proposal. Both Richards and Eliot were more circumspect and speculative regarding the problem. Richards from a neurophysiological point of view, Eliot in the position of analysing the creative experience of which he had

first-hand knowledge (Richards posited this as a reason for the poet's reluctance to discuss at length the act of writing). Richards's idea was that 'a large part of the distinctive features of the mind are due to its being an instrument for communication. An experience has to be formed, no doubt, before it is communicated, but it takes the form it does because it may have to be communicated'.¹² This was not presented as a definitive statement of the relationship between experience and communication, but was an attempt to arrive at a useful description of the relationship that was based on a 'scientific' principle. Richards everywhere tried to avoid, in his analysis of 'value', terminology that was essentially indefinable, such as 'beauty'. He made no analogies between 'communicative efficacy' and aesthetic achievement¹³ and he aimed throughout at an empirical investigation: 'The two pillars upon which a theory of criticism must rest are an account of value and an account of communication'.¹⁴

Eliot, likewise, did not aim at definitive statements; he implied the expressionist doctrine to the extent of saying that the metaphysical poets 'were, at best, engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling'.¹⁵ Eliot may represent one of Richards's imagined poets, one of those artists 'who

12. Ibid. p 25.

13. 'I am not going to identify "beauty" with "communicative efficacy". This is a trap which it is easy to fall into. Principles of Literary Criticism, p 28n.

14. Ibid. p 25.

15. 'The Metaphysical Poets', Selected Essays p 289.

both knew what to do with a work of art and also understood what they were doing, [and who] have been for the most part . . . little inclined for, or capable of, the rather special task of explaining. It may have seemed to them too obvious to need explanation'.¹⁶ However, it is more likely that Eliot is the exception to this generality. His involvement with and understanding of Bradleian aesthetics produced in him a reluctance for statements or declarations of principle in the realm of aesthetics. Eliot referred to 'Bradley's polemical irony and his zest in using it, his habit of discomfiting an opponent with a sudden profession of ignorance, of inability to understand, or of incapacity for abstruse thought . . .'¹⁷ Leavis, in contrast, was concerned to elevate his critical responses into statements of aesthetic principle.

In common with Richards and Eliot he decribed the poet as an individual of unique and unusual abilities. Eliot saw this uniqueness in the poet's capacity for experiential assimilation and organisation:

When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constant-

16. Richards, loc. cit. p 31.

17. 'Francis Herbert Bradley', Selected Essays (1951), pp 444-5.

Cf. Kenner's comment: 'What Eliot's readers have frequently taken for a mood, The Waste Land tone, . . . is actually Bradley's deeply-thought-out metaphysical scepticism . . . Eliot's strategy . . . employs the ironic intimation that other and more ardently active people have not been brought to this realisation, of how principles invoked in the press of practical disputation thereby turn into slogans, losing what little integrity they have, that of standpoints in an evasive whole of perception, and how one must therefore defend practical judgements by reference to one's impressions alone'.

Hugh Kenner, The Invisible Poet (1960) p 41.

ly amalgamating disparate experience: . . . in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes'.¹⁸ Leavis's description, however, involved an abstract terminology of the emotions, a terminology that was essentially indefinable and yet contained a compressed amount of evaluative meaning: the poet, for Leavis, 'is unusually sensitive, unusually aware, more sincere and more himself than the ordinary man can be'.⁽¹³⁾ This vocabulary, 'sensitive', 'aware', 'sincere', indicated a private, incommunicable sense of the nature of the poet and the conditions of poetic creativity. Leavis did not attempt a definition of his terms; he aimed to make them self-defining by virtue of their context. This procedure is not the same as that practised by Eliot in his criticism, but it is apparent that Leavis borrowed from Eliot not only suggestive ideas but a general tone of discursive authority with which to assert his 'practical judgements'. Nevertheless, while the intention was the same - to employ a critical 'voice' imbued with an authoritativeness that would divert the reader's attention away from seeing how purely private and how little 'practical' these judgements were - the method was not. Kenner noted that 'Eliot has repeatedly evaded quibbles concerning his more abstrusely-based positions by claiming amateur status and incapacity for pursuing the abstruse', and has remarked 'the disarmingly hesitant and fragmentary way in which he makes a point or expresses a conviction'.¹⁹ There is nothing disarming or hesitant in Leavis's declarations. The polemical aims of the book resulted in a tone of voice that hectors and asserts rather than persuades or argues. The

18. 'The Metaphysical Poets'. Selected Essays, p 289.

19. Kenner, op. cit. p 88.

authority to which Leavis implicitly appealed was one that derived from the social polemic which was in the background of the study and which provided Leavis with the inspiration for the justification of his sense of unequivocal rightness, the sense that 'this must be so'.

Leavis's insistence on the unassailability of his position was the corollary to his insistence on the importance of the social and political dimension of criticism's function. This is an emphasis that sorts ill with his elevation of Eliot to a key position and one which led Leavis into an ambiguous position. In a passage that indicates the confusing and occasionally contradictory impulses that were behind the book, Leavis referred back to this social and political dimension. The above-quoted ascription of emotional qualities to the 'ideal poet' is followed by a proviso that is something of a non sequitur in the local context but which refers back to the opening paragraph of the chapter:

But if the poetry and the intelligence of the age lose touch with each other, poetry will cease to matter much, and the age will be lacking in finer awareness. What this last prognostication means it is perhaps impossible to bring home to anyone who is not already convinced of the importance of poetry.(14)

This is slightly confusing. The loss of contact here contemplated as potentially imminent ('this . . . prognostication') had previously been declared a contemporary fact ('very little of contemporary intelligence concerns itself with poetry'(5)). Leavis's social pessimism had been modified by the preceding idealist description of the latent

powers of the 'important poet': he was uncertain as to how far advanced the present crisis was, his bleaker forebodings having been modified by the poetic achievement of Eliot. The synthesis of the political and the social with the literary critical had the effect of concentrating Leavis's attention on both the poetry and the criticism of Eliot. This focusing of attention provided evidence in support of a more optimistic attitude and a basis - in terms of both ideas and 'tone of voice' - from which to open the discussion of the contemporary state of affairs.

The adaptation involved certain difficulties. Eliot's critical 'voice' was calculated to be effective in a given context of brief studies of various topics which did not pretend to be comprehensive or systematic. Leavis's borrowings from Eliot typically entailed the development and elaboration of hints and suggestions into more extended analyses that did imply both comprehensiveness and system. A problem resided in the question of the extent to which the tone of assertive authority could be sustained in the more detailed discussion; whether it tends not to deteriorate into mere stridency and artifice, or if it could indeed retain the integrity of its premises. An ancillary problem, relating to New Bearings in English Poetry in particular but which has wider implications, concerns Leavis's use of Eliot's poetic example as a means of finding a way to understanding modern poetry in general. Professor Bilan, in making a claim for Leavis's 'originality' in the book, says that in 'attempting to establish Eliot as the central modern poet, . . . Leavis obviously could not depend on Eliot the critic'.²⁰ In fact, exactly the opposite

20. Bilan, op. cit. p 88.

is the case: Eliot was the one key Leavis had for understanding Eliot and 'establishing' him; and it was through Eliot that Leavis found a way of formulating an understanding of the new movements in poetry and revising the conventional estimates.

The development of Leavis's awareness of the central significance of Eliot's poetry and criticism was a gradual process. The ideas that were eventually clarified and systematised in New Bearings in English Poetry were the culmination of impressions first adumbrated in the early reviews and articles for the Cambridge Review and The Bookman. The influence of T.S.Eliot over these writings was even more emphatic in some respects than in the later study, where Eliot's ideas have been mediated more noticeably through Leavis's critical judgement. In the earlier material, it is possible to trace the initial ideas that were eventually brought to fulfilment in the later book.

Many of the phrases and paragraphs that later appeared in the first chapter of New Bearings in English Poetry were originally published as part of an article in the Cambridge Review that defended Eliot against hostile criticism that had appeared in the New Statesman.²¹

21. 'T.S.Eliot - a Reply to the Condescending', Cambridge Review, 8.2.29: This reply was prompted by a review of Eliot's For Lancelot Andrewes ('For T.S.Eliot') in the New Statesman, 29.12.28. This review, which was unsigned, was by R. Ellis Roberts and it described Eliot's book as 'a pleasant little volume of essays written by a man who is evidently fond of reading'.

Leavis acknowledged for the first time his debt to Eliot, though he wrote as the spokesman for an unspecified group - 'those of us who are aware of our debt to Mr. Eliot have learnt not to be too provoked by this kind of condescension' - which gave the commendation of a little-known reviewer greater force than it might otherwise have had and which indicates the self-image that Leavis had of this group as a heterodox enclave promoting the new poetic revolution. The claims that were later made for Eliot were first made in this article: that 'poetry tends recurrently to confine itself by conventions of "the poetic"'; that Eliot has 'solved' the problem 'and so done more than solve the problem for himself' (the problem being how to write poetry under the present conditions), concurrently re-establishing the seventeenth century in the English tradition ('If no serious critic or poet now supposes that English poetry in the future must, or can, develop along the line running from the Romantics through Tennyson, this is mainly due to Mr. Eliot.');

and that Eliot 'never forgets that poetry is made of words.' More significantly, Leavis was at pains to identify Eliot as the source for all that he saw as valuable in contemporary poetry and criticism. He claimed that whilst gathering material for a lecture series on modern poetry he himself had 'found that the helpful review or critique almost always showed the influence of Homage to John Dryden'; and furthermore that the influence extended to Leavis's own critical practice: 'Mr. Eliot represents for us the essentially critical . . . for no-one has set forth our justifying ideas so clearly and cogently.' The idea that this kind of criticism - heterodox and challenging - required 'justifying' again indicates that Leavis interpreted his position as being minority and unconventional - and essentially so.

In ensuing articles and reviews, Leavis worked from Eliot's example. A review of Cambridge Poetry 1929²² made the same point regarding 'the preoccupations of "the poetic" coming down from the last century' and saw Eliot as the principal agent for the change that had led to the abandonment of those preconceptions. (Hopkins is also said to have had some effect.) In a later article on 'The Influence of Donne on Modern Poetry',²³ the pre-eminence of the seventeenth century was asserted ('Those who are seriously interested . . . in modern poetry (I might almost say in poetry at all) feel themselves closer to the seventeenth century than to the nineteenth') and Donne's importance was argued for by comparison with Eliot. The latter aimed at defeating the nineteenth century "poetic" conventions in order to reassert 'the tradition established by Donne [in which] it was assumed that a poet should be a man of distinguished intelligence.' The two were said to be alike 'in exhibiting a complex sensibility.' Later still, an article entitled 'This Age in Literary Criticism'²⁴ made the same claims for Eliot as a critic: he was 'the first to see what the present problems of poetry were.'²⁵

22. 'Cambridge Poetry', Cambridge Review, 1.3.29. p 317-8.

23. The Bookman, LXXXII, March 1931, pp 346-7.

24. The Bookman, LXXXIII, October 1932, pp 8-9.

25. Leavis in this article also acknowledged the work of I.A.Richards: 'His unquestionable achievement . . . has been to provide the critic with an incomparably better apparatus of analysis than existed before.' In the article 'The Influence of Donne on Modern Poetry' there occurred the following phrases: 'Poetry matters because of the kind of poet who is more alive than other people - more alive in his own age' and 'the potentialities of human experience in any age are only realised by a tiny minority, and the poet is important because he belongs to this.' Both owe much to Richards, but it is clear that while Eliot's influence was paramount in Leavis's early development, Richards's was peripheral and ancillary, providing the occasional phrase or general insight but not a whole system of critical practice.

well: it aimed to establish the critical and poetic discoveries of Eliot as the basis for contemporary critical practice and poetic ambition. The question is: what are the consequences of the application of an homogeneous critical method to such disparate material? and secondly, to what extent has the style, or tone, of Eliot's critical discourse been modified and constructively applied by Leavis in the course of his own argument?

With regard to the 'situation at the end of the war', Leavis discussed Yeats at length. He also made briefer comments on Hardy, de la Mare, Edward Thomas and Edmund Blunden, who were seen as at once interesting in a minor way and 'representative' in their lack of serious significance. Leavis saw Yeats's peculiar interest as a matter partly of his place in history (his origins were in the late nineteenth century but he was also witness to modern upheavals) and partly his nationality: his Irishness gave 'his dream-world . . . an external validation'(34) in that his myths and symbols were part of a known cultural heritage still extant. Leavis argued, and so more concretely appreciable than, say, William Morris's day-dreams and their 'exquisite aesthetic etiolation'.(34) The result was that while the poetry was clearly in the conventional 'day-dream' tradition of the Victorian period, it was unusually aware of its situation and thus expressed overtly the conflict of the age between a tendency to oneiric escapism and a recognition of the prevailing forces of disintegration.²⁷ Yeats

27. This was a conflict that Tennyson, according to Leavis, could not reconcile, although he made the attempt: '[The Victorians] clearly could not take the day-dream habit seriously, though to cut free from the accompanying conventions and techniques would not be so easy as one might think. . . . Tennyson did his best. But, in spite of a great deal of allusion to scientific ideas . . . his intellectual interests . . . have little to do with his successful poetry, which answers to the account of "the poetical" given above.'(14-15)

combined 'a fresh unliterary spontaneity', derived from his Irish identity, with 'a recognition, implicit in the shifting, cloudy un-seizableness of the imagery, that this "reality" must be illusory'.(37) The result is that the poetry was 'more subtle and more vital than any pure product of Victorian Romanticism'.(38)

The discussion of Yeats was highly selective. Leavis referred specifically to three volumes of Yeats's poetry, The Wind Among the Reeds (1899), The Green Helmet (1912) and The Tower (1928). After demonstrating the poet's equivocal relationship with his Victorian origins, Leavis analysed what he saw as the most significant development in the poetry, the move from the 'dreamy, hypnotic' verse of the early period to that of The Green Helmet, which belongs to the actual waking world and is in the idiom and movement of modern speech'.(42) Leavis saw this as a 'disintoxication' from the day-dream habit that was combined with an irony and a sense of 'disillusionment' because that change had come too late: 'his strength has been wasted, and habit forbids readjustment'.(43) The poetry of The Tower reinforced this impression (Leavis neglected the seven intervening volumes) expressing a 'kind of ripeness in disillusion'.(45)

As a critique of Yeats's poetry this was clearly unsatisfactory. A selective and limited account, it ignored more than it attended to, and the poetry that was discussed was read for examples that answered to a specific thesis regarding Yeats that Leavis was attempting to promote. It was not a comprehensive account of Yeats's poetry but a presentation of Yeats as a representative case, as symptomatic of a general and prevailing condition of English poetry:

What he testifies against is not the poetic tradition, but the general state of civilisation and culture: a state which, he contends, makes waste inevitable for the sensitive. But he implies nothing against holding that if the poetic tradition had been different, as it might very well have been, he might have brought more of himself to expression.(48)

The possible 'difference' in the tradition that Leavis had in mind was one that was related to his description of the changes that manifested in Yeats's later poetry. Leavis found in this poetry something 'rather like seventeenth century "wit"' ²⁸ and he suggested that 'if the poetic tradition of the nineteenth century had been less completely unlike the Metaphysical tradition Mr. Yeats might have spent less of his power outside poetry' (44) ²⁹ Yeats's significance for Leavis was limited and singular, in that it 'illustrates the special disability of the poet in the last century, and impressively bears out my argument about the poetic tradition.' (50)

28. Leavis quoted the following stanza as an example of this "wit":

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
 Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;
 Solider Aristotle played the taws
 Upon the bottom of a king of kings:
 World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras
 Fingered upon a fiddle stick or strings
 What a star sang and careless Muses heard:
 Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

'Among School-children', ll 41-48.

29. 'His poetry is little more than a marginal comment on the main activities of his life.' (47)

'Argument' is a loose definition of Leavis's actual procedure. He outlined the narrow premises of appraisal, based on Eliot's model, and indicated how Yeats failed to match these specifications. This method is not the same as proving an 'argument' by reference to a prevailing consensus of poetic standards. Leavis's problem was that there was no consensus relating to modern poetry and that in asserting his heterodox opinions he made himself vulnerable to the accusation of excessive concentration on too fixed a standard of poetic achievement. Leavis was concerned with analysing the present difficulties as he saw them and proposing remedies according to the model provided by Eliot. Leavis's social analysis was combined in the literary sphere with Eliot's reappraisal of the seventeenth century tradition and the application of new poetic techniques derived from it to twentieth century problems. Consequently, the poetry of Yeats was secondary to these main objectives and therefore became the subject of a superficial and selective critique. The nature of the approach to Yeats indicates the narrow premises and intentions that characterised the general strategy of the whole study.

This impression is further enforced by the terms with which Leavis dealt with other minor poets of the post-war era. De la Mare's poetry is seen as 'a poetry of withdrawal'(52) in a nineteenth century sense. Hardy was 'a Victorian in his very pessimism which implies positives and assurances that have vanished' (57) who developed a style that was effective for his own purposes: 'but there was little in his technique that could be taken up by younger poets, and developed in the

solution of their own problems.' (58).³⁰ The 'Georgians' (particularly Rupert Brooke) and the 'academics' were dismissed as lacking in originality, for finding no way out of the present difficulties. Edmund Blunden and Edward Thomas received more favourable attention, though again they were both seen as representative cases. Blunden's 'meditative pastoral' escape from memories of the war could not be sustained in the modern context, which is why Leavis found it 'interesting'. (67-8) Thomas 'was a very original poet who devoted great technical subtlety to the expression of a distinctively modern sensibility.' (69) Yet Thomas's awareness of the 'modern disintegration, the sense of directionlessness . . . implies limitations' (72) and his achievement did not displace the 'debilitated nineteenth century

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30. '[Eliot] has solved his own problem as a poet, and so done more than solve the problem for himself.' (25)

Leavis's analysis of Hardy borrows substantially from that of Richards's in Science and Poetry (1926; chapter VIII, pp 68-83). Leavis pointed out six poems of Hardy's for particular attention - After a Journey, The Voice, The Self-Unseeing, A Broken Appointment, Neutral Tones and During Wind and Rain - the first four of which are also cited in Richards's book (p 69). Richards said that 'it is in the contemplation of death that the necessity for human attitudes, in the face of an indifferent universe, to become self-supporting is felt most poignantly.' (70) Leavis wrote that Hardy's poems 'are particularly evocations of utter loss, the blindness of chance, the poignancy of love and its helplessness, and the cruelty of time.' (61) Leavis acknowledged the usefulness of Richards's book (see 52n and 57), although not at every point where the borrowings are overt. The same applies with the acknowledgement of Richards's help with regard to Eliot. Leavis quoted the suggestion regarding the 'musical' organisation of The Waste Land (95) that had appeared in Appendix B of Principles of Literary Criticism (2nd edition, 1928), yet neglected to recognise the same appendix as the source for his comment that Eliot's allusions have the effect of 'compression'. (107) See Principles of Literary Criticism, Appendix B: 'Allusion in Mr. Eliot's hands is a technical device for compression.' (p 232)

tradition.'(73) This last point was no more than an expression of a private opinion that Eliot's poetry represented a decisive break with tradition, while Thomas's did not: the evidence offered in support of this contention was minimal and was contained within the boundaries set by Leavis, boundaries which were again drawn from Eliot's example.

A key sentence in the midst of the discussion reveals the singular source for Leavis's considerations. He described the 'environment of the modern poet' in terms taken precisely from Eliot:

Urban conditions, a sophisticated civilisation, rapid change, and the mingling of cultures have destroyed the old rhythms and habits, and nothing adequate has taken their place.(61)

'Urban conditions, a sophisticated civilisation . . . and the mingling of cultures' are the major themes of The Waste Land. ('Rapid change' refers to Leavis's social polimic.³¹) Leavis utilised Eliot's proposals regarding the outmoded post-Victorian poetic vocabulary and the model for new poetic forms that could be found in the Metaphysical and seventeenth century tradition; but he also combined the tangible

31. 'The machine . . . has brought about change in habit and the circumstances of life at a rate for which we have no parallel . . . It is a breach in continuity that threatens: what has been advertently dropped may be irrecoverable or forgotten.'

'Mass Civilisation and the Minority Culture', in For Continuity, pp 16-17.

elements of Eliot's poetical vision with his own social and political discourse. The categories quoted above are identical with those perceivable in The Waste Land, and Leavis so commingled all the elements that have been described that the criticism and the poetry become almost indistinguishable. The critical observations are simultaneously applied to the poetry as they find their source in it, with the result that the poetry and the criticism appear interdependent, neither being necessarily prior.³² Of The Waste Land Leavis wrote:

What is the significance of the modern Waste Land?, The answer may be read in what appears as the rich dis-organization of the poem. This seeming disjointedness is intimately related to the erudition . . . and to the wealth of literary borrowings and allusions. These characteristics reflect the present state of civilisation. The traditions and cultures have mingled, and the historical imagination makes the past contemporary. (90-91) ;

Leavis's argument was that Eliot had made the decisive 'break' with 'the nineteenth century tradition' (75) with 'Prufrock' and 'Portrait of a Lady', wherein 'the canons of the poetical are forgotten'. He thus produced a poetry that 'expresses freely a modern sensibility . . . of one fully alive in his own age.' (76) This claim summarised points made previously and brought from Eliot ('the canons of the

32. Leavis saw an equivalence between the two activities, regarding neither as necessarily prior. The opening chapter discussed the problems confronting literature in the modern world. 'those conditions which it rests with the poet and critic to modify - those which are their immediate concern.' (7) (Emphasis added)

poetical') and Richards ('one fully alive in his own age'). Leavis went on to discuss 'Gerontion', where he saw 'the likeness in Mr. Eliot's verse to mature Elizabethan dramatic verse'(80), thus expanding on Eliot's own predisposition towards the earlier English tradition.

In his discussion of The Waste Land Leavis continued to follow a critical method based on Eliot's example. 'Gerontion', Leavis said, had 'the impersonality of great poetry'(83), and 'impersonality' in The Waste Land similarly defines 'the mode of consciousness to which [the poem] belongs.'(93) Leavis used Eliot's notes to the poem to support his own critical appreciation, so that the ascription by Eliot of significance to the figure of Tiresias ('What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem'³³) was used by Leavis to substantiate his own assertion that the poem represents 'an effort to focus an inclusive human consciousness.'(95) Leavis's criticism was a matter of exposition rather than close textual analysis, a matter of setting out explanatory observations rather than developing a detailed critical inquiry.

The whole approach of New Bearings in English Poetry was designed to place Eliot at the centre of an account of contemporary poetry that was determined to assert that poet's primary influence in the establishment of 'new bearings'. Therefore, Leavis's social diagnosis was subordinated to this prior ambition. Leavis saw the minority appeal of The Waste Land as being not historically unique ('how large in

33. The Waste Land. l 215n.

any age has the minority been that has really comprehended the masterpieces?'); and the poem's difficulty as symptomatic of the present crisis. The poem therefore had 'limitations in self-sufficiency' in that it is dependent on the existence of a literate minority for its own existence and validity. Leavis might have concluded from this that Eliot's poetry paradoxically represents simultaneously with a radical criticism of the 'modern world' in its spiritual aspects, a vested interest in maintaining the status quo of minority appreciation so that the poetry might still be read. Eliot's poetry, whilst reflecting on the current plight, actually militates against any kind of recuperation of cultural 'integration' that would undermine this necessary relationship between poet and reader. However, Leavis's conclusions are the opposite, which indicates how the absolute centrality of Eliot to his critical practice clouded Leavis's social perspective and led him into an ambiguous position. Leavis argued that the allusions, though marked by the occasional weakness because of excessive obscurity,³⁴ were nevertheless, for Leavis, generally 'justified in the appeal they make to special knowledge'.(106) The 'limitations [are] inherent in the conditions that produced [the poem]'(113) but the poem, by its appeal to the minority, reinforces those conditions. This reciprocation Leavis chose to ignore. Leavis's extra-literary social and political position was one of committed involvement ('if we care at all about the issues we cannot help believing that,

34. Of the end of 'The Fire Sermon' Leavis said that 'no amount of reading of the Confessions or Buddhism in Translation will give these few words the kind of presence of "eastern and western ascetism" that seems necessary to the poem: they remain, these words, mere pointers to something outside.'(105)

for the immediate future, at any rate, we have some responsibility. . . . It is for us to be as aware as possible of what is happening.'³⁵⁾ but this was compromised by his assertion of Eliot's pre-eminence. The comment that the 'special knowledge' required by The Waste Land 'can fairly be held to be common to the public that would in any case read modern poetry'(104-4) represents a dilution of that political engagement, in so far as the phrase 'in any case' indicates a mode of resignation alien to the prevailing demand in his writings for positive action in response to the present 'state of culture'.

Leavis's concentration on Eliot's predominance thus fundamentally affected his social and political position. It had a similar effect on his literary evaluations. Clearly, the essays dealing with Pound and Hopkins in New Bearings in English Poetry were concerned primarily to account for those poets according to Eliot's model of poetic practice. The commendations were derived directly from Leavis's criticism of Eliot. Leavis was not writing from an independent point of view, but as a critic measuring these poets' achievements against that of the poet from whom he has taken his standard of appreciation. That this 'indebtedness' had a limiting effect is shown by the fact that Leavis's own ideas were obscured and even undermined by Eliot's. As a result, Leavis's criticisms of Pound and Hopkins were limited and unoriginal. The critical language employed by Leavis was almost entirely dependent on Eliot's example for its meaning.

35. For Continuity, p 40.

Pound, Leavis argued, produced in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley 'a representative experience of life: . . . throughout there is a subtlety of tone, a complexity of attitude, such as we associate with seventeenth century wit'.(141) 'His technical skill is . . . a matter of bringing to precise definition a mature and complex sensibility.' (143) Leavis's rejection of the importance of The Cantos explicitly referred to Eliot: they dealt with 'the contemporary plight', but 'to compel significant art out of that plight needed the seriousness, the spiritual and moral intensity, and the resolute intelligence that are behind The Waste Land .' (156) Hopkins, similarly, expressed poetically qualities that were epitomised by and made most effective in Eliot's poetry. He was, according to Leavis, 'one of the most remarkable technical innovators who ever wrote';(159) his use of the English language 'contrasts him with Milton and associates him with Shakespeare' (169): and 'a technique so much concerned with inner division, friction, and psychological complexities in general has a special bearing on the problems of contemporary poetry.'(193) These phrases - 'inner division, friction. . . . psychological subtleties' - take their meaning in this context entirely from Leavis's discussion of Eliot's poetry. Leavis's claim for the reader's acceptance of them as useful descriptive and evaluative terms depends on a reference back to Leavis's claims for The Waste Land. Leavis practised a highly involuted critical method, never distancing himself from the argument in order to give the terminology objective definition and greater force.

It is necessary to speculate as to what degree of insight into the achievements of these two poets Leavis would have obtained had it not been for Eliot, the Eliot who had 'solved the problem, and

so done more than solve it for himself'. Pound and Hopkins would not be so clearly associable as poets - because of their differences, both historically and poetically - were it not that Leavis's criticism associated them as further examples of poetic possibilities that had been made available by the singular example of Eliot.³⁶ The terminology of Leavis's appreciation was vague and undefined. It achieved its meaning and a local relevance by referring back to Eliot: without this referral, the terms become indistinct, clouded by imprecision and unhelpful in persuading the reader of the value of the poetry under review. The disparate kinds of poetry produced by Pound and Hopkins were forced into this collocation in order to substantiate the account of the situation with regard to poetry, post-Eliot, that Leavis was attempting to enforce. The consequence for Pound's and Hopkins's poetry was that the criticism was correspondingly limited by the narrowness of the viewpoint and, as Leavis later acknowledged in the case of Hopkins,³⁷ exaggerated because of the polemical intentions that lay behind them.

A further difficulty concerns Leavis's judgements on the contemporary poetry of the period leading to 1932. A revealing comment

36. 'It is owing to Mr. Eliot that Pound and Hopkins can be discussed as having the significance here attributed to them, and can be associated with him in terms of a revised tradition.' (196)

37. 'In assenting, half-protestingly, to Mr. Eliot's description of [Hopkins] as a 'nature poet' one is virtually recognising that a significant limitation reveals itself when a poet of so remarkable a spiritual intensity . . . gives nature - the 'nature' of the 'nature poets' - so large a place in his poetry.'

'Gerard Manley Hopkins', The Common Pursuit, (1952) p 53.

occurs in one of Leavis's early articles: 'One may lament that Mr. Eliot no longer devotes himself to literary criticism, but one sees that the development was necessary and waits intently for what he may write next'.³⁸ Criticism of Pound and Hopkins was an activity sanctioned by prevailing circumstances as well as by the internal structure of Leavis's book. Eliot's advocacy of Pound³⁹ was taken by Leavis as a challenge to assert Eliot's primacy and an incentive to establish Pound's effect on the development of the 'new bearings'. Hopkins's poetry was, as the 'retrospect' attests, a matter of controversy. Leavis promoted him with the aim of displacing the scepticism of the conventional view of Hopkins⁴⁰ and 'establishing his existence as a challenging fact, of great significance for any critical view of the immediate past of English poetry'⁴¹ - or, at least, for any critical view organised the way Leavis's was. Hopkins's poetry was, in this respect, less immediately interesting to Leavis than the problem of ensuring that it would be taken seriously. Leavis therefore fitted Hopkins into his (Eliot-centred) conception of modern poetic practice by asserting the essentially 'modernistic' (i.e. Eliot-like) tendency of his 'technical innovation'.

38. 'This Age in Literary Criticism', The Bookman LXXXIII, (October 1932) p 9.

39. Cf. for example Eliot's introduction to Pound's Selected Poems (1928).

40. 'I can testify that well on into the thirties, Professors of Poetry and of English Literature, confident in the support of those whose opinion mattered to them were voicing freely their scorn for anyone who could take Hopkins seriously.'

'Retrospect, 1950'. New Bearings in English Poetry (1950) p 237.

41. Ibid. p 237.

However, when it came to dealing with the new writers of the post-Eliot period, Leavis was on less solid ground. This was the consequence of the over-riding centrality of Eliot as a standard for modern poetic practice, a standard that was confusingly both specific, in the sense that Eliot's poetry existed as a tangible example for others; and vague, in so far as the critical terminology used to describe Eliot's poetry partook of a highly specialised meaning that was difficult to make applicable in general, to other poetry. Leavis wrote that poetry would not 'exhibit modernity by mentioning modern things, the apparatus of modern civilisation, or by being about modern subjects or topics. . . . All that we can fairly ask of the poet is that he shall show himself to have been fully alive in our time. The evidence will be in the very texture of his poetry.'(24) It is impossible to say with any precision what 'fully alive in our time' means, or indicates, or how such a condition is manifested in poetry. Leavis did not define the phrase; he used Eliot's poetry to do so and that was the superimposed standard against which other poetry was to be measured. In arguing that Ronald Bottrall was 'a very considerable poet'(202) it appears that, contrary to the above, it was precisely because 'the apparatus of modern civilisation' featured in his poetry that Bottrall had his significance. There was little more in the stanza quoted by Leavis⁴² that would otherwise qualify

42. See, for example:

Microscopic anatomy of ephemerides,
 Power-house stacks, girder-ribs, provide a crude base;
 But man is what he eats, and they are not bred
 Flesh of our flesh, being unrelated
 Experimentally, fused in no emotive furnace.

This stanza stood as part of the epigraph to the book.

it for attention as a particularly 'modern' piece of writing. Leavis was led by its vocabulary into regarding it as something innovative and original.

Leavis's enthusiasm for Bottrall is revealing. For while in actuality Bottrall's poetry is 'laboriously and eclectically parasitic'⁴³ on Eliot, Leavis found it remarkable because it dealt with the problems that Eliot had dealt with, and in a similar way: 'His world is Mr. Eliot's; a world in which the traditions are bankrupt, the cultures uprooted and withering, and the advance of civilisation seems to mean death to distinction of spirit and fineness of living'.(205) Leavis followed this with a quotation from one of Bottrall's 'best poems' (The Future is not for us) which contains the lines

We can humanise
 We can build new temples for the body,
 Set our intellect to tilt against the spies
 Of fortune, call the Chance or that Gate,
 Estimate the logical worth of 'it may depend . . .',
 Leading out of the path
 Which was to be an Amen having neither beginning nor end.

Leavis overstated the quality of this verse. The resonances from Eliot are manifold and the 'originality' that Leavis found is difficult to point to except to notice the flat conversational tone and vague

43. Leavis discussed the 'young intellectuals . . . being laboriously and eclectically parasitic upon the various phases of Mr. Eliot's poetry'. (197) One who exhibited Eliot's influence was Empson, but he redeemed himself in Leavis's view by having 'learnt a great deal from Donne' in terms of applying intelligence and developing technique; although this was an autodidacticism that had itself been inspired by Eliot's example.

spiritual nostalgia that gives the poetry its peculiar tenor. Yet it is clearly not of the same order as The Waste Land. Leavis's judgement was wrong because it had been suspended in the interest of finding proof of his general thesis: 'Mr. Bottrall's work clinches felicitously the argument of this book, and sanctions the high hopes for the future'. (211) That 'argument' was that a 'revised tradition' had been established by Eliot and that poetry in the future would have to follow a new line of influence (Shakespeare, Donne) rather than the obsolete nineteenth century tradition (Spenser, Milton, Tennyson). Leavis's preoccupation with the polemical impulse of the book - asserting Eliot's pre-eminence - resulted in selective and narrow critiques of the particular poets and, more significantly, began the development of a specialised critical vocabulary. The significance of this can be seen in Revaluation, where Leavis's analysis of the revision in poetic tradition received its logical fulfilment in an approach to the whole canon of English poetry from the seventeenth century onwards. This analysis was based on the same critical standard that Leavis took from Eliot and utilised the vocabulary of evaluation developed in New Bearings in English Poetry.

2. Donne versus Milton, Shelley versus Keats

Revaluation falls broadly into two sections, organised according to the antinomies hinted at in the above heading and centred on the changes that occurred in English poetry with the rise of the Romantic poets. The procedure of the book was complex and involved, a matter

of stating relationships, making comparisons, and eliciting hierarchies. The substance of the argument was concerned with poetry (there was no historical background) and with the outline of a detailed and extensive 'tradition' of English poetry, focused on a study of the major figures and developments. The emphases forced by Leavis were painstaking and exacting and fell in turn into two distinct but related categories. These are not easy to define but can be loosely designated as 'criticism' in the sense of writing that is immediately concerned with analysis of poetry; and 'judgement' which deals with the relations between poetry and other matters, social, cultural, political or moral; and with the hierarchy of literary evaluation: the claim that one poet is 'greater' or more 'representative' than another. This distinction was indicated in Leavis's discussion of 'the problem of method'. It was necessary, he said, 'to work as much as possible in terms of particular analysis, . . . and to say nothing that cannot be related immediately to judgements about producible texts'.⁽²⁻³⁾⁴⁴

This approach was to be carried over into the understanding of 'tradition': 'One deals with the individual poet in terms of representative pieces of his work; one deals with tradition in terms of representative poets'.⁽³⁾ The criticism was therefore dealing with close analysis of particular passages; 'judgement' saw these passages as particularly relevant to an appreciation of the poet, as 'representative', and also placed the poet in a relative scheme of literary value according to how he compared with other poets. To the 'tradition', lesser poets 'bear . . . an illustrative relation'

44. Figures in parentheses refer to page numbers in Revaluation (1936)

and the more important 'represent significant development.' (3) Leavis was involved, in Revaluation, with two concurrent activities. Critical analysis was the first stage, but he was determined to see the criticism borne out on a larger scale, chronologically, and so made contributory to judgements of relative value. It will be seen that the 'important' poets in Leavis's scheme did not in fact in the first instance 'represent significant development' (though they may do so incidentally): they were more often seen (as with the Augustans, for example) as evidence of a sympathetic relationship between the poetic intention and the prevailing moral and aesthetic predispositions of the contemporary culture. Or, as in the case of the Romantic poets, they signify the impossibility of such a relation and the poet's necessary detachment from the prevailing social forces. It was this moral background and its connections with 'society' that, combined with his examination of the nature of poetic language, was Leavis's chief concern in 'revaluing' the history of English poetry.

(i) The 'ideal community' and poetic language.

Leavis's discussion of Donne was highly compressed but contained many insights even in this abbreviated form. The discussion did not cover such issues as the nature of metaphysical imagery or the structure of the conceit, but was specifically concerned with the use of language. The external constraints to poetic form faced by Donne were seen by Leavis as a means to a creative originality:

Donne uses in complete dissociation from music a stanza-form that proclaims the union of poetry and music. The dissociation is positive; utterance, movement, and intonation are those of the talking voice. . . . The exigencies of the pattern become means to the inevitable naturalness.(11-12)

Leavis's phrase for Donne's use of language was 'mimetic flexibility' (14) and this suggested the relationship, which Leavis saw as essential, between form and content. He praised 'Donne's use of the speaking voice and the spoken language' and evoked a comparison with Shakespeare, though this was not elaborated. One of Leavis's examples of 'mimetic flexibility' was

The way in which the stress is got on 'Did', and the intonation controlled, here:

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did till we lov'd?

The verse movement and the language are combined to produce a simultaneous verbal and metrical effect of emphasis on the particular word, an emphasis that gets its force as equally from this semantic and metric pressure as from the particular context, its place in the poem as a whole.

The contrast implicit in this version of the operation of language in poetry was with Milton. The significance of Leavis's criticism

of Milton has been exaggerated.⁴⁵ The chapter, 'Milton's Verse', constituted the application of Leavis's notion of the nature of poetic language to poetry that demonstrably used language in a different way and to other ends than, say, Donne. The argument was not complicated and was based on a comparison of Milton's 'Grand Style' with the relationship that Leavis saw as operating in Donne's poetry between expression and 'the thing expressed'. In Milton's Grand Style, 'commonly the pattern, the stylised gesture and movement, has no particular expressive work to do, but functions by rote, of its own momentum, in the manner of ritual'.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The poetry contains a separation between form and content, between the language and its subject, that inhibits the readers' appreciation. The language, in effect, draws attention too much to itself and the burden that it is attempting to convey is lost in the process - lost, that is, both to the reader and to the poet:

45. 'This essay ['Milton's Verse'] is certainly the most famous in the book and it is perhaps the most controversial essay that Leavis has ever written, provoking a heated debate that still goes on'.

Bilan, *op. cit.* p 90.

If this is the case then the debate or controversy must have been sparked off not by Leavis's argument - which is straightforward enough and reasonably refutable (see, for example, Robert Boyers, F.R. Leavis: Judgement and the Discipline of Thought (1978) pp 10-17) - but by the unceremonious terms with which he affected to dispose of Milton as a relevant influence in the poetic tradition. More probably, the 'heated debate' did not get going until Eliot's 1949 British Academy paper on Milton was interpreted as a renunciation of his earlier position and which prompted Leavis's reply, 'Mr. Eliot and Milton' (Sewanee Review, lvii (1949)), an altogether more polemical approach to the question.

the medium calls pervasively for a kind of attention, compels an attitude towards itself, that is incompatible with sharp, concrete realisation, just as it would seem to be, in the mind of the poet, incompatible with an interest in sensuous particularity. (50)

The significance of Milton's example for the 'English tradition' will be seen later. It was the capacity for 'concrete realisation' that was the crux here. This, for Leavis, was the primary responsibility of a genuinely 'poetic' use of language: that the form should as nearly as possible operate to convey its meaning 'sensuously' and 'concretely' and not merely semantically or symbolically. Where Leavis indicated exceptions to the general rule of Milton's 'sensuous poverty' it was because the 'heavy rhythmic pattern' became suddenly appropriate to the particular subject, as in the "Proserpin gath'ring flow'rs" passage (Paradise Lost, IV, 268ff). There, 'the movement of the verse seems to be the life of the design, performing . . . something of the function of imagery' (63); or it was because in his earlier poetry (eg Comus), Milton was still under the influence of Shakespeare, producing poetry of 'comparative sensuous richness'. (48) Generally, however, Leavis noted the 'extreme and consistent remoteness of Milton's medium from any English that was ever spoken'. (51) It was this fact that set him apart from the seventeenth century and which made him influential over a later development in English poetry.

Leavis's point regarding Donne's use of 'the strength of spoken English' (14) in his poetry was not simply a critical observation relating to the verse. Leavis argued that this usage set Donne at the head of a key development of the Metaphysical tradition. This

aspect of Donne's poetry was associated with the 'Court culture' as represented by Carew and the 'idiomatic naturalness' and 'racy vigour' of Jonson's poetry, which evoked 'an ideal community, conceived of as something with which contemporary life and manners may and should have close relations'.(19) It was this further significance of Donne's poetry that gave him his place in the 'tradition'. It was the notion of an 'ideal community', in its poetic guises, that instigated and sustained the poetic tradition of the seventeenth century. Leavis found this notion represented in Jonson's 'classicism', a term that was applied in The Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse⁴⁶. The development inspired by Jonson was known by Leavis as 'the line of wit', which was a system of relationships between various poets that had first been suggested by Eliot:

The poetry of Donne . . . is late Elizabethan, its feeling often very close to that of Chapman. The 'Courtly' poetry is derivative from Jonson, who borrowed liberally from the Latin; it expires in the next century with the sentimental witticism of Prior. There is finally the devotional verse of Herbert, Vaughan and Crashaw.⁴⁷

While Leavis claimed that in Revaluation he was aiming to resist Eliot's loose generality, to 'do some disengaging and restressing'(24-5),

46. The Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse (ed. H.J.C.Grierson and G.Bullough, Oxford 1934). This was the book under review when this section of Revaluation was being written originally (Scrutiny, V, 3 (1935)). In using the term 'classical', the preface made the collocation 'Jonson, Milton, even Herrick' (p vi), which, Leavis said, indicated that 'there are ways and ways of being classical.'(17)

47. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets'. Selected Essays (1951) p 282.

his study of the seventeenth century was still nevertheless highly derivative, particularly with regard to the wider discussion of the nature of 'metaphysical' poetry, as opposed to the weighing and comparing of various poets.

What Jonson managed in his poetry was a conflation of the 'classical' with the 'idiomatic'; that is, his imitations and translations were an 'effort . . . to feel Catullus, and the others he cultivated, as contemporary with himself.' This was not to say that Jonson merely modernised the classics by rendering them into the vernacular; it was that Jonson aimed 'to achieve an English mode that should express a sense of contemporaneity with them'.⁽¹⁹⁾ Jonson, Leavis argued, was attempting to recover the social sanctions germane to classical poetry in an English idiom. This idiom was 'consciously urbane, mature and civilised,. . . expressive, if to a large degree by aspiration only, of a way of living'.⁽¹⁹⁾ The contemporary relevance of such an idiom was enforced by Jonson's 'native good sense', his Englishness.⁴⁸ It was this conflation of idioms - which gave Jonson's poetry its 'racy vigour' and 'urbane grace'⁽²¹⁻²²⁾ - that 'initiate[d] the tradition, the common heritage, into which a line of later poets could enter'.⁽²⁴⁾ The model of the 'ideal community' thus gave the Caroline poets an implied measure or standard against which they could size their own achievement. It supplied a 'mode' or idiom in which they could combine the different impulses of the 'ideal' - erudite

48. Leavis used Eliot's phrase 'tough reasonableness' ('Marvell', Selected Essays, 1951) to suggest the combination in Jonson of uncompromising commonsense and Latinate erudition.

urbanity and English commonsense - to produce what Eliot described as 'a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace'.⁴⁹

This idiom was the principle common amongst the poets in Leavis's 'line of wit'. The major poets in the line are Donne, Marvell and Pope; among those that bore 'an illustrative relation' to it were Cowley (1618-67) and Carew (1598?-1639?). This notion of the 'ideal community' provided Leavis with a means for making these distinctions and eliciting this hierarchy.⁵⁰ Through it he was able to claim, for example, that Marvell's 'seriousness is the finer wisdom of a ripe civilisation'(28) and allow the phrase to have some contextual meaning, referring back to this idea of the 'ideal community' and what it signified in terms of the aspirations of the Caroline poets. It allowed Leavis to make the major poets, though different in particular ways, associable in terms of what they represented as a 'tradition', or line of development; and it allowed him to make the finer distinctions between poets of apparently similar achievements, such as Cowley and Carew. Leavis considered Carew to be part of this genealogy because of the combination of Augustan and Caroline wit in 'The Inscription on the Tombe of Lady Mary Wentworth'.⁵¹ Cowley's achievement indicated that the poetry had moved into a different

49. Leavis quoted the paragraph from 'Andrew Marvell'.(24)

50. 'The line, then, runs from Ben Jonson (and Donne) through Carew and Marvell to Pope'.(29)

51. 'The conceit in the second stanza is both Jonson and Donne and the third stanza is specifically Metaphysical. After the Augustan passage we come to the Caroline wit of "chaste Polygamy"'. 'Note A' (37-38)

historical era: Cowley's 'Of Wit'

discusses and expounds wit in a manner and spirit quite out of resonance with the metaphysical mode - quite alien and uncongenial to it. . . . It is a spirit of good sense, of common sense, appealing to criteria that the coming age will refine into "Reason, Truth and Nature".(30)

So two poets who had flourished within a few years of each other⁵² were seen to belong to two different schools of poetry. Leavis was able to make the distinction between them because he had refined his idea of what 'wit' and 'metaphysical' meant against this notion of 'ideal community' until he achieved this capacity for discrimination. In that case, and in so far as it allowed for this judging and balancing of conflicting claims and achievements, the fact that the 'ideal community' received no greater substantiation from Leavis than the bare description provided is not a serious handicap. The notion was a vague abstraction of an undefined quality said to be common to the poetry, but it could be an enabling abstraction, providing a means for discriminating amongst a heterogeneous anthology of poetry.

(ii) 'Augustanism' and decline: concrete and ideal moral orders.

Two categories emerged from the discussion of the 'line of wit': the exploitation of the properties of language in poetry to encourage

52. Carew's Poems was published in 1640; Cowley's Miscellanies (which included 'Of Wit') was published in 1656.

'concrete realisation' or 'mimetic flexibility': and the notion of the 'ideal community', where poetry was seen to have been written within an ethos that aspired to predominate over social and moral discriminations. This ethos gave the poets a common literary and moral aesthetic to which to refer. Leavis observed that problems arose when the 'ideal community' was manifested as a potent actuality, when the implicit aspirant virtues became the dominant moral standards of society. How could poetry subsist by appealing to a latent consensus regarding the higher values of 'Reason' and 'Truth' when that consensus had already become a convention? For Leavis, one poet solved this dilemma of eighteenth century poetry; most of the poets of the period failed to do so and thus set in train a process that was still having its effect at the turn of the twentieth century and which produced other problems for another poet to solve.

Leavis argued that Pope, uniquely, transcended the dilemma of Augustanism; his uniqueness was a combination of 'genius' and timing. The essay on Pope was not to be thought of as a full-scale 'reevaluation' but as an attempt 'to suggest coercively the reorientation from which a reevaluation follows'.(69) Leavis felt that in the general revival of interest in seventeenth and early eighteenth century poetry, instigated in part by Eliot's Homage to John Dryden (1921), Pope had somehow been neglected. What was worse, his 'rehabilitation was left to Bloomsbury . . . [and] the post-war cult of the dix-huitième'.(68) It was this comparative neglect that Leavis hoped to remedy.

It was essential therefore that Leavis should establish that Pope had connections extending beyond the conventional estimate of him

as, with Dryden, one of the central figures of Augustan poetry. Leavis claimed in his opening chapter that the 'line of wit' culminated with Pope, and that Pope was part of a line of continuity and not only the archetype of a new poetic development. He bridged the gap between the two traditions and was 'as much the last poet of the seventeenth century as the first of the eighteenth'.⁽⁷¹⁾ Pope combined the Metaphysical with the 'polite'. The greater part of Leavis's discussion of Pope was taken up with the 'Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady'. Leavis found an admixture in this poem of Metaphysical elements and elements of Augustanism and in the whole he saw evidence of a unique reconciling poetic genius. However, this one poem was a narrow area upon which to base a defence of Pope and one that was again conditioned by the limiting objectives of the main argument. Nevertheless, this restrictiveness enabled Leavis to produce a convincing analysis of one aspect of Pope's poetic achievement; but it leaves the uneasy feeling that too much perhaps has been omitted for it to serve as a wholly satisfactory account.

The 'Metaphysical' element in Pope was manifested as 'subtle complexity' in the early part of the poem. Leavis quoted the lines that had previously been quoted by Murry to indicate Pope's Metaphysical aspect.⁵³ The discussion of the poetry was not centred on considerations of language, however; the characteristic that Leavis wanted

53. ' . . . the earlier lines we have quoted from The Unfortunate Lady . . . touch the intensity and psychological revelation of Donne, and have sustained perfection of phrasing that Donne never attained.' Murry, J.M., Countries of the Mind (first series, 1931) p 59.

to emphasise was the interplay of 'disparate tones', of the combination of 'seriousness' with the 'ludicrous' that demanded, 'as essential to the total effect, an accompanying play of the critical intelligence',

(71) For Leavis, a sense of the 'ludicrous' was a distinctive feature of Metaphysical poetry and the 'polite' was a mode characteristic of the eighteenth century. The combination of the two was a mark of originality and Pope's connections with the preceding tradition allowed him to escape the limiting tendency towards the poetic complacency that undermined the writings of the general Augustan period. Paradoxically, the problems of poetry in this period stemmed from the same conditions that provided Pope with the means for producing work of such originality. Leavis saw the Augustan idiom as the result of a correspondence between the implied moral ethos in the poetry and the actual moral standards of contemporary society. Thus, on the one hand, the poet could make reference to such broad abstract concepts as 'Reason' and 'Truth' in the knowledge that the words had a meaning and a significance that was sanctioned by society; and yet, on the other hand, the presentation of such concepts in readily-accepted formulations removed from the poet any responsibility for active inquiry into the nature and meaning of the concepts: 'satire' in these circumstances became less an implicit critique of social mores and more an expression of hostility towards transgressors of the 'social code'.

The correctness of Pope's literary form derives its strength from a social code and a civilisation. The Augustans could be so innocently unaware of the conventional quality of the code - it was 'Reason' and 'Nature' - because they were in complete accord about fundamentals. Politeness was not merely superficial; it was the service of a culture and a civilisation, and the substance and solid bases were so

undeniably there that there was no need to discuss them or to ask what was meant by 'sense'. Augustanism is something narrower, less fine, less subtle, than what Marvell stood for, but it has a corresponding strength of concentration and singlemindedness.(76-77)

What Marvell stood for were 'maturely valued interests' and 'the finer wisdom of a ripe civilisation'.(28) It was under these conditions that Pope was able to produce poetry of such 'poised and subtle variety'(84) and which gave his satire its positive strength:

Ask you what Provocation I have had?
The strong Antipathy of Good to Bad 54

- we may not accept this as suggesting adequately the moral basis of Pope's satire, but it is significant that Pope could offer such an account: his strength as a satirist was that he lived in an age when such an account could be offered.(84)

Pope's uniqueness lay in the complete correspondence of his moral values to those of his society. It was this recognition that found 'concrete realisation' in the poetry,⁵⁵ since Pope's exploitation of the poetic properties of language were very different to Donne's or Marvell's. Typical features are 'intensity' and 'sense of order': the relation of form to content received a different emphasis in Leavis's appreciation of Pope than in his appreciation of Donne. In Donne, the significant strength was 'mimetic flexibility' whereas

54. Pope, Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue II, ll. 197-8.

55. 'Pope's peculiar greatness is that he can be a complete Augustan, realising in his poetry the strength of that actual concentrated civilisation immediately around him.'(33)

in Pope, the singular achievement was continually to express the sense of moral order almost regardless of the subject-matter. Where Donne or Johnson wrote with an abstract vision of an 'ideal community', a sense of the moral norms necessary to human society, Pope wrote against a background in which those moral standards had become actual, forming the basis for order in society as well as for the organisation of the verse. The ideal made real supplied the ultimate moral sanction for poetry: 'The order of Augustan civilisation evokes characteristically in Pope, its poet, when he is moved by the vision of it, a profound sense of it as dependent on and harmonious with an ultimate and inclusive order'.(83-4)

Pope was the archetypal Augustan poet, in so far as he took as his material the morality of his society and responded to it positively and poetically to produce 'what is poetry even by Romantic standards'. (83) His 'technique' was 'the instrument of fine organisation . . . bring [ing] to bear pressures and potencies that can turn intense personal feelings into something else'.(84) The 'community' and its idealist moral values had become concrete and objective. Pope's poetic talents found a place in history that perfectly suited them; yet the necessary entrenchment that this implied, its inherent reactionism, had a deteriorative effect on poetic ambition and achievement in the period: 'the poetic tradition developed unluckily; unluckily in the sense that the prevailing modes and conventions of the eighteenth century did not on the whole tend, as those of the seventeenth century did, to bring into poetry the vitality of the age'.(101) It was only in Pope that the Augustan use of language -for varied satiric effects, in its puns and its use of irony of differing degrees of antagonism

and in the subtlety of its use of the scansion of the heroic couplet⁵⁶ - could be elevated into the genuinely poetic. Lesser writers found the predominance of the 'polite' mode of Augustanism an obstacle to real expression and, as Leavis claimed to demonstrate, the poetry went into a decline. 'Vitality' was not a quality that Leavis could clearly isolate in Pope; the 'vitality of the age' would seem to have resided in the correspondence of the poet's moral ideal to society's moral practice, the manifestation of the 'ideal community'. 'Vitality' therefore lay in satire, irony, 'wit' and 'order' in the poetry. Pope's mastery of the Augustan mode, his complete acceptance of the values of his time and his genuine poetic response to them fixed those values in the poetic tradition; he established an ideal Augustan poetry that represented the central development of the early eighteenth century. For practitioners lacking the capability of a Pope the fixity of the suffusing moral values of society and the abeyance of the poetic-critical reflex towards challenging them inhibited the development of an original and significant art. Poets were either driven out of poetry or resorted to a Miltonic 'meditative-melancholic',⁵⁷

56. 'Above every line of Pope we can imagine a tensely flexible and complex curve, representing the modulation, emphasis and changing tone and tempo of the voice in reading; the curve varying from line to line and the lines playing subtly against one another.' (31)

57. 'Yet the influence of Dryden and Pope over the middle of the eighteenth century is by no means so great, or so noxious, as had been supposed. A good part of the dreariest verse of the time is written under the shadow of Milton'.

Eliot, loc. cit. p 13.

escapist mode of writing, the prototype of the nineteenth century's preoccupation with a 'dream-world' that was 'a by-line from Pope' and yet constituted a main development of the century.⁵⁸

The positive aspects of the Augustan convention still operated: it saved Gray's Elegy from 'the general censure'(106) of Leavis's account of the period. However, only Gray's Elegy and Collins's Ode to Evening gained exemption; on the whole the poetry of the age neither made an advance on the Augustan mode nor 'emancipated' itself from it through the discovery of new techniques.⁵⁹ The relations of culture and society in the period - 'the age was one in which the code of Good Form was in intimate touch with the most serious cultural code'(113) - meant that 'Restoration polite culture . . . had no serious relations with the moral bases of society'.(113) Only Pope demonstrated that the poet, 'using an idiom and forms that insist so on the authoritative reality of the social surface, is not necessarily confined to that surface'.(114) While 'the Augustan concern to be civilised is a concern for human centrality . . . working in the fashionable idiom and conventions, a poet, to achieve the profound in poetry would have to be great indeed . . . to enable him to trans-

58. Blake was the exception: 'his genius was that he saw no choice but to work out a completely and uncompromisingly individual idiom and technique.'(124)

59. This idea had occurred to Eliot: 'In the eighteenth century there are a good many second-rate poets: and mostly they are second-rate because they are incompetent to find a style of writing for themselves, suited to the matter they wanted to talk about and the way in which they apprehended this matter.'

Samuel Johnson, 'London: a poem' and 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' with an introductory essay by T.S.Eliot (1930)

cend his age'.(114) To write in praise of 'the virtues of polite civilisation' was not appealing and hence the resort to 'meditative-Miltonising poetical modes'.(116)

The absence of transcendent moral insight: this was the distinguishing weakness of this poetry, the lack of a sense of something beyond the superficial social values, an orientation that was genuinely meta-physical, displaying an awareness of moral significances that lie beyond the immediate contemporary valuations. Through this awareness the poetry does not simply reflect the social values but places them in a wider moral context. With the manifestations of the 'ideal community' in an actual social ideology, with its consequent fixity of ideals and the resultant complacency of its adherents, an abstract, extra-temporal idealist moral scheme needed to be reasserted in order to recapture the possibilities of a poetic art for an effective 'criticism of life'. The Arnoldian formula was implicit in Leavis's notion of the poet's relations with his age, his insistence on the poet's simultaneous correspondence with the material values and his transcendence of them. By recovering an idealist moral perspective, Johnson.Leavis claimed, attained this simultaneity of impulses and escaped the debilitating complacency of the lesser Augustan poets:

living as much in an ideal world of letters as in the actual society of his friends and associates, he transmitted no pressure of Good Form, no polite social code, through his pen. His sense of form was a sense of a traditional morality of his craft, enjoying an artistic and intellectual discipline. (116-117)

Johnson's 'moralising' depended on exactly the attitude of critical

antagonism that had been absent from his predecessors' poetry, where 'a perceptive and responsive organisation ha[d] ceased to function' (112). Leavis identified this attitude in Johnson's imagery and his use of 'wit'. It was wit that lightened Johnson's 'declamatory weight' and it had undergone noticeable changes since the mid-seventeenth century. Leavis thought of Metaphysical wit as a reconciliation of humour and 'solemnity'; in Pope it was more than the 'interplay of disparate tones'; whilst with the post-Augustans it had 'ceased to function'. In Johnson it appeared 'as a conscious neatness and precision of statement tending towards epigram. It meant a constant presence of critical intelligence'.(119) This presence of 'intelligence' produced 'a characteristic kind of imagery' that was both 'generalised and unequivocally concrete'.(118) It contrasted with Milton's 'complete incapacity to question or explore' his sense of righteousness: a 'defect of intelligence [that was] a defect of imagination'.(58) 'Intelligence' for Leavis implied a critical predisposition in the poet to be aware of the nature and kind of attitude that he was attempting to express, an awareness that was an essential part of the poet's perception: as such it was a function of the imagination. The absence of intelligence weakened the poetry, but also, as shall be seen in the case of Shelley, pointed to weaknesses in the poet.

Intelligence worked to produce a correspondence in the poetry between the subject matter and the use of language. Johnson's moralising was balanced by a consciousness of the formal properties of language that gave his moral values the same kind of 'concrete realisation' that Leavis found in the Metaphysicals. Where this

correspondence failed to materialise, as in Cowper, the result was an inferior kind of poetry. Comparing Cowper's The Castaway with Johnson's On the Death of Robert Levet Leavis found Cowper's poem 'very fine' but 'susceptible to caricature by unsympathetic rendering'. This was because the language (the 'mode') of the poem was not completely commensurate with its subject (its 'purpose') and there appeared to be a 'discrepancy' between the 'emotion' and 'the prose rationality and critical balance' of its expression.(120-121) This is a materially different kind of weakness to that demonstrated by Milton when he 'exhibits a feeling for words rather than a capacity to feel through words'.(50) In Leavis's criterion for poetic strength, language in poetry must perform the task of 'concrete realisation' rather than merely aim for 'mellifluousness'; Cowper at least attempted such a realisation, even though he failed fully to reconcile subject and form, to make the form 'realise' or 'enact' its subject.

The association of language and 'intelligence' as the main elements of poetry that qualified for serious attention was central to Leavis's aesthetic. 'Language' in its poetic guise must, in this aesthetic, bear a reciprocal relation to the matter of the poetry: there must be an equivalence between the expression and the thing expressed. However, this aesthetic had a further dimension, developed from the abstract notion of 'the ideal community' around which Leavis organised his discussion. This notion had for Leavis an essential moral aspect, in a Johnsonian sense, requiring of the poetry a fundamental 'concern for human centrality', improving, critical ('intelligent') and dealing in its relations to society in a mode of optimistic humanism. This was the function of the 'ideal community' as it occurred in Johnson's

verse: as an attempt to express the moral ideal as 'something intimately bound up with contemporary life and manners'.(17) In Pope it manifested as a complete identification of the poet with his age, a poetic propagandism for 'Reason, Truth and Nature'. Johnson revitalised the ideal by releasing it from the narrow complacency of Augustanism and asserting it in a wider moral and historical context.

Leavis's approach to poetry was typified by this attempt to isolate the moral basis operating in the creative process. The 'tradition', the line of development that he drew, was centred on an implicit moral sanction present either ideally - as in the case of Johnson and the Metaphysicals - or concretely, as in Pope. Decline, Leavis asserted, was the consequence of a disruption of the operation of this moral imperative. Thus, the 'decay of the Caroline courtly tradition'(34) after the Restoration was the result of the inability of the tradition to survive the hiatus, the displacement of the guardians of 'Court culture' and the eventual change of allegiance of the Court from the traditional rural power-bases to the new metropolitan centres: from, as Leavis described it, 'the country-house' to 'the coffee-house'.(34) The consequence for poetry was exemplified by Rochester, whose 'few best lyrics are peculiarly individual utterances, with no such relation to convention or tradition as is represented by Carew or Marvell'.(35)

This view is Leavis's version of the 'dissociation of sensibility' and it relates in a direct way to his account of the decline of the organic community in the face of technological and utilitarian advance that he saw as having a continuing effect in the twentieth century. No matter the kinds of skill or ability evinced by the poetry: if

the poet offered no evidence of this fundamental moral imperative he was irredeemably secondary in Leavis's estimation. Dryden, for example, was, despite having been promoted by both Eliot and Hopkins,⁶⁰ inferior to Pope, in that Pope's 'stricter versification' produced 'a much greater fineness and profundity of organisation, a much greater intensity of art'. Leavis suggested a comparison of a passage from the Dunciad with MacFlecknoe. One commentator, reviewing Revaluation on its publication, noted 'an inhibition' with regard to Dryden in Leavis's discussion, and complained of the comparison of 'immature Dryden with fully-fledged Pope'.⁶¹ Yet it was not essentially a difference of poetic achievement that Leavis wanted to expose, but rather Dryden's inferiority in terms of a normative, moralist aesthetic. Unlike Jonson, Dryden had no sense of the 'ideal community', no sense of the ways in which poetry could offer to society a moral perspective by means of which it could objectify its own moral code: 'the community to which Dryden belongs as a poet is that in which he actually lives, moves, eats and talks; and . . . it is so completely engrossing that he has no ear, no spiritual antennae, for the other community'.(32-3) That is, Dryden was disadvantaged as a poet by a moral inadequacy, a lack of 'spiritual antennae', or the capacity for awareness of the wider issues and the larger possibilities.

This moralist aesthetic, with its implicit norms of the relationship

60. Leavis quoted Hopkins, Letter CLV, to Robert Bridges. Cf. Revaluation, p 31.

61. Bonamy Dobrée, The Spectator, 23.10.36. Dobrée suggested that a better comparison might have been Religio Laici.

between poetry and morality, provided Leavis with the means for structuring his hierarchy of the English tradition. However, unlike the concept of the 'ideal community', this aesthetic was an abstraction that had more than a temporary practical usefulness. It left its underlying criteria undisclosed, and produced a sense of unease in some readers by intimating that the ostensibly literary criticisms are in some degree predetermined by this covert set of moral criteria. Judgements of relative value and significance then appear precarious and unconvincing. The main testimony to this dissatisfaction was Wellek's request to Leavis for enlightenment regarding his underlying critical premises, but it was echoed elsewhere.⁶²

Notwithstanding the perplexity that may result from Leavis's determination not to discuss his assumption about the relationship of the moral to the aesthetic, it is necessary to recall that, as in his critique of Milton, he was exploiting and adumbrating an individual and refutable approach to the history of English poetry. He imposed an order on that history and developed a means of understanding the various shifts that he found within it by the application of this undefined aesthetic to the problem, which helped Leavis to fulfil the programmatic ambitions of the book as a whole. It is significant that the title of the book is in the singular, suggesting a comprehensive and inclusive analysis rather than (as 'Revaluations' might have indicated) a series of separate reappraisals of individual authors or periods (the subtitle of the book is 'Tradition and Development

62. Cf. Wellek, 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy', Scrutiny, V, 4, (1936)

The reviewer in the TLS (ie J.M. Murry) wished that there had been a chapter discussing the 'critical presuppositions' of the author of Revaluation.

in English Poetry'). The programme of the book was a new understanding of a 'history' in which individual poets were essential constituent parts inseparable even in their uniqueness from the historical whole. Leavis's general critical principle, on which was based his understanding of the relatedness of these parts, was his moralist aesthetic, his own developed sense of the evaluative criteria that are indispensable to great art. This aesthetic bore the same relation to Revaluation as T.S.Eliot did to New Bearings in English Poetry: it provided the essential organising principle and the criteria from which to elevate 'criticism' into more widely-based 'judgement'. A key part of Leavis's ambition was to elaborate his criticisms of particular poetry within the broader categories of history, tradition and morality.

(iii) The Romantics: morality and literary evaluation.

Johnson's critical writings exhibit very notably the characteristic wisdom, force and human centrality of the great moralist, but they have also a value that is peculiarly of and for literary criticism - their specific interest is in and of that field.⁶³

Leavis's critical writings, particularly in the later chapters of Revaluation, exhibit very notably a concern for human centrality that is peculiarly of and for literary criticism; that is, the subject

63. Leavis, 'Johnson as Critic'. Scrutiny XII, 3, 187.

of critical attention (poetry) is examined against the background of moral values which the poetry is seen to reflect or involve.⁶⁴

The key terms of this criticism are organisation, impersonality, intelligence, realisation, normality, and discipline. 'Morality' underlies all these terms as the unifying conceptual abstraction to which they all refer. Those terms which Leavis had taken over from Eliot ('impersonality', 'intelligence') have been subsumed into this larger moral scheme so that they have gradually shed their obvious Eliotic connotations and have become assimilated into Leavis's own critical grammar. Leavis's critical writings typically utilised these terms as a means for elevating the straightforward literary analysis of the language and subject-matter of poetry into a wider context of extra-literary judgement. The declaration at the beginning of the chapter on Shelley - 'when one dissents from persons who, sympathising with Shelley's revolutionary doctrines and with his idealistic ardours and fervours - with his beliefs, exalt him as a poet, it is strictly the poetry one is criticising'(204) - is difficult to square with the later condemnation of Shelley's 'viciousness and corruption, . . . disabilities and perversions'(216): terms of indictment that imply judgements very much outside the realm of the poetry. Leavis's criticism was an idiosyncratic extension of expressionism. Poetry in this sense became the infallible expression of the poet's personality, including his 'sensibility' and his moral capacity. Weaknesses and strengths in the poetry were regarded as originating in corres-

64. 'Leavis's . . . mental habitation is a world not of what poetry but of what criticism ought to be. . . . A world in which the existence of all values in poetry is made to depend on what is said about it.' Spender. Criterion. January 1937.

ponding weaknesses or strengths in the poet. This was because of the position that the poetry holds in relation to the criticism: the Johnsonian moral imperative had a normative pressure behind it and it saw the ideal poet as essentially concerned with a positive moral impulse. The critic, in this scheme, aimed to expatiate on the moral significance discoverable in the poetry, to elicit from the poetry its fundamental ethical structure. The poet, therefore, could not be seen as aloof from the moralising creative process: there had to be a human figure behind the art that was concerned with 'human centrality'. Similarly, the critic placed himself - in his elucidation of the moral absolutes that are, or ought to be, present in the poetry - at the centre of a critical and moral exchange between poet and reader that takes place via the poetry. Leavis said of Wordsworth: 'What he had for presentment was a type and a standard of human normality, a way of life: his preoccupation with sanity and spontaneity⁶⁵ working at a level and in a spirit that it seems appropriate to call religious'.(164) It was the responsibility of the critic - such was the implication - to identify the 'standard of human normality' with which the poet was said to be dealing. There is no way of discovering it without the critic as intermediary, since there can be no one fixed standard of 'normality', neither generally nor in the particular poetry. So the critic delineates a moral standard that is ostensibly derived from the poetry but which must ultimately originate within himself. In order to avoid appearing to express a merely partial, individual opinion, the critic must requisition

65. 'Spontaneity' in Wordsworth was, as shall be seen, not the same as the spontaneity in Shelley.

the poet as additional support for his version of the supposed moral standard. Leavis was in the position of saying, in effect, that the moral implications of the poetry are not merely constituent elements of a particular creative process, but actually represent a 'concern' for or 'preoccupation' with this morality in the poet himself. The nature, or character, of the poet becomes an essential component of the critical discussion.

It is necessary to distinguish between the areas in Leavis's criticism which were concerned with, respectively, critical analysis in terms of use of language, imagery, subject-matter and form, and the more complex problem of morally-based literary evaluation. Organisation, impersonality, intelligence, realisation, normality, and discipline: these basic terms can be seen to have specific definitions as they function in the criticism, relating to the two categories, 'criticism' and 'judgement', outlined above. 'Organisation' and 'realisation' can be said to relate directly to the procedure of close analysis; 'impersonality', 'normality' and 'discipline' belong in the less clarifiable area of literary evaluation. 'Intelligence', either native or critical, mediates unspecifically between the two overlapping practices. All the terms were made by Leavis eventually to refer back to the moral abstract that lies behind the critical procedure; they are not neutral terms, nor do they function as such. For Leavis, there was no such thing as a neutral term beyond the purely descriptive, such as 'rhyme' or 'metre'.

It is noticeable that these terms were for Leavis more easily applicable to Shelley (on the negative side) and Keats (on the

positive) than to Wordsworth. With Wordsworth, Leavis, while he focused on the 'patriotic sonnets' in order to illuminate the problem of Wordsworth's 'decline', was more generally concerned with the 'religious' dimension that he saw supervening in the early poetry. He dealt with the question of Wordsworth's 'philosophy' and tended to view the poet in specifically Johnsonian terms: 'He stands for a distinctly human naturalness; one, that is, consummating a discipline, moral and other'.(170) Certainly Leavis did not see in Wordsworth a typical Romantic poet: 'he may have been a "Romantic" but it would be misleading to think of him as an individualist'.(171)

With regard to Keats and Shelley the issues were more clear-cut and were concerned (in the first instance) with immediate problems of the poetry. The 'revaluative' aspect of the two essays involved a response to current issues in Keats/Shelley studies. Leavis was making a personal point when he insisted that these problems might be eased by 'a recall . . . to strict literary criticism'.(241) He disputed that difficulties relating to Shelley were a matter of "the question of belief or disbelief"⁶⁶: all that was required was attention to the poetry. And Leavis aimed to rescue Keats from appropriation by the aesthetes of the 1890s and the consensus that assumed his greatness to be a matter of 'promise and potentiality rather than achievement'.(241)

66. Leavis quoted the following: 'It is not so much that thirty years ago I was able to read Shelley under an illusion which experience has dissipated, as that because the question of belief or disbelief did not arise I was in a much better position to enjoy the poetry.'

Eliot. The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933)

On the positive side, Leavis's critical terms were applied to Keats's poetry in a direct way, which minimised the degree of speculation regarding the author's personal capacities, moral or otherwise. The fact that the poetry was generally 'successful' in these terms meant that Leavis had less need for appealing to the poet's psyche for an explanation of the condition of his poetry. When the poetry is successful, no further explanation is necessary; the criticism simply culminates in a general proposition regarding the poet's moral health. In Keats's case this was revealed by his 'characteristic vitality'; his 'joy in life' - as opposed to the pre-Raphaelite 'joy in art'.⁶⁷ This meant that any opinion in this regard could be read as simply an extension of the approbation given to the poetry. Only when negative moral judgements on a poet's character are extrapolated from his poetry does the question of the legitimacy of such a procedure seem to become urgent.

The Ode to a Nightingale exhibited Keats's particular qualities as a poet and supplied evidence of his capacities as an individual:

The rich local concreteness is the local manifestation of an inclusive sureness of grasp in the whole. What the detail exhibits is not merely an extraordinary intensity of realisation, but also an extraordinary rightness and delicacy of touch; a sureness of touch that is the working of a fine organisation.(245)

'Concreteness' and 'realisation' operated in the ode in the 'extremely

67. This was only a convenient shorthand: 'The difference between joy in 'art' and joy in 'life' is, of course, not so plain as the antithetical use of the two terms would suggest.'(257)

subtle and varied interplay of motions, directed now positively, now negatively'.(246) Leavis traced the fluctuations of mood and tenor in the imagery of the poetry and the verse movement. In the first stanza, the 'heavy drugged movement ("drowsy", "numb", "dull")' gives way at lines 5 and 6 and 'moves buoyantly towards life . . . ("shadows numberless")'.(246) The fourth stanza evinces a positive 'motion':

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
 Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
 But on the viewless wings of Poesy

- It points now, not to dissolution and unconsciousness but to positive satisfaction, concretely realised in imagination.(248)

The movement suggested by the "away!" of this stanza towards something positive is what Leavis designated as 'concrete realisation'. The force of this 'realisation' is effected by both the physical nature of the word and its conceptual implication. Movement and imagery are combined to produce a simultaneous mimetic presentation of idea and feeling that in turn relates, either synthetically or anti-thetically with the other constituent parts of the whole poem. Leavis's term for this is 'organisation', although he used the same term when discussing the imaginative capacity of a poet and his capacity for reacting to disparate experience with a homogeneous artistic response. Thus, in Wordsworth, 'the poetic process engaged an organisation that had, by his own account, been determined by an upbringing in a congenial social environment'.(171) The subtlety of this 'organisation', the metrical and verbal commensurateness of its parts, was what made the poem valuable and successful for Leavis. The subject matter was a different problem.

Keats had been praised by Symons and Murry for, respectively, inventing the principle of 'art for art's sake' and being comparable only to Shakespeare.⁶⁸ Leavis dismissed both claims in characteristic terms. The Ode was 'incomparably better art' than the 'art for art's sake' principle implied: 'it is better in a way involving a relation to life'.(251) Yet the poetry was not of the same order as Shakespeare's mature poetry.⁶⁹

It is as if Keats were making major poetry out of minor - as if, that is, the genius of a major poet were working in the material of minor poetry. . . . The pain with which his heart aches is not that of a moral maturity, of a disenchantèd wisdom born of a steady contemplation of things as they are.(251-52)

What made Keats's poetry seem to Leavis to be irretrievably 'minor' was its subject matter. Keats was an 'Aesthete', although, contra Symons, he does not indulge in the escapist aestheticism of the 1890s; and 'the one Aesthete of genius'. He had 'unique vitality and creative power'(259) but what he lacked was, crucially, the kind of 'pre-occupation . . . with a distinctively human naturalness, with sanity and spiritual health'(165) which, according to Leavis, Wordsworth had. Keats avoided the 'religious unction'(259) of Paterian

68. Leavis referred to Murry, Keats and Shakespeare (1925) and Symons, The Romantic Movement in English Poetry (1909)

69. Murry had said that the Odes were 'poems comparable to nothing in English literature save the works of Shakespeare's maturity.' Cf. Revaluation, p 242.

aestheticism (in the Ode on Melancholy for example) through a paradoxical mixture of indulgent soulful anguish and 'characteristic vitality'(260):

His souls shall taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

The sudden burst of freshness is, as it were, the vitality behind Keats's aestheticism breaking through(261)

The 'vitality' that thus emerges in imagery and metre in the poetry Leavis saw as deriving from the presence of another key term, 'critical intelligence', manifested, as it had been manifested in Johnson, in the poetry's 'sureness of touch' and 'the relation between the firmness of the art and the firm grasp on the outer world'; Keats 'never takes his dreams for reality'.(262)

Keats's poetry, then, evinced a strong capacity for the exploitation of poetic language and an ability to 'organise' its material into a coherent whole, presided over by a self-judging and self-discriminating 'intelligence'. The 'intelligence' prevented the inherent aestheticism from residing too completely in a romantic void which was a 'strength' Leavis said, that 'makes him put La Belle Dame sans Merci aside'.(262) Its weakness was its inwardness, its inability to encompass wider, essentially moral, concerns.⁷⁰ Where these wider concerns became more germane to the poetry was in the revised Hyperion.

70. 'A focusing of the vision so as to shut out the uncongenial, is essentially the purpose of Keats's worship of Beauty - a purpose such as, uncountered and persisted in, must, we feel, necessarily result in devitalisation'.(257)

It is significant that at this point Leavis turned to Keats's letters for evidence to augment his case. In trying to discover Keats's 'maturer moral self' Leavis had increasingly to consider directly, without the mediation of poetry, Keats's personal experiences and responses. The first Hyperion, though an attempt at expressing 'his profoundest moral and philosophical concerns'(266), failed because of its Spenserian-Miltonic mode, as Keats himself acknowledged.⁷¹

In the revised version of the introduction, Leavis saw Keats dealing with 'the blows of fate'(270) with an 'impersonality' that transcended the personal suffering and turned it into 'tragic' art. The qualities of 'concrete realisation' that made the Ode to a Nightingale more than merely indulgent ('the grasp of the object, the firm sense of actuality, the character and critical intelligence implied') now emerged 'in the field of tragic experience'.(271) The ode To Autumn,

71. Leavis quoted Keats's letters to Reynolds (22 Sept 1819) and his brother George (21 Sept 1819). From the letter to Reynolds Leavis quoted, *inter alia*, the following: 'I have given up Hyperion - there were too many Miltonic inversions in it.'(266-67) Leavis regarded this as 'Keats's own judgement upon the first Hyperion'.(266) However, the original version of Hyperion had been 'abandoned in April, 1819' (Allott, ed.. The Poems of John Keats (1970) p 655): the Hyperion to which Keats referred in September 1819 was in fact the revised version, 'largely completed in its present form by 21 Sept 1819' (Allott, 655) which was the day preceding the letter to Reynolds which Leavis took to be referring to the first version. Keats clearly felt that even in the new version Milton's influence was too predominant, an opinion that was shared by Leavis, who found only the mode of the introduction to be materially different: 'the ensuing narrative . . . remains, but for some mechanical changes in phrasing and word-order, what it was'.(268) If Leavis had been clearer about the dates of composition he could have been able to attest Keats's opinion in support of his own, which was the reason for referring to the letters in the first place.

written after the second Hyperion had been put aside, exhibits what was for Leavis the central change that had taken place in Keats's art, the poetry having been suffused with 'a moral and spiritual discipline'.(272)

It was in this manner, by a shift from the procedures and terminology of 'criticism' to those of 'judgement', that Leavis structured his approach to poetry. In the chapter on Keats the discussion moved, by means of changes of emphasis and the introduction of a vocabulary with an extra-literary dimension, from a consideration of the techniques of the poetry (language, imagery, the mimetic relationship between form and content⁷²) to an evaluation of the moral condition of the poetry and of the poet. In the discussion of Keats this last manoeuvre was only marginally explicit; to see to what degree it was an inevitable part of Leavis's procedure it is necessary to examine the essay on Keats's antithesis, Shelley.

This essay began with a close analysis of lines from Shelley's Ode to the West Wind and questioned the appropriateness of the imagery: 'In what respect are the 'loose clouds' like 'decaying leaves'?'.(205) Leavis wanted to point out 'an essential trait of Shelley's: his weak grasp upon the actual'.(206) Shelley failed the test of 'concrete realisation': his imagery does not function

72. ' And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook . . .

In the step from the rime-word 'keep', across, so to speak, the pause enforced by the line division, to 'Steady', the balancing movement of the gleaner is enacted'.(263-64).

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to bring its subject into clear focus but, on the contrary, deliberately keeps it blurred so that the metaphors become 'autonomous' and unrelated to the initiating perception. This blurring is the converse of 'concrete realisation' and it demands of both the reader and the poet an abeyance of 'critical intelligence'(207): 'feeling, for Shelley as a poet, had . . . little to do with thinking'.(208)⁷³ Leavis's indictment went further than this; his expatiation on this aspect of Shelley's poetry was couched in terms that contain an implicit moral judgement, largely as a result of the force that 'intelligence' now has as an evaluative term in Leavis's vocabulary:

The effect of Shelley's eloquence is to hand poetry over to a sensibility that has no more dealings with intelligence than it can help; to a 'poetic faculty' that . . . demands that active intelligence shall be, as it were, switched off.(210)

Shelley's Romanticism was of a different order than Wordsworth's, which had been essentially a reaction against 'Augustan rationality'. Wordsworth's spontaneity was correlated with an internal organisation that placed the poetic emotions within a context with a 'social-moral centrality'. Shelley's spontaneity was that of the 'egoist' and can have 'nothing to do with any discipline'.(210)

Shelley's poetry was measured by Leavis against the standard represented by his terminology. It failed to demonstrate any of Leavis's

73. For the reader, 'the imagery feels right, the associations work appropriately, if (as it takes conscious resistance not to do) one accepts the immediate feeling and doesn't slow down to think'. (207)

predicated qualities of realisation, organisation,⁷⁴ intelligence or discipline and was therefore declared by Leavis to be 'bad poetry'. (216) In the analysis of Shelley's weaknesses, Leavis kept reasonably clearly within the bounds of 'literary criticism': that is to say, he dealt directly with the poetry in terms familiar to poetry criticism. It was with the introduction of a term such as 'intelligence' with its implications of a judgement of the poet's creative habits that the 'criticism' shifts from a purely literary sphere to one involving extra-literary standards and generating moral evaluations. This was an inevitable development because of the foregrounding of the poet's own personality that was a main element of Leavis's critical procedure. 'Criticism of Shelley has something more important to deal with than mere bad poetry; or, rather, there are badnesses inviting the criticism that involves moral judgements'. (216) Why? because Shelley's 'surrendering to inspiration cannot . . . have been very distinguishable from surrendering to temptation'. His 'favoured vocabulary' exemplified 'a wrong approach to emotion'; 'the viciousness and corruption are immediately recognisable.' (216)

Can poetry be immoral? It is clear from the unrestrained vocabulary of Leavis's indictment of Shelley - 'viciousness and corruption', 'radical disabilities and perversions' - that Leavis believed that it could. Yet morality and moral judgements cannot be sustained in an intellectual void; there has to be some kind of conceptual framework to give such judgements meaning and form - and even then moral

74. '"Inspiration", there not being an organisation for it to engage . . . had only poetical habits to fall back on.' (214-15)

precepts do not partake of an objective impartiality. Leavis had clear ground for interpreting Shelley's poetic failings as moral depravity, because he saw the key weakness as 'a radical lack of self-knowledge' witnessed by 'the antipathy of his sensibility to any play of the critical mind'.⁷⁵ This judgement arose naturally from his discussion of the poetry. It was a logical step, from finding the poetry lacking in 'discipline' to seeing the poet's creative process as a form of turpitude. It is not the logic of this extension but its value that is in question. The essay aimed at a 'reevaluation' of Shelley's poetry and was determined to demonstrate that the problems were not problems of 'belief'. In Leavis's version, they became problems regarding the moral character of the poet. It raises a different set of difficulties when one approaches the poetry through judgements on the poet rather than when one demurs, like Eliot, at what the poet purported to believe.⁷⁶ In the first instance, it requires the critic to be precise about his own moral standard and its source; and secondly, it raises the complex matter of the relation between poetry and moral responsibility. The terms of Leavis's commendation of The Mask of Anarchy - 'no suspicion of indulgence, insistence, corrupt will, or improper approach' (229-30) - indicate the perplexity that exists for the reader of this criticism. It is possible to accept the notion that in this poem 'the emotion seems to inhere in the vision communicated, the situation grasped', to agree that the mimetic potential of language in poetry has been valuably exploited; but it is another matter accede to the proposition that the opposite 'emotionalism' that Shelley's failures evince is necessarily 'corrupt'

75. Leavis discussed 'When the Lamp is shatter'd'. (216-22)

76. See note 66 above.

or 'improper', even supposing that it is possible to reach an agreement as to the meanings of those terms. Leavis's position in relation to Shelley's poetry was extreme (witness the intemperate vocabulary) but it was inevitable. Given the proposition that the poet is not separable from the poetry, that, indeed, the poet is essentially knowable through the poetry, and accepting that one's literary critical terms are also morally prescriptive terms, it follows that negative criticism of specific poetry must develop into negative moral judgements about the poet. The less successful the poetry, the more wicked the poet: this is the force of Leavis's critical procedure. The difficulty is not with Leavis's practical analysis but with the judgements made outside the immediate realm of criticism or poetry.

3. 'Judgement and Analysis': a critical terminology and its practical applications.

The exchange between Wellek and Leavis following the publication of Revaluation⁷⁷ failed to raise the issue of 'immoral' poetry and was diverted into an unyielding argument about hidden assumptions and Platonic idealism in Wordsworth. Wellek was inhibited by his pre-occupation with theory and systems: 'I could wish that you had stated

77. See Wellek, 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy', Scrutiny V, 4 pp 375-83, and Leavis, 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy: a Reply', Scrutiny VI, 1 pp 59-70. Wellek's response to Leavis's reply appeared in Scrutiny VI, 2 pp 195-6.

your assumptions more explicitly and defended them systematically. . . . I would have misgivings in pronouncing them without elaborating a specific defence or a theory in their defence'.⁷⁸ The second part of this might be seen as the intuitive reflex of a philosophically-orientated mind (it does not seem to matter whether the 'defence' is practical or theoretical). It is the preceding request that is interesting, because of the response it elicited from Leavis: 'I knew I was making assumptions . . . and I was not less aware than I am now of what they involve'.⁷⁹

Leavis's argument was that while it was clearly possible to extract general principles of criticism from his discussion of poetry, he denied that such activity would serve any useful purpose relative to the intention of that criticism - which was a matter of judging and 'placing' specific poetry and individual poets. Leavis said of Blake, replying to another of Wellek's points, 'his symbolic philosophy is one thing, his poetry another'.⁸⁰ In his own writing, the abstract principles were certainly inherent, but it was the particular criticisms, the specific system of relations that he established, that he claimed were of primary importance. A similar kind of 'organisation' was required in the critic as Leavis had stipulated as a prerequisite in the poet. The critic makes a judgement of the poetry's relative value, he 'places' it:

78. Wellek, loc. cit. p 375.

79. Leavis, loc. cit. p 59.

80. Ibid p 65.

And the organisation into which it settles as a constituent in becoming 'placed' is an organisation of similarly 'placed' things, things that have found their bearings with regard to one another, and not to a theoretical system or a system determined by abstract considerations. . . . My whole effort was to work in terms of concrete judgements and particular analyses: 'This - doesn't it? - bears such a relation to that; this kind of thing - don't you find it so? - wears better than that', etc. ⁸¹

The central part of Leavis's reply to Wellek was based on this claim that he was making 'concrete judgements and particular analyses' and his insistence that unlocated 'theorising' was at best an irrelevance and at worst a limiting distraction. The discussion thus avoided completely any approach to the serious questions raised by Leavis's attack on Shelley. The point is that whilst engaged, as he claimed, in formulating 'concrete judgements and particular analyses', the nature of the evaluative grammar, the burden carried by terms such as 'intelligence' or 'discipline', meant that the criticism of particular poetry was inevitably elided with extra-literary moral judgements, which of their nature could not be represented as 'concrete' or 'particular'; the criticism was set against this background of moral specifications. A debate might ensue from the 'particular analysis' of a poem, but it is difficult to see how the collaborative process can be made anything but redundant in the context of such a comprehensively negative moral judgement as that which Shelley attracted. What Wellek's critique of Leavis failed to raise was the whole problem of the origin of Leavis's moral principles as they emerged in his study of Keats and Shelley. The implications of those statements regarding 'perversity' and 'corruption' indicated an ethical background

81. Ibid pp 61, 63.

to literary evaluation, which was not questioned by its purveyor. This background was neither defined by a context of 'concrete judgments and particular analyses', nor elucidated by any clear conceptual context into which the notion of 'moral' could be seen to fit.

The 'assumption' that logically tended towards the moralist aesthetic was clearly present in Leavis's statements of intention:

By the critic of poetry, I understand the complete reader: the ideal critic is the ideal reader. . . . The critic's aim is, first, to realise as sensitively as possible this or that which claims his attention; and a certain valuing is implicit in the realising. . . . The business of the literary critic is to attain a peculiar completeness of response and to observe a peculiarly strict relevance in developing his response into commentary.⁸²

The critic's skill or achievement was to be measured against the same standard as the poet's, that is, his capacity for 'realisation' as revealed in his writing. For the poet this capacity was ascertainable by reference to the effectiveness of the relation in his poetry between language and subject matter, with the greater poet achieving a form intricately related to its content. The critic's powers of 'realisation' are defined by the extent of his ability 'to observe a peculiarly strict relevance in developing his response into commentary', or by how effectively (and relevantly) he translates his essentially personal reactions into a cogent and coherent critique. However,

82. Loc. cit. p 61

despite the blurring use of a similar vocabulary, it is difficult to sustain the implied equation between poetry and criticism. For while it is possible, 'by choice, arrangement and analysis of concrete examples',⁸³ to investigate the success or failure of particular poetry, the same is not true for criticism. A critical 'commentary' stands or falls according to the degree to which it is convincing - this much is implicit in Leavis's version of the collaborative dialogue between a critic and his reader. A critique's ability to convince depends on internal logic, the pertinence of quoted material, the cogency of its terms of analysis and the extent to which that analysis and succeeding judgement are observably cognate. In Leavis's criticism, these criteria are generally satisfied until the problem of the unspecified and undefined moralist aesthetic is encountered. The judgements whose commission are dependent on this aesthetic are fundamentally extra-literary judgements elaborated according to a scale of implied moral values that is not immediately relatable to a set of literary values. In this respect, Leavis was making a similar type of non-legitimate appeal to an outside authority as he had highlighted in Wellek: where Wellek had referred to a general history of ideas as if for sanction for his literary judgements, Leavis was invoking a similarly abstract moral scheme in support of his. The question then is: what is the nature of the critical impulse in Leavis and how does it relate to his idea of the importance of literature? and to what extent is the moralist aesthetic implicit in his conception of the function of criticism?

83. Ibid pp 63-4

A clear sense of Leavis's conception of the character and ability of the critic and his responsibilities can be derived from his discussion of Johnson (and, to a lesser extent, Arnold) 'as critic'.⁸⁴

That Leavis aligned himself to a considerable degree explicitly with Johnson's critical attitude is hinted at by the presence of the quotations from Johnson that occur in Revaluation and The Great Tradition as epigraphs ('not dogmatically, but deliberately'). The account in 'Johnson as critic' enforces the identification explicitly:

Johnson is not invariably just or complete; but the judgement – and he never fails to judge – is always stated with classical force and point, and based beyond question on strong first-hand impressions. He addresses himself deliberately and disinterestedly to what is in front of him; he consults his experience with unequivocal directness and always has the courage of it. Concerned as he is for principle, he refers with characteristic contempt to "the cant of those who judge by principles rather than by perception" (Life of Pope).⁸⁵

A similar description could be applied with little variation to Leavis. The key points are the emphases on 'judging', 'first-hand impressions', the 'disinterested' bearing and the referral to personal experience. These factors, together with the subordination of 'principle' to 'perception', summarise Leavis's own version of the function of the critic. The critic is actively engaged in the understanding of creative art; he is not a passive observer. The strength of his criticism depends wholly on his own personal capacities for integrity of response and intelligent perception. The critic, no less than the poet, must exhibit a competent intelligence and an alert

84. See 'Arnold as Critic', Scrutiny VII, 3; and 'Johnson as Critic', Scrutiny XII, 3.

85. Scrutiny XII, 3 p 199.

'sensibility'. Leavis said of Arnold that his criticism was marked by 'an intelligence that is informed by a mature and delicate sense of the humane values and can manifest itself directly as a fine sensibility'.⁸⁶ With regard to Johnson, Leavis had to reinterpret those aspects of the criticism that most overtly contradicted his own practice, accounting for an apparent perversity of judgement by citing the distorting effect of historical circumstances. Johnson's dismissal of Lycidas, for example, could be explained 'by reference to the cultivated predilection, the positive "ear", with which they are correlated'.⁸⁷ That is, Johnson's judgement had been unbalanced by the operative standards of taste of his contemporary period, and despite the negative conclusions, the critical approach was based on sound principles: 'The taste that matters is the operative sensibility, the discriminating 'touch', through which, in exploration and critical response, a fine and exclusive organisation engages'.⁸⁸ This avoided the problem raised by the fact that Johnson saw Lycidas as 'impious'.⁸⁹ Leavis was prepared to explain Johnson's finding 'the dictions harsh,

86. 'Arnold as Critic', loc. cit. p 323.

87. Loc. cit p 190.

88. Ibid. p 188.

89. Cf. Johnson: 'With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverent combinations. . . . Such equivocations are always unskilful: but here they are indecent, and at least approach to impiety'.

'Milton', The Lives of the English Poets, (ed., S.C.Roberts) (1965) p 124.

the rhymes uncertain'⁹⁰ in terms of the nature of contemporary taste, but ignored the moral disposition of Johnson's criticism, perhaps because it would have entailed greater explicitness on his part about the derivation of his own morality.

An 'operative sensibility' and 'a fine and exclusive organisation' are as equally the qualities of a poet as of a critic; Leavis made no distinction. He posited a concept of perception in the poet and the critic which stated that great poetry demanded an intense effort of 'realisation' on the part of the critic who wanted to understand it, just as the production of great poetry demanded an equal effort of concentration, organisation and intelligence on the part of the poet. Failure of critical acumen becomes then a personal failure in the critic, a neglect or betrayal of his essential responsibilities to the text and the revelation of a personal failing with regard to the subtlety and capacity of his sensibility. Such a failure was, for Leavis, equivalent to weakness of character because of the underlying 'moral' basis of his critical perspective. The corollary to this was that the critic was entitled, under these conditions, to elicit from his perception of weaknesses in the poetry weaknesses in the poet. The personal integrity of both poet and critic were thus engaged in the critical exchange; 'disinterested' applied to the criticism only in the narrower sense of an absence of overt bias or partiality. This explains the process through which Leavis was able to extend his critique of Shelley's poetry into a condemnation of Shelley's moral character. It does not explain the way in which

90. Ibid p 123.

Leavis's critical practice brought to bear on the poetry his sense of moral obligation. To understand this it is necessary to turn to 'Judgement and Analysis: notes in the analysis of poetry'.⁹¹

The principles regarding the criticism of poetry that are outlined in these articles develop inevitably into a formulation of a moralist aesthetic - it is fundamental to the logic of the procedure. This procedure itself developed out of a proposition that was absolutely central to Leavis's conception of 'the function of criticism', which was an exploration of the significance of the Arnoldian premise that poetry should be a 'criticism of life'. In attempting to enforce this predicate in the modern period, Leavis was required by circumstances to elaborate more substantially what this responsibility entailed.⁹² He was not able simply to approach the matter via the poetry, by example; some explanation of the nature of his criticism was needed. 'Criticism' thus became as much a key element as 'poetry',

91 See '"Thought" and Emotional Quality: notes in the analysis of poetry', Scrutiny XIII, 1 pp 53-71. The two succeeding articles carried the same subtitle: 'Imagery and Movement', Scrutiny XIII, 2 pp 119-34; and 'Reality and Sincerity', Scrutiny XIX, 2 pp 90-98. These articles were reprinted as the middle section of The Living Principle (1975) under the title 'Judgement and Analysis'.

92. 'For Matthew Arnold it was in some ways less difficult. I am not thinking of the much more desperate plight of culture today, but (it is not, at bottom, an unrelated consideration) of the freedom with which he could use such phrases as "the will of God" and "our true selves". Today one must face problems of definition and formulation where Arnold could pass lightly on.'

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requiring an equal amount of discussion and illumination, so that the convention of the priority of the one over the other was negated and the two became factors of parallel importance in the discourse on society. Criticism, and the nature of the critic, were not to be divorced from wider moral considerations relating to extra-literary obligations. The clearest and most emphatic formulation of this equality of responsibility was Education and the University (1943). This book was primarily a 'sketch' of the possibilities for an 'English school' that would facilitate the advancement of such a school's primary aim, the 'training of the sensibility',⁹³ whilst maintaining its connections outside the realm of the purely literary:

The more advanced the work the more unmistakably is the judgement that is concerned inseparable from that profoundest sense of relative value which determines, or should determine, the important choices of actual life.⁹⁴

The serious critic derives from the study of literature a 'sense of relative value' that must be equally operative in 'actual life' as in the domain of the literary-critical. This premise was basic to Leavis's criticism. The writings of the period after Revaluation represent a movement towards this more overt explication of the moral dimension that had been implicit in the earlier work. 'Notes in the analysis of poetry' was the practical elucidation of this general

93. ' . . . there must be a training of intelligence that is at the same time a training of sensibility; a discipline of thought that is at the same time a discipline in scrupulous sensitiveness of response to delicate organisation of feeling, sensation and imagery.' Education and the University, p 38.

94. Ibid. p 35

thesis.

The three essays demonstrated the interrelation of three aspects of the nature of poetry. 'Thought', or intelligence, the use of language ('imagery') and the genuine emotional response to a given situation ('reality and sincerity') were the main elements in Leavis's analysis. They connect in ways that provide a clear illustration of Leavis's notion of the moral dimension of poetry and criticism.

Intelligence manifests in poetry as an 'attitude towards' its subject matter. That is, the poet, concurrent with his expression of the material, expresses an opinion about it: he simultaneously 'places' the experience as he evokes it. This process Leavis called, variously, 'impersonalisation' and 'disinterested valuation'.⁹⁵ The antithesis is emotional 'indulgence'. 'Intelligence' reveals itself through the language that the poetry exploits, semantically and metrically, to achieve its effects. The conviction with which this is accomplished depends in part on the genuineness of the original experience, on the poet's 'sincerity'. Leavis made a subtle differentiation of the degrees of sincerity that are available to the poet in a comparison of Emily Bronte's 'Cold in the earth' with Hardy's 'After a Journey'.

Leavis's analysis of the poetic use of language has been described through his discussion of Donne and the Metaphysicals. In 'Imagery

95. Cf. A Selection from 'Scrutiny', (2 vols., 1968), vol. I p 215 ff. (Figures in parentheses in the following passage refer to this source.)

and Movement' this analysis was developed further and Leavis saw metaphor in a poem as the reflection of the overall linguistic effects. These effects are matters of 'complex verbal organisation'(231) and the metaphor, at its most effective, involves both the collocation of 'the disparate, the conflicting, or the contrasting'(233) and the evocation of a wider context, so that the reader, 'in pronounc[ing] the organised words, . . . performs in various modes a continuous analogical enactment'(237) of the meaning. The metaphor exhibits the poet's 'attitude towards' his subject, and is the means whereby 'intelligence' or 'thought' manifests locally its general presence.

'Intelligence' in poetry is ultimately dependent on the reality of a poet's response to a real experience: Leavis's term is 'sincerity'. It is indicative of the peculiar idiom of Leavis's criticism that a potentially unspecifiable quality can be made to work towards an explicit definition of itself. Brontë's 'Cold in the earth' is a less 'sincere' poem than Hardy's 'After a Journey' because of 'the absence of any convincing concreteness of a presented situation'.(252) The poetry has a 'declamatory generality', whereas 'After a Journey' 'conveys a quite complex attitude that entails a weighing of considerations against one another and leaves them in a kind of poise . . . It could . . . have been written only by a man who had the experience of a life to remember back through'.(255) Brontë's poem, on the other hand, was a 'disciplined imaginative exercise'. 'After a Journey', in comparison, 'is seen to have a great advantage in reality'.(252) One of the strengths of Leavis's critical procedure is that it was able to recuperate a word as unspecific as 'sincerity' and make it useful as an evaluative term. Intelligence, manifested

as an objectifying appraisal of the emotion of the poem, and 'sincerity' are reflected in the language of the poetry, in its power to produce an 'analogical' (tactual, physical, intellectual) reproduction of the original creative impulse. In Education and the University, Leavis described analysis as 'a constructive or creative process'.⁹⁶ The full significance of this formulation only emerges in Leavis's discussion of the poetry that fails to satisfy these predicates.

'Imagery' is a matter of 'particularity, intensity and emotional sincerity'(240) as Leavis demonstrated in his analysis of Wordsworth's 'Surprised by joy'. When it fails to involve these qualities, the resultant poetry prohibits 'strong realisation', as in Wordsworth's 'Calais Beach', and 'there is nothing to qualify the sweet effusion of solemn sentiment'.(243) Leavis was not able to let this stand as a culminating observation on the weakness of the poem. Even the terms of the disparagement convey a tone of disapprobation, but this is made explicit in the summary. The poetry is described as 'cloying' and the sestet 'adds saccharine to syrup and makes the sonnet positively distasteful'.(243) Despite the metaphor, 'distasteful' does not mean merely 'unpalatable'; it involves a more fundamental value-judgement. Similarly, Housman's poem(245), which might (Leavis said) be defended on the grounds of its 'hunger after beauty', is condemned by him in terms which also invoke an ethical, rather than merely aesthetic, judgement: 'the kind of beauty offered values itself implicitly at a rate that a mature mind can't endorse'.(246) 'Mature' clearly has a pressure of moral evaluation behind it.

96. Cf. p 70.

Leavis's analysis of poetry does not work only positively, in the sense of suggesting the ideal relations between 'thought', 'imagery' and 'sincerity' and measuring the poetry according to that standard. In the negative sense, poetry that does not attain to the standard proposed is seen as a failure not only in terms of its poetical shortcomings but also, more importantly, in the broader terms of 'moral value'. Tennyson's 'Break, break, break' Leavis described as 'inferior in kind'(213) to Wordsworth's 'A slumber did my spirit seal':

"Inferior in kind" - by what standards? Here we come to the point at which literary criticism, as it must, enters overtly into questions of emotional hygiene and moral value - more generally (there seems no other adequate phrase), of spiritual health(214)

Literary criticism has to deal with 'questions of emotional hygiene and moral value' because 'judgement . . . [is] inseparable from that profoundest sense of relative value that determines . . . the important choices of actual life'.⁹⁷ A poet of Tennyson's 'emotional habit' 'we should expect to find . . . noticeably given to certain weaknesses and vices'.(213) Not just weaknesses, but 'vices'; and these phrases do not apply only to the poetry, but to the poet as well. A similar logic allowed Leavis to expand a criticism of Shelley's poetry into a denunciation of Shelley's 'viciousness' and 'corruption'. For poetry and criticism in Leavis's view have an ultimately moral obligation to be responsible for 'habits' and attitudes that operate in 'actual life', not merely in the poetic or literary-critical realms:

97. Ibid. p 35.

. . . in the examination of [Shelley's] poetry the literary critic finds himself passing, by inevitable transitions, from describing characteristics to making adverse judgements about emotional quality; and so to a kind of discussion in which, by its proper methods and in pursuit of its proper ends, literary criticism becomes the diagnosis of what, looking for an inclusive term, we can only call spiritual malady. (219)

The key phrase is, of course, 'by its proper methods and in pursuit of its proper ends'. The 'methods' are those of close verbal analysis of specific poetic examples. The 'ends' determined what that analysis should be directed toward discovering and how its conclusions should be extended into evaluative judgements. The 'ends' are ultimately to formulate a 'sense of relative value': that is, 'value' in the poetry, the poet, the critic and the criticism, 'relative' to a moral standard operating in 'actual life'. Failure according to these specifications is therefore identified as indulgence, lack of intelligence, immaturity, insincerity: 'spiritual malady'. The moralist aesthetic derives inevitably from Leavis's critical method and his version of the ultimate purpose of literary judgement.

The revealing term in the above paragraph is 'diagnosis'. It was because of the diagnostic/analytical impulse that existed in the background of Leavis's literary critical endeavour that his critical judgements were extended into a set of valuations that took their substance from a set of moral standards which were said to operate in 'actual life'. For Leavis, the literary critical and the social were not discrete fields of intellectual inquiry: literary criticism was a means of analysing not just literature but its cultural context. With regard to the individual writer, therefore, literary criticism

represented a means of analysing his poetry and, by extension, that poetry's personal (moral) context. The problem for a reader of Leavis's criticism lies in the extent to which its literary evaluations require him to accede to the reciprocal moral judgements. Problems of 'morality' do not trouble all readers of poetry and Leavis's criticism therefore retains its validity whilst its vocabulary of evaluative terms (for example, 'sincerity' as applied to Hardy) do not necessarily collude with the moral perspective to make the literary and moral judgements synonymous. Where the terminology does effect this elision between critical and moral positions ('intelligence', 'discipline') - as in the essays on Keats and Shelley - the criticism, for all its analytical rigour, becomes disablingly restrictive in its fundamental approach.

3. 'The Great Tradition' (1948)

1. Criticism of the Novel: Leavis's organising principles

The 'diagnostic' orientation of Leavis's literary criticism manifested itself in the terminology of evaluation that he employed. In his study of poetry, the value-terms Leavis made use of in the analysis of poetic achievement were linked - in his own overall system, though not ineluctably - with moral values. The same value-terms that were used in the discussion of lyric poetry were taken up again by Leavis for his study of the novel. A wholesale transference of the evaluative terminology was made between the poetry criticism and The Great Tradition(1948). This book was Leavis's synoptic introduction to the English novel, in the same sense that Revaluation represented his survey of the development of English poetry according to the historical changes he himself saw as significant. This viewpoint in turn was governed by Leavis's perceptions, influenced by T.S.Eliot, of what constituted significant poetic achievement. Leavis formulated his sense of this significance in his critical terminology. Similarly, with regard to the novel, Leavis's study was organised according to the requirements of two basic concepts, of 'tradition' and 'moral responsibility':

the major novelists . . . count in the same way as the major poets, in the sense that they not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of the human

awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life.(2)¹

. . . [the great English novelists] are all distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity.(9)

The stipulation that a great writer should promote 'human awareness . . . of the possibilities of life' was derived directly from Leavis's sense of what attitudes and habits would be central to the appropriate remedial response to his own diagnosis of contemporary social and cultural conditions. His literary criticism was directly modelled on the diagnostic/remedial pattern of the early writings. The polemical substance of that diagnosis emerged in the criticism in the shape of this moral connection. The study of the novel was set in the context of the ameliorative remedial programme upon which Leavis's critical enterprise was founded.

'Tradition' and the 'moral intensity' of the novelist were principal themes around which Leavis's criticism of the novel was organised. The approach was thus doubly selective. The attempt to designate a particular 'tradition' implies the selection of material on grounds not of literary judgement alone but because of perceived causal links between respective parts. That which is excluded finds itself so because it has qualities, which may from another point of view be equally significant, alien to the class of similarities and connections that characterises the particular major line. Secondly, the 'moral'

1. Figures in parentheses refer to page numbers in The Great Tradition (1948).

prerequisite itself limits the material available for consideration to certain types of literary work. It immediately places 'outside' the tradition types of literature said not to express a certain kind of 'moral intensity' - a concept in itself formulable only by means of a specialised evaluative vocabulary - and to be excluded from the major line of development is to be downgraded in terms of valuation. The principles of Leavis's novel criticism were thus limiting and restrictive by virtue of the nature of their orientation towards the literature. The criticism may nevertheless make some contribution to an understanding of the selected material, with the proviso that an agglomeration of critically evaluated authors and works can be taken as the 'great' or supervening 'tradition' only in terms of the preliminary qualifications established by Leavis's approach.

(i) 'Tradition'

Implicit in the title of The Great Tradition is the notion of 'tradition' as an applicable term in the realm of 'lesser' writers and artists: it implies the idea of a minor 'tradition' or traditions. Minor novelists are not excluded from the discussion of the major authors, but by their very nature contribute to a definition or delineation of the qualities that make, a contrario, the 'great' novelists 'great'. Throughout the introductory chapter of the book, in a series of footnotes and asides, Leavis sketched the outline of an underlying minor tradition in the development of the English novel. This outline proceeded by contrast with negative examples, although

its sketchiness prohibited detailed exposition or analysis. The lines of development that Leavis postulated can be clearly indicated and the key categories under which he classified areas of relative value begin to emerge.

'Tradition' for Leavis was in part a matter of 'influence', although the identification of links between authors was as much a matter of dispelling the prejudices of fashion as illustrating definite connections. Many essentially minor novelists have been overvalued by fashionable popularity. The 'present vogue of the Victorian age' meant that 'one after another the minor novelists of that period are being commended to our attention . . . and there is a marked tendency to suggest that they not only have various kinds of interest to offer but that they are living classics. (Are they not all in the literary histories?)'.(1-2) The minor authors ('Trollope, Charlotte Yonge, Mrs. Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, Charles and Henry Kingsley, Marryat, Shorthouse') are ranked in this estimation alongside the genuinely 'classical novelists.'(2) Leavis aimed to restore a hierarchy of valuable texts, with the great number of minor works falling somewhere in the middle ground, between the great 'classics' and the negligible failures; they all 'have various kinds of interest to offer', without aspiring to greatness. Thus Peacock's books 'have a permanent life as light reading . . . for minds with mature interests' (18); Walter Scott, 'a kind of inspired folk-lorist, . . . was a great and very intelligent man' but he lacked 'the creative writer's interest in literature'.(14) This vocabulary is revealing, as the pressure of meaning and implied value noticeably begins to accrete to a word as apparently unambiguous and innocuous as 'interest'.

From being a neutral descriptive term the word is increasingly burdened with responsibilities as a key evaluative term, even though the definitive characteristics that constitute its significance as such are never expounded. Similarly, Leavis's use of the word 'mature' conceals a large amount of pre-conceived valuation. This word frequently recurs throughout this study with an increasing weight of judicial assessment relative to its occurrence. What it implies, though, is never more than vaguely apparent and 'mature' gradually becomes part of the obscure vocabulary of evaluation - along with 'discipline', 'intelligence'-which Leavis employed to formulate his main critical judgements. The meaning of this vocabulary only becomes effective if the reader tacitly accedes to each component's apparent force as a term in a coherent system of evaluative judgement.

The figures peopling the 'minor tradition' have a bearing on their successors. 'Out of Scott a bad tradition came' which 'spoiled Fenimore Cooper' and produced in Stevenson '"literary" sophistication and fine writing'.(5n) Conversely, of the Brontës, Charlotte 'had a remarkable talent' and has 'a permanent interest of a minor kind', while Emily was 'the genius'. She 'broke completely' from the prevailing traditions of Scott and the eighteenth century 'in the most challenging way. . . . Out of her a minor tradition comes, to which belongs, most notably, The House with the Green Shutters.'(27) Thackeray, for his part, remains 'minor' because 'his attitudes and the essential substance of his interests are so limited'.(21) However, for Leavis, the most interesting group of 'lesser' novelists was that represented by Fielding, Richardson and Fanny Burney, the trio of significant influences on Jane Austen.

Leavis's description of the relationship between these three writers and Jane Austen, and between each other, is complicated and partially obscured by a confusion of qualified evaluations and imprecise designations of influence:

Fielding deserves the place of importance given him in the literary histories . . . because he leads to Jane Austen. . . . He made Jane Austen possible by opening the central tradition of English fiction.(11)

. . . the conventional talk about the 'perfect construction of Tom Jones . . . is absurd. There can't be subtlety of organisation without richer matter to organise, and subtler interests, than Fielding has to offer.(3-4)

'Richer matter' and 'subtler interests': these phrases are consonant with the term 'mature'. In his arbitrary dismissal of Tom Jones, Leavis seems to have had in mind only the bawdy and picaresque elements - although the nature of Leavis's comment means that his can only be a speculative supposition. What is interesting about this statement is the implication that the form of a novel (its 'organisation') reflects its content or presented themes (its 'interests') directly, without qualification. What Leavis was arguing was that the technical or formal achievement of a work of art was entirely dependent upon the nature of the treated material or subject matter. His version of the form/content relationship was that 'great' art could not be wrought from material lacking in 'richness' or 'subtlety' - in a word, 'maturity': 'Fielding's attitudes, and his concern with human nature, are simple, and not such as to produce an effect of anything but monotony'.(4)

The way Fielding, Richardson and Burney exerted an influence over

Austen was, as Leavis described it, an intricate process. In contrast to Fielding's 'external action', he argued, Richardson offered 'a more inward interest' and dealt more effectively with 'emotional and moral states'.(4) Nevertheless, his interests are also 'extremely limited in range and variety'. The qualifications attend immediately upon the praise, approximating a sense of the actual value of the writing. This approximation is defined by further comparison, in this case with Fanny Burney, seen in this context as a kind of filter between Richardson and Austen. For while Richardson is 'a major fact in the background of Jane Austen' - which periphrasis we take to mean that Richardson had some kind of 'influence' on Austen - his dealings with characters on an elevated social scale are too 'immitigably vulgar' to be of direct value to Austen; Fanny Burney 'transposed' Richardson 'into educated life'(4) and thus made him accessible to Austen. This is a point where the lesser tradition intervenes in the major line of development. The significance of Richardson and Burney as novelists is that they allowed for and facilitated Jane Austen's achievement.

The 'tradition' described at this secondary level is inconsequential except at such moments of direct intervention in the major line.

'Tradition', therefore, stands as something more than a collective noun for separate groups in a hierarchy of authors:

To distinguish the major novelists in the spirit proposed is to form a more useful idea of tradition (and to recognise that the conventionally established view of the past of English fiction needs to be drastically revised). It is in terms of the major novelists, those significant in the way suggested, that tradition, in any serious sense, has its significance.(3)

The value of such a notion of 'tradition' is to enable the critic better to formulate his impressions, aiming to provide a new grammar of ideas with which to articulate his perceptions. Its legitimacy as an organising principle depends on the terms under which the concept is defined and the justifications for its exclusiveness. That it must be exclusive in order to have a function is clear; too great a level of generalisation would be of little use in identifying what is valuable: 'There is habit nowadays of suggesting that there is a tradition of "the English novel" and that all that can be said of the tradition (that being its peculiarity) is that "the English novel" can be anything you like.'⁽³⁾ But the principles governing exclusion must be coherent. T.S. Eliot's version of 'tradition', expressed with characteristic hyperbole, attempted to impose it as a concept over the whole history of literature and to use it as a means for referring to all existing literature as a holistic entity. New work effected an alteration of that entity that both redefined the whole and gave a context to the new:

The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, ² values of each work of art towards the whole are adjusted.

The relativity of Leavis's evaluations, the greater and lesser 'traditions', illustrates that it was his particular concern to discriminate between the parts that comprised the whole and not to

2. T.S.Eliot Selected Essays (1951) p 15.

envisage the whole as having a separate, superior existence. The 'adjustment' of historical sequences by the 'supervention of novelty' was the idea that Leavis took from Eliot. It is this idea that informs his conception of the nature and function of 'tradition'. Those writers who are subordinate to the major line, Fielding, Richardson, Fanny Burney, constitute, despite their inferiority, a tangible tradition of their own, which was more influential the nearer in time those they influenced were. Tradition has an historical aspect: Tom Jones found favour with 'Scott, and Coleridge' because 'standards are formed in comparison, and what opportunities had they for that?' With regard to Jane Austen, 'if the influences bearing on her hadn't comprised something fairly to be called tradition she couldn't have found herself and her true direction'.(5) Not only do the influences exist, they make themselves felt as a 'tradition', as a tangible cultural phenomenon that is substantial and not merely the consequence of ephemeral fashion. The problem here is that Leavis also seemed to insist on the inversion of this relationship and to argue that the 'influences' would not have been so potent, in the sense of producing an effect in Jane Austen, had they not constituted 'something fairly to be called tradition'. The emphasis changes according to the situation of the point of view in time. From Jane Austen's position, the immediate past developments of the novel were visible, Leavis argued, as the 'tradition' established by Fielding and Richardson, the latter mediated through Fanny Burney. From the point of view of a reader coming after Jane Austen, her emergence has a significance that projects both backwards in time and into the future: her work has a 'retroactive effect':

as we look back beyond her we see in what goes before,
and see because of her, potentialities and significances

brought out 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.

That is, the group of writers pre-eminent in Austen's immediate past (Fielding, Richardson, Burney) only coalesces into a 'tradition' when their creative endeavours achieve a transformation in the writings of an author in the main line of development. 'Her work . . . gives a meaning to the past': not in itself, but in the critic's reading of it, which also involves a predisposition to interpreting the past in a certain way. Leavis's statement here is not as philosophically profound as it might appear. What he was saying, in effect, was that the influence - in terms of adjusting and expanding the possibilities of the novel form - of the preceding novelists can be indicated in Jane Austen, who can therefore be seen as the epitome or consummation of the creative efforts of her predecessors. Their mutual association in Austen thus gives the collocation 'Fielding, Richardson, Burney', a renewed significance and may change the reader's perception of the importance of their respective achievements. 'Tradition' in this sense is merely a convenient shorthand for expressing this kind of relationship.

In another sense, 'tradition' for Leavis simply refers to discernible groups of related works or authors and their own limited range of influence: for example, the 'bad tradition' that came out of Scott, or the 'minor' one that sprang from Wuthering Heights. The looseness of the term at this level produces an occasional tautology - 'by great tradition I mean the tradition to which what

is great in English literature belongs'(7) - which is more a matter of style and less a problem of method. This simpler usage of the word has necessarily a less firm grasp on the historical context of a particular work. Groups ('traditions') of writers are aligned in a similar ranking in terms of relative value and the historical differential is effectively erased. Bunyan is thus classified according to the same terms as James Joyce. Bunyan

counts immeasurably in the English-speaking consciousness; . . . his influence would tend strongly to reinforce the un-Flaubertian quality of the line of English classical fiction . . . as well as to cooperate with the Jonsonian tradition of morally significant typicality in characters.(2n)

In Joyce

there is no organic principle determining, informing and controlling into a vital whole, the elaborate analogical structure, the extraordinary variety of technical devices, the attempts at an exhaustive rendering of consciousness, for which Ulysses is remarkable(25-26)

However, Bunyan's 'organising principle' - the integrity of his moral concerns - must be seen as resulting in part from his historical context. Moral preoccupations adopt the forms of the prevailing cultural milieu; and if in the 'modern' period an equally firm correspondence between literary and moral enterprise cannot always be identified (Leavis found it in Lawrence) this is because the forms of moral preoccupation in this period have altered and the literature has altered in reflecting that change. Comparison with the seventeenth

century may serve to illuminate those changes and propose some notion of the way such changes develop. However, it does not seem wholly legitimate to establish the forms and preoccupations of an earlier period as criteria for the evaluation of incommensurable preoccupations in the literature of the more immediate past. This tendency to make comparisons between heterogeneous elements is repeated in the essay on George Eliot and Henry James. It reveals the way in which Leavis formulated a critical perception in one field and then attempted to assert its universal applicability; this reflects the restricted nature of the effort to establish such a thing as a 'great tradition'.

Notwithstanding the drawbacks of Leavis's use of the term, the concept of 'tradition' provides a flexible framework for profitable discussion because it is at a level of generalisation that makes it unnecessary to go outside its framework for excluded but relevant material. All literature is discussable within this framework, which is not of itself exclusive and therefore has no need to justify acts of selection. It is when Leavis begins to discuss single entities and their relationships that relative evaluations appear and a process of selection is involved. The general usage of the term supplies the stable pattern for the whole design within which the details are matters of constant re-assessment. The crux is the degree to which the substance of Leavis's version of the details, which is dependent on the legitimacy of the definition and operation of his key value-terms, is consistent, and the scope for collaborative discussion which this allows.

(ii) Morality

Leavis's value-terms are never stated directly but arise from the increasing pressure of significance that gradually attaches to certain repeated words and phrases. Significance accrues with incremental repetition and plain words of apparently straightforward sense are made to bear an unusual burden of meaning - a burden that is intensified by the deliberate avoidance of an overt exposition of this meaning. The vocabulary gestures obliquely towards an unstated referent that lies at a more generalised level behind the immediate argument; cognition depends on the correct interpretation of these gestures and on drawing conclusions in the abstract about the underlying formulation. Leavis's avoidance of theoretical analysis is in a way irresponsible, as well as tending to obscure the principal features of his argument. For conclusions must be drawn about the underlying assumptions in order to give the overloaded vocabulary more than a vaguely impressive weight of significance, and to approach a generalisation in the abstract about what constitutes value in literature; which is, after all, Leavis's prime concern.

For Leavis, the relationship between form and content has a fundamentally moral dimension:

when we examine the formal perfection of Emma, we find that it can be appreciated only in terms of the moral preoccupations that characterise the novelist's peculiar interest in life.(8)

. . .

It was James who put his finger on the weakness in Madame Bovary: the discrepancy between the technical ('aesthetic') intensity, with the implied attribution of interest to the subject, and the actual moral and human paucity of this subject on any mature valuation.(12-13)

The two categories of critical appraisal that in Leavis correspond respectively to the form of the novel and its subject-matter are the analysis of moral values, or 'preoccupations', and the appreciation of literary technique. At the time of publication of The Great Tradition one reviewer, discussing Leavis's 'moral or quasi-moral judgements' made the point that

Leavis nowhere goes into the question of whether these judgements are of the same logical type as those made in purely "technical" criticism, or how they are derived from the latter if they are not.³

Leavis would argue that the question does not arise, since in his scheme moral interest cannot be separated from technique, as the criticism of Flaubert revealed. There is obviously a way of approaching literature which is able to see a distinct separation of formal attributes and subject-matter - between aesthetics and morality - and it is this approach which raises the question of their relationship as types. However, the structure of Leavis's argument is such that it did not allow for such a separation to be acknowledged and he thus escaped the problem by ignoring it.

3. W.W. Robson, Review of English Studies, new series, I (1950) p 378.

Whether or not Leavis will acknowledge it, the question of the comparability of "technical" and moral types of criticism does arise and it is relevant to the general matter of his critical method. The analysis of literary technique is fundamentally an objective procedure, insofar as it sustains its own definitive terminology that relates to stateable facts about the text (properties of rhyme and metre) and requires no external referent - no appeal to another authority or orthodoxy, moral or otherwise - to validate its conclusions. With the discussion of moral values, judgements of an essentially subjective nature are a necessity. Discussing F.W. Bateson's notion of the practice of 'literary history', Leavis said that the material of literary history must be analysed critically,

by an appropriate and discriminating response; a response, that is, involving the kind of activity that produces value judgements. And these judgements are not, in so far as they are real, expressions of opinion on facts that can be possessed and handled neutrally (so to speak).⁴

The relationship of the subjective to the objective process is simple in the sense that all literature is a matter of words; but once the objective facts about a text have been mediated through the individual reader into a series of subjective judgements, it can be seen that the relationship is neither simple, nor logical in the sense of fixed and constant.

4. 'Criticism and Literary History' [review of F.W. Bateson, English Poetry and the English Language (1934)] , Scrutiny IV, 2 pp 186-7.

Subjective judgement is dependent on responses that relate to a structure of values derived from the individual's private experience. It therefore invites considerations on the text that are not necessarily inherently appropriate, but are 'accidents of personal association'.⁵ C.H.Rickword wrote that

though it may be that the critic's ultimate concern is with the conception of life (the 'values') of which the novel is a vehicle, yet he is only so concerned in as far as that conception is made active through art. . . . That conception . . . cannot be known apart from the form in which it becomes manifest. Obviously, a right apprehension of that 'form' depends on a right apprehension of its elements.⁶

Leavis's assumption of an inevitable rather than a potential connection between morality and aesthetics means that evaluative judgements that he made carry an air of specious objectivity where they ought to acknowledge their subjective tendencies. Leavis's argument in The Great Tradition is problematic because it rested on abstract value-terms that were required to perform a concrete evaluative function. The terminology of the detailed critical analysis (words such as 'intelligence' and 'maturity') itself referred back to the underlying

5. 'The sentimental person in whom a work of art arouses all sorts of emotions which have nothing to do with that work of art whatsoever, but are accidents of personal association, is an incomplete artist.'

T.S.Eliot, The Sacred Wood (1920) p 7.

6. C.H.Rickword, 'A Note on Fiction' (1926); reprinted in Edgell Rickword, Essays and Opinions 1921-31, ed. Alan Young (1974). Leavis published this essay in his anthology of articles from The Calendar of Modern Letters, Towards Standards of Criticism (1933).

moral component in Leavis's account of the relationship between form and content. The concepts of 'morality' and 'tradition' have no essential or objective significance other than that generated by Leavis's dependence upon them as organising principles on which he could proceed in the matter of discriminating amongst the heterogeneous material of 'the English novel'. As with the criticism of poetry, Leavis's commentary on the novel is more valid the more its value-terms are independent of the elision between literary and moral judgements. With the novel, however, this problem becomes more acute because of the implied evaluative bearing that the realist narrative has towards its represented material.

2. George Eliot and Henry James: some problems of method.

Classic realism requires the narrative voice to evaluate the events it recounts as well as to make sense of them.⁷

For the practice of literary criticism one of the fundamental differences between poetry and narrative prose of the nineteenth century organic-realist genre is that the critic encounters in the narrative a simultaneous or concurrent critique of the characters it represents and the events and exchanges it relates. The critic

7. Catherine Belsey, 'Re-reading the great tradition', in Re-reading English, ed. Peter Widdowson (1982) p 125.

of lyric poetry aims to wrest a meaning from enigmatic poetic language. The critic of the novel intervenes or mediates between the content of the narrative and the author's apparent evaluation of it. The relationship between form and content has this other aspect: the form (narrative structure, language, imagery, tones of voice) reflects its subject-matter in the direct sense; it is also modified, though, according to the author's own predisposition towards the content, which is inevitably subjective. The critic intervenes in this relation and a critical account of the narrative involves a reconstruction and assessment of the author's evaluative intention - which has to be derived from the formal characteristics that contain it.

Leavis's critical terminology recognised no formal difference between poetry and prose. However, the nature of the criticism of narrative prose meant that Leavis was able to engage more fully in a debate with the novelist regarding the 'moral responsibilities' evinced in his writings. In the criticism of poetry the moral issues were raised only speculatively; with the novel, Leavis was able to pinpoint exact moments of what he saw as authorial aberrancy: these he could represent as failures, using literary terms which had an inescapable moralist implication. The difficulties that this kind of critical practice generates can be seen in Leavis's discussion of George Eliot and Henry James.

A simple formulation of Leavis's approach to Eliot and James is to say that in each he identifies the 'great', the mediocre and the negligible, although each category is marked by various qualifying

clauses and each novel has its place in the hierarchy of an evaluation of the artist's whole oeuvre. Thus, Adam Bede, whilst 'conventional' is nevertheless a 'classic' and Silas Marner, despite its limitations, is a 'minor masterpiece'. The gradations referring to 'minor' examples proceed from criteria identical to those which are used to signify what is 'great' in an author's work. A similar approach is applied to both the lesser and the major works. The designation of items of relative value is not confined to a comparative analysis of complete novels. Leavis was not protective of the integrity of the novel as a single unit and he dissected and dismantled the texts in an effort to gradate areas of interest within the single novel. The famous example is his separation of 'Gwendolen Harleth' from Daniel Deronda; but Leavis practised similar separations elsewhere. The effect is to represent George Eliot's achievement not as a series of complete novels of varying degrees of value and interest but as a collocation of passages - themes, dialogues, characterisations - that constitute the best part of the artist's achievement. The two elements of the approach are the practical analysis of passages that are seen as successful and the diagnosis of areas that are deemed to have failed. The two approaches are substantially different. Practical analysis remains largely in the realm of literary criticism. The diagnostic impulse tends to look beyond the immediate text to biographical details and speculations about the author, as well as the teleology of literary production. In the case of Henry James the problem becomes particularly acute, as the novelist's life was seen as responsible for the failure of the later novels. Leavis made a direct moral connection between biography and creativity. The analysis moved away

from specifically identifiable features of the texts into a realm of unverifiable speculation. This was an abstraction that was compounded by his judging James's novels by the standards set in Eliot, a novelist with different creative intentions. In order to gain a clear impression of the way Leavis's critical method dealt with the second-order novels of these writers it is necessary to reconstruct Leavis's discussion of them. In this way, the dominant categories of appraisal become apparent and his key value-terms emerge.

'The appreciation of George Eliot's oeuvre has not been put on a critical basis and reduced to consistency'. The 'accepted view'⁸ of George Eliot's achievement separates her work into the novels of 'reminiscence' and the novels that are the work of the intellectual; the implicit valuation is that where the intellect intrudes the novel suffers. By this convention, Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner are her 'classics' and Romola, Felix Holt, the Radical and Daniel Deronda represent the work of 'the distinguished intellectual rather than the great novelist'.(34) This leaves Middlemarch aside, as generally recognised as 'one of the great masterpieces of English fiction'.(34-35) Leavis quoted from The Common Reader (1925 first series) Virginia Woolf's judgement that Middlemarch 'is one of the few English novels written for grown-up people'. Leavis saw this convention as one of the reasons for the novel's 'established recognition'.(35) The problem with the convention, he argued, was

8. Leavis referred to Elton, A Survey of English Literature 1830-80 vol II (1920); cf. The Great Tradition p 124.

its inconsistency: 'For if you think so highly of Middlemarch, then, to be consistent, you must be more qualified in your praise of the early things than persisting convention recognises. Isn't there, in fact, a certain devaluing to be done?'(35) The 'devaluing' that Leavis did was a mixture of diminishing the importance of recognisedly successful works and of identifying representative and significant areas of weakness in others. Scenes of Clerical Life is a 'remarkable' book, he said, which revealed the 'promise of a great novelist'; but while it is so, the predominant quality of the book is 'charm' and the fact that the material is based on recollection indicates that this was the author's 'prentice-work'.(36)⁹ Adam Bede, similarly, offers 'genuine attractions', though the book has been over-praised. The weakness lies in an absence of a unifying creative impulse at the centre of the novel, so that 'it is too resolvable into the separate interests that we can see the author to have started with'.(49) The depiction of rustic life is also 'charming' but much of the book is 'idealised' as well, as a comparison between Adam and Caleb Garth of Middlemarch reveals. Recognising the idealising element in this comparison 'involves limiting judgements for the critic'.(37) The limitation has to do with the seriousness of the subject-matter of the novel and the interference of merely 'artistic' conventions. An organised unity is achieved, but some of the dramatic elements are imposed by the author on the structure for the sake of convention and 'there is not at work in the whole any pressure from her

9. In the slightly revised edition of The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth 1962) Leavis rewrote this paragraph, concluding: 'Her histories are straight from life: she doesn't invent - she hasn't arrived at a sense of her art that prompts her to do so.'(p 49)

profounder experience to compel an inevitable development'.(37) That is, the dynamic of the novel is part genuine, part artificial; the combination makes the novel 'satisfactory' but the artifice 'means an abeyance of the profounder responsibility' and the result is conventional rather than original.

The vocabulary of these assessments indicates the way in which Leavis's criticism of the particular novels took the form of a response based upon his assertion of the moralist relation between form and content. 'Perfection of form' is directly dependent upon the nature of the 'moral preoccupations' of the particular narrative. Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede lacked the prerequisite kind of 'preoccupations' that this moralist critique demanded. Their content was not adequate to the stipulated seriousness of interest that Leavis required for the greater artistic achievements. What Leavis seems to have missed in these novels is originality and profundity. They therefore occupy a lower rung in his estimation than Middlemarch; but these novels are generally regarded as lesser works in the Eliot canon and Leavis's categories have demonstrated only this convention. Leavis articulated his reasons for placing them thus in relation to Middlemarch in order to introduce into the discussion the value-terms and concepts that would enable him to argue against the conventional valuation of the 'intellectual' novels, hitherto commonly disparaged. For this reason Leavis introduced at this point phrases such as 'profounder experience', 'inevitable development', 'an abeyance of the profounder responsibility'. The assumptions behind this vocabulary made themselves felt more strongly with regard to The Mill on the Floss.

The weakness that Leavis pointed to in The Mill on the Floss is more radical and has bearings on all the subsequent fiction that Eliot produced. The writing in this novel is of a different order from that which preceded it. The recollections of the novel are not idealised or 'soften [ed] with a haze of sentiment'; Mrs. Poyser, Dinah and Adam could not exist here, they 'belong to a different world'.(38)

The change is a consequence of greater application on the author's part: a combination of intelligence and 'feeling and remembering'. This, for Leavis, is an 'obvious' fact, but one which is not generally acknowledged. Yet a great deal of the strength of the novel has to do with 'the strong autobiographical element': this is a crux for Leavis. The fact of 'the poignantly immediate presence of the author' produces the 'vividness', and its associated qualities, of the book; yet it also contains the key to its fundamental limitation. Maggie Tulliver is too closely identified with the author, and the autobiographical element causes Eliot to suspend her intelligence and her judgement to produce a fiction that has a self-idealisation as heroine. The result is that Maggie's spiritual nature is accepted without criticism - by both the author and reader - and her immaturity, though presented with 'great sympathy' is not 'placed' by 'relating it to mature experience'.(42)

With regard to Maggie, Eliot's intelligence is supervened by emotion; this in turn produces a dramatic artifice, of a kind with that noticed in Adam Bede that betrays George Eliot's real talent. The ending, for example, partakes of this artificiality and represents significant failure on the author's behalf:

. . . something so like a daydream indulgence we are all familiar with could not have imposed itself on the novelist as the right ending if her mature intelligence had been fully engaged, giving her full self-knowledge.(45)

Leavis objected further that 'the soulful side of Maggie' was 'offered by George Eliot herself . . . with a remarkable absence of criticism'.
(41)

The authorial evaluation of the character of Maggie and the critical evaluation, which aspires to greater objectivity, were in dispute at this point. Leavis's critique interposed itself between the text and the author and challenged the values the author is seeking to promote. The climax of The Mill on the Floss is seen as 'daydream indulgence', a resolution of narrative events that is an 'artificial' imposition rather than 'inevitable' dramatic development. We might agree that the end of the novel is melodramatic and primitively symbolic. Leavis's criticism formulated his unease with this part of the narrative in terms that invoked his moralistic aesthetic: 'mature intelligence' and 'self-knowledge'. In inverting the conventional valuation that applauded Eliot's personal reminiscence and deprecated her intellectuality, Leavis employed value-terms that had implications beyond literary criticism. His adjustment of the convention was a judgement upon it, implying that mature intelligence and self-knowledge were in abeyance in the habit of the conventional estimate. The forms that the moralist aesthetic took in its intervention in literary study can be seen in the discussion of the early novels of Henry James, where 'early' was approximately defined as

'before The Portrait of a Lady' (1888). This passage of The Great Tradition follows the comparison of that novel with Daniel Deronda and its main aim was to elucidate 'the conditions that enabled [James] to make a variation on 'Gwendolen Harleth' . . . something so different, positively, from that work. . . . By conditions I mean the inner conditions - largely determined as they are by the outer. I mean the essential interests and attitudes that characterise his outlook on the world and his response to life'.(126)

Leavis obviously felt that 'the essential interests and attitudes' of the author were a main source of interest for the critic.¹⁰ They are only determinable by means of an examination of the implicit evaluative bearing of the author towards his narrative. Leavis's criticism, therefore, concentrated on this aspect of the novels in the process of discriminating amongst them. Their relative qualities were assessed according to the nature and type of the orientation of the author to the presented material. Leavis was less concerned with the formal characteristics and thematic developments of the narrative than with this area of intervention between author and text. Again, Leavis was only able to discuss the moral orientation of the author by means of the loaded vocabulary of value-terms that was emerging from the repetitively suggestive use of certain words and phrases. On the other hand, this terminology was itself dependent for its meaning

10. 'By "interests" I mean the kinds of profound concern - having the urgency of personal problems, and felt as moral problems, more than personal in significance - that lie beneath Jane Austen's art, and enable her to assimilate varied influences and heterogeneous material and make great novels out of them.'
(127)

upon the inclusive moralistic aesthetic concealed in the background of the whole critical practice.

The novels of James that Leavis favoured were Roderick Hudson, The Bostonians, Washington Square, The Europeans, The Awkward Age, What Maisie Knew and above all The Portrait of a Lady. Their virtues were maturity, intelligence, irony, wit, seriousness. Leavis admitted to the reductive tendency of his essay - 'the impossibility of being fair to James in any directed and limited survey' - and declares that he has 'a given exploratory line in view'(139) The exploration was a matter of tracing the influence of the qualities listed above as it was revealed in the novels.

The circumstances of James's life, his experience of New England and Europe, produced in him 'a bent for comparison, and a constant profound pondering of the nature of civilised society and of the possibility of imagining a finer civilisation than any he knew'.(128) Leavis called this James's 'international theme', seeing the comparative process functioning in novels that are not, like The Europeans, explicitly preoccupied with this theme. James also had his influences, most notably, in Leavis's view, that of Hawthorne, from whom James inculcated a sense of the 'poetic' possibilities of prose fiction. This 'poetry' is described in terms of 'the profound seriousness of [James's] interest in life.'(129) Another influence seen by Leavis is that of Dickens: James 'was helped by him to see from the outside, and critically place, the life around him', although James 'give[s] the Dickensian manner a much more formidable intellectual edge'.(132)

James's ironic detachment, learnt from Dickens, develops an 'un-Dickensian subtlety' which is a matter of 'mature standards and interests'(132), of a kind not evinced in Dickens's own work. The Bostonians 'gives us Martin Chuzzlewit redone by an enormously more intelligent and better educated mind'.(134) The novel also displays a quality that has no kinship with anything in Dickens, 'the kind of knowledge of individual humans and concrete societies that we expect of a great novelist'.(135) Witness to this is James's treatment of Basil Ransom, and Olive Chancellor and her relationship with Verena Tarrant. Leavis punctuated these comments with a generous amount of quotation that was made to speak for itself. For example, the visit of Olive Chancellor and her scion to Henry Burrage's rooms is quoted extensively, as evidence of James's psychological acuteness. The reader of these passages of quoted extracts must decide for himself as to the attributes of the text in which James's 'fine psychological comedy' inheres. Leavis attempts no close analysis of the workings of James's prose; the qualities Leavis is describing are simply said to be there, to be self-evident. He is not concerned to examine in any greater detail the precise ways in which these effects are contrived. The argument proceeds from the general to the general; there is no serious endeavour to achieve 'convincing particularity'.

This generalising is not a result of the attenuated nature of Leavis's discussion of James, it is an inherent characteristic of his critical procedure. Leavis's discussion of The Bostonians began with the proposition that this novel is Martin Chuzzlewit 'redone' with greater subtlety and intelligence. This assertion was supported, though not immediately confirmed, by examples such as the description

of Miss Birdseye.(133-4) Olive Chancellor is seen as evidence of James's 'understand[ing] of the finer civilisation of New England' (134): she is dealt with by James in 'a very remarkable piece of psychological analysis'.(135) Leavis also quoted the visit to Burrage, and Olive's vision of 'ideal happiness' (evenings with Verena reading Goethe). This 'refinement' receives an ironic contrast in the 'vulgarity' of Mathias Pardon and this irony is described as 'typical' of James. Leavis then summarised the novel:

The Bostonians is a wonderfully rich, intelligent, and brilliant book. . . . It is an acknowledged masterpiece, but I don't think that it has anything like the reputation it deserves. . . . It has an overt richness of life, . . . it is incomparably witty and completely serious. . . . It is one of James's achieved major classics, and among the works that he devoted to American life it is supreme.(138)

This account borders on the hyperbolic; but its major weakness is the extent to which it is all so much a matter of assertion. It is a summary in a generalised form of what are essentially general observations. This is the logic of Leavis's critical practice. James's qualities as a 'great novelist' are asserted a priori; the criticism proceeds on this basis and works to produce evidence to confirm the presence of these pre-existent characteristics. The criticism is affirmative rather than 'exploratory' or analytical. The possibilities for radically dissenting alternative observations of the quoted extracts are multifarious; but they are prohibited by Leavis's primary assertions of James's distinction as a creative artist. Dissent from his judgements regarding the quoted extracts is in effect dissent from the initial valuation, so that to quarrel with Leavis's judgement

on a certain novel is to argue with the general assertion of James's 'greatness'. This places the dissenting voice outside the boundaries of Leavis's discourse. This is not to say that one would wish to declare that James is not a great novelist: nor that Leavis's general observations regarding James's novels are all invalid. His analysis, through both its positive and negative manifestations, of James's 'international theme' is concise and illuminating. The summary, which is what the whole discussion essentially is, of the theme's complexity provides some insight into the nature of James's art. However, the asserted propositions about James do not emerge from a close or detailed discussion of any of the novels. Leavis ramified a complicated sequence of comparisons and suggested relations of value between texts in the canon and with other authors; but ultimately the judgement on James that is offered to the reader demands that he accedes to the moralist implications of the main value-terms, without which Leavis's commentary is more or less negated. Close textual analysis was not part of Leavis's procedure in The Great Tradition; the focus of his interest lay in the region of the evaluative subtlety of the particular author. This feature could only be transmitted via the specialised vocabulary, whose meanings were not adumbrated by Leavis but were left undefined, as if self-explanatory. The import of the extended passages of quotation were, such was the implication, equally self-evident. In a sense, for Leavis to have attempted to unravel the significances of these passages would have been for him the equivalent of making explicit the presupposed meaning of a word such as 'mature' or 'intelligent', an activity he regarded as inessential, as the meaning was 'plain'.

After quoting 440 words from Roderick Hudson and 360 from The Bostonians Leavis said of the latter passage: 'This, in itself, would perhaps not have suggested a relation to Dickens, but when it is approached by way of the passage from Roderick Hudson the relation is plain'.(133) Some 800 words of quoted material received only this comment. Like the value-terms that were so crucial to this criticism, its significance was 'plain'. This example is typical of Leavis's practice and it means that, because of the possibilities for alternative views to be developed from the passages, Leavis's own asserted propositions have an insubstantial validity. It was a critical commentary that aimed to confirm presuppositions which had their source in an extra-literary sphere rather than to discover, in the particular texts, literary values. The study of James was subordinated to the main impulse of The Great Tradition, of establishing a coherent line of development, which was in turn part of a larger exercise in producing a set of moral values derivable from literature for use in the remedial polemic against the prevailing cultural decline.

The first creative achievement of real substance that Leavis found in George Eliot is in the 'Transome theme' of Felix Holt; he quoted a long passage 'where the dialogue is so different in quality from that in which Felix Holt figures, and the analysis of so different an order (and in so different a prose) from that characteristic of Romola'.(52) Leavis found Felix's dialogue 'unconvincing' and the study of Romola an 'idealisation'. The difference manifested in

Jermyn's exchange with Mrs. Transome¹¹ is 'that the theme it handles is profoundly felt and sharply realised'.(54) The antithesis between George Eliot's 'reminiscences' and her intellect (the first producing Adam Bede, the second Romola) is here made redundant and translated into something new. The 'perceptive' and 'reflective' modes¹² are synthesised in this writing: 'the perceiving focuses the profound experience of years - experience worked over by reflective thought, and so made capable of focusing'. The artist and intellectual in Eliot combine to produce 'a new impersonality' in the Transome theme. (54)

Leavis quoted T.S.Eliot's tag regarding 'impersonality': 'the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates'.¹³ He explained George Eliot's inability to identify with Mrs. Transome as the key to the difference of treatment. The difficulties of presenting the history of Mrs. Transome were analysed by Leavis; George Eliot's achievement is to have presented the situation 'with complete objectivity'.(55) This objectivity extends to the moral issues arising out of Mrs. Transome's status and condition. There is 'nothing of the Victorian moralist' in the treatment of this theme; nor anything explicitly 'moralising' in any degree: 'although [Mrs. Transome's] case is conceived in an imagination that is profoundly moral, the

11. The Great Tradition pp 52-54.

12. This distinction comes from James, Partial Portraits (1888) p 51, quoted by Leavis pp 33-34.

13. T.S. Eliot Selected Essays (1951) p 18.

presentment of it is a matter of psychological observation'.(56) 'There is . . . an intently matter-of-fact directness: this is human nature, this is the fact and these are the inexorable consequences.'(57)

The 'inexorability' is a key mechanism. Quoting an extract describing Mrs. Transome's 'agonised helplessness'(74) during the crucial exchange between Jermyn and Harold, Leavis describes the passage as 'dramatic constataion, poignant and utterly convincing, and the implied moral, which is a matter of the enacted inevitability, is that perceived by a psychological realist'.(59) The concept of morality invoked here has nothing to do with homiletic platitudes inserted in the narrative but concerns George Eliot's whole attitude towards her theme. This attitude is contained in all the component elements of the novel, including dialogue, authorial commentary and the whole narrative structure. These elements are interrelated in a way that enhances the 'realist' ambitions of the narrative at the level of 'psychological' probability. By this phrase Leavis meant that the characters acted according to a cogent inner compunction rather than simply because of an externalised dramatic relation with other characters and events. The idea of 'enacted inevitability' is associated with the inclusive artistic structures of the 'moral fable', where the organisation of the parts is determined by the 'moral' intention of the whole. This 'inevitability', together with the objective 'impersonality', makes the study of Mrs. Transome's predicament 'so astonishingly finer and maturer than anything George Eliot had done before'. Yet the moral 'inevitability' and the 'impersonality' are observed characteristics only; they are not analysed by any of the means available to Leavis. There is no close analysis of the language, nor a wider investigation into the nature of Eliot's implied 'morality' and the reason for

the 'inevitability' of the inevitable. This is not to deny that these two categories of critical appraisal do not operate to emphasise specific qualities of the text. The question is whether the observation of them is enough, whether these categories ought to be made to carry the additional responsibility of having to act as value-terms. This is a question, in essence, of to what degree this kind of analysis contributes to an understanding of George Eliot's art.

Middlemarch was, for Leavis, Eliot's most substantial achievement. The critical categories into which its main characteristics were organised are as follows:

sociological interest:	in the novel's 'study of provincial life;
intellectual understanding:	in 'the pathos of Dr. Casaubon's predicament'(61) - which is treated with irony but also 'compassion'; and Lydgate's 'intellectual idealism'(66);
the objective presentation of characters:	seen in Lydgate's attitude towards women (producing the 'poetic justice' of his marital relations) and Rosamund's 'destructive' egoism;
comedy:	for example the dialogue between Rosamund and Mary Garth, and the conversation, amongst others, between Mrs. Bulstrode and Mrs. Plymdale;
'analysis': ¹⁴	of Bulstrode's 'peculiar religious world'(69) - also a blend of satire and compassion;

14. I.e., 'of the "merciless" kind that only intelligence lighted by compassion can attain'.(70)

'creativity': for example, the 'peculiar quality of life' of the minor characters¹⁵

together with the 'self-identification' and 'idealisation' that combine to produce the 'weakness' of the novel. This combination 'betrays a radical disorder'(78) in George Eliot's art, which resulted in the presentation of the character of Dorothea and the 'immaturity' of the valuations that she, and Ladislaw, represent.

Classic value-terms are here mixed with those which have a meaning peculiar to Leavis. The sociological interest of the novel, its comic and ironic aspects, its objective and compassionate analysis and the creative vitality of the minor characters are categories of appraisal that have a conventional evaluative function. The operation of the constituent parts is demonstrable and the relation between the critical term and its evaluative capacity is a direct one. For example, the 'creativity' evinced in the presentation of the minor characters is textually verifiable by means of quotation. That this 'vitality' is an advantage to the novel is not arguable. Similarly, Leavis's examination and assessment of Eliot's treatment of Casaubon brings direct textual evidence to bear on the evaluative judgements that are made. To contest these judgements it would be necessary to provide a judgement equally evidenced that countered or undermined Leavis's assessment. There is nothing in the structure of Leavis's argument in this regard that prohibits, through aprioristic assertions of value, the dissenting voice from presenting an alternative case

15. For example: '... the Garths,... the Vincy family, Mr. Farebrother, the Cadwalladers, and also in the grotesquerie of Peter Featherstone and his kin'.(72)

to the one being argued. The value-terms are concretely determinable, and not asserted in the abstract. In utilising the categories in this way Leavis is engaging an orthodox critical practice in a way that will concede to attempts at a refutation of its conclusions; its orientation is collaborative rather than dogmatic.

The diagnostic element of Leavis's approach is revealed in the discussion of Dorothea as the source of the novel's 'weakness'(72). The problem lies in the theme that Dorothea develops, described in the Prelude as 'a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with meanness of opportunity'. Leavis calls this 'a dangerous theme for George Eliot'. It is a danger that is avoided in the early chapters, Dorothea not being exempt from the ironic tone that generally pervades there. Gradually, however, the presentation of Dorothea begins to show signs of 'an unqualified self-identification'(74) by the author with her heroine, marked by an abeyance of this ironic tenor. The weakness is further manifested in Will Ladislaw, who is meant to mediate the author's version of Dorothea to the reader; but Ladislaw 'has no independent status of his own' and 'represents' certain of George Eliot's 'intentions' which she has failed to 'realise creatively'.(75) The reader is asked to accept Ladislaw's valuation of Dorothea, and Dorothea's of Ladislaw - both of which are the valuations of the author. Dorothea is another 'day-dream ideal self' for George Eliot and the novel 'alternat[es] between the poised impersonal insight of a finely tempered wisdom and something like the emotional confusions and self-importances of adolescence'.(75)

There are two consequences of this idealisation. The first is

a failure of 'creative realisation', a lapse of authorial objectivity which is accompanied by loss of judgement, or self-critical analysis. The reader is asked to take seriously something that is manifestly preposterous. For instance, the final scene between Dorothea and Lydgate (chapter LXXVI) is demonstrably 'a failure in touch [that,] in so intelligent a novelist, is more than a surface matter; it betrays a radical disorder'.(78) The second consequence is more involved and concerns this 'radical disorder'. Seeing George Eliot identifying herself so completely with Dorothea, Leavis feels entitled to interpret the author's creative 'disorder' as it is revealed in the novel's flawed characterisation: to conflate, that is, the authorial voice with the historical figure. Leavis used extracts concerning Dorothea as if they were direct statements about George Eliot. The 'radical disorder' is the 'extraordinary' coexistence in the novel of an immature 'self-indulgence' with the 'objectivity' and 'vigour of illusion'.(79) Yet this 'self-indulgence' and the 'impersonality' are terms which are applied by Leavis to George Eliot, not Dorothea. Leavis found the weakness of the novel in the author's attitude towards her subject. His formulation of the significance of this weakness is based on his criteria regarding the evaluative moral bearing required of an author. In this way, Leavis's criticism asserts its moralist aesthetic. Leavis did not analyse Dorothea's character according to her circumstances within the narrative, nor did he accept the motives and valuations represented in the narrative at their face value. He regarded all these features, in the manner typical of most modern literary criticism, as reflections of the valuations of the author. For Leavis, the author was as much a part of the text as any major character. In a sense, George Eliot was the 'main

character' of her novels, since it is in terms of her implied moral valuations that Leavis discusses the achievements of her work: this is the distinguishing feature of his criticism. By intervening in the narrative at those points where the authorial evaluation obtrudes, Leavis can assert his own system of moral criteria. The more closely identified were his and the author's moral values, the greater the significance of the achievement. By this means the novel finds its place in the particular Leavis hierarchy.

The coexistence of weakness and strength recurs in a more extreme form in Daniel Deronda. By now the critical categories under which these elements are to be classified are familiar. Leavis saw The Portrait of a Lady as a variation on 'Gwendolen Harleth', the 'good part' of Eliot's novel. (85-6) He made some idiosyncratic claims for the similarities between these novels: 'Henry James wouldn't have written The Portrait of a Lady if he hadn't read 'Gwendolen Harleth'.' This was offered as 'an assertion of fact and a critical comparison', as was his declaration that the earlier novel 'is decidedly the greater'. Leavis was not prepared to argue this point. 'The fact, once asserted, can hardly be questioned.'¹⁶ The reader's perplexity when faced with these 'assertions of fact' arises out of the difficulty of pointing to the rationale behind the comparison and the reason why it is pursued at such length.

16. This statement parallels the earlier declaration regarding the relationship between the two novels: 'That relation demonstrated nothing more is needed in order to establish the general relation I posit between the two novelists.'(14)

In fact, it is George Eliot's novel that benefits from the comparison, at James's expense. The bulk of the essay is taken up by Daniel Deronda, with James's novel offering a pragmatic example of how and why a similar creative impulse (Leavis is inclined to think James's borrowing was 'unconscious'¹⁷) could produce dissimilar results. The crucial distinction rests on the 'completer' and more 'real' presentation that George Eliot is able to achieve. This distinction is a matter of measuring the representations of character, incident and circumstance against the actualities of real life, and establishing the substantiality of each novel's respective moral preoccupation. These two aspects are not separable in Leavis's scheme but have an inevitable correlation. This correlation between art and morality, and Leavis's sense of its ineluctability, is fundamental to The Great Tradition. It is not encountered in the discussion of the early and minor work of these novelists and it takes a different form when applied to Hard Times in its guise as a 'moral fable'. It is most apparent with regard to those novels that Leavis ranks as of the highest order. The lesser novels are not, as one might expect, 'lesser' because the problem of morality fails to arise. The implication of Leavis's criticism is that a preoccupation with the relationship between art and morality is what makes a novel 'serious' and that a successful synthesis of it is a condition of a novel's 'greatness'. The absence of this preoccupation is precisely the condition that determines a novel's second-order status; judgements

17. '... that he had [Gwendolen] in mind at all consciously, so that he thought of himself as attempting a variation of George Eliot's theme, seems to me very unlikely. The inspiration, or challenge, he was conscious of was some girl he encountered in actual life'.
(86)

and observations on what it otherwise achieves are not inhibited by this fact, but they can make no essential difference to the primary valuation. Moreover, this posited ideal relation is essentially unprovable: it is a fundamental contention that was basic to the critical discourse, not one that emerged from literary analysis; its source lay outside the realm of literary criticism.

The key to the whole structure of Leavis's critical method is contained in a question put by Leavis himself at the beginning of the chapter on George Eliot:

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 realised? - a responsibility involving, of its very nature, imaginative sympathy, moral discrimination, and judgements of relative human value?(29)

For Leavis, Flaubert embodied the antithesis to these criteria. He represented, for Leavis and other Scrutiny writers,¹⁸ 'the incarnation of formalism and moral anomie in the modern novel'.¹⁹ Leavis had earlier freely adapted James's comments on Flaubert to indicate the latter's failure to attend sufficiently to 'mature' moral and human interests.²⁰ Leavis claimed that James found Madame Bovary 'an

18. For example, Martin Turnell, who published two essays on Flaubert alongside Leavis's 'Revaluation' of George Eliot: 'Flaubert - (i) and (ii)', Scrutiny, XIII, 3 and 4.

19. Francis Mulhern, The Moment of Scrutiny, (1979) p 279.

20. 'It was James who put his finger on the weakness in Madame Bovary: the discrepancy between the technical ('aesthetic') intensity, with the implied attribution of interest to the subject, and the actual moral and human paucity of this subject on any mature valuation.'(13) This was not a quotation but a paraphrase.

instance of a preoccupation with "form" that is insufficiently a pre-occupation with human value and moral interest'.(29) What James actually says about Madame Bovary is more direct and qualified than Leavis's account suggests:

The form is in itself as interesting, as active, as much of the essence of the subject as the idea, and yet so close is its fit and so inseparable its life that we catch it at no moment on any errand of its own.²¹

James's objection to the novel is directed at the character of Emma, which he finds 'in spite of the nature of her consciousness . . . is really too small an affair.'²² This comment is made in association with similar remarks on L'Education Sentimentale: James condemns Flaubert's characters for their 'inferiority' but exempts Emma for her 'perfection'.²³ It is difficult precisely to pinpoint the antimony that Leavis discovered. It is significant that immediately before the comment on Flaubert (the passage leads to the quotation given above) Leavis had rejected the 'misleading antithesis' that James presented for the novel - that is, as either a 'picture of life' or a 'moralised fable'.²⁴ Leavis found hints and indications in James's criticism that suited his purpose, after the necessary adaptation, of establishing normative criteria for his own treatment of the novel.

21. James, Notes on Novelists, (1914), p 63.

22. Ibid. p 64.

23. Ibid. p 65.

24. 'Moralised fable' is James's phrase. See Partial Portraits, p 51, quoted by Leavis, p 28.

James's assertion of the formal achievement of Madame Bovary is emphatic; the qualification that succeeds it is more reticent, and more concerned with Frédéric Moreau than with Emma Bovary. Yet in Leavis, this was rendered in terms of the inseparable elision of 'formal perfection' and 'moral superiority'. Flaubert is exactly the novelist whose 'preoccupation with "form" is not a matter of his responsibility towards a rich human interest'(29); and he is a novelist in receipt of the highest acclaim from one of the constituents of the 'great tradition': so Leavis's version of James's critique, never fully quoted, emphasised the admonitory rather than the approbative clauses.

Leavis's treatise on the novel had this insistence on the moral aspect of the form/content relationship at its centre. Its presence was a matter for discussion in respect only of the 'great' novelists, but there its authority is absolute. This was the organising principle for the comparison between James and Eliot. Before that it served to account for the formal inadequacies of that half of Daniel Deronda that Leavis wished to set aside. There were similarities between the weaknesses of all Eliot's novels. Maggie Tulliver, Felix Holt and Romola were all examples of a tendency to self-identification by the author that derived from an unguarded 'inspirational' source. They undermine George Eliot's capacity to judge objectively and contextually the valuations she implies for her characterisations. 'In these inspirations her intelligence and real moral insight are not engaged', with the result that 'all in the book that issues from this inspiration is unreal and impotently wordy'.(85) Leavis quoted several examples of this and thus terminated his discussion of the 'bad half' of the novel; he then embarked on an appraisal of 'the astonishingly contrasting strength and fineness of the large remainder'. George

Eliot here overcomes ('transcends') the weakness, as well as 'what are commonly thought to be her limitations'. To enforce this claim Leavis adduced James's debt to 'Gwendolen Harleth'. The comparison of the two novels serves to show, in effect, how much better George Eliot was with the same material. This is an observation that may be argued for or contested in many ways. What is crucial is the set of terms germane to Leavis's particular demonstration of it.

Two quotations juxtaposed will give the essence of the argument and will introduce into a literary critical sphere the criteria adumbrated in Leavis's question about the responsibility of the great novelist. James's presentation of Isabel Archer is 'partial in both senses of the word, . . . both incomplete and indulgent'.(86) It is therefore less 'real' than George Eliot's portrait of Gwendolen because it is less detailed and less objectively critical. George Eliot's critical stance towards Gwendolen is not merely 'animus'. It is that

simply, as a very intelligent woman, [George Eliot] is able, unlimited by masculine partiality of vision, and only the more perceptive because a woman, to achieve a much completer presentment of her subject than James of his. . . . It isn't that she doesn't appreciate the qualities that so appeal to Henry James: she renders them at least as well as he - renders them better, in the sense that she 'places' them.(87-8)

To underline this point Leavis quotes a long passage from the interview between Gwendolen and the Reverend Gascoigne (chapter XIII). Gascoigne illustrates in the particular Eliot's general capacity for representing the world with which she is concerned with 'complexity and completeness'

and a 'fullness of vision and response.'(91) In contrast,

James's presentment of what is essentially the same world is seen, in the comparison, to have entailed much excluding and simplifying. His is a subtle art, and he has his irony; but the irony doesn't mean inclusiveness - an adequacy to the complexities of the real in its concrete fulness; it doesn't mark a complex valuing process that has for upshot a total attitude in which all the elements of a full response are brought together.

. . .

His world of 'best society' and country house is, for all its life and charm, immeasurably less real . . . than George Eliot's. He idealises, and his idealising is a matter of not seeing, and not knowing (or not taking into account), a great deal of the reality.(91)

In these judgements are involved all the criteria of Leavis's initial question, which presented 'complexity of interests, . . . imaginative sympathy, moral discrimination, and judgements of relative human value' (29) as the prerequisite ingredients of 'responsible' creativity.

The key word of the question is 'responsibility'; 'irresponsibility' is the quality represented by Flaubert's antithetical formalism.

It is a subjective term: the question as to what the responsibility is owed can only be answered preferentially. Flaubert's 'responsibility', one might argue, is manifested in his dedicated formalism; it does not lay claim to any part of Leavis's metaphysical 'complexity of interests, profoundly realised'. Leavis is making a subjective moral judgement by insisting on the inevitableness of the relation between 'technique' and the moral valuations of the author.

There are two issues involved, one relating to Leavis's analysis of the moral dimensions of the two novels, and the other to his

examination of their formal ambitions. In the two novels the moral circumstances of the respective heroines are different in each case, but both are eventually concerned with dealing with the consequences of choices freely made. Gwendolen's situation is dealt with by Eliot in terms of 'the complexities of inner constitution and outer conditions' that make her 'amenable to moral judgement'. This is achieved through 'speech and action' and 'a kind of psychological notation'.(102)

Compared to this, James's representation of Isabel is suspect: there is something 'equivocal about his indirectness', she is not internalised in the way Gwendolen Harleth is. 'The difference between James and George Eliot is largely a matter of what he leaves out.'(110)

So far, Leavis has explored what are essentially differences in artistic ambitions. Confusion sets in with the reference to James's 'positive art' as 'compensation' for the omissions. That is to say, the omission was not regarded by Leavis as a matter of artistic intention but as a failure: 'he fails to produce the fable that gives inevitability and moral significance'.(111) He sees Isabel's choice of Osmond in the face of unanimous opposition and the picture of her 'enjoying . . . the admiring pity due to a noble victim who is above criticism' as examples of 'inconsistencies' and 'moral incoherences'; (112) and yet, in the chapter on James, Isabel's rejection of Warburton was seen as 'an act of radically ethical judgement'.(148) The novel as a whole is described, in direct contradiction to the above, as one that, although 'on so much a larger scale than The Europeans, and [which] because of its complexity doesn't invite the description of 'moral fable', . . . is similarly organised: it is all intensely significant'.(152)

The source of this contradiction lies in Leavis's critical procedure. Leavis denied James any conscious borrowing from Eliot,²⁵ yet that there are similarities was not in doubt. Leavis felt that James was aiming to reproduce 'the irony of Gwendolen's married situation'. However, Isabel has none of Gwendolen's 'moral significance' and James is presenting 'a valuation of Isabel that is incompatible with a really critical irony'.(111) He does not 'place' the 'American idealism' that produces her naivety in extenuation of this. The comparison, therefore, allows Leavis to illustrate what he sees as failure in James that would not otherwise have been obvious; that is, a failure to reproduce an ethical structure unconsciously taken from George Eliot. This is a failure that, taken in isolation, is less pressing, and Leavis's discussion becomes contradictory. He sees in Eliot a relationship between art and morality that conforms to his expectations of what constitutes 'responsible' creativity. Daniel Deronda represents a set of criteria that are not fulfilled by The Portrait of a Lady; the status of the former novel was established by Leavis as a standard by which to assess other works and the criticisms of James were organised around it.

James's art had not for Leavis the commensurate realistic force of evocation required by this standard of novelistic achievement. The connection of this evaluation to an assertion of a moral 'irresponsibility' is the source of conflict in the critical practice.

25. See note 17 above.

George Eliot's attitude to Gwendolen is described by Leavis as 'that of a great novelist, concerned with human and moral valuation in a way proper to her art'.(109) The background of implied orthodoxy that is contained in the generalisation is asserted without further exposition, as if the qualities of Eliot's art were proof in themselves of the autonomy of Leavis's implied normative criteria. A similar logical fault is made plain in the discussion of 'the later James'. This introduces the second issue arising from the intervention of Leavis's version of the relationship between form and content, namely the question of formal 'intentions':

The trouble with the late style is that it exacts so intensely and inveterately analytic an intention that no sufficient bodies response builds up: nothing sufficiently approaching the deferred concrete immediacy that has been earned is attainable.(168)

The reply to this is that 'concrete immediacy' was never part of James's purpose, that 'analysis' is the formal preoccupation with which he is engaged. Leavis asserts that this deficiency produces 'moral unsatisfactoriness': for example, the attitude towards the main characters in The Golden Bowl 'isn't meant to be ironical' and this necessitates a corruption of the reader's 'finer moral sense'. (158)

The premises of this comparison encapsulate the main principles of Leavis's approach to the novel. The differences between George Eliot and Henry James were essentially differences relating to their critical bearing in relation to their represented material and their contrasting formal ambitions. In both respects, Leavis found George Eliot the more congenial and he based his criticism, of both James

and of Conrad and Dickens, on the values he derived from her work.

'Complexity of interests', or plenitude in the material of the novel, and 'concrete immediacy' were the basic evaluative terms. Leavis felt that the greater the inclusivity and completeness to which the novel aspired the greater was its potential achievement. 'Inclusiveness' meant an 'adequacy to the complexities of the real in its concrete fulness'.(91) That is, the narrative should aim to be as close an analogue to 'real' life as possible; reality is extremely complex, so 'complexity of interests' in the novel denotes an aspiration towards 'realism'. Eliot, Leavis argued, was capable of a 'much completer presentment of her subject' than James. This is a matter of authorial intention. Leavis excluded without argument the possibility of an alternative artistic ambition, one that aimed to simplify its representations of reality to generate metaphoric truths about 'real life' rather than producing a complex analogue of it. James's method was less 'direct' than Eliot's; for Leavis, this meant that he was being 'equivocal'.

Leavis deprecated this 'indirectness' because of his prerequisite of 'concrete immediacy', a value he had employed in the criticism of poetry. There it was contrasted with 'vague abstraction' as in the contrast between Shelley's imagery and Keats's 'sensuous immediacy'. In the novel, it appears to mean the dramatic impression of a given passage, together with the analogous complexity of 'reality' that it pursues. At any rate, it condemns anything oblique, 'indirect' or analytic, on the grounds that 'no sufficient bodied response builds up'(168) during passages marked by those characteristics. The prose

style of the later James is a problematic crux for literary criticism; but it is not one that will be illuminated by the introduction of alien categories of evaluation that are based on an analysis of the achievements of another author. Moreover, as far as Leavis was concerned, the absence of 'concrete immediacy' was allied to failings in terms of the author's moral orientation. The lack of a sufficiently 'ironical' or critical bearing towards the presented material was an artistic failure and one that Leavis saw as being the result of the 'analytic' or oblique prose style. However, the formal intentions of the narrative cannot be held absolutely responsible for weaknesses in authorial detachment and moral disinterest. James may have been 'self-indulgent' in regard to the characters in The Golden Bowl in his inadequate ironic 'placing' of them (in relation to what criterion of moral behaviour?); but Leavis is not convincing in his attempt to blame the prose style for a weakness of moral orientation in the author because the thrust of his argument depended to such an extent on asserted critical principles supported by the turbid vocabulary of value-terms, rather than emerging from a heuristic literary critical or analytic process.

Leavis contrasted James's imagery of the 'early' with that of the 'late' style. The earlier figurative effects have a 'poetic immediacy' where in the 'developed Jamesian style [there] is a more deliberate and elaborated kind of figure, . . . the imagery is not immediate and inevitable but synthetic. It is diagrammatic rather than poetic'. (167) This according to Leavis is further evidence that James's 'technical preoccupation . . . took his intelligence out of its true focus and blunted his sensitiveness'. (165) The proof of that claim depends on the status of Leavis's preconceptions about the nature

and function of the figurative elements in a literary text. Those preconceptions were based on Leavis's conviction that literature has a 'responsibility' to produce 'concrete immediacy' in its metaphoric and analogous modes, which in turn derived from the larger generalisation concerning his assertion of the novelist's responsibility to something called 'life'.

The word 'life' had a typically idiosyncratic function in Leavis's account of James. The early novels had 'the abundant, full-bodied life of well-nourished organisms'; the later work showed 'an unhealthy vitality of under-nourishment and etiolation'.(165) This phraseology was designed to suggest that 'life' has a substantial rather than a metaphorical existence in the work of art: it suggests that 'the work really possesses a form of life which is a kind of counterpart of its author's'.²⁶ Leavis's intention was thus to close the gap between the author and his work so that the authorial irony (or lack of it) was a direct index of his personal capacities and experience of life, which then become more vital to his ability to produce a work of art than the capacities of his sensibility. Leavis's critical method was capable of intense critical awareness of the textual problems and attributes of the novels but this was combined with a limiting subjectivity with regard to the considerations he brought to bear on the texts from outside the realm of strictly literary criticism.

26. John Kilham, 'The use of "concreteness" as an evaluative term in F.R.Leavis's great tradition', British Journal of Aesthetics, V, 1 (January 1965), pp 14-24.

3. Conrad and Dickens: success and failure of critical method

The cogency of Leavis's essay on Conrad is especially striking in its context, following the chapters on Eliot and James. The criticism is different because of the nature of the author and his work and because the concept of 'morality' appears in a more obvious guise and partakes much less of the abstract philosophical considerations that preoccupy Leavis's discussion of the preceding novelists.

The notion of 'impersonality' helped Leavis to differentiate between George Eliot and Conrad: the latter 'is more completely an artist' because 'he transmutes more completely into the created work the interests he brings in'.(32) Eliot's work is marred by the 'direct (and sometimes embarrassing) presence of the author's own personal need', whereas Conrad's personal experience emerges 'out of the complex impersonalised whole'.(33) The material of personal experience that Conrad employs is more of an ethos ('the Merchant Service') than direct historical occurrences: there is nothing of the 'reminiscence' typical of George Eliot. Moral problems are correspondingly much simpler in their presentation, success or failure in Conrad being more directly dependent on the adequacy or inadequacy of form to content. This was examined according to T.S.Eliot's suggestion regarding the logic of the expression of 'emotion' in literary form:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such

that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. . . . The artistic 'inevitability' [of Macbeth's response to his wife's death] lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion . . . 27

Leavis claimed that Heart of Darkness 'achieves its over-powering evocation of atmosphere by means of "objective correlatives": the 'sinister and fantastic' atmosphere is evoked by the presentation of sinister and fantastic occurrences, images, surroundings. When this metonymic correlation is defective, Conrad resorts to mere 'adjectival insistence': 'the vague and unrealisable, he asserts with a strained impressiveness, is the profoundly and tremendously significant.' (180)

The criticism thus remained within the boundaries of literary criticism, utilising classic critical categories and conventional value-terms. This is clearest in Leavis's analysis of Nostromo:

The impressiveness [of Nostromo] is not a matter of any profundity of search into human experience, or any explorative subtlety in the analysis of human behaviour. It is a matter rather of the firm and vivid concreteness with which the representative attitudes and motives are realised, and the rich economy of the pattern that plays them off against one another. (195)

Leavis analysed the main characters according to their representative significance in the dramatic structure of the novel; he was dealing

27. T.S.Eliot, 'Hamlet', Selected Essays (1951) p 145.

with literary figures in a literary landscape and their moral attributes were defined in terms of the configurations of dramatic action or their shared relations with the dynamic of events. The novel is not a 'moral fable' and its formal achievement cannot be classified as 'poetic'. It is, rather, 'melodrama . . . completely controlled to the pattern of moral significance.' (198)

The terms of this appreciation would appear to contradict those that formed the basis of the critique of George Eliot: 'psychological realism' and 'complexity of interests'; or even that of Jane Austen, whose art, Leavis said, evinced 'kinds of profound concern - having the urgency of personal problems, and felt as moral problems, more than personal in significance'. Conrad's novels were classified as novels of 'pattern'; Eliot's were commended for their convincing psychological analysis. The term common to both types is Leavis's 'concreteness'. However, this adaptability means the word could only function as a descriptive rather than an analytical term.²⁸ The search for passages of 'vivid concreteness' in Leavis's meaning - which led to statements about Conrad rather than an understanding of him - had the result of turning up a different Conrad to the one of conventional estimation. The emphasis on the design or 'pattern' of the novels at the expense of the 'poetic' qualities of the prose - Leavis specifically denied the attribution of the term - ignored the Conrad familiar as the great exploiter of the 'poetic' resources of the English language. Leavis placed the emphasis thus because for him 'concreteness', far from having a simple descriptive function, was synonymous with 'moral seriousness'. The uncomfortable fact

28. Cf. Kilham loc. cit. p 17.

about the criticism, though, is that this synonymity was only statable, rather than demonstrable. The prose style of the later James was condemned by Leavis for its lack of 'immediacy', which was a hindrance to a representation of the appropriate moral judgements on the prof-fered material. What Leavis sought in Conrad was the kind of 'moral seriousness' that early James and the best of George Eliot had achieved; hence the emphasis on 'concrete immediacy' and the search through Conrad for passages of impressive dramatic realism.

Notwithstanding his setting aside Conrad the 'prose-poet', Leavis's study of the novels presented a coherent account from a recognisable viewpoint, unencumbered by the interpolation of undefined value-terms deriving from an exclusive concept of the moral basis of literary form. Conrad's creative 'consciousness' is marked by a 'radical scepticism' similar, in Leavis's view, to that embodied by Decoud and this accounts in part for the recurrence of the theme of 'isolation' in the novels and the drama of the recuperation of human relations that is the substance of the 'victory' in Victory. This was as far into abstract speculation regarding the relations between authorial creativity and the actual figure of Conrad as an historical individual that Leavis needed to go. Weaknesses in Conrad's work are artistic lapses, not moral derelictions; conversely, 'significance' is a matter of the depiction in the concrete of the moral consequences of human action and involvement. The structures of the novels were organised around identifiable moral concepts and a stable moral ethos. Consequently, Leavis's criticism remained solidly in the realm of textual analysis.

Leavis's criticism of Conrad was governed by the kind of narrative technique that is employed in the novels. There is no 'psychology' or 'philosophy' in Conrad - at least there is nothing of the order of Eliot's 'psychological notation' or profound moral philosophy. The narrative is dramatic, dealing with the representation of characters in a metonymic landscape ('the interaction of the particular incidents, actions and perceptions'(177)) that presents a cogent 'pattern . . . of moral significances'.(191) The criticism is commensurately concrete and exegetic, revealing intrinsic meaning.

With Hard Times, however, an uncertainty of critical motive re-appeared, allied to a confusion of critical intentions and value-terms. Here, Leavis's judgement was sabotaged by the underlying moral absolutism of his version of the form/content dialectic, as well as by the subordination of the particular valuations to the general theme of 'tradition'. As a result, the text receded from the foreground of the argument and was subsumed by the introduction of extra-literary categories and extrinsic meanings. The extra-literary considerations that enter the discussion are not those advocated by Leavis as being of relevance to a study of Hard Times in his preface to Mill on Bentham and Coleridge²⁹. Hard Times is there described as 'the supreme document in creative literature, where Victorian Utilitarianism and its part in Victorian civilisation are in question' and one which invites 'close relations between literary criticism and extra-literary

29. First published in Scrutiny, XVI, 2, (1947), pp 104-26.

studies'.³⁰ The extra-literary material that actually intervenes has to do with narrative technique and the asserted moral dimension of its relation to subject matter. Leavis decried the novel as a 'moral fable',³¹ a designation which derived from a perception of the relations between creative intention and expression. In a 'moral fable' 'the intention is peculiarly insistent, so that the representative significance of everything in the fable - character, episode, and so on - is immediately apparent as we read'.(227) This is a cryptic variation on the form/content relationship, since it is ambiguous about the determination of the nature of the 'intention'. That is, either the intention is primarily assumed via an interpretation of authorial ambition through external evidence, or it is revealed in the text in a process of critical exegesis. Leavis's emphasis seems to rest on the latter procedure, although in the preface to Mill on Bentham and Coleridge he says that the critic of Hard Times 'finds himself considering those aspects of the Victorian world which exercised so strong a compulsion upon Dickens's creative powers and controlled them, for once, to a profound and sustained seriousness of response'.³² Unlike his social criticism in the other novels ('casual and incidental'), here he is possessed by 'a comprehensive vision' of the sources and sanctions of the 'inhumanities of Victorian civilisation'.(228)

30. Loc. cit. p 124.

31. The essay originally appeared under the rubric 'the Novel as Dramatic Poem'; in Dickens the Novelist (1970), it is subtitled 'The World of Bentham'.

32. Loc. cit. p 124.

The 'moral fable' is a novel wherein the relations between form and content have achieved an ideal and complete synthesis: the relation of the parts to the whole is one of total inclusivity, so that there is in the novel nothing that does not bear a significant relation to its central thesis. This is to say more than that Hard Times is a roman à thèse:³³ it insists that the entire content of the novel is subordinate to the abstract conception governing its creation, and that its whole structure - its form - is aimed at reproducing in the narrative technique the material of this imposed content. The implication is that the authority of the 'thesis' over subject-matter and form is absolute.

This claim in respect of Hard Times is exaggerated; and it may be that it is theoretically unsustainable except with regard to highly eccentric novel forms.³⁴ The revealing flaws of the argument concern an over-evaluation of narrative achievement entailing an avoidance of the artistic weaknesses in the narrative and an overestimation of the novel as a whole.

Leavis quoted a passage from the scene in the school-room which describes Sissy Jupe and Bitzer caught in the same shaft of sunlight, which irradiates the former with light and washes out the colour of the latter.³⁵ The symbolic substance of the passage is clear and

33. In 1970 a 'moral fable' was described as 'an essay turned into art': Dickens the Novelist (1970) p 209.

34. Leavis describes Silas Marner as a 'moral fable' (46): in this context, his usage was only beginning to develop, and 'moral' here has fewer resonances than attach to it at a later stage. The essays on What Maisie Knew (Scrutiny, XVII) and The Europeans (Scrutiny, XIV) reveal how the notion of the completely formalised moral intention in a novel organises its containing structure.

35. Hard Times (Harmondsworth 1966) pp 49-50.

the expression of it requires no analytic subtlety. Leavis gave it high praise, noting 'the force . . . with which the moral and spiritual differences are rendered here in terms of sensation' and he saw the passage as 'representative of Dickens's art in general in Hard Times'.

(230) It goes with the horse-riding of the circus in illustrating the 'poetic-dramatic nature of Dickens's art'.³⁶ The enthusiasm Leavis showed for this aspect is symptomatic of the general feeling he has for the novel. Even his own prose style - the sentences uncluttered by qualifying clauses - reflected his energetic promotion of its achievement. He spoke of

the astonishing and irresistible richness of life that characterises the book everywhere. It meets us everywhere, unstrained and natural, in the prose. Out of such prose a great variety of presentations can arise congenially with equal vividness. They are, unquestionably, 'real'. It goes back to an extraordinary energy of perception and registration in Dickens. (234)

This is followed by a quotation from Santayana³⁷ and a note on the nature of 'realism' in Dickens: it is not mimetic, but a 'richly poetic art of the word, . . . he writes with a poetic force of evocation'. (234) Finally there is the summarisation that 'the confutation of Utilitarianism by life is conducted with great subtlety'. (236)

This is clearly overstated. The descriptive terms - 'astonishing'.

36. Cf. p 263 in the revised 1962 edition of The Great Tradition

37. 'When people say that Dickens exaggerates it seems to me that they can have no eyes and no ears. They probably only have notions of what things and people are: they accept them conventionally, at their diplomatic value.' Soliloquies in England (1921) p 65.

'irresistible', 'unquestionably', 'extraordinary' - present an exaggerated appreciation of one aspect of the novel. It appears that the dispassionate objectivity of the critic has been set aside. Leavis did not expand on the phrase 'a richly poetic art of the word': it was made to stand as if self-explanatory and defined by its context, but this still leaves it as unreasonably vague and unilluminating. Further, the term 'subtlety' is much more dubiously applied. If the criticism is operating within the limitations of a method that has established the inclusive 'moral fable' as its organising principle it is very difficult then to point to major weaknesses in the particular for fear of undermining the legitimacy of the claims made for the whole. The presupposition of authorial intention presents the critic with the necessity of having to account for or ignore elements that are not so clearly commensurate with the central thesis as might be desirable. 'Subtle' is a generous description of Gradgrind's process of self-discovery.³⁸ The general level of overstatement must be explained by the interference of the primary notion of the novel as a 'moral fable' and the way in which this notion operates.

38. 'As a moral fable, Hard Times is a vigorous and goodhearted book, but if 'shallow' is unduly severe with regard to the level of insight with which it proceeds, Dr. Leavis, in writing that here 'creative exuberance is controlled by a profound inspiration' has conceded just the word which requires to be withheld.' John Holloway, 'Hard Times, a criticism and a history', The Dickens World. eds. Gross and Pearson (1962) p. 172.

"... the creative exuberance is controlled by a profound inspiration". I cannot take this in the spirit in which Dr. Leavis meant it, because the control seems to me skilfully chosen by a professional arguer rather than irresistibly compelled by a profound inspiration.' Robert Garis, The Dickens Theatre (1965) p 160.

A related symptom of the interference in the critical perspective of this preconception is the interposition of extra-literary value-terms. One example illustrates particularly how Leavis utilises an esoteric grammar of critical terms that have been established in earlier discussions. The description of Sissy Jupe in the shaft of sunlight as 'the dark-eyed and dark-haired' girl receiving an added lustre from the sun which imbues her with symbolic energy is, Leavis claimed, 'an essentially Laurentian suggestion'.(231)

This has a particular and a general significance. In general, the recourse to what is in essence a critical term that has a meaning unique to Leavis, without expanding on this implicit meaning, makes the criticism obtuse and imprecise. By refusing in this way to expatiate on the symbolism in the narrative, the criticism conspires to make that symbolism more mysterious and vaguely evocative, rather than exposing its hidden meaning and literary effect. Furthermore, 'Laurentian' has a meaning only for this critic; the reader must determine its significance from the context in which it is encountered - but this renders the term pleonastic. Specifically, the application of the term 'Laurentian' is not appropriate - as has been shown elsewhere³⁹ - in the case of Sissy Jupe, since she is not presented by the usual Dickensian symbolic strategy of repetition (her 'dark eyes' and 'dark hair' never reappear). Leavis's use of the passage as a key one in his appreciation is undermined this fact:

39. Cf Garis op. cit. pp 150ff.

. . . the description of this metaphor poses the question of the difference between Lawrence's characteristic symbolic and structural habits and Dickens's, a difference so great as to make the word Laurentian in Dr. Leavis's usage extremely questionable.⁴⁰

The use of the term is further evidence of the inherent limitations in this critical method. The final commentary on Dickens emphasises the subjective propensity of these assertions of value made without due regard for textual analysis or their implications in a theoretical domain. The methodological limitations of The Great Tradition that have been discussed here will become more apparent with regard to the succeeding work by the Leavises on Lawrence and Dickens.

40. Garis loc. cit. p 153.

4. The 'Case' for D.H. Lawrence

1. Claims and Refutations: the background to Leavis's criticism of Lawrence

D.H. Lawrence: Novelist is not an analytical book. Leavis had a set of claims regarding Lawrence that he wished to enforce. Part of this enforcement was inevitably to be attempted in the face of opposition from prevailing preconceptions regarding Lawrence and this meant that Leavis was going to be involved with making a 'case' for Lawrence that would defeat these oppositional forces. Leavis said in the book that Lawrence was a 'case for literary criticism'(146)¹, but this was intended to distinguish his own approach to Lawrence from that of J.M.Murry's in Son of Woman (1931). In fact, the 'case' - the combination of claims and assertions and the dissertations on Lawrence's significance - that Leavis wished to make was more than a simple contrast with Murry's 'psychological documentation' attitude to the novels. It involved Leavis in a discourse on the nature of art, on the condition of contemporary civilisation and on the responsibility of art (and, by implication, criticism) to establish remedial norms with which to counteract the general decline. 'Analysis' in a technical sense had a radically diminished part to play in this critical exercise. What Leavis was more concerned to do was to present

1. Figures in parentheses refer to page numbers in D.H.Lawrence: Novelist (1955)

'Lawrence' as a cultural fact, essential to the healthy state of contemporary civilisation. A discussion of the dynamics of the Lawrentian text was not his main aim; he wanted rather to expatiate on the significance of the essentially diagnostic and remedial insights that he saw Lawrence as proclaiming:

Any great creative writer who has not had his due is a power for life wasted. But the insight, the wisdom, the revived and re-educated feeling for health, that Lawrence brings are what, as our civilisation goes, we desperately need.(15)

It is also significant that D.H.Lawrence: Novelist was the first major study of Leavis's to concentrate on a single writer. The previous major projects had been attempts to draw diverse and eclectic examples together and to present them as an homogeneous collection answering to the general claims of Leavis's argument about literature. The study of a single author had this previous endeavour - and particularly The Great Tradition - behind it, so that Lawrence was seen by Leavis in part as the culminative figure of the developing structure of his history of the English novel.² Furthermore, Leavis's study of Lawrence was begun in 1950, by which time Leavis had established fairly clearly the terms and methods of his own critical practice. Developed from his criticism of English poetry and his formulation of the place of criticism in the university, Leavis's critical practice expanded its theoretical sense of the relationship between language, poetry, art and 'life' (or, in a general sense, morality) in his study of 'the great tradition'. 'Greatness', the measure of relative value,

2. 'This book carries on from The Great Tradition.' (9)

was there defined according to the same terms as poetry had previously been evaluated: that is, according to how and to what degree the literary work was faithful to the conditions of actual life and, more importantly, to what extent it contained within its mimetic representations of the world a positive moral attitude. This was the background to D.H. Lawrence: Novelist and the later study had no need to be burdened with considerations on the general theory of the function of literary criticism and the nature of the achieved literary work.

When Leavis said that 'any great creative writer who has not had his due is a power for life wasted' the terms were to be understood, to be defined, by reference to the earlier critical vocabulary and procedures. Leavis's book on Lawrence was not to be concerned with problems of theory or of the relations between criticism, art and life. It was aimed at representing Lawrence as the epitome of all the assertions that Leavis had previously made on these matters and this ambition was to be related to his main claims for the place of literature in the structure of social relations. The study of Lawrence was a culmination, the advanced expression of Leavis's developed proposals regarding literature and criticism:

The more advanced the work the more unmistakably is the judgement that is concerned inseparable from that profoundest sense of relative value which determines, or should determine, the important choices of actual life.³

3. Education and the University (1943), p 35.

The study of Lawrence could not be a 'closed' discussion, dealing only with the immediate problems of the novels. Arising out of this discussion would be a commentary on the wider topics central to Leavis's fundamental ideas.

It was on this criterion - the need to make the value judgements gained from literature operative in actual life - that Leavis based his argument for making a choice between the aesthetic represented by Lawrence and that represented by Eliot. This was a distinction fundamental to Leavis's conception of literary value: the two aesthetics were antithetical and a predilection for one necessitated, in his eyes, the derogation of the other; the two were mutually exclusive.⁴ Leavis saw Eliot as representative of an order of literary endeavour inimical to Lawrence's artistic achievement. He further felt that Eliot had deliberately conspired to disadvantage Lawrence's literary reputation. The 'case' for Lawrence was thus organised according to ideas derived from opposition both to Eliot's artistic method and to what Leavis saw as his campaign against Lawrence's justified recognition.

In the broadest sense, Lawrence and Eliot stood for sets of artistic aims and methods that were inherently incompatible. Leavis depended on Eliot as a source for his initial considerations on the function

4. '[Lawrence and Joyce] . it seems to me, were pre-eminently the testing, the crucial authors: if you took Joyce for a major creative writer, then, like Eliot, you had no use for Lawrence, and if you judged Lawrence a great writer, then you could hardly take a sustained interest in Joyce.'(10)

of criticism and as a model for the means whereby a contemporary poetic could have a diagnostic purpose in relation to society in general. Therefore, when he turned his attention to understanding Lawrence's significance he was faced with a conflict of interests; he was presented with the necessity of choosing between the two literary figures, and of substantiating and justifying his choice. Leavis overcame the difficulty by adjusting the terms of the comparison somewhat: for example, he referred in general to the work Eliot produced after Four Quartets, that is, the plays. He concentrated his repudiation of Eliot on the poet's 'failure' to recognise Lawrence for what he was - indeed, this failure was adduced by Leavis as symptomatic of a deeper inadequacy at the heart of Eliot's psyche. In this sense, Leavis's choice was made for him, Eliot having failed to come up to the mark in his dismissal of Lawrence's ambitions and achievements, which were now Leavis's adopted standard measure.

The contrast was centred on a matter of definition: the question of the particular emphasis placed by the antagonists on differing concepts of 'intelligence'. The notion of 'intelligence' as a key factor in the creative endeavour Leavis had originally taken from Eliot; he had adapted it into various guises that each suited the respective context of a particular line of argument. Eventually, his developed definition, or applied sense, of what 'intelligence' was, found its consummate exemplar in Lawrence. By this time the concept had a meaning diametrically opposed to that for which it was employed by Eliot:

It is Lawrence's greatness that to appreciate him is to revise one's criteria of intelligence and one's

notion of it. Eliot's finding him incapable of thinking is a failure of intelligence in himself.(2)

'Intelligence' was for Leavis a word that had different nuances depending on the context. Eliot, in contrast, avoided weighting the notion with abstruse implications: for him, with regard to Lawrence, intelligence was (or was not) manifested as the power of rational thinking. It was for Lawrence's apparent inability to engage in rational thought that Eliot primarily disparaged him: he described Lawrence as 'a man of fitful and profound insights, rather than of ratiocinative power'⁵ and as exhibiting 'an incapacity for what we ordinarily call thinking'.⁶ He had an 'extraordinarily keen sensibility and capacity for profound intuition - intuition from which he commonly drew the wrong conclusions.'⁷ This was connected to the question of his 'education', which was not a question of whether Lawrence ought to have gone to Cambridge; 'educated' in Eliot's sense meant 'having such an apprehension of the contours of the map of what has been written in the past, as to see instinctively where everything belongs, and approximately where anything new is likely to belong'.⁸ This was not a matter of 'information' so much as of 'the critical faculties which education should give'⁹; combined with 'a lack of intellectual

5. Fr William Tiverton [ie Fr Martin Jarrett-Kerr], D.H.Lawrence and Human Existence (1951) p vii. (Introduction by T.S.Eliot)

6. After Strange Gods (1934), p 58.

7. Ibid. p 58.

8. T.S.Eliot in Baillie, J and Martin, H. Revelation: a symposium (Edinburgh, 1937), p 29.

9. After Strange Gods p 58; although Eliot also said that 'Lawrence was an ignorant man in the sense that he was unaware of how much he did not know.' (Tiverton, op. cit. p vii).

and social training'¹⁰ this characteristic made Lawrence inherently amoral¹¹ and a dangerous influence: 'A trained mind like that of Mr. Joyce is always aware of what master it is serving; an untrained mind, and a soul destitute of humility and filled with self-righteousness, is a blind servant and a fatal leader.'

In common with Leavis (and numerous other commentators on Lawrence) Eliot formulated this statement by referring only obliquely to the novels.¹² Like Leavis, he was dealing with his impression of Lawrence as a whole entity, 'Lawrence' the cultural phenomenon. He used Lawrence's example as a means of pursuing a general thesis regarding the relationship of art to orthodox morality in contemporary culture. In this, he approached Lawrence exactly as Leavis approached him: with a view to using him as a means of advancing a specialised argument. Eliot's attack on the 'heresies' of the modern world found in Lawrence an example through which to make clearer his claim regarding the deleterious effect of the change whereby 'morals cease to be a matter of tradition and orthodoxy'¹³; Lawrence was supposed to enforce and support his case. Leavis discussed Lawrence in the same way. Since, however, Eliot was hostile to Lawrence and Leavis sided with him, it followed that Leavis must combine his advocacy of Lawrence with an assault on Eliot's position.

10. After Strange Gods, p 59.

11. 'A man like Lawrence, therefore, with his acute sensibility, violent prejudices and passions, and lack of intellectual and social training, is admirably fitted to be an instrument for forces of good or forces of evil; or as we might expect, partly for one and partly for the other.' After Strange Gods p 59.

12. He did not claim even to have read all the major novels. (See After Strange Gods p 60).

13. After Strange Gods p 54.

The response of each critic to Lawrence's work was to perceive in it terms of its applicability to actual life. For Eliot, this relation was unacceptable:

Mais même si l'on ne se cabre devant la terrible monotonie, sous ses admirables variations du thème de M Lawrence, on se détourne néanmoins en pensant: "Ceci n'est pas mon monde, tel qu'il est, ou tel que je souhaiterais fût."¹⁴

Leavis, on the other hand, found the application not only relevant but essential: '... the insight, the wisdom, the revived and re-educated feeling for health, that Lawrence brings are what, as our civilisation goes, we desperately need'.⁽¹⁵⁾ The difference between Leavis and Eliot depended on the critics' respective attitudes to art and life. Eliot, clearly, was writing against the background of his commitment to the established Church and state and he interpreted Lawrence as the threat to the stability of these institutions.¹⁵ It was not Leavis's nonconformist ethos, however, which led him to a concerted attack on Eliot's position. It was a combination of the desire to refute Eliot's argument and to account for the reasons why his former mentor should now be found to be occupying a position directly opposed to his own. In the nature of Leavis's critical process, this became a question not of how the stances of his and Eliot's came to be so differentiated, but of 'how, if I am right in sum about Lawrence's genius and achievement, a mind capable of Eliot's best

14. 'Le Roman Anglais Contemporain', La Nouvelle Revue Française (Paris) vol. 28, (Mai 1927) p 62. (referred to by Leavis, pp 23-24n)

15. Eliot wrote of 'the deplorable religious upbringing which gave Lawrence his lust for intellectual independence.' After Strange Gods p 58.

criticism can have been so wrong in matters so important'.(24) Leavis found himself in a crisis of opposition to Eliot and his response was to attack Eliot's position by attacking Eliot, rather than attempting to explain the difference in terms taken from a discussion of Lawrence; by, that is, making the apprehension of Lawrence's significance a fundamental critical issue, in an all-or-nothing way.

Leavis claimed that 'the failure of criticism and of the cultivated in respect of Lawrence . . . is a disgraceful chapter of English literary history'.(21-2) Leavis attested Eliot as the main source and cause of this failure, with Eliot not simply representative of a prevalent set of literary values that found Lawrence uncongenial, but as actively endeavouring to do as much positive harm as he could to Lawrence's reputation, by propagating adverse opinions and judgements about him. Eliot had influence, and he used it to malign Lawrence. Discussing Eliot's article in La Nouvelle Revue Française¹⁶ Leavis said

the valuations in general are essentially those of what was then the chic social-literary world. There is what would be distinguished intelligence if it were not stultified by the conventionality, and, where Lawrence is concerned, by grossly wrong preconceptions, blindly held, and the attendant unperceived contradictions.(23n)

It should be noted that Eliot's article for the Revue appeared in 1927, three years before Leavis's pamphlet on Lawrence found, among

16. Cf. pp 23-24n.

other things, The Lost Girl the 'best novel', and Women in Love difficult to get through.¹⁷ Certainly Eliot's opinions on Lawrence at this time later appeared jejune; but it can hardly be said to have been intended maliciously, the less so since at the time Lawrence was still alive and very much an écrivain contemporain with new work still likely to emerge. Leavis's real argument was with the case stated in After Strange Gods (1934). In his original review of the book¹⁸, Leavis was also primarily concerned with Eliot's attitude to Lawrence. The review, however, was more balanced than the later discussion in D.H. Lawrence: Novelist.

The discussion in the review hinged on the sources for the sense of moral value that is to be sought after in literature. For Eliot they were to be found in the dogmas of the established Church. This, for Leavis, was too much a matter of applying standards of valuation from the outside. Leavis argued not against the need for an extra-literary level of understanding and 'discrimination', but against the idea that the criteria for such understanding can be pursued separately from the process whereby they are made apparent: 'When [Eliot] says that he is 'applying moral principles' to literature, we cannot accept those principles as alternatives to the criteria we know'.¹⁹ The capacity for discrimination must be engendered in the process of discriminating: the standards germane to this

17. See D.H. Lawrence (minority pamphlet no 6) (1930) pp 11 and 14.

18. 'Mr. Eliot, Mr. Wyndham Lewis and Lawrence'. Scrutiny III, pp 184-191.

19. Scrutiny III. 2 p 185.

process must be already inherent in it and not superimposed through the medium of another doxa (in Eliot's case, the Anglo-Catholic creed):

. . . we could recover such standards only by the development - as the development - of a more critical spirit out of the capacity for discrimination that we have already. To put it another way: moral or religious criticism cannot be a substitute for literary criticism, it is only by being a literary critic that Mr. Eliot can apply his recovered standards to literature. . . .It is not as a substitute or an alternative that what Mr. Eliot nowadays offers us could recommend itself, but only as a completion, and this it is far from seeming.²⁰

Eliot's assertion of the priority of moral principles over those inherent in the process of literary criticism was an emphasis that Leavis found unacceptable. For him the discovery of religious values was part of a combined activity that aimed at eventually making the essential system of values apparent, 'as a completion'. 'Critical' values and 'moral' values were for him identical. Hence, Leavis dismissed Eliot's concentration on his narrow version of 'tradition and orthodoxy' even while accepting the premise that the 'religious sense' in some way needed to be redefined and asserted in the modern world.²¹ Leavis clearly felt that the boundaries of Eliot's orthodoxy needed to be widened to allow for the possibility of eliciting the 'religious sense' from something more than merely formal religion:

20. Ibid. pp 185-6.

21. ' . . . with conscious inadequacy, holding on to what one is sure of, one agrees that "to re-establish a vital connection between the individual and the race" means, in a civilisation that more and more, at higher and lower levels, fosters the chauffeur-mentality, reviving what it may be crude to call the religious sense - the sense that spoke in Lawrence when he said, "Thank God I am not free, any more than a rooted tree is free."' Scrutiny, III, 2 p 184.

One may at any rate venture that health - even religious health - demands a more active concern for other things than formal religion than Mr. Eliot now shows or encourages.²²

The weakness of Eliot's position was revealed to Leavis in the commentary on Lawrence. The integrity of Eliot's method could be tested only if he could 'demonstrate convincingly that his application of moral principles leads to a more adequate criticism'²³; Leavis found that generally it did not,²⁴ although he acknowledged that the writing on Lawrence 'exhibit[ed] something much more like a critical attitude'.²⁵ Nevertheless, it was not a 'critical attitude' that was fully capable of dealing with its material. The 'main significance' of Eliot's comments on Lawrence was that they were 'largely and revealingly uncritical'²⁶ and open to objections based on matters that forced Leavis to go beyond the convention of agreement and disagreement, or collaborative exchange.²⁷ It was fundamentally a problem of attitude, of Eliot's orientation in relation to the question of the priority of the moral principle. Leavis did not claim that 'in Lawrence we have all we need of moral concern'; but, on the other hand, he said

22. Loc. cit. p 186.

23. Loc. cit. p 185.

24. 'In these lectures, if he demonstrates anything it is the opposite: . . . the criticism seems painfully bad - disablingly inadequate, often irrelevant and sometimes disingenuous.' Loc. cit. p 185.

25. Loc. cit. p 186.

26. Ibid. p 187.

27. 'We are decidedly far away from the imagined 'frightful consequences' of Lawrence the don at Cambridge, 'rotten and rotting others'. It would, indeed, have been ungracious to recall this unhappy past if Mr. Eliot's attitude now had been consistently or in general effect critical, to be agreed or disagreed with.' Loc. cit. p 187.

that 'a preoccupation with discipline - the effort towards orthodoxy - also has its disabilities and dangers'.²⁸

In 1934, Leavis's opinions about Lawrence were still in a state of flux. He was leaning towards Lawrence in this review, but his advocacy was not unqualified. He conceded, for example, that Eliot could make 'a strong case' for attributing "spiritual sickness" to Lawrence. He seemed to feel that from both quarters something valuable could be retrieved, in terms of the general ambition to restore humanity to some condition of 'health'. He clearly supported Eliot's preoccupation with 'tradition and orthodoxy', which he saw as a serious attempt to revitalise the human spirit and rescue the individual from the 'chauffeur-mentality'. Yet he also saw in Lawrence a different kind of 'moral concern', something 'without which the preoccupation (necessary as it is) with order, forms, and deliberate construction cannot produce health'.²⁹

However, by 1950, when Leavis began his articles on Lawrence, his views had crystallised into a deep antagonism to what Eliot had represented in After Strange Gods. It was an antagonism that was incipient in the review in the comments regarding Eliot's and Lawrence's respective attitudes to sex,³⁰ but it extends in the later study to a condemnation of Eliot's whole aesthetic. For by this time, Lawrence

28. Ibid. p 190.

29. Ibid. p 191.

30. Cf. ibid. p 189.

had become the centre of Leavis's attention and the alternatives that Eliot presented were now fundamentally antithetical: Lawrence and Eliot had become for Leavis two sides of an irreconcilable opposition rather than, as they had been, distinct but resolvable elements of a comparable social and moral endeavour.

This change must be seen in the light of the significance that Lawrence now had for Leavis and in terms of the consequential choice that he had made in this regard. Leavis's speculations on what might make for 'spiritual health' had evolved into more concrete determinations which were to be consummated in the study of Lawrence. Eliot had come to represent the opposing valuations and the significant crux of the debate was a question of the perceived or implied relation between art and 'life'. What in the introduction to the later study appeared to be simply an innocuous distinction (a preference for Joyce or Lawrence must be exclusive³¹) was in fact crucial and led to Leavis's increased antipathy towards Eliot.

The whole matter of the moral responsibilities of the author in a novel had been charted in The Great Tradition: in the later study it was distilled essentially into the dynamic of the choice, Joyce or Lawrence. The archetype of the aesthetic represented by Joyce was, as it had been in The Great Tradition, Flaubert. Now Leavis was able to bring Lawrence's comments on Flaubert to substantiate his claim that the French writer had adopted an 'attitude to life'

31. Cf. D.H.Lawrence: Novelist p 10.

that was essentially one of 'distaste and disgust'.(25) It was in this regard that he was equatable with Eliot, both writers sharing this negative 'attitude to life'. Leavis expanded this by comparing Flaubert's 'religion of art' with Eliot's Christianity. The plays following Four Quartets Leavis saw as exhibiting 'a Flaubertian intensity of art: . . . the slow meticulous labour of calculating judgement; . . . [and] the sick poverty, the triviality, and . . . the human and spiritual nullity'.(26) There was no detailed discussion of the plays; Leavis dismissed them as if their weaknesses were self-evident.

It was here that Leavis's definition of 'intelligence' made itself felt, in all its senses. In one respect, Leavis saw Eliot's apparent incapacity for reading Lawrence as a 'persisting and grievous default of intelligence in a gifted writer'.(26) This failure extended to the poet's '"standing off" from life', which indicated a similar 'radical sickness of the spirit' as that shown by Flaubert; both manifested in their work 'an inner contradiction, a defeat of intelligence'.(26) In this sense, intelligence was equated with a creative impulse tending towards the positive; it requires a capacity for making judgements of value that are applicable in actual life, in a similarly positive way. This is what Leavis called 'the major order of value-judgement' and Eliot failed when faced with the crucial test, of placing Lawrence accurately and understanding the contribution he made to the encouragement of 'health'. Eliot, despite his achievements as a poet, which Leavis largely left aside, concentrating his attack on the plays and the criticism,³² had 'shown himself incapable

32. Even to the extent of criticising the criticism for being 'badly written'. See p 310n.

of sustained precision of thought' and 'liable to shallowness and confusion'.(26) Hence he had proved inadequate when the challenge of Lawrence presented itself and he did not 'show up well in the major order of value-judgement, those depending upon the critic's sense for the difference between what, in his time, makes for health and what makes against it'.(26)

In contrast, there was Lawrence's 'genius and achievement', which was further enhanced by the comparison. Where Eliot revealed 'an inner contradiction', Lawrence displayed a 'transcendental intelligence' that was 'inseparable from [his] creative genius'(27):

. . . intelligence in him can be, as it is, the servant of the whole integrated psyche. It is representative in consciousness of the complex need of the whole being, and is not thwarted or disabled by inner contradictions in him, whether we have him as artist, critic or expositor.(27)

Lawrence, in effect, defined 'intelligence' as the term was used by Leavis. In some respects, the refutation of Eliot's position was a redundant exercise; Leavis's claims for Lawrence would have stated the opposition clearly enough by implication, without Leavis having to go over arguments originally laid out some twenty years previously. Leavis's impulse behind the attack seems to have been finally to resolve the dilemma of his ambiguous attitude towards Eliot's critical principles and to emphasise his allegiance to the Lawrentian aesthetic. Eliot condemned himself, almost, by his professed interests, by

find[ing] the creative originality that really matters
in the contrivances of Joyce, where insistent will and

ingenuity so largely confess the failure of creative life, and in the technique of the Cantos, where, by Eliot's own account, he is not interested in what Pound says, but only in the way he says it.(27)

In 1934, such a predisposition would have been regarded by Leavis as a matter for discussion: that is, a convention of agreement/dis-agreement would have been in force. By 1951 it had become the in-criminating grounds for strong condemnation. Such was the nature of the importance with which Lawrence was by then imbued in Leavis's mind. Contradiction had come to represent not so much a difference of attitude as a betrayal of the essential purpose. In the light of this, it is necessary to resist some of the claims that have been made for Leavis's critique. For example, P.J.M. Robertson³³ has stated that

in discriminating between Lawrence and Eliot, and discerning the defects as well as the virtues of each, Leavis sharpened his criteria, knew his own mind, spoke with a voice both distinctive and perhaps as influential as theirs, and in due time wrote of them with something like the impersonality he sought in them.³⁴

In D.H.Lawrence: Novelist , at least, the balance was not so nicely maintained as this suggests. 'Virtues' did not accrue to Eliot, who was disparaged by Leavis in strong terms and to the same kind of extreme as that to which Lawrence was praised. The 'criteria' that were adumbrated emerged only gradually out of the main body of the

33. Cf. The Leavises on Fiction (London 1981) chapter 5.

34. Op. cit. p 77.

study, and were, in effect, self-defining. For example, Lawrence was said to possess a rare 'intelligence', manifested as 'creative genius'; while 'creative genius' was described as 'transcendental intelligence'. What the reader is left with is Lawrence, and an accumulation of laudatory comments on him.³⁵ It is necessary to interpret this study as saying as much about Leavis as it aimed to say about Lawrence, and the epithet 'impersonality' is not, therefore, that which is most appropriate to the enterprise. Certainly, Leavis spoke with a 'distinctive voice', but this was as much to do with the polemical intentions of his book as with the fact that he had achieved a well-defined perception of Lawrence's significance.

The key to Leavis's critical appraisal is contained in his dichotomy of Joyce/Lawrence, the two authors who were supposed by him to symbolise antithetical aesthetic attitudes. Notably, it was Flaubert who was made to bear the brunt of Leavis's hostility towards the 'religion of art', that creativity which was not 'spontaneous' but 'contrived', 'conscious' and 'intense'. Joyce presented an altogether more complex problem than Flaubert, against whom Leavis could bring

35. Elsewhere, Robertson says that 'Leavis's terms [when dealing with Lawrence] are almost mystical, not because he is being purposely portentous but because Lawrence's uncanny rendering of life forces him to be allusive rather than explicit and definite.' Op. cit. p 90.

Surely, though, one of the main responsibilities of the literary critic is to attempt to make explicit that which is obscure or in doubt? (This is what Leavis implied when he said that the critic's task was 'to realise as fully as possible' the work of art with which he is dealing.)

direct evidence from both Lawrence and Henry James³⁶. The terms of his discussion of Joyce³⁷, however, provide further means of understanding the critical procedure of D.H.Lawrence: Novelist.

Leavis's rejection of Joyce's experiments following Ulysses can be seen as a dismissal of some of the basic precepts of the modernist aesthetic tradition, in a reaction away from the idea that formal innovation was of itself adequate to the challenge of the contemporary world. Leavis had always sought 'technical innovation' - Lawrence himself was 'as remarkable a technical innovator as there has ever been'(18) - but this had to be part of a whole process of expression, where the form is dictated by the needs of the subject matter and thus remains a constitutive element in the eventual work of art, rather than representing its primary interest. Form was not of itself adequate as the entire concern of the work of art, it was essential to have as well some other compulsion behind the desire for creativity.

This is the theme that tells in Leavis's comparison between Joyce's creative procedure and Shakespeare's.³⁸ What differentiated the two was the relation of the creative impulse to something coherent and

36. Leavis quoted from Lawrence's review of Thomas Mann's fiction (originally published in the Blue Review, July 1913 and reprinted in Phoenix (1936)) and referred to James's essay on Flaubert in The Art of Fiction (ed. Morris Roberts) (1948).

37. 'Joyce and "the revolution of the word"', Scrutiny II 2 pp

38. This was a comparison instigated by a comment in one of the books under review (to the effect that Joyce's development of his form was comparable to Shakespeare's in the late plays). The comparison was expedient and can hardly be seen (pace Robertson op. cit. pp 80-1) as a 'compliment to Joyce'.

in need of expression in the artist: 'Shakespeare's effects . . . register the compulsive intensity and completeness with which [he] realises his imagined world, the swift immediacy that engages at a point an inexhaustibly subtle organisation.' Joyce, on the other hand, practised a 'deliberate, calculating contrivance' and an 'external approach' that was essentially 'mechanical'. What Leavis stipulated was something of the order of 'inspiration' ('an inner impulse or principle of order') that was cognate with the 'organisation' (a set of apprehensions and perceptions that was capable of giving each new sensory experience its allotted place and significance) within which the inspirational urge was manifested. Joyce's conscious 'stratification and complication', his pursuit of linguistic effect for its own sake, was alien to Leavis's conception of art and the creative act. Lawrence's specification of 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being' was one to which Leavis firmly adhered, since it confirmed his presupposition that at some point in the creative process the urgency of the need to express would 'engage' an 'organised' capacity for expression and would thus produce the 'genuine' work of art. This is a conception that is essentially of the same order as that adumbrated in his writings on poetry, where the fundamental requirements had been 'concrete particularity' and 'mimetic flexibility'.

Leavis, therefore, came to align himself completely with the kind of artistic achievement represented by Lawrence. He epitomised Leavis's version of the work of art, its potentialities and responsibilities, and seemed to personalise for Leavis a form of artistic

endeavour that answered to his own quasi-political stance regarding the relation between art and the contemporary society:

when I think of the career that started in the ugly mining village in the spoilt Midlands, amidst all those apparent disadvantages, it seems to me that, even in these days, it should give us faith in the creative human spirit and its power to ensue [sic] fullness of life.(15)

Lawrence, for Leavis, was the ideal combination of cogent inspiration and a morally-orientated sense of social responsibility.

Where Leavis's preoccupation with refuting opposing preconceptions on D.H.Lawrence combined with his increasingly cohering sense of the magnitude of Lawrence's significance was in the chapter 'Lawrence and Class', dealing with The Daughters of the Vicar. This chapter was originally published in the Sewanee Review for 1954³⁹ and thus post-dates the bulk of the essays which in D.H. Lawrence: Novelist succeed it. Although the essay was ostensibly concerned with the question of 'class', the weight of Leavis's developed opinions of Lawrence lay behind it.

A contemporary reference to Lawrence's 'class-consciousness'⁴⁰ was seen by Leavis as being the historical successor of, again, Eliot's comments in After Strange Gods on Lawrence's 'snobbery'. Leavis set out to dispose of this charge and the associated claim that Lawrence

39. Sewanee Review lxii (1954) pp 535-62.

40. Cf. The Listener, 13 August 1953: see D.H. Lawrence: Novelist p 85.

had no 'moral or social sense'.(74) In his enthusiasm for extolling the contrary virtues in Lawrence, Leavis evinced a tendency to exaggerate Lawrence's achievements that is also apparent in his discussion of St Mawr. There is not the space here to develop an exhaustive dissenting case against Leavis's evaluation of The Daughters of the Vicar; it is necessary only to indicate the nature of the claims that were made in order to see the general structure of Leavis's approach to Lawrence.

In the first instance, Leavis claimed that The Daughters of the Vicar was a story that was 'profoundly representative of Lawrence'.(73) This is in itself unusual. The story appeared in The Prussian Officer volume (1914) and was amongst the earliest Lawrence ever published. The main themes of that collection - oppression, strain, alienation, defeat - were not those which later emerged in the best work; they were not markedly 'affirmative' in their general tenor and outlook. The Daughters of the Vicar was 'representative', it must be assumed, insofar as it dealt with the contingencies of positive and negative 'attitudes to life'. However, the tale is constructed in a way that is predictable and predetermining; the set of choices available to the contrasting protagonists (Louisa and Mary) are presented in such a way as to render the executive act of choosing virtually redundant.⁴¹

Nevertheless, Leavis found the tale the occasion for the statement that 'Lawrence is the greatest kind of creative writer'.(73) This

41. For a development of this argument see Eliseo Vivas, D.H. Lawrence: the failure and the triumph of art (1960) pp 166 et seq.

introduced once more the contrast with Flaubert and Eliot, names now linked irrevocably in Leavis's mind with that which was 'life-denying', where the crux of the comparison was the orientation towards something that Leavis called 'life'. This, and Lawrence's attitude towards it as expressed in his writing, was a concept that Leavis employed with great facility but was unable to define. He claimed that, whilst 'consciousness of class-distinctions' operated at the centre of the story, they were used by Lawrence as a way of reifying his abstract considerations on how, in human affairs, a positive bearing manifests itself. As Leavis described it, Lawrence aimed to demonstrate the defeat of 'class-feeling' - to show 'the triumph over them of life'. (74) This was what Leavis claimed that the tale purported to dramatise, but the phrasing could only receive its full significance by reference back to the story:

the phrase gets its force in the tale, the movement and sum of which define 'life' in the only way in which it can be defined for the purposes of the critic: he has the tale - its developing significance and the concrete particulars of its organisation - to point to. (74)

The utilisation of such terminology indicates the radical difference that Leavis perceived between Lawrence's art and that of Eliot or of Flaubert. Interpretation and evaluation along these lines - seeking the 'affirmative' aspects in the work - meant that writers not implicitly dealing with such matters must be seen as involved with a secondary order of artistic creation. Leavis saw in Lawrence a preoccupation with 'life', and an attempt to elucidate and define the exact nature of the kind of 'life' with which he was concerned.

Leavis described Lawrence's attitude as one of 'reverence':

The attitude is one of strength, and it is clairvoyant and incorruptible in its preoccupation with realities. It expresses, of course, the rare personal adequacy of an individual of genius, but it is also the product of a fine and mature civilisation, the sanctions, the valuations, and the pieties of which speak through the individual.(75)

'Class-feeling' in Lawrence's story is only one aspect of a set of social relations through which Lawrence explored the positive and negative sides of human nature.⁴² In his observations on Lawrence's procedure in this, Leavis was able to substantiate his claims for Lawrence's essential characteristics, summarised in the above phrases. 'Reverence' and 'life' were said to be defined in the course of the tale⁴³; and 'in the way in which the significance is developed and its profundity and scope are brought out we have the distinctive Laurentian insight'.(76) The essay, it can be seen, was not a critique per se of the tale, but a further attempt to enforce the 'case' for Lawrence which Leavis wanted to develop. It was an analysis of Lawrence's creative attitude rather than method; weaknesses in the narrative or the prose were not therefore germane to the issue. The tale, Lawrence's treatment of his subject, was regarded by Leavis as confirming his assertion of Lawrence's significance. The essay

42. 'Class is a major fact in the case presented, but attention focuses on the essential humanity this fact conditions, and the interest informing the attention remains pure and undeflected.'(86)

43. Leavis could not go beyond the texts to find a definition of his terms, since they found their meaning specifically in relation to the material (the particular narrative) to which they were applied. In a digression on 'Fanny and Annie' in this same chapter he said that in the end Fanny 'has chosen life': 'The sense in which she has done so it takes the tale to define, and in defining it, the tale justifies that way of describing her decision.'(90)

was, as a consequence, proportionally occupied with this aspect, to the relative exclusion of topics more directly in the realm of literary criticism. This is not to say that Leavis's handling of the tale was in any way peremptory; but the emphasis of the discussion was on those aspects of the 'Lawrentian insight' which gave support to Leavis's appeal for recognition of Lawrence's significance, for confirmation that his was 'a spirit informed by an almost infallible sense for health and vitality'.(70)

'Almost infallible' - Lawrence was not immune from criticism; and yet even where Leavis found areas that were suspect, a prose style that was unconvincing or a narrative excessively ponderous, he nevertheless extolled the creative impulse that he saw behind it: he argued, that is, that even where Lawrence exhibited weakness or inconsistency,⁴⁴ the overall creative intention was sound. This kind of tolerance can only be explained by reference to Leavis's overriding concern for establishing Lawrence as 'incomparably the greatest creative writer in English of our time'.(18) If anything, Leavis saw Lawrence as defeated - on the rare occasion⁴⁵ - by the complexity of the problems with which he aimed to deal, by the intransigence of actual life and the uncompromising nature of his own ambition:

To have found, as he contemplated human life, or lives

44. ' . . .his art sometimes cherishes the illusion that it grasps and presents more in the way of positive 'answer' to the large issues raised than it actually does.'(69-70)

45. 'But for how little the things that call for such criticisms count in the whole body of Lawrence's work.'(70)

in the contemporary world, the answers he was looking for, Lawrence would have had to be more than a great creative writer - he would have had to be something hardly conceivable(69)

This indicates precisely Leavis's feelings about Lawrence. His attachment to Lawrence's aesthetic ambition, or his perception of it, was such that even the failures were to be accounted for in terms of the strength of the originating creative inspiration.

Despite Leavis's describing the Lawrence canon as 'an immense body of living creation'(70) a phrase that is meaningless in its vagueness, Leavis's commentary actually set aside most of the main novels: 'I want the stress to fall unambiguously on The Rainbow, Women in Love, and the tales'.(14) What he called the 'lesser novels' he regarded as almost a separate body of work, in dealing with which he could 'concede to adverse criticism of Lawrence as an artist what I think has to be conceded'.(14) Leavis dealt with these works separately 'in order to put them clearly apart from the work on which I would establish the claim for Lawrence'.(30)

The early novels were set aside almost immediately, The White Peacock as 'painfully callow'(19), The Trespasser as 'hard to get through'(19) and Sons and Lovers as not portending 'greatness'(19), as well as having already 'not lacked attention'.(18) The novels that followed The Rainbow and Women in Love were 'exploratory and experimental' and, while 'very much open to criticism', were 'full of life and interest, . . . impressively the work of a novelist of

of genius'.(30) Aaron's Rod and The Lost Girl were notable, according to Leavis's estimation, for their successful parts, which were set amongst a confusion of undirected energies. The Lost Girl had 'no compelling total significance in control'(31) and in Aaron's Rod there was 'no closeness of organisation'(32) and Lawrence 'fail[ed] to transcend his own personal situation'.⁴⁶(44) Kangaroo was a record of the failure of political action which also is distorted by unassimilated personal experience (the Harriet - Somers relationship partaking too much of the Frieda - Lawrence ménage). Lady Chatterley's Lover was 'too deliberate . . . to be a wholly satisfactory work of art, appealing to imaginatively sensitised feeling'.(70)

Despite his general strictures on these novels, Leavis admitted positive qualities to them with a large degree of the same kind of tolerance that he evinced in his discussion of The Daughters of the Vicar. For example, his comments on Lawrence's treatment in Aaron's Rod of the protagonist's attitude towards his wife and family involve him in an ambivalent statement on moral relativism. He described the situation as 'a familiar kind of life-frustrating deadlock' ('familiar' to whom; and from what sources: life, or the novel?), and this introduced the common theme of all his adumbrations on Lawrence. 'Life' was the fundamental concept around which Lawrence, according to Leavis, structured his perceptions of the world. Leavis's introduction of the term to have the effect of a judgement of value was

46. Although 'the whole evocation of Aaron Sisson en famille has a marvellous reality. The chapter by itself would be enough to establish that the author was a rare kind of genius.'(33)

a key strategy of his critical method as regards Lawrence. 'Life' was the measure, the standard, against which, notwithstanding its essential vagueness, all Lawrence's representations of the human condition were implicitly judged. The artist's function, as Leavis saw it, was to observe and expatiate on the various forms, both positive and negative, which the individual response to particular circumstances takes. The critic's function, when presented with the case, was to interpret, and according to the same fundamental standard of value.

To describe, therefore, Aaron's relations with his family as 'life-frustrating' was virtually to close the issue; in such circumstances, the individual is justified in whatever action might be necessary to redeem the situation. Aaron Sisson abandons his wife and children, almost without compunction, yet Leavis claimed that this act had to be judged according to the extent to which it was pre-empted by the 'life-frustrating' conditions that Aaron wanted to escape. This was the level of moral judgement that Leavis designated as the relevant one; apportioning blame (moral responsibility) to either Aaron for his selfishness or his wife for having made his life intolerable would not be 'to the point': 'the moral concern goes far deeper than the level of those judgements'.(35) It was not, of course, the act itself, perceived objectively, which was accessible to this specialised interpretation, but Lawrence's treatment of it, his presentation of the case. It was a presentation which, Leavis said, 'transcend[ed] ordinary moral judgements'.(35) That is to say, human judgement and action in the context of Lawrence's art are conditioned by the special moral framework which the aesthetic inhabits: 'life' is the final

arbitrating concept, to which 'morality' ('ordinary' morality) is subordinate.

This is open to objection on two counts. First, it is not certain that Aaron's action has the validity which Leavis ascribed to it. The reader will only not demur at the apparent callousness if he consents to the special claims that Leavis made for the supra-moral pressure that the 'life-frustrating' circumstances exercised on Aaron's volitional capacities. Secondly, the introduction of the notion of moral relativism is a dubious ploy, begging as it does the question of to what kind of higher authority or sanction Leavis believed he was appealing when he posited the criterion of 'life' above and outside the realm of 'ordinary' moral judgement. 'Life' is not, of itself, a moral concept, engaging principles of right and wrong; placed outside morality it becomes merely amoral.⁴⁷ This is a truism which Leavis appears to have wanted to resist in his attempt to propose as superordinate something which was essentially indeterminate and definable only by reference to the texts in which it was said to manifest itself. This was a species of critical mystification, so to speak, whereby the manipulation of moral judgements reverts to an undisclosed, almost private sense of good and bad, so that 'what makes for health and sanity' becomes the arcane property of the artist, revealed to the reader only through the intercession of the critic; even then, the terms of the elucidation are cryptic and mysterious.⁴⁸

47. '... the appeal from morality to life is not what it pretends to be, for life itself, outside the moral law, or laws, cannot have primacy over morality. Outside morality ... life itself is . . . value-free'.
Eliseo Vivas, *op. cit.* pp 32-33.

48. See note 35 above.

This is the nature of Leavis's relations with the Lawrentian text: its peculiar condition was only incipient in D.H.Lawrence: Novelist and its full effect was not apparent until the later study (Thought, Words, Creativity (1976)). Nonetheless, that this critical procedure informed Leavis's study is a significant factor in any attempt to follow the arguments put forward in the book as a whole, and any attempt to account for the paradoxically closely related areas of success and failure of the critical exposition on Lawrence.

2. 'The Rainbow' and 'Women in Love'.

It is clear that Leavis had a special relationship with Lawrence and the Lawrentian text. In his discussion of Lawrence's novels, Leavis dealt with problems and ideas that had been central to his own discourse on art and society and the consequences for both of the radical changes ensuing on progressive industrialisation. Leavis's was amongst the earliest serious critical commentaries on Lawrence. However, its particular approach was not conditioned by this absence of pre-existing Lawrentian criticism but by the special interests of Leavis's general literary critical ambition and the congruence he discovered between the precepts of that ambition and the perceptions fundamental to Lawrence's aesthetic. The most serious consequence of this close connection between the art and the criticism was that the criticism was always in danger of abandoning its independent, objective standpoint and becoming merely the means whereby the esoteric significance of the particular texts received their explication for the ordinary reader. Criticism, as such, tended to be set aside in favour of exposition.

The effects of this peculiar interaction between text and criticism depend upon the nature and quality of the narrative under discussion, since the primary activity of literary criticism - adducing judgements of value - has been abandoned in preference for textual interpretation. Behind this adjustment lies the assumption that the 'value' of the text was not in question, especially when Leavis was dealing with The Rainbow and Women in Love⁴⁹. The judicial part of the critical enterprise was subordinated to the practice of interpretation, of finding in the novels arguments, proposals and dramatic 'enactments', in the nature of diagnostic and remedial insights and representations, which confirmed Leavis's own adumbrations on the same fundamental issues.

The extraordinary intensity of Leavis's essays on Lawrence - their energy of affirmation and raptness of attention - was that of a criticism in communion with its 'ideal' object.⁵⁰

Mulhern's observation indicates the unusual relationship between the writing and the criticism. Leavis's enforced collusion between the artist and the critic needs to be clarified. In the first place, it is necessary to emphasise the fact that 'energy of affirmation and raptness of attention' seem to have been exacerbated to levels of obvious exaggeration only where the text under discussion yielded its significance more intractably than the more obviously successful narrative: that is, the 'intensity' of Leavis's critique increased

49. 'I want the stress to fall unambiguously on The Rainbow, Women in Love and the tales'(14)

50. Francis Mulhern, The Moment of 'Scrutiny', (1979) p 297.

proportionally with the degree of difficulty involved in making a convincing case for his claims. Despite the extensive critical tolerance that Leavis demonstrated towards Lawrence, 'discipleship' is not the word that best characterises Leavis's attitude:

Leavis ceases to function as a critic when he gives himself over to Lawrence in a spirit of trusting discipleship. 51

It was not that Leavis ever 'ceased to function as a critic', but the tenor of his critical judgements was diverted by the fact that he found his own and Lawrence's extra-literary attitudes fundamentally commensurate. For that reason, Leavis's discussion of Lawrence dealt predominantly with the extra-literary dimension. Nevertheless, this did not amount simply to a matter of extricating from the novels ideas and beliefs pertaining to Leavis's discourse on contemporary culture. Leavis aimed to make explicit the ways in which the particular narratives contained essential truths about human relations. He wanted to make clear that a preoccupation with 'what makes for health and sanity' must inevitably find its counterpart in the prose that gives such a preoccupation tangible substance. The serious difficulties arise with Leavis's criticism when the reader discovers a lack of integration between what Leavis claimed a text was doing and that which it appears actually to have achieved.

51. Roger Boyers, F.R. Leavis: Judgement and the Discipline of Thought (1978) p 121.

Part of Leavis's enterprise concerning Lawrence was to explain what had until then been generally taken for impenetrable doctrinal obscurity. He confessed to his own difficulties in this (particularly with regard to Women in Love⁵²) and embarked on an attempt to dispel confusion about Lawrence's essential artistic ambition. The other, larger, aspect of the project was to insist on Lawrence's profound importance in terms of the conflicts and stresses of the contemporary world. Since Leavis himself had developed comprehensive views on the same issues, his critique of Lawrence was inevitably going to be, in large part, a matter of his finding in the Lawrentian text material that confirmed his own thesis.

Boyers said that this 'collaborative reading' should be undertaken 'in a spirit consistent with, though not identical to, the original authorial project.'⁵³ In a sense, this is a truism, since any critical 'project' that was not going to be largely negative would aim to deal with material that was generally congenial in 'spirit' or intent. However, the question that arises has to do with the extent to which Leavis disadvantaged his case by identifying himself too comprehensively with the 'spirit' of Lawrence's 'authorial project', so that the essential distanced objectivity ('disinterestedness') of his critical perspective was undermined. Again, this balance between a commitment to the subject's ulterior purpose and a surrendering of critical independence was dependent on the nature of the material

52. 'I have not always thought Women in Love one of the most striking works of creative originality that fiction has to show.'(146)

53. Boyers, op. cit. p 122.

under discussion. Leavis read the 'lesser novels' with a marked degree of sympathetic tolerance, such that indicated the development of the idiosyncratic relationship with Lawrence's novels in general.

It is necessary to examine whether Leavis maintained this judicial balance or whether on occasion his insistence on eliciting from the texts confirmation of facets of his own discourse on literature and society took precedence over the critical evaluation of the novels. This problem is not simply concerned with Leavis finding a weak narrative significant because of its implicit if unrealised intentions and thus overvaluing it; the need for maintaining some kind of judicial balance was equally pertinent when he was inquiring into those novels in which artist and critic found their 'ideal communion'. The writing of The Rainbow and Women in Love is the case in point, for in those novels Leavis undoubtedly recognised extra-literary preoccupations of his own that had found their consummate expression. For the critic, the question then is one of method. If the critical faculty is not called upon to judge the particular narrative, what ancillary function is it going to perform? While Leavis did find some slight weaknesses or faults in the novels - an occasional 'over-emphatic explicitness' in Women in Love, for example - for the most part the essays on these two major works were concerned with demonstrating that their incontrovertible 'greatness' was a matter of their being the product of 'creative genius', manifested as 'intelligence', that was preoccupied essentially with what, in human relations in the contemporary world, 'makes for health and sanity'.

The essays on The Rainbow and Women in Love both appeared in Scrutiny under the rubric 'the novel as dramatic poem'.⁵⁴ One line of Leavis's interest in the novels was directed towards demonstrating the ways in which Lawrence's prose achieved its effects. A notable feature of Leavis's writing on Lawrence is the length of many of the quoted passages. The majority of these quoted extracts were accompanied by a minimum of comment, their relevance and their strengths supposedly being self-evident. In many of the cases, the quality of the writing is not in question, and on the occasions when Leavis attempted to dissect the ways in which Lawrence achieved his effect of 'sensuous immediacy' (107, 112), the result was strikingly heavy-handed.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the several pages of quoted material that was included by Leavis and which he left to stand without comment comprise a complexity of literary effects and meanings that are not all immediately pertinent to the points raised by Leavis's commentary. The reader is occasionally bewildered by the scope and intricacy of the quotation and the lack of clear guidance from Leavis as to which particular aspect of it he is referring.

The reason for this lies in Leavis's conception of the ways in which a prose narrative operates, a conception summarised in the idea

54. 'The Novel as Dramatic Poem' [V and VI]: Women in Love [I, II, III], Scrutiny XVII pp 203-70 and pp 318-30; and Scrutiny XVIII pp 18-31; and 'The Novel as Dramatic Poem' (VII), The Rainbow [I, II, III], Scrutiny XVIII pp 197-210 and pp 273-87 and Scrutiny XIX pp 15-30.

Other novels that were discussed by Leavis under this heading were Hard Times (Scrutiny XIV pp 185-203), The Europeans (Scrutiny XV pp 209-21) and St Mawr (Scrutiny XVII pp 38-53); reprinted in D.H. Lawrence: Novelist as chapter 6, this was the earliest completed part of the study.

55. See, for example, pp 112-14.

of 'the novel as dramatic poem'. For Leavis the effects achieved in the linguistic dimension of a passage of a narrative prose cannot be understood in isolation from the 'dramatic' element that provides the forward movement or ostensible purpose of that passage. Discussing Tom Brangwen's courting of the Polish woman at the vicarage, Leavis said, after two pages of quotation, that

the marvellous reality of the evocation cannot be distinguished from an intense specificity of dramatic significance: what is evoked is a given spiritual crisis, a crucial moment in a particular human life.(114)

This follows from his previously stated resistance to the idea of form for form's sake: the idea of 'dramatic poem' represents a concatenation of the formal dimension with the implications of the subject matter in an inextricable relationship. Leavis's interpretation did not finish there, however; he found in Lawrence a relation between the 'poetic' and the 'dramatic' that was of a kind that extended beyond normal creativity and touched on the 'religious'. In this movement from a critical commentary to wide-reaching asseverations on an extra-literary plane lies a key to Leavis's critical method as regards Lawrence.

In discussing the Lawrence of The Rainbow Leavis used George Eliot as a comparison, initially to elaborate the significance of the title he gave to the chapter as it appeared in the full published version, 'Lawrence and Tradition'. Out of this comparison he developed his conception of the 'religious' intuition that informed Lawrence's creative impulse.

Leavis claimed that there was no 'organic' connection between The Rainbow and Women in Love, as revealed by the fact that 'there is much about The Rainbow that makes us see it as being, clearly and substantially, in a line from George Eliot'.(98) Apart from making this distinction, the comparison also had the function of refuting T.S.Eliot's assertion that Lawrence had suffered through 'not having been brought up in the environment of a living and central tradition'. (105) Leavis adduced The Rainbow as evidence absolutely to the contrary of this, which indicates how T.S.Eliot's criticisms provided Leavis with a polemical motive for making more emphatic his judgements on Lawrence. Leavis felt that The Rainbow, following as it did the progress of people living in a rural context with a deep historical past (the family had been in the region for 200 years) through the movements of civilisation that culminated in the contemporary situation, showed that Lawrence was familiar with the heritage and 'tradition' of the rural labouring classes. Lawrence was a 'social historian' and his background and upbringing fostered an understanding of the processes of change and status in rural society: 'as a recorder of essential English history he is a great successor to George Eliot'.(107) In Leavis's view, Lawrence was very far from lacking the benefit of having known a 'traditional' environment: 'The book might have been written to show what, in the concrete, a living tradition is, and what it is to be brought up in the environment of one.'(105) It was this background that linked him, in Leavis's estimation, with George Eliot. It was what he brought from that environment, from 'the civilisation and the tradition that associate him with George Eliot', that gave his writing its essential relevance as a 'social history' of rural English culture. What he developed out of this background was not

an 'evangelising earnestness, or a naive provinciality of ethical temper', but something that gave his work an extra dimension, one that ultimately superceded even George Eliot's ethical and religious valuations:

'Upbringing' and 'environment' worked on him through the means by which (to quote Mr. Eliot's account of tradition⁵⁶) 'the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present': and it is not anything merely residual he brings from them, but his very formation, something that lives and grows, and that expresses itself in his mature insight and wisdom, his creative impulse, and his criticism of the contemporary civilised world.(110)

Lawrence had this kind of 'creative impulse' informing his representation of the old rural culture and it was this that associated him with George Eliot. Lawrence, however, went beyond George Eliot in the 'religious' intensity of his 'creative impulse'; where George Eliot was essentially 'ethical' in expression and valuation, Lawrence was something more than that. It was this 'something more' in Lawrence that attracted Leavis's attention. It involved ideas and transactions on a higher plane than the purely rational intellectual process of the literary text, matters of which the text is a blurred reflection, their essential substance being fundamentally indefinable.

The opening passages of The Rainbow evince a preoccupation with the 'oneness of life' and an 'intensity of preoccupation with the individual'(102); the sequence at the start of the novel that deals with the conditions of farm life and the Bragwen women's aspirations

56. See After Strange Gods p 30.

for something other than mere hard toil introduces the main theme of the novel:

The life of 'blood intimacy' that [this passage] plays its part in creating is, in the novel, a necessary and potent presence as something to be transcended. The novel has for theme the urgency, and the difficult struggle, of the higher human possibilities to realise themselves.(99-100)

This 'struggle' is the focus of Leavis's interest in The Rainbow, that aspect which gave rise to the epithet 'religious'. An apprehension of 'the unity of life' was the central theme and it found its expression in the language of Lawrence's narrative, in a way that enforces the description 'dramatic poem':

Words here are used in the way, not of eloquence but of creative poetry . . . : they establish as an actual presence - create as part of the substance of the book - something that is essential to Lawrence's theme.(99)

The aspirations of the women, as expressed in this opening sequence, were 'indeterminate': 'what values may give it meaning, will be discovered and created in the living - in the actual life of the individual'.(101) Leavis took this aspect as the focus of his attention. The greater proportion of the subsequent essay was devoted to demonstrating how this aspiration towards 'realising' 'the higher human possibilities' was pursued by Lawrence through various manifestations that each in themselves adjusted to different sets of circumstances, to conditions that were affected as much by the past as by the present.

Leavis was not primarily interested in the intricacies of the text;

or, at any rate, with elucidating its complexity or identifying the means whereby Lawrence's 'creative poetry' contrived its effects. He was, rather, impelled to expatiate on this religious aspect and to assert Lawrence's extraordinary capacities in that respect:

The oneness of life; the separateness and irreducible otherness of lives; the supreme importance of 'fulfilment' in the individual, because here (if not here, nowhere) is life - the peculiar Lawrentian genius manifests itself in the intensity, constancy and fulness of the intuition(102)

The 'intensity, constancy and fulness' of Lawrence's intuition was not shown by Leavis but was only asserted. Following on from the above, Leavis quoted a passage in which is described an experience undergone by Ursula during her study of botany while at college. She is faced with the existential problem of finding the sense of "purpose" in the inanimate world of natural forces. ("Electricity had no soul, light and heat had no soul".) The quotation from Lawrence concludes with the following sentences:

She could not understand what it all was. She only knew that it was not limited mechanical energy, nor mere purpose of self-preservation and self-assertion. It was a consummation, a being infinite. Self was oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme gleaming triumph of infinity.⁵⁷

The reader is entitled to ask what this means, since it is mysterious, and its meaning not immediately comprehensible. Yet Leavis did not

57. See The Rainbow (Harmondsworth 1949) p 441.

quote the paragraph for the sake of illuminating its obscurities, but as a self-explanatory statement which supported the claim he had made, prior to the quotation, regarding the strength of Lawrence's 'intuition'. The quotation, the material from Lawrence, was inserted into Leavis's argument not so that it could be discussed or analysed but in order to advance that argument to its next stage. Ursula's mystical perception that "self was oneness with the infinite" was taken by Leavis almost as a concrete statement of fact and he followed up the intuition by saying that it revealed that

it is only by way of the most delicate and complex responsive relations with others that the individual can achieve fulfilment. . . . Except between 'fulfilled' individuals - individuals, that is, who are really themselves, recognising their separateness or otherness, and accepting the responsibility of that - there can be no personal relations that are lasting and satisfactory. (103)

This kind of gloss does not help to advance an understanding of the preceding quotation; nor does it contribute substantially to the sum of the reader's awareness of what Lawrence was attempting in The Rainbow; a serious reading of the novel would already have found this kind of insight from ancillary texts by Lawrence himself. In Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious Lawrence stated that "the goal of life is the coming to perfection of each single individual".⁵⁸ It is necessary to recognise that what in effect Leavis was doing with the text of The Rainbow (and Women in Love, though in a different

58. Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (Harmondsworth 1971) p 240.

way) was glossing it. That is, he took certain passages or sections that he saw as focal, given his emphasis on the theme of the 'unity of life', and quoted or referred to them in the normal manner of a critical commentary. However, these quoted extracts were deployed primarily for the purpose of elaborating their meanings, which he did not make lucid or specific, into broad, extra-literary statements relating to what Leavis felt was the essential significance of Lawrence's art. Rather than analysing the text to elicit this significance, Leavis presupposed it. His further adumbrations on selected passages served to confirm the presupposition and to place it in a wider context of religious and doctrinal issues. These issues were not primarily of a literary nature, but had been raised by the implications of Lawrence's writing. That writing was then, as it were, set aside or subordinated by Leavis's interest in the doctrinal themes. The gloss on the original text was phrased in such a way that it almost seemed independent of the material which had instigated its formulation. The following quotation shows how and to what extent Leavis took Lawrence as the text for his own speculations on the existential dilemma:

The particular concrete terms of the state of 'fulfilment' vary from individual to individual. To have achieved 'fulfilment' is to find meaning in life in the sense of having found immunity against torments of the question, 'What for?', and found it, not by falling into inert day-to-dayness, the anaesthesia of habit or automatism, but by achieving what Lawrence elsewhere . . . calls 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being'.(117)

Leavis was presenting his version of Lawrence and it was not exclusive of alternative representations. This version was predetermined by

the values and interests that informed Leavis's critical viewpoint. As a result of this, the themes which Leavis highlighted were those which he found commensurate with his own predispositions and beliefs. As the above quotation illustrates, this consonance led Leavis into an expansive discursive reading of Lawrence, the conclusions of which were ultimately only tenuously connected with the original text.⁵⁹

A further difficulty is hinted at in the above quotation, which concerns the resistance of Leavis's terms of approbation to rigorous definition, or specificity of meaning. The existential problem - lack of a sense of purpose - can be resolved by the achievement of what Lawrence called 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being'. This is as vague as Ursula's apprehension of "oneness with the infinite": what does it signify? Typically, Leavis maintained that the meaning of the phrase was delineated by its context. It was a phrase that

both the context of discourse in Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and the art of The Rainbow and Women in Love make . . . very much more than phrase .(117)

Leavis had quoted the passage from Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious in which Lawrence's phrase occurs in the essay on Women in Love. Since that essay followed the one on The Rainbow in the published volume, a certain amount of confusion might be instilled in a reader

59. ' . . . the works under discussion functioned, so to say, as pre-texts for a generalising discourse on human existence in the modern world'.

Mulhern, op. cit. p 293.

not familiar with the passage to which Leavis was referring. This is less significant, though, than the fact that the phrase has been given no greater degree of specific meaning than this. The passage from Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious did little to make it any clearer; nor was the referral to the 'art' of the two major novels very helpful. The phrase, "spontaneous-creative fulness of being", was a key one for Leavis and was made to bear the burden of profound significance whilst not actually having had anything like a particular sense given to it.

Other words and phrases in these essays suffered a similar handicap. Words such as 'fulfilment' and 'beyond', for example: as in 'it is in the establishment of a sure relation with the "beyond" that the creativeness of a valid marriage has its inclusive manifestation'.(117) These were also said by Leavis to have been defined by their context: the words were said to point to something which 'all the varied resources of Lawrence's dramatic poem are devoted to defining'.(117) The vocabulary, that is, had no independent meaning outside of the context in which it was employed. Either the words partook of a vagueness ('beyond') that, outside their literary confines, signified only a general spatial relation; or words which had a comparatively specific meaning in normal usage were employed by Leavis as specialised terms, delimiting their ordinary sense to the point where, again, their significance could only be intimated by their context. 'Intelligence', 'imagination' and 'impersonality' were words of this second order. Words like 'fulfilment' and 'beyond' were used to connote his conception of Lawrence's moral, or 'religious', attitude to the human condition. These other terms were part of his vocabulary of critical

evaluation and as such they bore an even greater responsibility to approach something like an intelligible coherency. If they failed to do this, Leavis's commentary on Lawrence could only be seen as contributing to the problematical mysteries of his art, rather than disposing of its evident obscurities and so revealing his essential content.

In many cases, Leavis's introduction of these polysemic terms without delineation was merely gratuitous, from the point of view, that is, of a critical explication of the workings of the novel. An example of this is his discussion of Lawrence's treatment of Ursula Brangwen. Leavis saw this treatment as largely autobiographical; he felt that Sons and Lovers had been cathartic and that Lawrence had turned the 'misfortune' of his childhood experiences into 'insight'. In using the experience, Lawrence was being 'wholly impersonal', and there was nothing 'diagnostic about it in relation to the writer': that is, Lawrence was not seeking to understand himself by writing of it, but to explore the objective nature of that kind of experience. The most obvious way in which Lawrence attempted to escape direct autobiography was in making his protagonist a woman. In another author, Leavis said, this might have been 'a disguise prompted by a sense of danger'; but not in Lawrence: there

it is rather the mark of creative genius, the impulse and the power to transcend the merely personal predicament by the intelligence that is imagination - or the imagination that is intelligence.(132)

Leavis also described this 'impersonalising' or 'transcending' of private experience as 'a triumph of supreme intelligence - the

intelligence that is inseparable from imagination and self-knowledge'.

(131)

The series of propositions is highly characteristic of Leavis's criticism of Lawrence. Leavis noted the autobiographical nature of the treatment of Ursula and the psychological problems that derive from 'the excessive demand by parent on child'(132); and he disposed of the idea that Lawrence had been irretrievably damaged by his relations with his mother⁶⁰ by demonstrating this distancing process that he had engaged in presenting Ursula. He went on to elevate his analysis of Lawrence's artistic procedure to an inflated level of approval, characterised by the vague language which attempted to assert an obscure extra dimension of significance to the achievement.

'Intelligence that is imagination - or imagination that is intelligence': even the form of Leavis's statement of the case indicated the limiting circularity of definition and meaning by which his terminology was restricted. Again, the reader's understanding of Lawrence's novel is not aided by the vague, expansive declarations of Lawrence's skills and achievements which were couched in a language unsubstantiated by a coherent controlling set of intelligible criteria. As Lawrence

60. ' . . . and those who talk as if Lawrence had been warped for life or in some way disabled by the strain set up in babyhood would be hard put to it to assemble any weight of critical evidence from the writings'.(156) This was a reference to Middleton Murry who had talked of 'that irreparable inward division into which [Lawrence's mother] had compelled him. The plasma of the total organism - the physico-spiritual unity which is man - had suffered vital injury'.

Son of Woman (1930) pp 47-48.

himself said:

it seems to me a good critic should give his reader a few standards to go by. He can change the standards for every new critical attempt, so long as he keeps good faith. But it is just as well to say: This and this is the standard we judge by.⁶¹

The problem with Leavis's criticism of Lawrence is that the 'standards' to which Leavis referred his readers were those represented by, contained in, Lawrence himself. Leavis's procedure was to claim that certain particular qualities were manifested in Lawrence and that these qualities entailed a profound moral valuation, or 'religious sense'. The authority to which he appealed for confirmation that these moral valuations ('standards') were authentic and relevant was something as vague as 'life', which in turn found its definition, its function in the critical process, in the way in which it was represented in Lawrence's art. The sanctions to which Leavis applied for confirmation of his commendations of Lawrence were sanctions that were themselves defined and delineated by Lawrence's work, either in the novels or in the discursive essays. Yet, as far as an understanding of the Lawrence of The Rainbow and Women in Love is concerned, the appeal to a higher level of critical terminology ('higher', that is, insofar as it was more abstract) was unnecessary. The reason why Leavis extended his critique into this diffusive language ('intelligence', 'impersonality', 'imagination') had to do with the ulterior purpose that was linked with his primary aim of making a

61. 'John Galsworthy', Phoenix (1936) p 539.

'case' for Lawrence: that of making a 'case' for his (Leavis's) own conception of literary criticism and its place in alleviating the conflicts being generated in the stresses of progressive industrialisation and their effect on the discriminative powers of the individual in society.

The elevation of the critical language was 'unnecessary' as far as these novels were concerned because Leavis's critique provided a valuable introduction to the problems and complexities of the two novels and established a model for the critical approach to a difficult subject. This statement is confined to The Rainbow and Women in Love because elsewhere Leavis showed himself to be less accomplished in maintaining even a minimal degree of judicial objectivity. Nonetheless the two essays on these novels were notably successful in many ways.

For example, Leavis demonstrated that he had a clear grasp of the structure or organisation of The Rainbow in the way he was able to trace the development of the themes through the three generations of the Brangwen family. It is a complex narrative and, as Leavis said, many readers are defeated by it. Leavis's explication, both of the novel's actual structure and the creative reasoning behind it, provide a valuable guide to Lawrence. A related aspect is the way in which Leavis clarified the changes in the nature of the problems with which each successive generation is faced. These changes amount, effectively, to a study of 'the movement of civilisation in England', (137) and of the 'plight of human life in an industrial civilisation'. (142) Out of this development, as the novel becomes increasingly 'contemporary', Leavis observed that the themes were beginning to

over-reach the boundaries of this novel and to extend into the ethos of its successor. Leavis noted how the original conception (The Sisters, or The Wedding Ring) expanded with Lawrence's growing perception of what he needed to do to create the pre-history of the later novel, until the project became dissilient, as evidenced in The Rainbow: the novel had 'no real conclusion, only a breaking-off was possible'. (142) Many other examples of Leavis's perspicuity exist in his discussion of The Rainbow.

With regard to Women in Love, a similar pattern emerges. A large proportion of Leavis's attention was given over to consideration of the figure of Gerald Crich, Lawrence's treatment of which showed how

the diagnosis of the malady of the individual psyche can become that of the malady of a civilisation. (152)

. . . In Gerald, in fact, we see the malady of the individual psyche as the essential process of industrial civilisation. (158)

In his discussion of Gerald, Leavis followed that theme of Women in Love which most closely answered to his own presentation of the condition of contemporary society and the possible consequences. A third of the chapter on the novel was taken up by this theme. A similar bias of interest was evident when, in the chapter on the 'lesser novels', Leavis referred, as being the major focus of interest of Lady Chatterley's Lover, to Lawrence's depiction of the colliery town of Tevershall.⁶² The discussion of the relevant chapters ('Coaldust'

62. Leavis quoted a long paragraph containing this description alongside a comparable passage from 'England, my England' (see pp 71-2). These quotations were appended to the essay without comment.

and, more particularly, 'The Industrial Magnate') was a rehearsal of his own political arguments, reformulated around specific notions in Lawrence, representative of the same kind of interest. For instance, Leavis took up Lawrence's concept of 'disquality' proposed by Birkin and, in the manner of his general technique in these essays, elaborated on it providing this expansive gloss on the basic principle:

No great novelist can be a Benthamite; for him the fact that we can be said to be 'all abstractly and mathematically equal' has little to do with his interest in mankind. [Lawrence's] study of the individual psyche has led him to the diagnosis of a civilisation in which the idealism he condemns (it amounts, he points out, to the same thing as materialism) has become a deadly enemy to life. The truth that 'disquality' insists on has, he knows, to be insisted on in the modern world - and he was writing Women in Love thirty years ago, when Lenin's revolution was contemporary news ('Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive').(162-3)

This example gives the typical pattern or movement of Leavis's commentary on Lawrence. A quite cogent and specific idea ('disquality') was discussed so that its full significance might be felt. From this level of practical comment, however, Leavis moved off into the wider, more diffuse realm of the historical context of Women in Love, culminating in a purely personal and unlocated evocation of the jejune excitement of revolutionary fervour. This sardonic aside left Lawrence receded into the background, with Leavis's comments, highly generalised, to the fore. The main analysis of Lawrence's ideas was more than reasonably salient; the problem is that Leavis identified so completely with Lawrence's moral and political perspective that his commentary on the novels melded almost ineluctably with presentations of his own sense of the case.

Two areas in which Leavis's critical method manifested itself in revealing ways were his discussion of the Ursula-Birkin theme and the treatment of Hermione. The major difficulty for Lawrence's 'diagnosis' of the 'malady of a civilisation' lay in presenting a convincing alternative to the surrender to mechanistic idealism figured in Gerald Crich. Birkin cannot be said to present an alternative in as convincing a manner as Gerald represents the inevitable advance to 'self-destruction'(156) of the complete materialist. Leavis claimed that

a strong normative preoccupation, entailing positives that are concretely present in many ways (we have them in the above phrases, "the goodness, the holiness, the desire for creation and productive happiness") informs the life of Women in Love - the life that manifests itself in the definition and 'placing' of these opposite human disasters.(167)

However, the actual substance of this 'normative preoccupation' is hard to locate. Birkin's attitude towards and relationship with this society is ambiguous and contemptuous rather than positive or 'normative':

[Birkin's] totally inconsequent psychological attitude, blending a rejection of collective action with acceptance of its benefits [ie, the unearned income of £400 per annum] , underlies the whole social criticism of Women in Love, an emotional, affective, irrational criticism, always seen from the point of view of Birkin, the outsider.⁶³

Delavenay's is a reasonable reaction to the inconsistency of Birkin's

63. Emile Delavenay, D.H.Lawrence: the Man and his Work. The Formative Years 1885-1919 (1922) p 420.

status and circumstances in the novel, and to the incomplete intelligibility of his proposed remedies (as Daleski argues):

Pace Leavis . . . I must confess that I find the norm Birkin proposes, in so far as it is defined by the values he advocates rather than by those he rejects, neither clear nor cogent.⁶⁴

The problem with Birkin supposedly representing a remedial alternative may have a deeper ramification than this lack of cogency. Despite Leavis's claims of a 'strong normative preoccupation', Lawrence's politics have moved away in this novel from the attachment to the ethos of the rural labouring classes shown in Sons and Lovers and The Rainbow. He no longer exhibits the same concern for the character or condition of working class society. As Delavenay says,

in this work created by a collier's son, not once does any character show a sign of sympathy or understanding of the common people. Birkin, Gudrun and Ursula all suffer from the ugliness of the industrial landscape, and protest against the defilement of the earth by the pitheads and the slag heaps. Not a word to show the true life of human beings in this setting, their pride their vitality, their sturdy independence.⁶⁵

This may be overstating the case, as well as sentimentalising Lawrence's early representations of working class life. Nonetheless it is true to say that Lawrence's 'diagnosis' of industrial civilisation is done from the outside, and it cannot be claimed that

64. H.M.Daleski, The Forked Flame: a study of D.H.Lawrence (1965) p 174.

65. Op. cit. p 421.

Birkin's remedial alternative extends to include any programme for alleviating the conditions of the working classes. The insubstantial nature of Lawrence's 'normative preoccupation' was indicated in Leavis's claiming to find its 'concrete presence' in a series of phrases such as "the goodness, the holiness, the desire for creation and productive happiness". So strong was Leavis's desire to elicit positive attitudes from the novel that he was diverted away from consideration even of the possibility that Lawrence's political attitude of hostility to mechanistic idealism ('Benthamism') might have failed to generate a genuine notion of an effective alternative.

In contrast, Leavis's analysis of Lawrence's treatment of Hermione was illuminating and provided an insight into Lawrence's creative method. The episode of the attack on Birkin with the paperweight revealed, Leavis said, 'the preoccupation with significances that are not to be conveyed by crises and resolutions of the familiar kind, at the level of the drama of "characters"'.⁶⁶ Leavis demonstrated convincingly the way in which the violence 'issues with a sufficiently clear inevitability . . . out of a preceding exoteric drama'⁶⁶. Leavis's success in this analysis was due to the fact that during the course of it he maintained a strict fixity of attention to a specific aspect of the text and was not tempted to elaborate any element of his discussion into diffusive speculations on general themes. The criticism utilised a vocabulary of terms that were more directly comprehensible than those which invoked a distant philo-

66. 'The way in which [Hermione] eventually succumbs to her own inadequacy has been brilliantly analysed by F.R. Leavis with a comprehensiveness that leaves little to be added'.
Daleski, *op. cit.* p 139.

sophical authority for their substantiation. In these areas Leavis was dealing with matters which were more closely associable with events presented in the text (Hermione's attack on Birkin). The criticism was therefore able to avoid developing mystifying abstractions, such as had arisen in dealing with Ursula's cosmic experience in the Botany class, and was correspondingly more enlightening about the material under discussion.

The success and failure of Leavis's criticism of these two novels were the result of the same set of conditions. Lawrence combined a feeling for the 'organic community', although this was not untainted by a political scepticism, with an interest in aesthetic exploration. As Leavis said, he was 'consciously and pertinaciously preoccupied with problems of method, technique and form'.(147) This set of interests paralleled Leavis's own concerns for the cultural heritage as represented by, inter alia, John Bunyan and George Eliot, and George Bourne's The Wheelwright's Shop (1923): and for the necessary aesthetic response to the changing pattern of modern life in the technical and formal innovations introduced by T.S.Eliot. When Leavis sustained a close attention to the texts under discussion, his sensitivity to the problems and resources contained in Lawrence's art was invaluablely illuminating. However, it was exactly because Leavis felt such a profound sympathy with what Lawrence was trying to do that he tended to extend his critique to involve generalised doctrinal and thematic divagations. The weaknesses and strengths of these essays on The Rainbow and Women in Love both derive from the congruity that Leavis found to exist between Lawrence's artistic aims and his own critical ambitions.

3. 'The Captain's Doll', 'St Mawr' and the tales.

'The Captain's Doll' is one of Lawrence's more difficult works and one which needs to be read sympathetically in order for it to yield its main theme convincingly. The tone and substance of the tale are both vulnerable to parody, being poised in a delicate balance between the significant and the ridiculous. Nevertheless, its thematic significance is important and it is a demonstration of Leavis's interpretative subtlety that he should have been able to discuss the tale in such a way as to bring out the full force of this significance.

Leavis's discussion of this tale was written after the essays on The Rainbow and Women in Love⁶⁷ and it is therefore not surprising that much of the tenor and direction of the critique should have been adopted from these previous writings. What must be analysed, Leavis said, was 'a very remarkable flexibility', and 'a sure rightness of touch in conveying the shifts of poise and tone that define an extremely delicate complexity of attitude'.(197) It was necessary, he implied, to highlight again the fundamental connection in Lawrence's art between the nature and quality of the writing and the creative inspiration that lay behind it. Two long quotations were given in the first few pages to emphasise Lawrence's 'dramatic range', which was 'the range of a truly great dramatic poet'.(198) The success of the writing in this respect was seen as the result of the depth of

67. The essay was originally published in Scrutiny XIX (1952), with a note appended saying that it was part of 'a study of four of the tales'.

Lawrence's creative vision: the 'rightness' of the nuances of speech, for example, were said to 'testif[y] to the profundity of the whole perception it registers'.(198) Continually, Leavis made the point that Lawrence's perceptions, what he saw and felt, conditioned the nature and quality of his writing: or, at least, did so with regard to that part of his creative achievement which was most accomplished. If this was a connection which Leavis wanted particularly to enforce, it should have been clear to him that in those places where either the writing is less compelling or the perceptions less profound and less well-organised, a less certain kind of achievement is denoted. That this was not always the case with Leavis on Lawrence is a matter that will be discussed with reference to St Mawr.

An initial problem with the tale 'The Captain's Doll' concerns the doll itself. To read it as being merely symbolic of the relationship between Hannele and the Captain would be limiting and reductive and would, in effect, make the business of the doll redundant and mechanical. Clearly, the fact that Hannele has made the doll is meant to indicate early on that a state of some intimacy exists between the two main characters, an indication that is emphasised by Mitchka's responding to the doll in a manner of restrained eroticism ("Has he really such beautiful fine legs?"). There must be more to the doll than this, though, in order that its symbolic function can avoid being banal. In Leavis's interpretation the doll had two ancilliary functions the first relating to the attention given to its legs, the second relating to the general theme of the nature of the relations between men and women.

The vaguely erotic insistence on the doll's legs and its "tight-fitting tartan trews" was an aspect of the doll's symbolism that had a key significance for Leavis. It was an insistence, he said, that

gives us a clear intimation that the theme of 'The Captain's Doll' carries with it a characteristic Laurentian challenge to 'personality' - to the place and valuation of 'personality' in the accepted understanding of personal relations, especially those between a man and a woman . . . The significance of the trews and the legs they insist on is one with the significance of the Laurentian 'body'.(201)

At this point, Leavis referred to a passage he had quoted in the course of the essay on St Mawr.⁶⁸ This quotation was from Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and it signified for Leavis what Lawrence intended to convey in discussing the 'body'. In that quoted extract there occurred various characteristic Lawrencean maxims - "The body's life is the life of sensations and emotions", "All the emotions belong to the body and are only recognised by the mind" - which Leavis took up, wholesale and unquestioningly, as part of his own language of interpretation, alongside other phrases such as "spontaneous-creative fulness of being".

The dependence on Lawrence's discursive essays for an insight into a problem in his creative work is a common procedure. In the present case, at any rate, it enabled Leavis to gain and present a subtle understanding of the function of the doll in the story. The insistence

68. This essay follows that on 'The Captain's Doll' in D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, but was in fact completed two years previously having originally appeared in Scrutiny XVII, 1 (1950).

on the physical characteristics of the doll, emphasised in Mitchka's response and by the fact that the 'tartan trews' are not a part of the Captain's regular attire, denoted for Leavis a preoccupation on Hannele's part with the 'body' of the Captain to the exclusion of any ability or inclination to be concerned with his personality - which is linked in Lawrence, Leavis said, with "'ideals", "ideas", and "will"'.(201) The nature of Hannele's relationship with the Captain is thus placed firmly within the physical and emotional sphere, in an avoidance or denial of those aspects of 'personality' which make the Captain an effectual individual. This denial contributes to the 'dramatic! contrast - the doll-portrait against the sentient being - that emerges when the Captain eventually arrives: Leavis noted a 'pregnant paradox here, a profound contradiction'.(201) Hepburn is "like the doll" and yet at the same time the fact that he is a sentient human being undermines the doll's representational efficacy. The 'paradox' that Leavis saw lies in the fact that the doll both is and is not the Captain. It is in the sense that it resembles him in form and feature to a recognisable extent; and yet the doll gives no suggestion of the Captain as an individual, as Hepburn, the man who looks at Hannele with "dark eyes", thus expressing a 'personality' which Hannele, in her emphasis on the physical characteristics, had attempted to deny. For it is that part of the Captain which affects her most strongly: "Her heart always melted when he looked straight at her with his black eyes". The doll, then, has contributed a complex of intentions, suppressed and overt, and has suggested the central condition of the relations between the two characters:

[Hannele's] sense in his presence. when she can see

him and hear him speak, that what communicates with her through the voice and the dark eyes is something unknown and unpossessable imposes itself on us with compelling force. Troubled and baffled, she rebels, and yet has to reckon with the fact that what she rebels against is what irresistibly attracts her.(202)

The confusion and bewilderment that mark Hannele's attitude towards Hepburn is figured in the doll she has made and makes up a main part of the 'dramatic tension' of the tale: her problem

is that of determining whether the spell exercised upon her by the man owes its power to reality or illusion. . . . The solution, the dénouement, is her tacit recognition of her own deepest desire or need.(202)

It is this subtlety of interpretative skill that indicates the capabilities of Leavis's critical faculty. The doll in the story is a potent image, compressed with meaning, but it is necessary to read the story attentively and with this kind of subtlety before the resources of the imagery become fully convincing.

It is also necessary to read the tale with a certain degree of sympathetic attention. Elsewhere in Leavis's study of Lawrence, in his discussion of Aaron's Rod, for example, the critic's sympathy emerged as an easy tolerance of weakness or ambiguity. However, in the essay on 'The Captain's Doll', Leavis's identification and analysis of the major theme only gained from the fact that he found this presentation of it congenial to his own ideas.

This is not to say that a familiar kind of overstatement did not

creep into the discussion: 'the tale expresses Lawrence's profoundest insights into the relations between men and women'.(203) That Leavis's qualitative clauses should be couched in the superlative case is a repetitive feature of the writing on Lawrence, as much as on other favoured authors; it is distracting, and the reader needs to develop an automatic qualifying response, one which dilutes the extremeness of the praise without rejecting its essential insight. For, undoubtedly, 'The Captain's Doll' is preoccupied with the complexities of male-female relations and Lawrence's treatment is reciprocally complex and profound. The difficult nature of the subject matter is reflected in the difficulties of the text, which, superficially comic, yet deals with these issues in intricate detail and with great subtlety. It is to acknowledge Leavis's critical skill that, notwithstanding the occasional redundant superlative, he presented a reading of the story that contributes to an understanding of its complexity and significance.

Hepburn's preoccupation with the moon and his telescopes does not have an immediately objectifiable symbolic or metaphorical function. Leavis's reading gave an interpretation of its functional properties that was compatible with his insistence that the story dealt with problems of human relations. Hepburn's astronomy is the means Lawrence employs for reifying certain essential abstractions contained in the Captain and in the general nature of human interaction. It indicates, Leavis claimed,

that impersonal purpose (if 'purpose' is the word) which an individual human being must have while he has his integrity and his raison d'être: that 'purpose' which cannot, without disaster, be abdicated in favour of anything else.(213)

In comparison with the preceding comments on Ursula's existential trauma - presented by Lawrence and reported by Leavis with a large degree of mystifying ambiguity - this current discussion was more lucid and controlled. It remained in much closer contact with particular material in the text and the comments contributed to a clearer understanding of the nature of the issues involved, rather than adding to the air of mystery and confusion. Leavis's comments on the scenes following Hepburn's wife's death are exemplary in their interpretative lucidity and pertinence and are representative of the tone and orientation of the strongest parts of the whole essay:

what we have had presented to us by the whole scene is the fact of otherness: we cannot possess one another, and the possibility of valid intimate relations - the essential lasting relations between a man and a woman, for instance - depends on an acceptance of this truth. (213)

The exchanges between Hannele and Hepburn after they have been reunited involve a complex interplay of ideas and emotions. The Lawrentian maxims voiced by Hepburn, regarding the proper attitude for a man to adopt towards a woman, are tempered by the objections of the positive and strong-willed Hannele. This is not a simple opposition between emotion and intellect, but a drama of two individuals separating and identifying themselves and each other - a necessary process preliminary to their being capable of committing themselves to a shared existence. It is a drama which Leavis understood and analysed with great clarity. The outing on the glacier serves, he said, 'to confirm the positiveness and the validity of Hepburn's ostensibly negative attitude - his repudiation of "love" and his

"meaninglessness"'.(217)

Hepburn's 'attitude' is one of 'insistence on the reality', the force of which 'expresses an ultimate - an unsentimental and unideal - vital faith, a profound assertion of life and wholeness'.(217) Another phrase Leavis had was 'affirmation of life', a positive aspect that was contained in, for example, the 'vehemence' of Hannele's retorts when Hepburn berates her on the glacier. The tale culminates in an interchange between the two characters in the course of which their essential attitudes are outlined, weighed and balanced. Leavis was sensitive to the significance of this process:

[the]terms of the formulation define . . . a conception of the relations between a man and a woman that cannot readily be convicted of impoverishment The traditional terms . . . are revitalised in the service of a profound insight into the deeper human needs and desires.(220)

This was not a commentary which involved a series of obscuring glosses on already intractable material, as sections elsewhere in the book had tended to be. The positive, or 'normative', aspiration of the story⁶⁹ was more readily identifiable than, say, Birkin's had been and Leavis was not therefore forced to engage in a series of mysterious metaphysical adumbrations. On the contrary, where Birkin's 'normative' preoccupation had been obscure and ambivalent, Hepburn's was difficult, complex, but essentially rational. Leavis elucidated

69. 'We have to note of course that theme and creative impulsion are, as I have said, essentially normative.'(267)

these difficulties and elicited from the complexities of the text its essential theme. As Leavis himself said, "'The Captain's Doll' does not propound or generalise';(221) consequently, it can be said, neither did Leavis's critique of it: it sustained, in fact, its coherency and inclusiveness.

In contrast, there exists a radical inconsonance between Leavis's claims for St Mawr and the actual creative achievement represented by that story. This is a contradiction that has a significance for Leavis's criticism of Lawrence, as well as for his general critical enterprise. The reasons for this distortion have to do with Leavis's emphatic and deep sympathy for the theme of the nouvelle, but also, more importantly, with a fundamental incapacity in Leavis for discriminating between doctrine and artistic method. The critic appeared to suppose that if the theme was important enough, its expression would be inevitably an accomplished and brilliant thing. In fact, throughout the chapter on St Mawr, the actual writing was very little discussed, while the story's doctrinal concerns were construed painstakingly and at length, despite the fact that the essay was included under the general heading 'the novel as dramatic poem'.⁷⁰

A notable feature of Leavis's discussion of St Mawr is the aggressive assertiveness of the language he employed:

70. See note 54 above.

St Mawr seems to me to present a creative and technical originality more remarkable than that of The Waste Land, being, as that is not, completely achieved, a full and self-sufficient creation. It can hardly strike the admirer as anything but major. (225)

(The 'admirer', note, not just the 'reader'). The disparagement of T.S.Eliot, the unqualified praise (the sentence before this had called the story an 'astonishing work of genius'), and the gratuitous insistence of the last sentence: all these features combine to give an impression of overstatement and exaggerated claims. The last sentence particularly encapsulates the kind of urgent, would-be intimidating, nature of Leavis's critical style when he is faced with the problem of making claims for a literary work that can really only be substantiated through a series of the broadest and most unspecific generalisations. When the work in hand yielded its literary qualities more readily, the criticism was correspondingly clearer and more astute; such phrases do not occur in the essay on 'The Captain's Doll'.

Leavis not only made claims for St Mawr which were exaggerated and vague: some of the positions that he adopted towards the story were simply untenable:

Lawrence writes out of the full living language with a flexibility and a creative freedom for which I can think of no parallel in modern times. (226)

This claim, if the reader takes it to be referring exclusively to St Mawr, is preposterous. The quality of the writing in the story cannot be classified as part of that order of literary achievement. Many examples of indifferent, dull, repetitive, vague and meaningless

passages can be pointed to, to the extent that Leavis's saying that the story is 'completely achieved' appears perverse. An additional problem arises with the attempt to determine what the phrase 'completely achieved' actually signifies: the comparison with The Waste Land (on grounds, ostensibly, of subject-matter) is not helpful and even Leavis himself did not develop it. These are typical features of the discussion; evaluative overstatement not evidenced by the text and a deliberate ambiguity in the terminology of that evaluation.

One reason for the excessive praise that Leavis offered may be the early date of the piece. First published in Scrutiny, XVII 1 (1950), the essay on St Mawr preceded all the writing on Lawrence that subsequently went to make up D.H. Lawrence: Novelist. Leavis therefore began his 'reevaluation' of Lawrence with this essay. That it appeared under the rubric 'the novel as dramatic poem' indicates that Leavis saw the piece as belonging more to that continuing enterprise than to any full-scale project on Lawrence. Hence he might have felt obliged to enforce claims for the Lawrence canon in general rather than restricting himself to the tale under immediate discussion. This would help to explain the distance between what was said by Leavis about Lawrence in this chapter and the actual quality of the work under discussion.

That this was the case becomes clear when Leavis can be seen to have been employing phrases and ideas about Lawrence which were to be expanded later in the essays on The Rainbow and Women in Love. The quality that Leavis found predominant in St Mawr was 'intelligence' in the presentation of the essential ideas. This was

not a quality that 'prove[d] its possibility by being presented in any character': on the other hand,

it [was] no mere abstract postulate. It [was] present as the marvellous creative intelligence of the author. . . . creative genius in Lawrence manifests itself as supreme intelligence.(234)

The familiar litany was thus reiterated: 'intelligence' equals 'creative genius' manifested as 'intelligence'. What reward or insight this might offer the reader of Lawrence is not clear. Leavis discussed in this context Lawrence's 'generalising power which never leaves the concrete'.(235) What Leavis might be said to have exhibited was a 'generalising power' that rarely made any contact with the 'concrete' at all.

St Mawr is not one of Lawrence's most striking performances, although undoubtedly there is much in it that deserves attention. Eliseo Vivas⁷¹ and Graham Hough⁷² have discussed St Mawr in the light of Leavis's comments on the tale. Vivas called St Mawr 'second-rate Lawrence' and Leavis's comments a 'baffling panegyric'.⁷³ The story is in two parts, comprising Lawrence's animosity towards the sophisticated English milieu that he had characterised 'dramatically' in

71. Eliseo Vivas, 'Mr. Leavis on D.H.Lawrence', Sewanee Review lxxv (1957) pp 123-36.

72. Graham Hough, The Dark Sun. (1956) pp 179-86.

73. Vivas, op. cit. p 126.

the Hermione circle in Women in Love, but which was here reductively 'conceptualised' ('Rico and his friends are merely puppets, fabricated to be sacrificed to the author's hatred'); and the 'American episode', which was 'essentially inchoate and inconclusive'. Vivas allowed for some 'passages of good writing' in the latter part, but found that in general 'the writing of St Mawr is stale and flat.'⁷⁴

Hough felt that some of the 'characterisation and description' merited high praise but that on the whole it was not 'an authentic piece of work' and that there was 'a falsity in the motive and the conception that fatally affects the whole'.⁷⁵ Hough, like Vivas, found the social satire too much conditioned by personal irritation, and that the story had been written not 'out of experience . . . but out of a need and a mood that are too partial and too close'.⁷⁶ He also felt that the stallion was 'too obvious and unmodulated a symbol of primitive energy'; and Lou's and Mrs. Witt's insistence that Rico ride the horse as implausible ('crazily impossible'⁷⁷). An accumulation of contradictions and inconsistencies in the story led Hough to the conclusion that 'this whole elaborately painted English scene is pure pasteboard, a stage set done with nothing more than

74. Ibid. p 126.

75. Hough, op. cit. p 180.

76. Ibid. p 181. This was a 'need' brought on, in Hough's view, by Lawrence's visit to England from Mexico - 'one of the most dismal episodes of his career'.(180-81)

77. Ibid. p 182.

a scene-painter's knowledge'.⁷⁸ Furthermore, although the move to Mexico involves one of Lawrence's 'most magnificent pieces of description' the conclusion of the story is 'inadequate', and has 'no general validity': 'the creative struggle with wild nature . . . throws no light, however indirect, on the problems of a complex civilisation where this particular struggle has long ceased.'⁷⁹

Yet, despite the existence of these palpable weaknesses, this was story of which Leavis felt able to say that it was 'an astonishing triumph of the highest creative art'.(231) The reason for this is that Leavis was not primarily interested in the story in terms of its artistic achievement. What he was concerned with was its doctrine, the thematic message that he felt the story was attempting to transmit. Leavis talked early on in the chapter about Lawrence's 'free play of poetic imagery and imaginative evocation, sensuous and focally suggestive'(226) and supplied appropriately pertinent quotations in support. However, the quoted extracts were not analysed in an attempt to particularise the ways in which Lawrence utilised language to promote meaning, to give expression to his creative inspiration. Rather they were exploited by Leavis as a means of giving vent to his own, highly diffuse and inexact, ideas about what he believed Lawrence was trying to achieve.

78. Ibid. p 182-3.

79. Ibid. p 184-5.

This attitude towards the story enabled Leavis to overlook the inconsistencies and implausible elements of the tale. For example, that Mrs. Witt should deliberately cause the stallion to bolt as Rico rides him through Hyde Park is a dangerously irresponsible act and highly unrealistic, given that Mrs. Witt is not psychopathically disturbed. Yet Leavis was able to ignore this aspect - a failure to be realistically convincing that diminishes the value of the story as a whole - because of his insistence that 'Rico is the antithesis of St. Mawr; he represents the irremediable defeat of all that St Mawr stands for'.(228) For this to be true, Rico would have to be more tangibly present as a character, an individual, and St Mawr would have to represent something more than merely a potentially dangerous 'primitive energy'. If Rico was to bear the burden of representing a satire on the sophisticated Bloomsbury milieu of the period, then he could not simultaneously be represented as a figurative type in a non-realist moral fable. Leavis, however, was convinced that this is what was intended in the counterposition of Rico and St Mawr and he introduced, as further evidence, the reference to the 'body' as the source of 'sensations and emotions' from Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious. Leavis's gloss on this passage was that 'body' for Lawrence 'means all that deep spontaneous life which is not at the beck and call of the conscious and willing mind. . . . St Mawr, the stallion, is that life'.(231) This claim amounts to an uncritical reflection on Lawrence's metaphoric or symbolic aims in the tale. It was not supported by any serious analysis to demonstrate in what ways and how effectively the metaphors and symbols are developed in the story. The quotations given by Leavis betray an obviousness

that even the critic acknowledged, although without finding it to be disadvantageous to any extent. Leavis quoted the lines comparing Rico with Lewis the groom in which the latter's ability to deal with St Mawr is supposed to contrast with sophisticated inadequacies:

You could not imagine his face dirty, or scrubby, and unshaven or bearded, or even moustached. It was perfectly prepared for social purposes. If his head had been cut off, it would have been a thing complete in itself, would not have missed the body in the least.

Leavis said: 'The force of this needs no explaining'.(232)

This is exactly the point: Lawrence's tale is replete with similar examples of a simplistic presentation of ill-thought-out themes, redundant imagery (why John the Baptist?), an unmediated doctrine and the impatient jargon of half-developed, occasionally absurd, ideas. St Mawr is an incompletely construed and poorly constructed piece of writing, notwithstanding its occasional flashes of brilliance. That Leavis should have found it so important and 'achieved' is a sign of the extent to which his critical judgement was subordinated to his exposition of Lawrence's doctrine, for which he sustained a strong interest because it coincided to such an extent with his own beliefs.⁸⁰

80. Leavis said that the stallion 'represents deep impulses of life that are thwarted in the modern world'(287), a phraseology reminiscent of some of his own pronouncements on the state of contemporary civilisation; and Leavis eagerly applauds Lawrence for his hostility to Bloomsbury, a bête noire that loomed large in Leavis's animadversions on the state of contemporary culture.

The insubstantial quality of the story and the abeyance of critical judgement on Leavis's part is evidenced in the vagueness combined with assertiveness of his commentary:

The power of the affirmation lies, not in any insistence or assertion or argument, but in the creative fact, his art; it is that which bears irrefutable witness. What his art does is beyond argument or doubt. . . . Great art, something created and there, is what Lawrence gives us. And there we undeniably have a world of wonder and reverence, where the life wells up from mysterious springs. It is no merely imagined world; what creative imagination of the artist makes us contemplate bears an unanswerable testimony. (235)

It is impossible to reconcile this statement with Leavis's criterion which stated that criticism should maintain a close connection with the text under discussion. This commentary was very far away from a close critical analysis and the weakness of Leavis's critique is clinched by the manner in which he endeavoured to see the ending of the tale - generally recognised to be unsatisfactory and not connected to the first half of the story - as 'essentially so germane, so belonging to the significance' (244)⁸¹ of the tale as a whole. This claim was enforced only by the vaguest of means: by reference to the 'pioneering' life of the log cabin as a 'triumph of civilisation' and 'a triumph of the spirit' (245); and by quoting some of Lawrence's bizarre final paragraphs -

And every civilisation, when it loses its inward vision

81. The marked occurrence of italicised words in this essay is a small indication of the way in which vague insistence has taken over from persuasive argument.

and its cleaner energy, falls into a new sort of sordidness, more vast and more stupendous than the old savage sort. An Augean stables of metallic filth. . . . To win from the crude wild nature the victory and the power to make another start, and to cleanse behind him the century-deep deposits of layer upon layer of refuse: even of tin cans.

- with the comment: 'Lawrence can allow himself this because the affirmation merely brings to explicitness what his art has affirmed pervasively and cumulatively'.(245)

Leavis placed too great a burden of responsibility on the achievement of the 'art' of St Mawr which that 'art' was unable to carry off and which Leavis himself left unanalysed to speak, one supposes, for itself. Yet Lawrence's undigested doctrinal generalities do not have the scope and achievement which Leavis claimed for them; the tale is not 'great art' even in the narrow terms of the Lawrence canon. Leavis's misjudgement - the result of his fascination with the doctrinal elements - has serious implications with regard to the motivations that lay behind his general critical enterprise.

In Leavis's discussion of Lawrence's tales, a similar pattern emerges. In the collected edition of 1934 there were forty-six tales (inclusive of The Virgin and the Gypsy and 'The Fox') and Leavis mentioned, in passing or at length, fourteen of these. Of these, he found 'The Prussian Officer', 'The Thorn in the Flesh' and 'A Fragment of Stained Glass' 'immature'(246) and he set them aside. The rest, as far as Leavis was concerned, were all competent, 'achieved' works of art, full of insight, brilliant and wide-ranging. Again, Leavis's

critique, his expatiation on Lawrence's themes in the tales, was more convincing in those passages where it was concerned with stories that are overtly successful. But Leavis was determined to find a similar series of qualities and set of values in whatever story he happened to be discussing, and despite, it seems, the relative merits of each individual tale.

What Leavis was concerned to argue for the tales was their range of variety, their 'reverential' attitude to human life ('human centrality') and their diagnostic approach to contemporary society. These were the general headings under which he organised his assessment of the stories he chose to discuss. Those stories for which he preserved strongest approval, and whose quality would receive a general assent, included 'The Horse-Dealer's Daughter', 'You Touched Me', 'The Fox', 'England my England', 'Mother and Daughter' and The Virgin and the Gypsy. Those stories for which Leavis made claims that are difficult to substantiate included 'The Princess', 'The Man Who Loved Islands', 'The Woman Who Rode Away', 'Two Blue Birds', 'Sun' and 'Things'.

The first group were chosen for reasons which were typified by the discussion of 'The Horse-Dealer's Daughter', which Leavis described as 'a love-story - a story of the triumph of love and of life'.(251) In Leavis's view, Lawrence was 'concerned always with the relations between individual human beings - the relations in all their delicate complexity'.(252) And of 'You Touched Me' he said

What we . . . feel is the challenge to realise the full

complexity presented, and the tale leaves us with a sharp sense of how much, to what rare effect, this is an art calculated to promote one's imaginative perception in the face of ordinary human life.(256)

With regard to these two stories, Leavis's argument was developed around extensive quotations that were discussed in relatively general terms, leading to the kind of summary conclusions quoted above. Again, the writing itself was not closely scrutinised to examine how and in what ways it achieved its effects and the quotations themselves were made to do a disproportionate amount of work towards demonstrating the validity of the claims that were being made for them. Leavis sought other qualities in the passages, and in the stories as a whole, than those which might have come under the heading 'stylistics'. He was preoccupied with an exposition of the implications of the narrative structure of the story and he tended to take the literary techniques and effects as self-evident and pre-assumed. For example, discussing 'The Horse-Dealer's Daughter', in which a young doctor rescues a girl from drowning and then finds himself in love with her, Leavis said

The surprise [with which the doctor greets his new-found passion] is a complex one, and the compelling inevitability of truth that, in such a matter, one must recognise to be beyond the power of any but a very great writer.(250)

This was followed by a brief quotation which was supposed to demonstrate the 'unnerving rightness of touch'(250) of the scene in which this action takes place, and how the doctor's response to the girl is 'something profound and positive'.(251)

This discussion was all contrived as part of a general 'case' which

Leavis intended to enforce with regard to the tales in general. The discussion of this story ended with his saying that the significance of the last scene was 'plain enough' and needed no analysis but merely the insistence that 'it is what it is'. This statement was followed by a reference to T.S.Eliot designed to disparage that poet's attitude to love and sex⁸² in contrast with Lawrence's, a recurring comparison in Leavis. The implication of this procedure was that the qualities of the story were not in question; all that was necessary as far as Leavis was concerned was to highlight and underscore the profound significance of the fundamental theme. This was his attitude to the tales in general, and was expressed in such comments as that on 'The Fox': 'the whole fox motive in all its development is remarkable for its inevitability of truth and the economy and precision of its art'. (258) In actual fact, Leavis's description of the structure of 'The Fox' was competently done, bringing out the essential theme of a relatively complex narrative. That he avoided any consideration of the form⁸³ of the story is less important given the fact that the extracts that were quoted were more readily comprehensible in relation to the major theme of the tale and required no detailed exegesis to make their significance apparent. The same can be said of his commentary on 'England, my England' and, especially, The Virgin and

82. Leavis referred back to his earlier quotation of Eliot's article in the Nouvelle Revue Française in which Eliot had attacked what he thought of as the barbarity with which Lawrence's characters 'font l' amour' ('quelque hideux accouplement de protoplasme'). (See footnote to p 24.)

83. 'Structure' is here taken to mean the way in which the sequence of events in the story is organised: 'form' to mean the literary techniques involved in the writing.

the Gypsy. The problem is Leavis's apparent inability or reluctance to discriminate between the successful and the less successful of the tales; it is not possible to assume that those which he left undiscussed were those of which he had a less exalted opinion⁸⁴. This indiscriminateness was the result of two factors: the main point of this essay on the tales was to demonstrate Lawrence's 'range'(246): and the secondary intention was further to enforce his 'case' for Lawrence as the 'greatest creative artist' of his age.

The first of these aims turns out to be the least important. Essentially, Leavis maintained at the beginning of the chapter that Lawrence's tales 'constitute a body of creative work of such an order as would of itself put Lawrence among the great writers'(246). He then spent the rest of the chapter demonstrating the validity of this claim, by seeking in each respective story a reflection of what he saw as Lawrence's fundamental values; in the process, he emphasised his secondary point about the tales, their undoubted variety.

The second main intention of the essay may provide a clue as to why Leavis's account of the tales emerges as generalised and indiscriminating and how, given his own insistence on their 'range', he managed to credit Lawrence with an apparently homogeneous creative purpose behind the writing.

Leavis's formulation of a 'case' for Lawrence had a positive and

84. 'Of this great body of work all but a very small fraction is transcendently good.'(356)

a negative side. The negative aspect appeared in his approach to Rico in St Mawr and his having been willing to see such a weakly-drawn and ill-conceived character as a suitable vehicle for ironic comedy at the expense of the Bloomsbury milieu. The point is that Lawrence was, eventually, hostile to this social circle and felt himself to have been rejected by it, particularly during his visit to England from Mexico in the winter of 1924-25. Leavis, of course, had long sustained a comprehensive rejection of the social and literary values of Bloomsbury and also saw himself cast in the role of an outsider;⁸⁵ for these reasons he may have been especially receptive to Lawrence's satire on Bloomsbury, even to the extent of failing to see that the satire was not actually very good.

In the same way, the chapter on the tales was punctuated with disparaging references to T.S.Eliot (several times), Wyndham Lewis, Maupassant, Flaubert, as representatives of an aesthetic practice that failed to come near the achievement seen in Lawrence. Leavis recruited Lawrence in his battle against the encroachment into literature and criticism of those values represented by his main antagonists, Bloomsbury and Eliot - especially the Eliot of The Cocktail Party.

On the positive side, Leavis identified closely with Lawrence's diagnostic attitude towards contemporary society. He found, for example, in 'The Princess' 'an earnestness and profundity of response to the

85. See, for example, 'Keynes, Lawrence and Cambridge', The Common Pursuit, (1952) pp 255-60.

problems of modern civilisation'.(275) He claimed that stories such as 'Two Blue Birds', 'Sun' and 'Things' attested to the fact that 'in Lawrence modern civilisation has a student and analyst of incomparable range as well as insight'.(282) Furthermore, it was Leavis's contention that this analysis was above all 'positive'⁸⁶ and remedial and that in Lawrence there was not only a perception of how bad things were in contemporary society, but also a programme for ameliorating the present condition of mankind.

The stories discussed in this respect, however, are not all the most completely successful performances on Lawrence's part. 'Sun', for example, is a short, wordy exercise in simplistic counterpointing which Leavis called 'a terrible criticism of an aspect of industrial megalopolitan civilisation . . . done with great subtlety'.(283-4) However, it appears that this distinction was attributed by Leavis to a story for which he retained a large degree of intellectual sympathy which hindered him from viewing it objectively and seeing such weaknesses as are manifestly present in it. Similarly, for Leavis to talk so commendatorily of 'The Princess' was out of consonance with the strange, undeveloped characterisation of that story and the underlying viciousness of the tale - what Hough called its 'offensive . . . sexual malice'.⁸⁷ Once more, it would seem that Leavis has read more into the tales than can actually be said to be there because he is so essentially in sympathy with the underlying creative motive.

86. 'What is remarkable about Lawrence's irony is that, astringent as it may be, it never has a touch of animus'.(333)

87. See Hough. op. cit. p 180.

The chapter on the tales confirms the thesis that in the process of making a literary and social polemic out of the discussion of Lawrence, Leavis failed to adopt a position of judicial objectivity and was not as vigorously critical or discriminating as, by his own criterion, it is necessary for the critic to be.

5. The Critical Imperative (1953-69): the consolidation of Leavis's critical positions

1. Disputations and Controversies: the pattern of Leavis's polemical engagements

It is not necessary to examine the contents of C.P. Snow's 1959 Rede lecture, The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution, in any detail. What is important about it for the present study is the nature of the response which it elicited from Leavis and the effect which the debate had in focusing Leavis's cultural thesis and in instigating the formulation of his subsequent literary and social criticism.

That Leavis felt obliged - eventually¹ - to counter Snow's arguments is consonant with his general reactions to the literary debate and dispute, as previously presented in Scrutiny. Following the closure these were expressed in a series of letters and articles to various journals and weekly newspapers in both Britain and the US.² Right

1. Three years separated the Rede and the Richmond lectures. Leavis said that he had dismissed Snow's lecture as negligible at the time of its initial publication, but gradually the argument had become popularised, 'as if Snow . . . had given trenchant formulation to a key contemporary truth'; and he found, 'from marking scholarship scripts', that this pervasiveness was increasing. Cf. Two Cultures p. 11. This led to his mounting a full-scale attack.

2. Cf. D.F. McKenzie and M-P. Allum, F.R. Leavis: a checklist 1924-64 (1966), especially pp 40-56.

from the time of the establishment of Scrutiny Leavis had been prepared, had felt obliged, to engage in literary critical debate: much of his radical programme for Scrutiny and his own critical writing were developed in a series of articles which were occasioned by disobliging reviews of the new journal or volumes of criticism which were felt to betray an inadequate awareness of critical responsibilities.³

This polemicism was a key element of Leavis's critical practice: the maintenance and continuance of constructive disputation amongst those involved with literature was a fundamental part of the 'collaborative' critical process. With the closure of Scrutiny Leavis lost his platform for promulgating his own views, although it is necessary to note that in the last pages of the journal he responded to F.W. Bateson's editorial for the new Essays in Criticism⁴, an exchange of differences that was not diluted in its energy by the circumstances of the imminent extinction of Leavis's own publication.

The disputes in which Leavis became involved followed a distinctive pattern. Typically, it was not an example of great critical acuity or socio-literary integrity that provoked the more extensive responses, but rather manifestations of a departure from the basic principles and responsibilities of criticism as he saw them. The 'collaborative' process was not, by and large, an exchange of views between like-minded critics disputing minor points in an area of general consensus. Rather,

3. See especially 'The Literary Mind', Scrutiny I, 1 (1932): 'What's Wrong with Criticism?', I,2; '"Under Which King, Bezonian?"' I,3; and 'Restatement for Critics', I,4 (1933).

4. 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', Essays in Criticism, III.1 (January 1953) pp 1-27.

Leavis would aim to devalue the whole basis upon which a particular critical exercise rested. He dealt in fundamentals, and his concessions to dissenting viewpoints were few.

Two particular exchanges illustrate the procedure. Between 1953 and 1956 Leavis responded to different kinds of material in a consistent manner. Fr Martin Jarrett-Kerr published an article specifically on Leavis's criticism⁵ and F.W. Bateson outlined a programme or manifesto for Essays in Criticism.⁶ To this disparate material Leavis replied in ways that were essentially similar. These replies provide a background to Leavis's tactics during the 'two cultures' débâcle.

Jarrett-Kerr's article was ostensibly a review of Leavis's The Common Pursuit (1952), but the wide variety of material contained in that collection allowed for a general discussion of Leavis's literary critical practice. This discussion was presented as an attempt to undermine the 'common account' of Leavis: 'behind the battlements of Downing sits an ogre, guarding a treasure chest, small but precious, of all that after much scrutiny survives of English literature'. The Common Pursuit provided 'a fit occasion for re-examining this common account',⁷ in a way that The Great Tradition (Leavis's previous publication) had not, being narrowly confined, in the main, to four

5. Fr. Martin Jarrett-Kerr, 'The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis', Essays in Criticism, II,4 (1952) pp 351-68.

6. Bateson, op. cit.

7. Jarrett-Kerr, loc. cit. p 351.

novelists. Further, whereas The Great Tradition 'carried its negations and dismissals more lightly' than in most of his criticism, in The Common Pursuit 'they are explicit and firm, and the reader is never in doubt as to what must be rejected'.⁸

Jarrett-Kerr praised the homogeneity of Leavis's critical approach: 'his reaction to the most varied work is all-of-a-piece'.⁹ He also recommended Leavis's avoidance of philosophical paraphernalia; the 'metaphysical and moral judgements' that lie behind the criticism are 'deliberately kept out of sight because they could so easily become the focus of attention (and of dispute) and thus detract from the real subjects under discussion'.¹⁰ This, of course, begs several questions, not the least of which would be why should 'dispute' regarding these underlying critical assumptions be an unwelcome distraction? how can these assumptions be separated from the particular judgements made about 'the real subjects under discussion'? Jarrett-Kerr stated that a discussion of Leavis's aesthetic would not have an effect on the 'concrete judgements' he makes; in which case, why acknowledge the presence of an aesthetic as such? if it is not effective in this way, then what is the deeper source for the actual 'concrete judgements' and how do these latter fit in with a general apprehension of the nature of literature and literary criticism? These questions were not raised by Jarrett-Kerr and what he presented was an unconvincing defence of Leavis's avoidance of abstract theoretical discussion.

8. Ibid p 352.

9. Ibid p 352.

10. Ibid p 357.

The article in its second section then moved on to make what Jarrett-Kerr called 'the necessary criticisms'.¹¹ These involved objections to the inclusion of some pieces in the collection and to Leavis's 'style'; and dissent from certain of Leavis's critical valuations.

Jarrett-Kerr doubted whether Leavis should have bothered 'preserving' essays which deal with essentially 'ephemeral' material: attacks on John Hayward and Maurice Bowra ('The Progress of poesy'),¹² the demolition of Tillyard's study of Milton¹³ ('In Defence of Milton'), or the derogation of Stephen Spender;¹⁴ it indicated a lack of a sense of 'proportion' on Leavis's part. A further problem for Jarrett-Kerr was Leavis's tendency to use clichés: either in using individual figures ('the Warden of Wadham') or representative notions ('the Sunday reviewing' or 'the academic') to stand as symbolic of sets of critical compromises and betrayals as seen from Leavis's point of view. In this, of course, lies the key to the preceding problem: the 'ephemeral' is representative in its very ephemerality and the subject of a review

11. Ibid p 358.

12. John Hayward (1905-65), anthologist and bibliographer and companion to T.S.Eliot until the latter's second marriage in 1957. (Sir) Maurice Bowra (1898-1971), Warden of Wadham College, Oxford 1938-70; Oxford Professor of Poetry 1946-51. In 'The Progress of Poetry', Scrutiny XV (1948) [reprinted in The Common Pursuit (1952)] Leavis attacked Hayward's 'presentment of the currency-values of Metropolitan literary society and the associated University milieu as the distinctions and achievements of contemporary England'. (The Common Pursuit p 297) Hayward, in Prose Literature in England since 1939 (1949) praised Bowra as a humanistic critic; Leavis noted ironically that Bowra had recently 'applied his scholar's ripeness and percipience to an extended appreciation of the poetry of Edith Sitwell'. (The Common Pursuit p 298)

13. E.M.W. Tillyard, The Miltonic Setting (1938).

14. 'Keynes, Spender and Currency Values', a review of Spender, World Within a World (1951) and R.F.Harrod, The Life of John Maynard Keynes (1951), Scrutiny, XVIII (1951) pp 45-56. This review was not reprinted in The Common Pursuit, but Jarrett-Kerr was 'uncomfortably reminded' of Leavis wasting 'precious pages' on an 'unimportant biography' by his preservation of other discussions of apparently irrelevant subject matter.

may have little, eventually, to do with that review's main purpose. Often, as will be seen in Leavis's reaction to Jarrett-Kerr's own article, the aim was, in many of these cases, to demonstrate the kinds of failure in critical responsibility that are manifested in the material. Thus, the aberrant quality of Tillyard's study of Milton - a book that Jarrett-Kerr suggests would have been forgotten but for Leavis's 'devastating review' - is not the central point. Leavis was concerned with elucidating the reasons behind the weaknesses and with setting those reasons in a wider context that included similar types of literary critical irresponsibility. This was an insight that was not accessible to Jarrett-Kerr.

The second order of 'necessary criticism' concentrated on the particular 'concrete judgements' that Leavis made and tended in the main to derive from a feeling Jarrett-Kerr had that, at bottom, Leavis was rather 'narrow', 'stern', and 'humourless'. The feelings of apprehension displayed by Leavis on approaching new work was seen as a lack of readiness 'to revise opinions'¹⁵ and as symptomatic of his place in a severely moralistic 'realistic-empiricist tradition'. Evidence for this lies in his unwillingness to discriminate amongst the 'good' and the 'bad' in W.H. Auden;¹⁶ in his dismissal of Charles Williams, failing to recognise value in an 'imaginative writer' who

15. Loc. cit. p 364.

16. 'This is a failure to appreciate the embarrassment of those of us who, admiring Mr. Auden's genuine strength and intelligence, find it hard to be patient when he so constantly giggles at his own seriousness and falls back on clever patter when he is afraid of appearing solemn.'

was not 'primarily [a] creator'; and in mistaken overestimations of novels and novelists (Ruth Adams' I'm Not Complaining. L.H.Myers) based on a 'community of interest and valuation' and not genuine critical worth.¹⁷

In the same way that Leavis took Tillyard or Spender as superficial symptoms of a deeper problem his response to Jarrett-Kerr¹⁸ saw that critic's article as in itself symptomatic. For Jarrett-Kerr not to realise that a degradation in literary values was being deliberately pursued by the 'literary establishment'¹⁹ meant that Leavis's 'insistence' on this point had proved inadequate:

... the appearance in Essays in Criticism of such an essay must be for me a challenge and an occasion that I earnestly hope I shall be permitted to take. For the issues, I repeat, are of the most urgent importance to all who think that literature and literary criticism matter, and it is impossible to believe that, if under the conditions of advantage offered by such an occasion, what may be so readily verified is bluntly stated, the blankness²⁰ can survive.²¹

17. Ibid p 366.

18. 'The State of Criticism: representations to Fr. Martin Jarrett-Kerr', Essays in Criticism, III (1953) pp 215-33.

19. 'He would seem to agree with me in judging the 'currency values of metropolitan literary society and the associated University milieux' to be not really the 'distinctions and achievements of contemporary England' (my phrases): why then should he think it not a matter to be taken seriously when the resources and authority of the British Council are used to impose them as such?' Leavis, loc. cit. p 216. (Leavis used these phrases in the article quoted in note 12 above.)

20. 'If I have failed with [Jarrett-Kerr] . . . then I must have failed with many others whose continued blankness before the issues, urgent as they are, I should be equally reprehensible to acquiesce in'.
Loc. cit. p 216.

21. Ibid p 216.

As to the case of Spender, Leavis said, the point was the 'very important question of how the author of the "unimportant autobiography" became an established glory of British letters'.²²

Leavis defended himself against Jarrett-Kerr's other charges in a similar vein. The reviewing in the 'Sunday papers' represented the work of the 'enemies of criticism', a fact for which he was constantly trying to gain recognition in his continual deprecatory references to it. As for the use of the term 'academic' in a derogatory mode, this was entirely justified by Leavis's experience of the 'academic mind' against which it was necessary 'to defend literature', the academic approach being inimical to the 'study of literature that should be a discipline of intelligence, fostering life'.²³ Leavis's detailed defence against Jarrett-Kerr's criticisms continued along these lines. The particulars of the dispute are not of primary importance; it is Leavis's animadversions on the way he saw an 'anti-critical impulsion'²⁴ emerging in Jarrett-Kerr's representations - of the value of Auden, Charles Williams, George Every - that are significant. Leavis himself stated that 'a general principle [was] at issue - a general truth about the nature of literary criticism'.²⁵

22. Ibid p 216.

23. Ibid p 218. Leavis characterised the 'academic' approach as one of inventing a spurious 'problem' and then providing a 'solution' to it with a display of erudition. Cf. The Common Pursuit p 35.

24. Ibid p 229.

25. Ibid p 230.

This relates to his earlier essay, attempting to counter and refute the 'doctrinal' approach to T.S.Eliot's poetry.²⁶ Any 'special interest' that the reader may bring to the poetry (compatible doctrinal beliefs, for example) is legitimate only provided that the reader is not distracted by them away from a genuine, objective appraisal of the poetry's actual literary value. This latter tendency is what Leavis called the 'anti-critical impulsion' and he saw it in Jarrett-Kerr's valuations:

The judgements that they result in cannot be good as literary criticism, and I cannot believe that the indulgence - the refusal of discipline, test, self-questioning - such judgements, represent can truly serve any²⁷ real spiritual interests they may be supposed to speak for.

This was a statement of principle, but it was essentially merely an adjunct to the major statement Leavis was exploiting Jarrett-Kerr's article to develop and enforce, regarding the state of contemporary criticism and the critic's task in the face of it:

Literary criticism, then, has . . . an important function. It seems to me impossible that anyone who does with conviction agree should, having looked round, fail to see how nearly in our time the function has been extinguished, and what forces are arrayed against any serious attempt to make it effective again.

26. 'Eliot's Later Poetry', a review of The Dry Salvages, Scrutiny XI (1942), reprinted as an appendix to Education and the University (1943).

27. Leavis, loc. cit p 231.

. . . The assumption that there is [an interested and responsible] public . . . is necessary to all critical thinking: all criticism aims at justifying it. . . The more conscious a critic is that the assumption is ill-founded, the more conscious will he be of the need to evoke (or 'create') a public - to²⁸ provoke, challenge and persuade one into existence.

The details of this exchange of views were not, clearly, its most important aspect. What is significant is that Leavis developed, alongside a declaration of the importance of the function of criticism, a systematic analysis of the ways in which he felt that that function was, contemporaneously, being resisted and betrayed. It also marked an emerging sense in Leavis himself of how much work in terms of the reiteration and reformulation of Scrutiny's critical programme still remained to be done: 'When I have so clearly failed, what further can I do?'²⁹. His opposition was to the 'system of personal and institutional relations [that takes in the weeklies, the Sunday papers, the British Council and the BBC]' . . . that has resulted in so complete a triumph, in what should be the field of literary criticism, of the socio-personal values'.³⁰ The critical orientation of his response to the original article was such that his radical objections to the contemporary state of affairs inevitably emerged out of the discussion of particulars. Leavis's tactic was to see the details as representative of an underlying critical habit or procedure out of which he would generalise his own agenda for the crucial, broader

28. Ibid pp 231-2

29. Ibid p 217.

30. Ibid p 217.

aspects of the argument. He related the 'representative' weaknesses of the minor case to fundamental misdirections in the major field of literary criticism. In this way, he was able to relate each current dispute to a generalised background representing his main discontents and his insistent programme for counteracting the prevailing tendency for 'the function of criticism' to be gradually 'extinguished'.

By moving thus from the particular to the general, Leavis paralleled his literary critical procedure, keeping in touch with 'the concrete' but combining this with observations relevant to a broad spectrum and in a wider context. There was not a great deal of critical writing in existence that Leavis felt exhibited the appropriate sense of critical responsibility. Leavis's convictions urged him to dispute exactly those critical attitudes which were antithetical to his own position and which allowed him to continue his campaign for the resuscitation of the 'true' "function of criticism". It was a campaign organised to demolish prevalent misconceptions and at the same time to alert the 'interested and responsible public' to the dangers of the gradual undermining of critical principles that was taking place.

F.W. Bateson's editorial for the emerging Essays in Criticism was a 'pronouncement on Essays in Criticism's point of view and programme' 31 and thus set out to do explicitly what had been done only circum-spectly in the first number of Scrutiny. The editorial board of Scrutiny had eschewed a detailed introductory 'programme', although

31. F.W. Bateson loc. cit. p 1.

the 'manifesto' of the first number made its critical orientation, or 'point of view', very clear.³² Even in its abbreviated form this was entirely lucid in its sense of the relation between literary criticism and the general 'dissolution of standards'; in contrast, Bateson merely discussed the vague notion of the critic's 'social obligation not to mislead his readers'.³³

Bateson's essay began with a lament for the state of the art of contemporary criticism. He adduced, along a simple dividing line, two types of critical endeavour, both of which he felt had tended to extreme forms and had evinced a central weakness of 'irresponsibility'. The two schools identified by Bateson were, broadly, those critics in the T.S.Eliot line who concentrated on formal problems at the expense of 'historical and social factors'; and the 'sociological critics',³⁴ whose 'lack of interest in verbal and stylistic analysis' meant that their 'literary judgements tend[ed] to be superficial and second-hand'. Out of this very basic analysis Bateson drew a simplistic conclusion, to the effect that if the 'explicators' and the 'sociologists' were untrustworthy, then the 'obvious' conclusion was

that if we are to see the object as it really is we must

32. See Scrutiny I,1 (1932) pp 2-7. The 'manifesto' was signed 'The Editors', who were nominally L.C.Knights and Donald Culver; the terminology is such, however, that it is certain that Leavis made a substantial contribution to it.

33. Bateson loc. cit. p 23.

34. Bateson grouped under this heading a heterogeneous assortment of names: 'Wyndham Lewis, Christopher Caudwell, Edmund Wilson, George Orwell, Kenneth Burke and Lionel Trilling'.

35. Ibid p 24.

use both methods - a balance, in other words, of literary and sociological criticism, in which one mode may serve as the complement and the corrective of the other.³⁶

This elastic compromise was easier to propose than to envisage working in practice. Essays in Criticism, Bateson went on to say, would not be a vehicle for bland uncontroversial critical writing but would aim for 'a balance of genuine opposites'. The journal would seek 'to secure articles of every critical complexion and colour, the one test of acceptability being that they are good of their kind (whatever that kind may be)'.³⁷ This posits a conception of literary criticism as an activity which, like politics, is undertaken at a multitude of points along a spectrum between two extremes but which, ignoring the particular biases engendered by its place on that line, can be seen as essentially the same activity in a series of arbitrary guises. These different forms were, despite unfortunate nominal differences, basically equatable, representing sets of aims and values that were ideologically equivalent. At best, this was intellectually a very naive thesis for the new journal and it contained ideas about criticism that were so inimical to Leavis that a reply from him was inevitable.

Leavis must have felt the irony of the circumstances of this exchange. His 'insistent' opposition to the decline in critical standards took place at a time when his own publication was on the brink of

36. Ibid p. 25.

37. Ibid p. 26.

closure and was directed against impoverished ideas in a journal that was newly-established and apparently thriving. Nevertheless, despite these circumstances, Leavis mounted a detailed counter to Bateson's 'pronouncement'. This statement came to be his last opportunity for a reiteration of his principles within the journal he and his wife had sustained for so long. The whole exchange was clearly seen by Leavis as a summation on his part of the essential critical principles that had been contained in Scrutiny's example.³⁸ It was Leavis's last attempt - within the pages of his journal - to enforce and elucidate its critical raison d'être.

Leavis's reply was a general account, derived by way of dismissing Bateson's propositions, of his own conception of the aims and practice of literary criticism. He rejected Bateson's claim that it was necessary and possible for a critic to re-establish the 'total context', of a work of art through a series of 'contextual checks' that would ultimately yield 'a final meaning' for the work which could be called 'the correct meaning, . . . since it is the produce of progressive corrections at each stage of the contextual series'.³⁹ This ambition,

38. It was the penultimate chapter of A Selection from 'Scrutiny' (1968) under the title 'The Responsible Critic' and was succeeded there only by Leavis's 'Valedictory' from the final issue. This last stated that 'there has never been a Scrutiny orthodoxy, but there has certainly been a Scrutiny conception of the function of criticism at the present time, together with a corresponding one of the proper spirit of a critical quarterly'. Leavis's essay in reply to Bateson encapsulated that conception and, paradoxically and ironically, a detailed 'manifesto' or 'programme' for the journal was laid out only at the moment of its closure.

39. Cf. Bateson loc. cit. p 18.

Leavis said, was 'gratuitous' and the possible achievement 'illusory': this 'contextual apparatus' was entirely unnecessary for a reading of the poem or novel. Leavis in fact inverted the argument, stating that

it is to creative literature, read as creative literature, that we must look for our main insights into those characteristics of the 'social context' (to adopt for a moment Mr. Bateson's insidious adjective) that matter most to the critic - to the reader of poetry.⁴⁰

In Leavis's formulation, 'creative literature' has that relation to contemporary life and society that makes it inevitably the pre-eminent source of our knowledge about its 'social context'. 'Creative literature' has this pre-eminence by virtue of its being 'creative' and encouraging in the reader a 'creative' response to it. This, Leavis argued, can only be derived by relating the content of the poem to personal experience:

if the poem is an important challenge, it engages, in the response that 'reconstructs' it, and as an inseparable part of the response, the profoundest and completest sense of relative value that one brings from one's experience.⁴¹

This was a rearrangement of priorities that undermined Bateson's preoccupation with 'objectivity' and the search for a 'final meaning' by making the source of a reading of the poem primarily the experiences

40. Loc. cit. p 174.

41. Loc. cit. p 176.

of the reader, and by making the poem primarily the source of any wider 'context' involved in that reading. The question of 'values' as raised by Bateson (Leavis found his account 'wholly unintelligible') was not served by vague references to 'literary values' or the 'social obligation' of the critic not to 'mislead'. There was an altogether higher level at which the burden of the critic to be responsible operated: 'The critic, by way of his discipline for relevance in dealing with creative works, is concerned with life'.⁴²

This took the argument into a different realm and Leavis went on to state that the 'special responsibility' of the critic was to become aware of how the 'function of criticism' should be made effective in 'contemporary England'. The critic must become alert to his task of 'helping, in a collaborative process, to define - that is, to form, - the contemporary sensibility'; this aim in turn proposes the existence of 'a public intelligently responsive and decisively influential'.⁴³ In these respects, Bateson had been less than 'responsible' because, Leavis claimed, he had demonstrated no awareness of the fact that 'contemporary cultural conditions' were militating against the proper function of criticism. In this way the argument was brought to a familiar combination of generally stated principles and specific polemical discontents, as in the previous dispute with Jarrett-Kerr. For Leavis, the general principles behind the function of criticism ('at any time') were not separable from the specific misdirections and incomprehensions that were afflicting the function of criticism ('at the present time').

42. Loc. cit. p 178.

43. Ibid p 178.

It was precisely this sense of a critical imperative - to maintain an opposition to those who by carelessness or deliberate design were undermining the function of criticism⁴⁴ - that led Leavis eventually to embark upon an attack on Snow's Rede lecture. This impulse was entirely commensurate with the sense of obligation to his conception of that function and it was a fulfilment of a sense of responsibility consonant with that which had urged him to respond to Jarrett-Kerr and F.W.Bateson. That is to say, the content of Leavis's side of the controversy was neither extraordinary nor unexpected, although its tenor seemed to disturb many people⁴⁵ and probably contributed to the notoriety of the whole issue; but this notoriety clearly ought not to have been attached to the ideas Leavis was expressing, as he had been offering them - often equally vigorously - for several years previously.

Historically, the 'two cultures' 'debate' was not in any way original, in the sense of being concerned with issues and problems entirely new to the human condition. Matthew Arnold and T.H.Huxley had disputed exactly this question of the priority of science over the arts in the early 1880s.⁴⁶ Arnold's version, also delivered as

44. To keep up the 'daily battle . . . against the processes of civilisation that have been documented in Scrutiny . . . during the past twenty years'.

Loc. cit. p 179.

45. Cf. The Spectator, March 23 1962.

46. Cf. T.H.Huxley, 'Science and Culture' ('An address delivered at the opening of Sir Joshua Mason's Science College on 1st October 1880') in Science and Culture and other essays (1881); and Arnold, 'Literature and Science' the Rede lecture 1882 in The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, (ed. R.H.Super) X. (Ann Arbor 1974).

a Rede lecture (1882), had dealt more equitably with the issues but still had found that while the natural sciences' habit of 'dealing with facts' was 'a valuable discipline', nonetheless the 'results' of science remained mere 'knowledge'; only 'poetry and eloquence . . . the best that has been thought and uttered in the world' was capable of 'helping us to relate the results of modern science to our need for conduct, our need for beauty'.⁴⁷

Furthermore, the ostensible material of the Leavis-Snow exchange was largely secondary to underlying ulterior purposes; the classic terms of the 'science versus arts' dispute were deployed by Snow in their twentieth century guise and as crucial to the contemporary age⁴⁸ for reasons that may have been centred on more immediately practical motivations. John Tasker wrote of Snow's lecture that its real purpose had been 'to advocate the expansion of technological specialisation and to provide a rationale for the empire-building of scientific research in the universities'; therefore, he 'coupled his scientific chauvinism with a gratuitous and nasty attack on literature and the arts'.⁴⁹ A large proportion of Snow's lecture was preoccupied with a commentary on the condition of educational achievement in the USA and USSR, to the detriment of the British situation. This commentary

47. Arnold loc. cit. pp 66-67.

48. Snow had also denied great originality for his ideas, although for different reasons. The 'flood of literature' attendant upon the publication of his lecture suggested to him that 'the ideas were in the air. Anyone, anywhere, had only to choose a form of words.'
Snow, The Two Cultures; and A Second Look, an expanded version of 'The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution' (1964) pp 54-55.

49. John Tasker, 'The Richmond Lecture - its purpose and achievement', Books and Bookmen October 1972, p 17.

was combined with dire warnings about the consequences for the nation of ignoring these apparent disadvantages.⁵⁰ Consequently, Snow's analysis of the dissilience of contemporary 'cultures' (science versus arts) tended in its attention to literature merely to denigrate the literary values that were current at that time. That is to say, Snow's attention was directed towards the practical and quotidian, unlike Arnold's or Huxley's broader philosophical approach. 'Literature', therefore, was not given serious consideration as a form of human endeavour, but was deprecated for particular weaknesses peculiar to the moment of the discussion.

This gave Leavis the line of attack to pursue in his approach to Snow's thesis. The historical question of the 'two cultures' - of the priority of arts or sciences over one another - barely troubled him. Leavis's reply was almost exclusively directed towards vindicating 'literature' on an Arnoldian or philosophical level against Snow's strictures in the practical sphere. Ironically, Leavis's lecture also displayed an antipathy towards contemporary 'literary values', with the difference that Snow was not only included as a representative of those values, he was presented by Leavis as the archetype of the decay endemic in contemporary 'cultural conditions'. Leavis employed the same argument here as he had previously, in justifying (to Jarrett-Kerr) his attack on Spender's autobiography: Snow was himself 'negligible' but:

50. 'For the sake of the intellectual life, the sake of this country's special danger, for the sake of the western society living precariously rich among poor, ... it is obligatory for us to look at our education with fresh eyes'.
Snow, loc. cit. p 50.

his significance is that he has been accepted - perhaps the point is better made by saying 'created': he has been created as authoritative intellect by the cultural conditions manifested in his acceptance.⁵¹

Representatives of the literary culture, criticised already by Snow, did not find themselves redeemed by the literary critic. The subsequent correspondence in The Spectator was not edifying either in its content or its tone; according to Roy Fuller, speaking as Oxford Professor of Poetry,⁵² many correspondents displayed 'a gratuitous insolence that showed how excruciatingly Leavis had managed to knock their concepts'. These people were not offended by 'Leavis's denial of the problem of the two cultures but in his questioning the values of the literary culture as it is assumed to exist'. For Leavis, the dispute was all part of the same campaign of vindicating 'the function of criticism' and alerting the whole culture to the prevailing decline in standards.

Leavis attacked Snow's simplified notion of 'social hope'. Snow had argued that because the individual condition is 'tragic' there was no reason to suppose that the 'social condition' must inevitably be so. Leavis could not identify 'the social hope that transcends, cancels or makes indifferent the inescapable tragic condition of each individual',⁵³ unless it resided in the mere material satisfactions

51. Two Cultures? the significance of C.P.Snow (1962) p 10.

52. Roy Fuller, 'The Radical Skinhead', TLS February 5 1971, p 151.

53. Leavis, loc. cit. pp 19-20.

that Snow represented as 'jam'.⁵⁴ It was not Snow that Leavis was attacking, but the general ethic that held that material advancement was the ideal standard against which to measure human achievement and ambition. Simple materialism was life-impoverishing and it was only 'in coming to terms with great literature [that] we discover what at bottom we really believe'.⁵⁵ This was because 'language' was 'a prior human achievement of collaborative creation' and language is not fixed: 'it lives in the living creative response to change in the present'.⁵⁶ Literary criticism was a parallel 'creative-collaborative process' and literature can only exist 'in the living present, in the creative response of individuals, who collaboratively renew and perpetuate what they participate in, a cultural community or consciousness'.⁵⁷ Leavis claimed the 'English school' in the university as the centre for this 'human consciousness' and stated that Scrutiny had been at the 'contemporary intellectual-cultural frontier in maintaining the critical function'.⁵⁸

Leavis's attack on Snow's thesis was, on the one hand, part of a continuing process of engagement in polemical exchanges for the purposes of indicating his reiterated critical principles. On the other hand, though, the 'two cultures' controversy was the beginning

54. Discussing the advances in Asian, African and Chinese industrialisation, Snow commented approvingly that these nations had 'proved that common men can show astonishing fortitude in chasing jam tomorrow. Jam today, and men aren't at their most exciting: jam tomorrow, and one often sees them at their noblest'. (Loc. cit. p 44.)

55. Leavis loc. cit. p 23.

56. Ibid p 27.

57. Ibid p 28.

58. Ibid p 29.

of a new phase in Leavis's career during which his criticism moved increasingly towards a preoccupation with a more abstract vocabulary of value-terms, involving, in a more central way, large concepts that were not primarily literary in origin. This was a logical development of his critical principles. For if the critical response to literature involved 'the profoundest and completest sense of relative value that one brings from one's experience' and if 'the critic, by way of his discipline for relevance in dealing with creative works, is concerned with life', then, clearly, the literary criticism that would arise out of this type of approach was not going to be confined to straightforward textual analysis and a discussion of historical context. Leavis, in stating that it was through 'great literature' that we discover 'what at bottom we really believe', was making explicit the implications of his critical method. 'Experience', 'belief', 'life' were terms that invoked concepts outside the realm of the purely literary and which involved Leavis in increasingly metaphysical and teleological explications of the literature under discussion.

2. Literature, Civilisation and the University

It won't do to make a rising material standard of living the self-sufficient aim on the confident assumption that we needn't admit any other kind of consideration, any more adequate recognition of human nature and human need, into the incitement and direction of our thinking and our effort. ⁵⁹

59. 'Luddites? or, There is only one Culture', Lectures in America (1969) chapter 1, p 4.

Leavis's was not a lone political voice protesting against the increasingly utilitarian ethos of advanced industrial society. What was distinctive about his resistance to this ethos was the means he outlined for establishing a 'community' which would be source of a non-materialist philosophy and which would attempt to sustain, via its concentration on literature, the advancement of positive, 'creative' values throughout society in general. This 'community' was the university, and the means by which it was to propagate these values centred on literature, literary criticism and a literary education as a prerequisite requirement of the responsible minority. Leavis persevered in his belief in this proposal in the face of increasing indifference and inertia amongst the mass of society to the standards and values he represented by 'creative art'. The examples which indicated the decline in standards multiplied, his concern to make his conviction of the dangers known intensified and the effectiveness of his remedial programme was brought more and more into question.

The 1967 Clark lectures (English Literature in our time and the University (1969)) reiterated the ideas and arguments that had made up the bulk of Leavis's earlier polemical writings. The process was one of restatement and reinforcement. At this stage, a generation after Education and the University (1943), circumstances had changed considerably. This change was not simply a matter of worsening effects of cultural degeneracy making Leavis's case more crucial and more urgent, though this was an important aspect. Other significant changes had occurred, changes which served to give more force to Leavis's arguments and greater substance to his claims to represent an active political and pedagogic means for resisting the decline.

Leavis's earlier gamut of targets - Northcliffe, H.G. Wells, American behavioural scientists and advertising manuals⁶⁰ - had given way by the 1960s to Lord Robbins, C.P. Snow, and the like. These figures and their public work and pronouncements focused Leavis's attention. He was able to elaborate from their example a general case against the common views amongst the politicians and administrators as to the function of the university in a modern society, the place of literature and literary study in regard to that function and the consequences of advanced industrialisation on the 'cultural consciousness'. There was no detailed rejection of the report of the Committee on Higher Education (1964), or of Robbins's The University and the Modern World (1966) in these lectures. What Leavis attacked was an attitude, which he saw not as a new and dangerous phenomenon in the approach to the problems of higher education and the university but as another factor in the growing, utilitarianist ideology of British society. That attitude was summed up for him by Robbins finding Snow's Rede lecture unexceptionable, its 'diagnosis' seeming to him to be 'obvious'⁶¹ and further illustrated by the increasing tendency for university teaching to be seen in terms of vocational training and ancillary support in relation to the general problems of secondary and higher education.⁶² Against this background Leavis presented his own conception of the nature and function of the university.

60. Cf For Continuity passim.

61. Cf English Literature in our time p 171. Robbins's comment was quoted by Leavis from The University and the Modern World (1966).

62. Cf Leavis's letter to The Times, January 22 1968, rejecting Lord Annan's insistence that the university should provide help for under-educated (ie under-qualified) early school-leavers, and 'elementary teaching' for new students who have undergone a 'revised' (ie simplified) sixth-form course. (Appendix I, English Literature in our time.) Annan's comments were made in a letter to The Times, January 19 1968.

This conception remained very largely what it had been in Education and the University, although the later version was characterised by a more urgent insistence on the importance of his claims and by a higher degree of detail in the presentation of them. As before, the centrality of the university derives from the presence within it of the 'English School', itself in turn significant because only in the proper study of literature can the cultural heritage be sustained, replenished and passed on. This was because only literature can embody and transmit the deeper characteristics and significances of a culture. Only the kind of 'recreative' reading that would be taught in a properly orientated 'English School' would be capable of receiving this elemental culture, revivifying it to make it contemporaneously relevant and communicating it to the next generation. Leavis pursued this case through the lectures in a cycle of repetition and re-emphasis (essential in a public lecture series) and the alignment of his argument along various perspectives, literary critical, polemical and social-analytical. Essentially though, the substance of his thesis was a reinforced version of the arguments of 1943 and before.

It was an idealistic conception, unconcerned for the mechanics of social relations that would enable the enlightened wisdom of the 'educated and responsible minority' to percolate through to the mass of society. Leavis saw creative literature as the primary expression of a culture's entity, in the face of the fact of a declining reading public. He took no cognisance of the complex and interactive ways in which economic organisation affected the structure of human relations. He saw the pressures engendered by that interaction as simply a matter of the triumph of a materialistic, anti-individualist

ideology ('technologico-Benthamism'). The implication, which was unexamined, was that by undermining that ideology, by insisting on human 'needs' in a spiritual, non-materialistic dimension, it was possible to reverse or arrest the 'decline' consequent upon its present prepotence. Leavis did not formulate a practical political programme and his vision of a remedial ameliorative process for recapturing the ground lost to the commercial and industrial order was embodied in the language of his diagnosis, rather than taking more concrete form. Even the proposals regarding the 'English School' in the university were limited in their practical applicability in the realm of the 'technologico-Benthamite' society.

In some ways, Leavis's argument was assisted by history. While, for example, Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture could only offer a resolute and positive outlook,⁶³ in later years Leavis was able to point to the example of his own criticism, and the existence of Scrutiny and the work of its associates, to demonstrate that it was indeed possible to mount an effective resistance to the prevailing conditions. It was an example to which Leavis referred many times in the years following the journal's closure; the circumstances of his ostracism from Cambridge were eventually elevated to the level

63. 'We cannot help clinging to some such hope as Mr. Richards offers: to the belief (unwarranted possibly) that what we value most matters too much to the race to be finally abandoned, and that the machine may yet be made a tool'.

Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture p 28.

of myth.⁶⁴ Scrutiny undoubtedly existed as concrete evidence of a sustained critical enterprise that went against the flow of the general consensus; but the other inescapable fact was that the journal had closed, had ultimately been unable to maintain its heterodox position. This, to some extent, was because towards the end the journal was being kept alive almost entirely by the efforts of the Leavises alone. The paradox was that Leavis should refer, as an example of what might be done, to an enterprise that had proved ultimately insupportable. Nevertheless, the example of Scrutiny, and the legend of exclusion and hostility, were potent adjuncts to the argument; and yet Leavis himself indicated that Cambridge, previously the great hope for cultural regeneration,⁶⁵ was no longer actively resisting the 'reductive process'.⁶⁶

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64. Discussing Leavis's time at York in the 1960s and '70s, a biographer writes: 'In lectures and seminars, as at informal meetings over a cup of tea, he would be prone to speak at length about his experiences of being treated as an outsider by the cultural establishment and by the Cambridge English Faculty. Students would find this at worst boring and at best irrelevant to their own problems. For them it was almost impossible to realise that he had been an educational revolutionary.'
Ronald Hayman, Leavis (1976) p 121.
65. Leavis said that the early advocates of the idea of the English Faculty had hoped, by their insistence on it, to 'ensure that the actuality should sufficiently root itself at Cambridge to be permanently established, a robust living and developed presence at the centre, its necessity and significance recognised, its growth a matter of intelligent response to the advances of technological civilisation'.
English Literature in our time, p 23.
66. 'Cambridge is no longer a centre of life and hope. No clear purpose or positive idea replaces what has been exorcized. Where there is no positive idea that could inform a clear, strong and disinterested purpose ambition and incuria, natural consorts, reign in security. . . . Cambridge, that is, exemplifies rather than resists the universal reductive process.'
Ibid p 24.

The less problematical material of these lectures involved the literary critical discussions that Leavis undertook. These critiques were also a matter of reiterating former statements and setting them in the context of this social and cultural diagnosis. To enforce his point regarding the pre-eminence of literary study in the university, Leavis discussed the nature of 'great criticism'. He elucidated his version of the ultimate purpose of literary criticism in a comparison of the writings of T.S.Eliot and D.H.Lawrence; and he presented, through a discussion of Four Quartets, his own developed sense of what should be the form and the subject matter of a creative art that aspired to a general relevance in the context of an age characterised by the signs of dislocation and degeneracy which he had already noted.

The criticism of Eliot's that escaped Leavis's general censure was that which dealt with the poetry of the seventeenth century: that is, broadly, the essays contained in Homage to John Dryden (1924). Seeing this criticism from the point of view of the student in the hypothetical English School, Leavis said that a reading of this criticism would provide an insight into the meaning of the word 'sensitivity', a word he felt to be 'essential'.⁶⁷ Eliot's interest in the seventeenth century⁶⁸ had meant that his critical approach to

67. Ibid p 85.

68. Discussing 'Portrait of a Lady', Leavis said: 'the play of tone and inflection mean the possibility of a kind of strong and subtle thinking in poetry, an intellectual nerve, that explains Eliot's interest in the Metaphysicals'.
Ibid p 54.

the period had been to see the poetry and its techniques very much in terms of his own problems. His approach therefore involved him in a polemical history of poetry that effectively consigned the verse of the nineteenth century to the arena of the poetically obsolete. This had been the intention of Eliot's suggestion regarding the 'dissociation of sensibility'. This was a suggestion that answered forcibly to Leavis's own conception of the problem of the status of poetry, its content and technique, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Leavis had argued, in the first lecture in the series, that a 'cultural tradition' could only be sustained ('changing in response to changing conditions (material, economic, and so on)') 'by continuous collaborative renewal'.⁶⁹ This 'renewal' involved an awareness of the relation of the past to the present and of the principle that the literature of any period had its significance only in the ways in which it could be demonstrated to have a relevance in the present.⁷⁰

What gives Eliot his acuteness as a critic of poetry and poetic development in the seventeenth century is his diagnostic (and creative) concern with the state of things in 1920.⁷¹

So Eliot's appraisal of the Metaphysicals became a paradigm

69. Ibid p 54.

70. 'English literature . . . has its reality and life (if at all) only in the present. . . . What matters for each age is coherence - significant relatedness in an organic whole, the centre of significance being (inevitably) the present.'

Ibid pp 7-8.

71. Ibid p. 87.

for the practice of criticism in the hypothetical English School, and in general. Leavis's discussion of Eliot's critical work on the seventeenth century aimed to highlight the critical technique in a manner that evoked a conception of the deeper intentions of literary criticism. Leavis's appraisal was phrased in a way that was clearly intended to include his own critical practice in the formulation. In other words, the following comment on Eliot was designed to be applicable in a wider context and to include Leavis's criticism within it. The essays in Homage to John Dryden, Leavis said,

contain a highly compressed charge of perceptions, intuitions and suggestions. They offer no simple diagnostic formulas and no simple prescriptions. . . . Complex, packed and delicately organised, they obviously don't present an expository development of any one thematic strand, and so do obviously count on an energy of active critical intelligence in the reader - intelligence that responds constructively as well as in the questioning or dissenting way that is commonly felt to be meant by 'critically'.⁷²

Leavis was presenting here his ideal example and his praise for the particular qualities of Eliot's criticism amounted to a set of proposals for criticism in general. For this reason it was central to his discussion of the place of criticism in the English School, and hence in the university. Furthermore, the historical element of Eliot's thesis on the 'dissociation of sensibility', as expounded by Leavis, became a key factor in the hypothetical syllabus. Leavis felt that by coming fully to understand the processes of the change and the

72. Ibid pp 78-79.

emergence of 'modern prose' at the time of the Restoration, and the attendant development of rational enlightenment, the student would perforce recognise the source and derivation of contemporary conditions:

All the forces of change that had been at work through the century had come together to inaugurate the triumphant advance towards the civilisation, technological and Benthamite, that we live in.⁷³

Eliot's essay on Metaphysicals provides a starting-point for the student to see how the 'Benthamite' era was ushered in; his essay on Blake⁷⁴ reveals an understanding of the means whereby the utilitarian ethos may be counteracted:

. . . the sense of human responsibility that Blake represents is what we desperately need, to supplement, correct and guide - in sum, subdue to the service of life - a victorious, cock-a-hoop and hardly questioned Benthamism.⁷⁵

Leavis took Eliot's criticism as a text from which he argued in favour of the seventeenth century as the proper and necessary subject of study by his prospective students in the ideal 'English School'. In this way he expounded his deeper abstract considerations on the essential drive of literary criticism to combat (to 'subdue to the service of life') the reductive ideology of materialism.

Throughout the lecture series the pattern was the same. Leavis

73. Ibid p 95.

74. Cf Eliot, Selected Essays (1951)

75. English Literature in our time and the University p 107.

displayed his polemical and literary critical ideas together, aiming to evolve a coherent statement of his beliefs by submitting these ideas to contemplation from the perspective of his cultural diagnosis. Eliot's poetry and Lawrence's criticism⁷⁶ were thus both utilised to explore further dimensions of the contemporary situation and to propose an effective set of values capable of alleviating the present crisis. Developing previous reflections on Four Quartets, the burden of one of the lectures - 'Why Four Quartets matters in a technologico-Benthamite age' - was Leavis's attempt to 'justify my associating the special importance I attribute to Eliot's poetry with the fact that the civilisation we live in is what it is'.⁷⁷ To persuade his audience of this connection, Leavis quoted his own commentary on 'East Coker' of twenty years previously.⁷⁸ He had stated then that the poetry was not theologically didactic, but was 'a searching of experience, a spiritual discipline, a technique for sincerity - for giving 'sincerity' a meaning'.⁷⁹ He elaborated further on this point, with a view to the context and direction of the lectures. The poetry of Four Quartets, he insisted, could not be read in a 'detached, intellectual way' - 'it involves one's basic attitudes and one's habits of thought and valuation'. That the demands of the poetry were such allowed for the associated reflection on the current demise of cultural standards:

76. Leavis used Lawrence's essays in Twilight in Italy (1916) as the text for a comparison of the critical abilities of Eliot and Lawrence, rather than any more overtly 'literary critical' writing by Lawrence.

77. English Literature in our time p 22.

78. 'Eliot's Later Poetry' a review of The Dry Salvages, Scrutiny XI (1942) pp 60-71. Cf. Appendix I, Education and the University.

79. English Literature in our time p. 125.

No-one could take the communication of 'Burnt Norton' and not know, with decisive force, that the spiritual Philistinism of the world we live in is menacingly anti-human, or inertly accept 'a rising standard of living' as an adequate account of human ends and needs. ⁸⁰

Thus, the diagnosis of the 'reductive process', the propositions regarding the operation of a 'creative' critical response in the function of a university and the critique of Four Quartets were bound together in a co-ordinated attempt to reinforce the diagnostic points. Leavis was aiming to overthrow the prevailing materialist ideology of contemporary civilisation by reawakening it to the possibilities of spiritual enlightenment. At this point Leavis's criticism began to move towards what developed into an explicitly religious position. As a result, the tenor and direction of his literary criticism changed and his pre-occupation with contemporary 'spiritual Philistinism' and his concern for 'human ends and needs' meant that he was to become more involved with 'concepts' such as 'morality', 'thought', 'responsibility' and 'life'. This vocabulary consisted of orthodox philosophical concepts ('morality') and evaluative terms unique to Leavis's critical practice ('life'). The consequence of this for his literary criticism, as against his social analysis, was that the literature was in a sense subordinated to the larger theme, so that the commentary on the specific works constantly referred outward from the particular text to this theme of counteracting the general spiritual anomie. In a sense, the literature became secondary to the main subject of the developing critical discussion, relevant (in Leavis's view) only in the ways

80. Ibid p 129.

in which it could be made to yield matter pertinent to the commentary on contemporary civilisation.

3. The Creative Principle: Eliot, Yeats and the Novel

Leavis's mature consideration of the place occupied by T.S.Eliot in the history of modern English literature was split decisively along the line separating Eliot's criticism and his poetry. Leavis's opinions regarding these two aspects of Eliot's achievement were utterly opposed, the strength of praise for the poetry being matched by the intensity of his condemnation of the criticism. Even so, Leavis's critical judgements being structurally consistent, there was behind this ambivalent evaluative conclusion an inescapable logic: the weaknesses of the criticism were related directly to the strengths manifested in the poetry.

Several years separated Leavis's 'revaluation' of Eliot's standing as a critic⁸¹ and his summarisation⁸² (a prelude to a more detailed analysis⁸³) of Eliot's status as a poet. Nothing in the interim had caused him to readjust his position with regard to the criticism. Eliot's death in 1965 had brought the poetic career to a close. Develop-

81. 'T.S.Eliot's stature as critic: a revaluation', Commentary (November 1958). Reprinted as 'T.S.Eliot as Critic' in 'Anna Karenina' and other essays (1967).

82. 'Eliot's Classical Standing', Lectures in America (1969).

83. The Living Principle (1975), chapter 3, 'Four Quartets'.

ments in the social environment had made Eliot's poetry increasingly important as a source for attitudes and concepts that were capable of redeeming Western Man's life-impooverished state in the face of mass material advancement. In this respect, Eliot's creative achievement provided Leavis with a tangible literary example with which to substantiate his own cultural analysis. The poetry was the positive counterpart to those second-rate literary productions that Leavis had pointed to as evidence of a deep cultural decline in standards.

Leavis's regard for what he saw Eliot as having attempted during his poetic life was high indeed. It was a 'creative career', he said, that was

a sustained, heroic and indefatigably resourceful quest of a profound sincerity of the most difficult kind. The heroism is that of genius. The poetic technique of his intense preoccupation is a technique for sincerity.⁸⁴

Leavis referred, as before, to 'The Love-Song of J Alfred Prufrock' as 'impressive'; but he preferred to discuss in detail 'Portrait of a Lady' to enforce his conviction that there were contained in this poetry capacities for 'rhythmic life' and changing subtleties of 'tone'. The poetry evinced a use of language that allowed for

a new freedom of access to experience and a closeness to its actual texture, together with a flexibility of tone incon-

84. Lectures in America p 30.

ceivable in serious poetry . . . while the Arnoldian canons prevailed.⁸⁵

Eliot's 'technique' was developed through 'La Filia che piange' and 'The Hollow Men'. The latter revealed that Eliot 'had a desperate need to be able to believe in, to be sure of, something real not himself that should claim allegiance and give meaning'.⁸⁶ This development continued into Ash-Wednesday where the 'quest' became 'consciously religious'. Yet the 'discipline' of that poem which Leavis admired was not the discipline of Christian devotion that forms so central a part of it. It was the process of creation that Leavis concentrated on, the searching for positive values to set against 'death's twilight kingdom'. Eliot achieved this by means of a 'tentative, exploratory and wholly unwillful kind of creativeness, scrupulously unassertive ; it was an 'exploratory-creative procedure'.⁸⁷ It was not necessary to be an Anglo-Catholic, nor yet to be greatly concerned with Christian theology in general, in order to see the 'validity' of Eliot's poetry; its significance lay in the 'spiritual values' that it 'prompt[ed] and nourish[ed]'.⁸⁸ The importance of these values pertained not to a specifically Christian or an abstractly 'supernatural' dimension, but to the realm of actual human life:

85. Ibid p 36. In the 1958 article on Eliot's criticism, Leavis had referred to the poet as having been 'the man of genius who, after the long post-Swinburnian arrest, altered expression'. (See 'Anna Karenina' and other essays, p 178.)

86. Lectures in America p 45.

87. Ibid pp 46; 48.

88. Ibid p 51.

There is an intrinsic human nature with needs that don't exist for the technologist and the Benthamite as such; there is a need for significance, for that which makes life significant - something that can't be discussed or taken account of in terms of what can be averaged or defined, though rationality and intelligence (whether they know it or not) are thwarted when it fails.⁸⁹

This was a consideration of which, in Leavis's view, art, criticism, 'thinking' in general, should be aware. It was this 'spiritual' aspect, and Eliot's struggle for 'sincerity' in the expression of it, that made the poetry something that was fundamentally relevant to contemporary human life. It was Eliot's implicit denial of the relevance of this in his critical writing that attracted Leavis's hostility.

The 1958 article was remarkable for the violence with which Leavis rejected Eliot's claims to status as a major critic.⁹⁰ The grounds for this rejection were straightforward. Leavis argued that the premise of the separation of "the man who suffers and the mind which creates" was tenable only in relation to an artist such as Flaubert; in relation to 'Tolstoy or Lawrence . . . or Shakespeare - or George Eliot or Mark Twain' it was not intelligible. It was a separation that was not apparent in Eliot's own poetry. This fact led Leavis to a diagnosis of what he saw as a major 'disability' in Eliot: it was apparent in this critical proposition as an attempt to 'absolv[e] the artist from the need to have lived',⁹¹ which was allied to Flaubert's perception

89. Ibid p 51.

90. Of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' Leavis wrote: ' . . . the trenchancy and vigour are illusory and the essay is notable for its ambiguities, its logical inconsequences, its pseudo-precisions, its fallaciousness, and the aplomb of its equivocations and its specious cogency'. 'Anna Karenina' and other essays p 179.

91. Ibid p 181.

of 'art' as something superior to and apart from 'life'. This attitude was a 'significant defeat of intelligence' and it contributed to Eliot's errors and misvaluations in his critical essays.⁹²

Leavis saw Eliot as having a public and a private self characterised by differing modes of intellectual behaviour and expression. On the one hand, in his poetry he pursued his solitary and 'heroic' quest for sincerity, for something beyond the self in which to have faith, a quest which produced 'great creative art' as a consequence of its determined artistic integrity. In contrast, there was the public Eliot of the British Academy lecture on Milton (1949)⁹³ and the plays, where the 'heroic sincerity' disappears in deference to the 'social world'.⁹⁴ Eliot's criticism belongs to this latter social persona and it contains 'abundant evidence of negative attitudes towards life, attitudes of disgust and fear and rejection'.⁹⁵ Eliot suffered this 'radical failure of wholeness and coherence' when he betrayed the creative principle of honesty and responsibility towards self-recognition and self-knowledge and tried to deny the essential complexity of human existence and human relations.

Naturally, the poetry was not entirely uncontaminated by this inherent flaw. Leavis felt that for all its major importance, the critic

92. Leavis's article was ostensibly a review of Eliot's On Poets and Poetry (1957), which he derided for its 'inert and banal conventionality' and the lack of 'engagement' in Eliot as a critic. (He was too much swayed by the 'coterie' values of the Bloomsbury milieu, for example).

93. Which 'in its equivocal kind of noble and sophisticated innocence, concedes all that one needs for putting the case against Milton that is ostensibly suffering refutation'. 'Anna Karenina' and other essays p 189.

94. Cf. Lectures in America p 50.

95. 'Anna Karenina' and other essays p 183.

should still cultivate an attitude of 'Yes, but . . .' when dealing with the poetry. His main reservation concerned the inability of Eliot 'to take cognisance of full human love between the sexes', an aspect of human relations that should of been of 'supreme importance' to him, but which he reduced to a receded background role. This gave the 'spiritual quest' an element of 'starvation', but also of 'intensity', which was a 'necessary condition' of the 'creative integrity' of Four Quartets.⁹⁶

A specific example of the way Leavis's conception of the true creative process operates in Eliot can be seen from his comment on lines from 'The Dry Salvages',⁹⁷ including

The hint half-guessed, the gift half-understood is
Incarnation.

Of the inclusion of the word 'Incarnation', Leavis wrote

there is no sleight, nothing but openness, in the way the word presents itself at this point in the poem as if drawn up into a gap, a crucial emptiness, which it rises inevitably to fill.⁹⁸

The ulterior connotations of the word are not primarily significant; its significance, clearly, will vary depending on the predisposition of the reader.⁹⁹ What impressed Leavis about its usage was its

96. Lectures in America p 50.

97. Section V, ll 32-39.

98. Lectures in America pp 52-53.

99. Leavis himself later came to feel that 'Incarnation' represented too great a falling back on orthodox Christian theology, at the expense of the aspirations of the poetry towards an original inquiry into the human condition.
(cf. The Living Principle, chapter 3)

intellectual 'openness', or availability to interpretation, and its appropriateness in the created context, its 'inevitability'. It was the process by which the poet achieved these effects that Leavis called 'heroic sincerity' and it was this sincerity that characterised the genuine 'creative principle'.

Leavis employed this distinction in discriminating amongst Yeats's poetry in a lecture that was part of the same series.¹⁰⁰ It was the nature of the creative procedure that distinguished the great poems in the canon. One of the main limitations attendant upon a reading of Yeats is the need to refer outside the actual poetry for assistance in comprehending its intended content, references either to a system of 'symbolical elaborations'¹⁰¹ or to biographical information.¹⁰² This necessity was the result of the interference of 'extra-poetical habits' that inhibited the creative process and undermined the poet's 'sincerity', the completeness with which he has grasped and expressed his vision. The successful poems, Leavis said, were those, such as the 'Byzantium' poems, which attained 'a convincingness and inevitability that comes of, that is, a complete sincerity - the sincerity that is of the whole being, and not merely a matter of conscious intention'.¹⁰³ Too clear a notion of intention in the poet was contrary to genuine poetic expression: 'the process of composition . . . is the process of discovery or determination'.¹⁰⁴ That which is discovered

100. 'Yeats: the problem and the challenge'. Lectures in America pp 59-81.

101. Ibid p 65.

102. Leavis had referred extensively to Yeats, Autobiographies (1958) when discussing Yeats in New Bearings in English Poetry.

103. Lectures in America p 65.

104. Ibid p 65.

has a relation only to the poet's experience and his expression of it. No external scheme is necessary or relevant; the poem is self-sufficient, and the process of self-discovery that it narrates is a measure of its sincerity.¹⁰⁵

The overt moral overtones of Leavis's earlier approaches to poetry are absent here, having been replaced by a more abstract notion ('sincerity'). The implication is that the poet's responsibilities begin and end within himself, with his accessibility to self-knowledge and self-discovery. The language of Leavis's critical appraisal has changed. No longer were the stark pronouncements about poetry, morality, the poet himself, proffered undiluted by circumspection and an awareness of a more general context. These summaries were marked by a sense of the complexity involved in 'creativity' and in relating the products of that creativity to a conception of the ways in which literature and criticism impinge on actual life and have an effect there. This change featured largely in Leavis's critical language. 'Sincerity', 'belief', 'spiritual', 'wholeness' began to appear, the vocabulary of empirical moralism being replaced by a vocabulary more metaphysical and speculative. The stridency gave way to a tone that inclined more to the abstract. The intensity of his approbation (and its opposite) was directly proportional to the degree to which he felt that Eliot's poetry, say, attested to the 'need for significance' in mankind, and to what extent it recognised and expressed attitudes and concepts that could offer a remedial contrast to the overwhelmingly materialist ideology of contemporary society. Leavis insisted on this

105. ' . . . this self-imposed ordeal of self-questioning and self-realisation (a major poem for Yeats was that)'.
Ibid pp 73-74.

correlation because of his developing and intensifying sense of the dangers of loss and impoverishment in the face of rapid technological change. Eliot provided the concrete example from which the critic could elaborate a literary critical demonstration of the crucial role that was open for literature and criticism in the dimension of social change.

In relation to the novel - specifically Anna Karenina¹⁰⁶ - Leavis introduced another key word; or, rather, he brought to the fore and made crucial a word he had always found useful : 'thought'. In some respects, this word may be seen as the major term in Leavis's differentiation between poetry and the novel. Conscious deliberation or thought in the poet was liable, Leavis believed, to undermine his creative integrity and so diminish the potential for the poem to aspire to the condition of great art. In the novel, different considerations apply. Differences of scale, range and ambition make the novelist's task, creatively speaking, a more sustained, less immediately intense, expression of his insights and perceptions. 'Thought', in the sense of a continuously alert consciousness, is always present in the process of writing prose, whereas for the poet it is more of an ante - or post-facto activity, consciousness as such being suspended, so to speak, during the (for the poet, generally briefer) acts of composition.

In dealing with the novel in these later essays, Leavis was discussing works that related very closely to an ideal of novelistic achievement: that is, he dealt with material that matched in attainment his

106. 'Anna Karenina: Thought and Significance in a great creative work', an address to the Cambridge University Slavonic Society (1966), Cambridge Quarterly I, (1965-66) pp 5-27.

own idea of what the novel, perfectly created, should be capable of being. The essay on Anna Karenina did not set out to prove the novel's greatness; it was assumed, proclaimed in the essay's title, and Leavis was in fact preoccupied with understanding - in the broadest of terms - in what qualities that greatness actually inhered. This meant that the novel under discussion, together with his critical evaluation of it, became exemplary, providing a paradigm of creative writing, and the critical response to it, which could be presented as part of a practical discourse on the state of contemporary writing and criticism. The significances that Leavis identified in Anna Karenina were, by implication, significances that should be contained by any, novel that aimed to be anything other than mediocre and transient. Propositions made, with regard to Anna Karenina, about 'thought' and the function of the novel in comprehending human relations were presented as both specific evaluative judgements about Tolstoy's novel and as representative truths about the novel in general.

Leavis contrasted Tolstoy with Henry James, saying that the latter's fixation with a 'definitive' purpose in his writing 'entail[ed] a severe limitation in regard to significance'; Tolstoy represented 'an immensely fuller and profounder involvement in life on the part of the artist'.¹⁰⁷ This related to Leavis's version of what constituted the importance of Eliot's poetry; the 'greatest kind of artist' is one who evinces

the distinctive preoccupation with ultimate questions -
those which concern the nature of one's deepest inner

107. 'Anna Karenina' and other essays p 11.

allegiances and determinations, the fundamental significances to be read in one's experience of life, the nature and conditions of 'fulfilment'.¹⁰⁸

The intellectual effort required to approach these questions was not a matter of mere cold ratiocination:

Thought, to come at all near truth and adequacy, must engage the whole man, and relate in a valid way - such a way, that is, as precludes and defeats the distorting effects of abstraction and selection (both inevitable) - all the diverse elements of experience.¹⁰⁹

The avoidance of 'abstraction and selection' might have been a way of appealing for 'sincerity' in the novel. Leavis noted that Tolstoy had avoided any simplification of the issues in a denial of their complexity:

The greatness of Anna Karenina lies in the degree to which, along with its depth, it justifies the clear suggestion it conveys of a representative comprehensiveness. The creative writer's way of arriving at and presenting general truths about life is that which Tolstoy exemplifies with such resource, such potency, and on such a scale, and there is none to replace or rival it. Only a work of art can say with validity, and force, as Anna Karenina does, 'This is life'.¹¹⁰

In these quotations is encapsulated Leavis's matured and developed considerations about the nature of creative art, and in particular

108. Ibid p 12.

109. Ibid p 11.

110 Ibid p 13.

the novel. He was sensitive to writing that promoted the contemplation of problems and questions that lay beyond the material universe. He was attentive to the conditions suffusing the creative process that produced 'art' that, in its grappling with these matters, maintained an 'integrity' of perception and expression, so that an awareness of complexity and of the impossibility of a final answer was contained within it. Only true 'art' - that which maintained this creative integrity or 'sincerity' - could reflect states of being and of human relations with the kind of responsibility, scope and lucidity that was required to counteract the mystifying and destructive processes of technological progress. Tolstoy, Leavis claimed, had experienced the upheavals of the changes involved in this kind of expansion, 'taking their significances with personal intensity' and responding to the 'disharmonies, contrasts and contradictions' in a way that defeated the faith of optimism in 'progress': 'Anna Karenina, in its human centrality, gives us modern man; Tolstoy's essential problems, moral and spiritual, are ours'.¹¹¹

The critical attitude emerging from these essays was to develop into an increasingly spiritual and religious series of observations on the relationship between literature and 'life', and on criticism's place with regard to that relationship. Leavis's bearing on the problems of this relation is evident from the preceding quotations. The moral and spiritual aspects of his literary criticism were inevitably propelled to the fore by his conception of 'creativity'; the critical response to it, involving the individual's personal

111. Ibid p 32.

experience - and therefore his or her capacity for experience; and his expectations of the potential achievements of 'great creative art'. Only this, he argued, could show us what we 'believe' and know, and only 'a work of art' can specify what 'life' is and represent to us our 'essential moral and spiritual problems'. The significance of this perception for Leavis's critical practice can be seen in the developments featured in the later critical studies of Dickens, Blake and T.S.Eliot.

6. The Late Criticism (1970-76)

1. Dickens: 'art', criticism and 'life'.

Dickens the Novelist is an uneasy combination of two distinct types of critical method. Q.D.Leavis's essays - written with the book in mind and over a definite working period¹ - are fluent, scholarly and persuasive: detailed attention to their format and the structure of their arguments belongs in a separate study. F.R.Leavis's contribution to the collection, on the other hand, is more problematic. His three chapters do not exhibit a similar kind of coherence to that of Q.D. Leavis. The vocabulary of the criticism and its forms of expression reveal an underlying search for an 'essential' significance in the novels that resided not so much in what Dickens wrote as in what Leavis had to say about it. In this way, a familiar pattern of extension is established, with Leavis's criticism in a sense using the Dickens novel as a means for exploring abstract metaphysical ideas. The assertion of Dickens's significance for English literature was the primary motive; out of this, Leavis developed a set of values, and associated critical terms for their expression, which reflected his growing concern with the spiritual life of mankind and the way in which this could be examined by the means of literary criticism.

1. '[The four chapters by Q.D.Leavis] were all written ad hoc as constituent parts of the book when it had been conceived as something to be undertaken forthwith, and worked at in an intensive and sustained way until completed'.
Dickens the Novelist (1970) p xi.

The praise given to Dickens by Leavis was not in itself alarming or outrageous; but the critique of Dickens was dependent upon a specialised vocabulary for the expression of its value judgements. Following Leavis's characteristic method, the novels of Dickens, having been given exemplary status, gave the critical vocabulary its substantiating force. As with Lawrence before, the evaluative judgements on Dickens were dependent upon a terminology legitimised by the example of Dickens himself. Thus it appears that F.R.Leavis's contribution to Dickens the Novelist was designed, in the manner of D.H.Lawrence: Novelist, not as a comprehensive critical analysis of the Dickens canon but as a detailed setting out and defence, of particular claims for the nature of Dickens's art. This was combined with an account of the wider significance of the values perceived to be at the centre of Dickens's achievement, values that had an ultimate relevance in actual life. More comprehensively than before, Leavis was attempting to pursue both a literary and a social criticism, and his commentary on contemporary society was becoming increasingly metaphysical, if not explicitly religious.

F.R.Leavis had a highly specialised set of claims to make for the significance of Dickens's creative achievement. For F.R.Leavis in 1970 a book on Dickens was a kind of completion, a filling in of a gap in his criticism of post-1600 English literature. Dickens was one of two major writers (excepting Shakespeare) whom Leavis had come to recognise as warranting serious attention but about whom he had not written at length (the other being Blake). This may explain in part why Leavis was keen to give his past criticism a kind of retrospective coherence. In this way the study of Dickens could be seen

to be fitting in to a congruous line of critical practice. In any case, the two later essays on Dickens were culminative. They represented the advanced expression of Leavis's concern with discovering the true significance of artistic achievement, and of his sense of the function and responsibilities of literary criticism. As such they contain versions of his notion of what 'significance' in art consisted of, together with a grammar of evaluative terms that operated to give that perceived significance tangible form.

Leavis called Dombey and Son 'the first major novel' and he based this judgement on a claim that the novel marked the beginning of a key development in Dickens's career, 'his first essay in the elaborately plotted Victorian novel'.(2)² The achievement of the novel was mixed. On the one hand

the theme in actuality serves as a licence for endless overworked pathos, for lush unrealities of high moral insistence, for childish elaborations of sensational plot, and for all the disqualifying characteristics (a serious theme being proposed) of melodrama - Victorian melodrama.(2)

On the other hand these weak elements were balanced by something more interesting:

the genial force of Dickens's inexhaustible creativity is also strongly present, in the vigour of the perception and rendering of life, the varied comedy, the vitality of expression as manifested even in the melodramatic high moments and tours de force and . . . a kind of strength

2. Figures in parentheses refer to page numbers in Dickens the Novelist (1970).

that . . . demands some maturity of experience in the reader for a full recognition.(2)

As with his study of Lawrence, the vocabulary of Leavis's praise of Dickens is enthusiastic, but Leavis is less inclined to be betrayed by his enthusiasm in to making claims for the novelist that are insupportable. This is because his field of interest was narrower (limited to three novels); because he acknowledged the weaker aspects of, say, Dombey and Son, using them to give shape to his positive critical judgements; and because he found, in Little Dorrit in particular, a text through which he was able to formulate his own extra-literary account of the relations between 'art', criticism and 'life'. His commentary on that novel therefore takes the form of a kind of exegesis of its implicit meanings which were simultaneously extrapolated in the field of social criticism. What Leavis discovered in the 'moral' structure of Little Dorrit reflected and gave form to the values he saw as prerequisite to the maintenance of 'cultural health'. The values represented in the novel answered to Leavis's conception of the values that were essential to human existence.

Discussing the early part of Dombey and Son, Leavis saw as a significant achievement the depiction of Dombey as 'personified Pride'. This theme, he said 'tells so strongly because of the way in which, by Dickens's astonishing art, human life is evoked in its fullness'.(3) The pathos inherent in the theme was exploited by Dickens as the story was developed; but in this early part the novelist was 'possessed by an intense and penetrating perception of the real'. The theme represented by Dombey received 'its most poetic and dramatic definition' (5) in the scene between Dombey and Polly Toodles the wet-nurse. In

this scene, Leavis argued, Dicken's presentation of Dombey's self-defeating pride has a profound effect because of the way in which its opposite is drawn. The strength of this scene resulted from Dickens having been 'wholly commanded by a profound theme - a Dickens profoundly serious, that is, as well as genially creative'.(6) This statement recalls the commentary Leavis made on Hard Times. There he described Dickens as having been 'unmistakably possessed by a comprehensive vision'(188); but Hard Times was for Leavis a 'moral fable', a narrative in which 'the intention is peculiarly insistent, so that the representative significance of everything . . . is immediately apparent as we read'.(252) Dombey and Son was not a fable, but a narrative in which Dickens had been 'possessed by an intense and penetrating perception of the real'.(5) This novel represented an advance on the fable. Dickens evinced 'an intense concern for the real'(4) and he strove 'to achieve the expression of his own vision and sensibility in an art that should convey his profoundest sense of life'.(26)

It is clear that Dombey and Son was being approached from a different direction from that of the essay on Hard Times. The idea of a 'moral fable' was a formal concept indicating a highly organised and delimited narrative dominated by a single idea to which all the composite elements contributed thematic development. In the essay on Dombey and Son the attention to the formal dimension has been displaced by the 'moral' and 'realist' aspects. The language and focus of Leavis's criticism has been modified. He is now seeking qualities in the narrative not merely relating to formal design but which maintain a connection with life outside the bounds of the novel at the

moral level. These qualities contrast with the symbolic relations between narrative and life contained in the 'fable'. Leavis sought some correlation between the moral substance of the narrative and the actual world it was aspiring to represent. This movement from attention to formal characteristics to a focus on moral problems represents a significant shift in Leavis's critical interests. The Dickens essays indicate the way in which this search for a correlation between narrative development and intention and external moral values had become the dominant concern in Leavis's later criticism.

The way in which this concern was manifested is demonstrated in Leavis's reservations regarding the thematic development of the later part of Dombey and Son (essentially, after the death of Paul). The theme of 'money-pride' was translated into that of the 'Bought Bride', a theme of which, Leavis argued, Dickens 'knows nothing. . . What he takes for knowledge is wholly external and conventional'.³ The ingenuities of the plot were supposed to have 'a serious moral significance in relation to his theme'(23) but this was undermined by the surrounding unrealistic rhetorical gestures:

It is impossible to make moral sense of [Edith's] attitude towards her marriage, and only in the world of melodramatic rhetoric could there be any illusion to the contrary.(24)

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3. The question of 'knowing' was not a simple matter of information, but had a deeper connotation relating to intuition and unconscious patterns of cognition. This idea of 'knowing' was developed by Leavis in later essays (see, for example, Nor Shall My Sword) which explored the concept of knowledge with assistance from the writings of Michael Polanyi.

Similarly, Carker's villainy belongs 'to the same ethos of unreality'. The comic material also functions to obscure the correlation between the moral values operative in real life and those Dickens is attempting to assert in the novel. The comic passages, Leavis said, do not reveal moral truth, but simply provide 'reassurance':

reassurance that works by implicitly discounting the seriousness of the drama - by intimating that what we have to do with does not, at bottom, make any claim to be the world where the sanctions, conditions and inexorabilities of real life hold without remission.(24)

This insistence indicates the nature of Leavis's primary interests in Dickens and in the novel form in general. Leavis distinguished between the comic creations of Captain Cuttle and the Toodles: Cuttle belonged in the realm of 'reassurance', while the Toodles, having been in the opening chapters the focus of the 'life' to which Dombey's pride was 'stultifying' and 'inimical'(5), had overall, Leavis felt, an 'essential part . . . in an art that offers an astringent and wholly serious "criticism of life"'.(25) The strengths of Dombey and Son derive from that kind of evaluating moral structure. The weaknesses derive from an avoidance or denial of 'the sanctions, conditions and inexorabilities of real life'.

Dombey and Son was a partial success on these terms. 'Intelligence' and 'poetic' were two predominant critical terms utilised by Leavis in this context. The 'intelligence' manifested in the evolution of his art was revealed in the seriousness with which he undertook this 'criticism of life'. In this sense even the humorous characters (e.g. the Toodles) were substantiated by the underlying seriousness of their

relation to the main theme. Dickens achieved this seriousness by establishing 'a poetic conception of his art' expressed in the 'inexhaustibly wonderful poetic life of his prose'.(27) The comparison that Leavis made here was directly with Shakespeare, a comparison that Dickens was equal to by virtue of his 'vitality of language' (in 'description and narrative and dramatic presentation and speech'). This comparison lent support to Leavis's contention that 'in the Victorian age the poetic strength of the English language goes into the novel, and that the great novelists are the successors of Shakespeare'.(29) Dickens earned his place in this collocation by virtue of the serious moral structure of his narrative and the linguistic vitality of his artistic expression. When these two elements were combined most successfully Dickens was capable of producing fiction that qualified as 'major art'. As an artist, Dickens, Leavis claimed, had 'a penetrating insight into contemporary civilisation, its ethos, its realities and its drives', and he had the expressive capability for organising this insight into a coherent moral scheme. Dombey and Son was regarded by Leavis as 'intelligent', 'serious' and 'complex' in ways that were not apparent in Hard Times. Leavis felt that Dickens, 'with the conscious pride of responsibility as an artist',(30) understood his obligation to recreate in fiction 'the world where the sanctions, conditions and inexorabilities of real life hold without remission' in order to fulfil the responsibilities of the creative artist in relation to the world. That is, to be intelligently and creatively critical whilst keeping in view an ameliorative set of positive values and moral convictions. Dickens's creative power was not distinguishable for Leavis from his moral outlook. This consonance between the two aspects was crucial in Leavis's analysis.

The essay on Dombey and Son was in many ways a prelude to the more detailed study of Little Dorrit, about which Leavis had fewer reservations. Shakespeare was again invoked as the most pertinent predecessor to Dickens, both in terms of the latter's artistic endeavours and his relations with his reading public, or the general cultural milieu in which he had a significant place. Leavis deployed his critical commentary on Little Dorrit in such a way as to present a simultaneous critique of his own contemporary society, either by direct statement or by implicitly contrasting contemporary values and conditions disadvantageously with those operative in the age of Dickens. This meant that the terms of his critical exposition had a dual function: of formulating his commentary on the novel, as well as of defining the values implicit in his observations on contemporary society. The criticism merged with the social analysis. Increasingly, Leavis was to be preoccupied with the spiritual state of contemporary society and this preoccupation took its terms of value from the realm of literary criticism. Even where the judgements on the present were only implicit the valuations proceeded from Leavis's understanding of the need for the correlation to be established between the external moral universe and the logic of the moral structure of the particular narrative. The development of this process can be seen in the essay on Little Dorrit.

The direct comparison of Dickens with Shakespeare was based on the mutual accessibility and responsiveness of these writers to their respective publics and the conditions relating to artistic production that were prevalent in the contemporaneous culture. Leavis felt it necessary

to insist that Dickens no more than Shakespeare started from nothing and created out of a cultural void. . . . Dickens belonged as a popular writer, along with his public, to a culture in which the arts of speech were intensely alive.(214)

That vitality, moreover, stemmed in a large part from Shakespeare. In the chapter on Dombey and Son Leavis had emphasised that Dickens was abetted 'by the potent fact of Shakespeare, not only in his own life, but in the life of the English people for whom he wrote'(29). And just as Shakespeare in his own time retained an appeal to varied types of audience, Dickens,

pursuing indefatigably his career as best-selling producer of popular fiction, could develop into a creative writer of the first order, the superlatively original creator of his art.(214)

In the modern world - as the Leavises had often argued - a large popularity was hardly compatible with great artistic success. Dickens's achievement, significant in itself, additionally threw light upon the present state of culture:

the conditions of the kind of greatness represented by Little Dorrit have disappeared from the world and a corresponding blindness results, induced by the climate of implicit assumptions and ideas that now prevails.(213-14)

Leavis's essay on Little Dorrit developed a series of critical valuations on the novel. These were derived from a perception of the novel's strengths being dependent upon the relation between the moral position of the narrative and its critique of society. The terms introduced by Leavis to account for these valuations were in turn extra-

polated and universalised to allow them to be employed as a general set of critical values applicable in a literary sense, as well as formulating a critical stance in relation to contemporary society. The moral valuations that Leavis discovered in Dickens's novel were representative of a general literary critical position as well as functioning as a universally applicable morality.

Leavis insisted on the relevance of Dickens to the contemporary world, and on the consonance between the values perceivable in art and those which he felt were essential in life. His argument was conducted predominantly in the realm of the spiritual, involving a metaphysical and teleological series of propositions. The essay on Little Dorrit culminated with the statement that

Little Dorrit confronts the technologico-Benthamite world with a conception of man and society to which it is utterly blank, the blankness being a manifestation of its desperate sickness. (273)

It is necessary to separate out from the long and detailed critique of the novel the particular values and terms and their meanings which led to this formulation. There are two types of criticism in Leavis's study, one being concerned directly with the narrative, its language and its structure;⁴ the other dealing with the moral implications

4. That is, the kind of analysis of the text that was undertaken to prove Leavis's contention that with regard to Little Dorrit 'there are no large qualifications to be urged, and the whole working of the plot, down to the melodramatic dénouement, is significant - that is, serves the essential communication felicitously' (214); and that Dickens's was an art 'sensitively supple over so unlimited a human range'. (248)

of the novel and involving a broader philosophical approach to the text. These two elements are essentially inseparable, clearly; but the following is primarily concerned with the second type of approach and its place in the general development of Leavis's literary critical practice and his moral philosophy.

The relation between 'art' and 'life' that Leavis discovered in Dickens was crucial. He saw the Clennam house as representative of the 'Calvinistic commercialism' of Victorian England whose destructive ethos Dickens 'sums up . . . in its hatred of art':

What, at a religious depth, Dickens hated about the ethos figured by the Clennam house was the offence against life, the spontaneous, the real, the creative, and, at this moment preceding the collapse of the symbolic house, he represents the creative spirit of life by art.(215)

'Life' was a metaphysical abstraction that Leavis introduced into his criticism to function as a major term of critical evaluation. What it signified was summed up for him in Lawrence's phrase "spontaneous-creative fulness of being" and this vocabulary recurs throughout the essay on Little Dorrit. The 'criticism of life' which Leavis believed Dickens to have been undertaking was in one sense a commentary on society; but it also aspired to the status of a teleological inquiry. Clennam, for Leavis, was engaged in a personal search for a fundamental sense of purpose, the answer to the question "'What are the possibilities of life - for me, and, more generally, in the very nature of life?'" (216) This search paralleled the kind of inquiry undertaken by the novel as a whole. In the definition and analysis of these complementary metaphysical inquiries is contained the substance of Leavis's critical philosophy and the key terms of its

formulation:

The inquest into contemporary civilisation that [Dickens] undertook in Little Dorrit might equally be called a study of the criteria implicit in an evaluative study of life. What it commits him to is an enterprise of thought; thought that it is in our time of the greatest moment to get recognised, consciously and clearly, as thought - an affair (that is) of the thinking intelligence directed to a grasp of the real. Dickens's capacity for effective thought about life is indistinguishable from his genius as a novelist.(216)

The terms employed by Leavis in his account of Dickens's novel were 'life', 'spontaneous', 'real', 'creative', 'intelligent' and 'thought'. As a critical terminology this is highly unspecific. Definition of the individual terms as generally applicable in critical practice is not available; they gain their definition in the process of functioning in the developing critical argument. What was true for the novel -

it works by imaginatively prompting suggestion, so that the reader sees and takes in immediate perception what logic, analysis and statement can't convey(219)

- held, in some sense, for Leavis's account of it. The terms of evaluation find their definition in the text, not outside it. In Dickens, Leavis saw a process of 'definition by creative means'. He regarded this as more valuable than attempting definitions in the abstract. A word such as 'life', indeed, could only exercise critical force if it gained specific connotations from the context in which it was used. Leavis generalised at the level of the abstract about the relations between 'art' and 'life', 'creativity' and 'reality'. These generalisations were set out as observations on Dickens and

became prerequisites of artistic significance. He then developed his argument along more specific lines. His method was to take the 'focal words' and make the 'essential commentary'(225) on them: this represented a move towards a closer definition of the preliminary statements involving the abstract terminology.

Leavis's main exemplar for what Dickens was attempting in the novel was Little Dorrit herself. His commentary on the character illustrates the critical method, at the same time illuminating the relation between 'Dickens and Blake' (the title of this chapter). However, he denied the possibility of achieving a 'neat and systematic exposition'; what he proposed was some 'reflections' on the character of Amy, the novel's 'incongruous' heroine.(225) Out of these reflections would emerge an 'exposition' (unsystematic) of Leavis's fundamental intellectual position, as regards both literature and human relations.

Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam represent two counter-poised themes, Clennam undergoing a process of self-discovery and Little Dorrit comprising 'human qualities on which Dickens sets a high value'. (225) Amy, Leavis said, is 'indefectibly real, and the test of reality for the others'.(226) This is manifested in her supportive relations with her family, as 'the vital core of sincerity' in a world of collusive self-deceit. The character of Amy represents a 'human possibility . . . that has a normative bearing'.(226) The meaning of this observation was expanded by Leavis's comparison with Blake: the parallel arose from 'the way in which the irrelevance of the Benthamite calculus is exposed',(228) the way in which Blake, in the face of 'the ethos of Locke and Newton', insisted on the individual's responsibility

to something other than him- or herself. Little Dorrit is set off, in this respect, against characters such as Mrs. Clennam, Gowan, Miss Wade and others who are suffering from the 'selfhood' which is 'the closure against the creative flow from below [and] at the same time a closure against surrounding lives and life'.(230) Amy demonstrates that 'reality is a collaborative creation'. This impulse to collaboration will produce either a 'perverse' system of social relations: the 'unreality' maintained by Dorrit outside the prison as well as inside, or the 'Society' of Fanny, Merdle, Bar, Bishop and the Chief Butler; or a 'reality' of 'the disinterested individual life, the creative identity, [which] is of its nature a responsibility towards what can't be possessed'.(269)

Leavis's study of this novel was detailed and complex and Little Dorrit was seen as embodying the main theme. It is possible to see the way in which his main evaluative terms find their context in the midst of what is simultaneously an analysis of the meaning of the narrative in a literary sense; and a commentary on matters arising from the text which were applicable in actual life. The answer to Clennam's implicit question - "'What are the possibilities of life?'" - is to be found in the qualities represented by Little Dorrit (and, to a lesser extent, Doyce, Pancks, and Flora Casby): qualities Leavis summarised as 'reality, courage, disinterestedness, truth, spontaneity, creativeness - life'.(237) This may seem to be not much closer to a clear definition of the values which Leavis saw as prerequisite to the creation of a habitable 'reality'. But 'truth' and 'reality', the example of Little Dorrit shows, are dependent on the 'courage' and 'disinterestedness' of the individual, qualities displayed as

as a 'spontaneous creativity'; so might run the gloss on this aggregation of abstract terms. Does this yield any valuable insights into the nature of Leavis's criticism at this point in its development?

Leavis's commentary on the novel had an indissoluble connexion with his commentary on contemporary society. This commentary was, at different points of the essay, either overt or merely implicit. These terms of value were only defined in the process of their usage in the critique. A term such as 'disinterestedness' for example, found its embodiment in the nature of the character of Amy Dorrit, so that the term and the character were mutually defining. Nevertheless, they also have a relevance beyond the boundaries of the particular text. Leavis sought to establish a consonance between the moral evaluations which emerged from his discussion of the particular narrative and those which he felt were necessary in all social relations. The crux of this whole critical enterprise was the equation of 'life' ('as 'spontaneous creativity') with 'art'.

'Disinterestedness' is manifested by Doyce, who behaves as though his inventions were the products of "the divine artificer" and he had no part in the process of their discovery. Doyce's example demonstrated for Leavis the key point that Dickens

was a great artist, and familiar with the compelling impersonal authority of the real (and not the less for knowing so well that there is no grasp of the real that is not creative).(239)

So 'reality' and 'creativity' are mutually interdependent, not just in the fictional narrative, but in real life as well. For Leavis,

all this had a profound spiritual aspect. The passage describing the death of Merdle with its New Testament reference⁵ served 'to emphasise how essentially the spiritual, in what no-one could fail to recognise as a religious sense, is involved in the whole evocation'.(270) Leavis called the novel 'a vindication of the spirit'.(270) He discussed the relevance of the incidents in the pass Great St Bernard in terms that indicate the emerging final phase of Leavis's critical practice. Dickens's 'potent evocation of time, eternity, the non-human universe . . . and death'(272) is of profound relevance to contemporary society. It gives form to the oppositions involved in the clash between 'human needs' and the 'technologico-Benthamite' world. The individual life is essentially 'creative' and human creativity 'essentially collaborative', as in the maintenance of a cultural tradition in the 'living language'. These sanctions and requirements were developed by Leavis out of this study of Dickens's novel and it was this increasingly 'religious' spirit that characterised his later writings. To gain a fuller understanding of the significance of this critical and moral philosophy it is necessary to set the commentary on Little Dorrit in a wider context involving Leavis's broader metaphysical propositions. These can be made clearer by an analysis of his developing attitude to William Blake.

5. Little Dorrit, Book the Second, chapter 5; this chapter concludes:

" . . . he, the shining wonder, the new constellation to be followed by the wise men bringing gifts, until it stopped over certain carrion at the bottom of a bath and disappeared - was simply the greatest Forger and the greatest Thief that ever cheated the gallows."

2. Leavis and Blake: 'the creative nature of life'.

It can be seen from the foregoing that in this later period Leavis's literary criticism was undergoing significant change. The late criticism is consonant with that which preceded it, but there is apparent a change of emphasis, an expansion, into a metaphysical realm, of Leavis's specifications regarding literature and criticism. The terms of evaluation employed in the essay on Little Dorrit reveal an increasing concern on Leavis's part for examining a literary work in a manner that eventually involved fundamental considerations on the nature of artistic achievement and the relations between artistic production and quotidian life. The philosophical centre of Leavis's literary criticism had previously been evacuated by a refusal to engage in questions of definition, or abstractions regarding ultimate purposes. It was indirectly occupied during this late phase by a conception of both the creative and critical function that was fundamentally teleological, seeing the ultimate purpose of both forms of endeavour as being irrevocably related to a moral vision of human existence. This conception linked all the major components in Leavis's system ('art', 'life', 'thought', 'creativity') inextricably. Leavis proposed a set of criteria for literature and literary criticism that had a moral basis, aimed at a polemical and diagnostic intervention in contemporary culture and was ultimately religious in spirit. This conception was both analytical and criterial: it established an evaluative response to literature and other cultural forms that simultaneously implied a set of criteria necessary for the achievement of parallel artistic significance. It is possible to clarify Leavis's

developing position by understanding his attitude towards Blake.

The essay on Little Dorrit in Dickens the Novelist was entitled 'Dickens and Blake'. Leavis sought to draw a parallel between the two artists - first to substantiate his feelings about the significance of the particular novel; and secondly to promote the idea of a fundamental relationship between 'art' and 'life'. This relationship became increasingly more important for Leavis and the later criticism is marked by this tendency to generalisation at an abstract level. Of this novel Leavis wrote that 'the inquest into contemporary civilisation that [Dickens] undertook in Little Dorrit might equally be called a study of the criteria implicit in an evaluative study of life'.(216) Leavis's reading of the novel might equally be termed a study of the same criteria, which in turn extended their applicability to general notions of 'art' as an 'evaluative' adjunct to 'life'. Leavis was concerned, as always, with 'art' at its highest level of performance, at its most successful. The relationship that, according to Leavis, had to be established between art and ordinary existence was a primary condition of the achievement, prerequisite to a positive evaluative judgement. A work of art that was remote from the criteria implicit in Leavis's conception of the creative function, that did not satisfy the expectations of that conception in its bearings on ordinary human life, disqualified itself from the higher estimates of artistic success. Leavis's attitude to 'art' required a positive moral dimension in the work under scrutiny. The terms of his evaluation of artistic achievement were not based on formal or aesthetic principles but on criteria that were essentially moral, political and ultimately religious. It was Blake who provided the model in which

these criteria were fulfilled and whose poetry substantiated Leavis's increasingly metaphysical critical terminology. These evaluative criteria were encapsulated in the metaphysical ambiguities (as Leavis saw them) in T.S.Eliot.

Leavis published two complementary essays on Blake in 1972 which integrated these stipulated criteria and set them in a substantiating philosophical context.⁶ They developed themes which had been introduced in Dickens the Novelist:

Dickens lays the same kind of emphasis on the creative nature of life as Blake does, and insists in the same way that there is a continuity from the inescapable creativeness of perception to the disciplined imaginative creativeness of the skilled artist, and that where art doesn't thrive or enjoy the intelligent esteem due to it the civilisation is sick.(236)

It is impossible to discuss Amy Dorrit as disinterestedness (and the creative nisus⁷ that placed her at the centre of Little Dorrit is intrinsically normative) without being brought to an explicit recognition that the disinterested individual life, the creative identity, is of its nature a responsibility towards what can't be possessed. . . . The value of Dickens's vindication of the spirit lies in its being a great artist's - as Blake's is; and that kind of vindication has a peculiar importance for us today.(269-70)

The three main components in these statements have respectively

6. 'Justifying One's Valuation of Blake', a lecture given at Bristol University, 15 November 1971, reprinted in The Human World no 7 (May 1972) and Paley, M.D. and Phillips, M. (eds) William Blake: essays in honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes (1973).

'Introductory: "Life" is a necessary word', Nor Shall My Sword (1972).

7. The meaning of this word is discussed below.

a moral, a political and a spiritual or religious aspect. The importance and centrality of these interrelated themes to Leavis's conception of the function of criticism emerged in his subsequent suggestions on Blake. The essays on Blake do not constitute a comprehensive appraisal of his poetry but are more in the nature of speculative propositions. Attention to the poetry was displaced by the larger matters Leavis was concerned to explore.

Blake's 'prophetic books' were dismissed as failures. The failure derived from Blake having been unable to break out of the logic of the Christian tradition which led him to attempt to balance the myth of the Fall of Man with a prophesied resurrection of Eternal Man. Leavis argued that by becoming fixated with this telos ('Jerusalem', Eternal Man) Blake was abandoning his own perceived truth regarding the human, individual responsibility operating in daily life. Such a perception was more essential than the prophesied telos, which Blake consequently failed to realise poetically, the prophetic books being for Leavis a 'plunge into a wordy and boring unreality'. This was because Blake's insistence on 'human responsibility' refuted all forms of determinism and because, in Leavis's formulation, 'human reality, the human condition to which art belongs, is inescapably a matter of individual human beings in their relations with one another, the only conceivable way in which Man could be "there"'.⁸

In rejecting Blake's traditional or orthodox telos Leavis implicitly

8. 'Justifying One's Valuation of Blake', The Human World, 7, (1972) p 60.

asserted his own. He developed a teleology of critical understanding that had its basis in his evaluation of Dickens's Little Dorrit, enforced by the terms of his appreciation of Blake. The telos that Leavis posited was one that was contained in individual lives in their quotidian social relations. It was permanently renewable and had a fundamental moral aspect, extending eventually into a version of the relations between art and life that was didactic, heuristic and ultimately religious.

(i) Moral

Key terms in the discussion of Little Dorrit are 'disinterestedness' and 'responsibility'. These are qualities that were for Leavis manifested in the individual. Blake, he argued, represented 'the new sense of human responsibility' that emerged in the Romantic movement. This sense of 'responsibility', moreover, was accompanied by a 'realisation that without creativity there is no apprehension of the real, but that if experience is necessarily creative, the creativity - as every great artist testifies - is not arbitrary'.⁹

'Creativity', then, is a feature of human existence not confined to the activity of the artist; 'life' itself was, ideally, a 'creative' process. Blake testifies to the 'intrinsic relation between creativity in the artist and that which is inseparable from life'.¹⁰ Here Leavis

9. Nor Shall My Sword (1972) p 12.

10. Ibid. p 20.

was integrating his commitment to Lawrence's description of life as 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being' with the belief that somehow art embodied the ideal representation of the 'creativity' that informed all human activity. The key differentiation between art and life was this 'ideal' status. Human existence, clearly, is frequently an ugly and destructive experience. The insistence in Leavis's criteria for high artistic achievement was that 'art' presented in its relations with the world a fundamentally 'moral' viewpoint. 'Responsibility' meant a 'disinterested' concern for the fate of others and required of the artist that the deeper implications of his work shared this underlying moral impulse. The representation of 'reality' had to involve this primary sense of responsibility; indeed, 'reality' for Leavis was the responsibility that was allied to 'creativity' in all human endeavour and made manifest in the work of art. Leavis's evaluation of the achievement of the artist began with an appraisal, not of formal characteristics, but of the artist's 'attitude to life'. 'Life' was a word that Leavis insisted on as being 'necessary',¹¹ and what it indicated was something that was 'concretely "there" only in individual lives'. The 'study of the individual life can't but be a study of lives in relation, and of social conditions, conventions, pressures as they affect essential life'.¹² Therefore, the novelist, say, was required by this critical approach to present through his art his own, necessarily evaluative, study of human relations and behaviour. The achievement would be assessed according to the degree

11. This phrase recurs in the later criticism. Cf for example Dickens the Novelist p 217; the introductory chapter of Nor Shall My Sword has the phrase as its title.

12. Dickens the Novelist p 216.

to which the modes and patterns of behaviour in the narrative reflect the moral code. The 'really great novelist can't but find himself making an evaluative inquiry into the civilisation in which he finds himself'.¹³ The moral code behind the evaluation was one that was ultimately informed by Leavis's political and religious propositions.

Leavis established his analytical terms - of 'responsibility', 'creativity' and the individual life in its social relations - as a means of exploring the moral significance of a work of art such as Little Dorrit. Leavis had always maintained that literature provided a means of understanding the world and contained, in its highest forms, a set of values distinctively applicable in the field of ordinary human behaviour. This conviction found its most complete formulation in these discussions of Dickens and Blake (and of Eliot). Leavis's moral code, as derived from his perceptions and assertions regarding the nature of the 'reality' that is transcribed in literature, was also an evaluative schema in the literary critical sense. The degree to which a work of art involved, in Leavis's exegesis, a commitment to the concepts of 'human responsibility' and 'human creativity', the extent to which they enforced a moral validation for the codes of thought and behaviour which they enacted, meant a corresponding level of valuation in his critical judgements upon it. Moral 'truth' and literary value were equivalent terms in this criticism. Literary criticism is the discourse in which the structures and impulses of the literary text are reconstituted and in which they achieve their

13. Ibid. p 216.

evaluative assessment. In Leavis's exploration of this discourse, the referent which governs both the reconstitution of the text's significance and substance as well as its objective valuation was this established moral code, determined by the concept of 'responsibility'. At this level, the criticism was essentially didactic in its promulgation of the overlying 'morality'.

(ii) Political

Nor Shall My Sword (1972) is a polemical book. In it Leavis reverted to the themes of Education and the University (1943), Two Cultures? the significance of C.P.Snow (1962) and English Literature in our Time and the University (1967).¹⁴ The main body of the text comprised four lectures delivered in England and Wales during 1969-72 and published in the Times Literary Supplement and The Human World.⁵ These public events were made the occasion for polemical analyses of contemporary culture, from the point of view of the study of literature in higher education. Leavis ranged over diverse areas of contemporary affairs, from the 1966 Robbins report on higher education, the new universities, student unrest, forms of popular culture, the function of the 'English School' in the university, the political vocabulary

14. In Nor Shall My Sword were reprinted the whole 'Two Cultures?' lecture, together with 'Luddites? or, There Is Only One Culture' from Lectures in America (1969).

15. 'English, Unrest and Continuity', lecture given at the University of Wales, 1969; reprinted in the TLS (1970); "'Literarism" and "Scientism": the misconception and the menace', lectures given at the University of Bristol, 1970, published in TLS (1970): 'Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope' and 'Elites, Oligarchies and an Educated Public', lectures given at the University of York, 1970 and 1971 and published in The Human World. (nos. 11 and 14.)

and general attitudes current in society. Discussion of the details of Leavis's politics belongs in a study of his overall political and polemical cultural analysis. As far as the literary criticism is concerned, what is important is the rationale governing the interventionist determination that the criticism insisted upon and the perception of the function of criticism that saw the intervention as necessary and valuable.

In the passage from Dickens the Novelist quoted above there is a statement of which variations occur throughout the essay: 'where art doesn't thrive or enjoy the intelligent esteem due to it the civilisation is sick'.(311) Leavis continually strove to give his commentary on Dickens a contemporary context. This involved extrapolating the analysis of Dickens's art - as an 'evaluative study of life' (286) - into the realm of generality. Dickens's specific act of inquiry into contemporary civilisation became a principle of novelistic endeavour. This principle was formulated by Leavis in his critique of Dickens and established as a component of his own evaluative criteria. It is as if the criticism which discovered the 'evaluative' or socially critical element in Dickens felt obliged to establish this particular artistic achievement as a general model upon which the creative artist ought to proceed. This was the result of the fact that Leavis found in Dickens an attitude towards 'life' and 'society' which consummated his own diagnostic inclinations. By analysing this element in Dickens Leavis was able to give form to his own version of the function of criticism and the obligations of the artist, and his own analysis of the condition of contemporary society. His essays on Dickens have this ulterior purpose and the novels become in some respects adjuncts

to Leavis's primary, diagnostic purpose. The discussion of Little Dorrit is comprehensive and compelling. Its context was a matter of an attempt to pursue the implications of the principle which stated that 'the discipline of literary criticism . . . is one without which there can be no adequate attention paid to the problems of our civilisation'.¹⁶ The consequences were that what was essentially a version of the content and significance of Little Dorrit was asserted as providing incontrovertible truths about the nature of art and the responsibilities of the artist. The judgements on the novel conspire to generate a teleology of critical and creative endeavour. The relationship between Leavis's criteria and their substantiation in the terms of his study of Dickens produced a highly exclusive critical circuit.

This exclusivity also meant that the material on which Leavis concentrated was of the higher orders of critical achievement: Dickens was a 'great' novelist, and he and Blake were both 'geniuses'. The heightened praise thus gained a corresponding intensity and Leavis's critique used the superlative adjectival form. No provision was allowed for lesser, more modestly ambitious literary forms. If a work could not be said to be equal to the 'best' achievements of the 'greatest' novelists, it was destined for an arena of critical inquiry regarding which Leavis had no interest. This is one of the major limitations of the closely confined cycle of the movement from the analytical to the criterial. It originates with the intensity of Leavis's concern with ultimate values, as if (as in his version

16. Nor Shall My Sword, p 204.

of Blake) his telos of 'moral responsibility' and 'human creativity' had itself obscured the more mundane significances of lesser literary endeavour. It is too facile to dismiss these secondary orders of literature as evidence of a 'sick' society. That there was no contemporary equivalent of Dickens (both popular and important) may be the case. The reasons for this can be understood outside the predominantly moral and metaphysical values of the approach adopted by Leavis.

(iii) Religious

Leavis sought to construe a philosophy of literary criticism discreetly, so to speak, without any overt recourse to recognised and defined philosophical terms. In this later criticism he attempted to define by example a teleology of literary criticism (and, by association, of the creative act). A teleology involves the contemplation of ultimate ends and values, as in Clelland's self-interrogation, as Leavis saw it: "'What are the possibilities of life - for me, and, more generally, in the very nature of life?'" (285) Leavis's investigations therefore inevitably involved considerations and propositions which were essentially religious. The implication is inherent in the phrases from Dickens the Novelist quoted above, 'a responsibility towards what can't be possessed' and 'a vindication of the spirit'.

Leavis's aim in elucidating these significances of the particular text was essentially maieutic: the exegesis was organised so that it appeared to bring to the surface meanings underlying the main text. This procedure was not objective or impartial. The exegesis was

governed by a prior set of values which predisposed the critic to the discovery and formulation of meanings that fulfilled the primary expectations. In Leavis's case especially, these expectations were unstated and undefined; they achieved their definition in the process of exegesis. The vocabulary of critical analysis was elided with the terminology of evaluation so that the relations between the two appeared inevitable. In this way, a version of a text was made to seem the single available interpretation. The collaborative process of critical exchanges which Leavis advocated is only sustainable once certain a priori assumptions are made regarding fundamental critical choices. These choices may in fact pre-empt subsequent critical judgment. The central question in studying Leavis's criticism concerns the degree to which the assumptions which he held to be indisputable - Lawrence's 'greatness', say - make critical debate redundant. What Leavis presents to the reader is the result of an internal cogitation which, in being reported to a reading public, omits the preliminary reasoning that generated the type and direction of the critique. A sympathetic reader may reconstitute this process to elicit as much as possible from the work. For the point of view which holds contrary or alternative positions the criticism may seem merely dogmatic and unhelpful.

In political terms, Leavis had always been concerned with the state of contemporary society. This state was ascertainable by means of a diagnosis of its cultural forms. For Leavis the use of language was the clearest index of a culture's subtlety and resources, and literature the most heightened form of linguistic expression. Leavis's iterated polemic centred on the condition of contemporary culture, the sources for the condition and the kinds of effort required for

its amelioration. In this later period, 'society', or 'civilisation', was replaced by 'life' as the key term in the discussion. The increasingly teleological thrust of Leavis's criticism meant that he required a value, or its conceptual embodiment, that transcended the concept of 'society' and was able to attain the status of a value-term that was both particular and general. 'Life' in this context encompassed both the quotidian and the transcendent. Leavis glossed the usage by reference to the notions of 'responsibility' and 'creativity'. In his discussion of this latter term the deeper, religious implications of his propositions emerge, and the strategy of asserting these terms so that they took on a greater significance than was superficially apparent, achieved their consummation.

It is notable that in his effort to circumscribe this literary critical teleology Leavis enlisted the support of contemporary philosophers, Michael Polanyi, Marjorie Grene and R.G.Collingwood.¹⁷ This tendency represents an attempt to gain confirmation of his argument from a non-literary source¹⁸ and the desire to give it a broader philosophical credence without having recourse to a precise philosophical vocabulary.

17. Leavis referred to and quoted from Marjorie Grene, The Knower and the Known (1966) and R.G.Collingwood, The Idea of Nature (1945) in 'Justifying One's Valuation of Blake', The Human World 7, 'May 1972) pp 62-3; that article mentioned Polanyi in passing and Leavis quoted several passages from Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi, (ed. M.Grene, 1969) in the introductory essay to Nor Shall My Sword, as well as occasionally in later chapters of the book.

18. 'I am myself helped to make the necessary points by Michael Polanyi who, for years a Professor of Physical Chemistry, isn't thinking of Blake and won't be accused of "literarism"'. Nor Shall My Sword, p 21.

Leavis drew an oblique parallel between Blake and Polanyi which was facilitated only by his (Leavis's) recognition that they were both antipathetic to the prevailing intellectual ethos of their respective cultures. Blake reacted to the ethos of Locke and Newton by asserting the primacy of 'human responsibility' and 'creativity' against the empiricism which made perception merely passive and anything unstateable in rational terms non-existent. This ethos had its counterpart in the contemporary period in the reductive rationalism of what Leavis called 'the technologico-Benthamite calculus'. Polanyi, Leavis argued, in common with Blake, refuted this 'Cartesian dualism', or the absolute separation of spirit and matter. Leavis quoted Polanyi: 'An exact mathematical theory means nothing unless we recognise an inexact non-mathematical knowledge on which it bears and a person whose judgement upholds this bearing'.¹⁹ This insight demonstrated for Leavis the fact that 'neither the scientist's nor the technologist's concern for reality is sufficient'²⁰ and that there must be something other, something beyond the rationally apprehensible.

To carry the burden of this part of his philosophical inquiry Leavis employed the terms 'ahnung' and 'nisus', signifying 'presentiment',

19. Knowing and Being, p 195, quoted in Nor Shall My Sword, p 21. In 'Justifying One's Valuation of Blake' Leavis quoted Grene's complementary statement: 'we have had to free ourselves from the bonds of Newtonian abstraction, to dare, not only to manipulate abstractions, to calculate and predict and falsify, but to understand. The revolution before us is a revolution of life against dead nature, and of understanding against the calculi of logical machines'.
The Knower and the Known p 13; cf. The Human World, vol cit p 62.

20. Nor Shall My Sword, p 23.

or 'foreboding', and 'effort', or 'impulse' respectively. This idiosyncratic phraseology appears to be a deliberate avoidance of any more recognisably 'philosophical' terms. The uncommon nature of the words lends them an unassimilable awkwardness that makes what is essentially a straightforward argument unnecessarily more difficult. Leavis employed these terms to explicate 'that movement towards the achieved work . . . which starts with an elusive sense of some coherence or pattern to be found in experience, or the sense of some deep inner need'.²¹ He also spoke of 'the directing ahnung implicit in life'.²² This underlying awareness or 'presentiment' emerged as human creativity. The 'nisus', represented an effort, a heuristic process, of understanding and making explicit the 'anticipatory apprehension' which provoked creative inquiry.²³ Criticism, in its turn, continued or completed the heuristic process, making intellectually explicit that which had been expressed in the first instance artistically. Criticism, therefore, in Leavis's practice, was equally a part of the inquisitive impulse (the 'nisus') and was aimed at formulating and making conscious both the presentiment ('ahnung') of what the creative work contained and the presentiment which engendered the work itself. This is the way in which criticism in Leavis's sense functioned maieutically: it aimed at the completion or resolution of a long process of heuristic endeavour. For this reason it tended to deal in an exclusive evaluative

21. Ibid p 25.

22. 'Justifying One's Valuation of Blake', loc cit p 63.

23. Polanyi wrote that 'a problem for inquiry comes to the scientist in response to his roaming vision of yet undiscovered possibilities'.
Knowing and Being, p 201; quoted in Nor Shall My Sword, p 22.

terminology and to speculate in the realm of mysterious spiritual absolutes.

The 'ahnung' - unconscious or inexplicit apprehension - was invoked in Leavis's recurrent use of Lawrence's statement about Tom Brangwen: 'he knew he did not belong to himself'.²⁴ Blake, Leavis noted, said of his paintings: 'Tho' they are Mine, I know that they are not Mine'.²⁵ Leavis found his sense of this transcendent 'other', the reality that existed outside the individual in his relations with other individuals, in

the potent authority with which Blake conveys his knowledge that in creative work he himself serves something authoritative - a living reality that is not his selfhood: testimony that goes with his vividly imparted sense of the intrinsic relation between creativity in the artist and that which is inseparable from life.²⁶

'Life' has thus been elevated to the position where it stands for all the unrecovered 'presentiments' that continually inform human 'creativity'; it serves Leavis as the ultimate concept to which the critical 'nisis' can refer. Though this 'nisis' was fundamentally teleological, Leavis refrained from establishing a fixed and absolute 'end' for critical and creative activity, but insisted rather on the constantly renewable 'life' that was 'creativity' and was manifested

24. Leavis called this 'an apt locus classicus' (Dickens the Novelist, p 317). The phrase recurs frequently in Leavis's writings after D.H.Lawrence: Novelist.

25. 'Justifying One's Valuation of Blake', loc cit p 59.

26. Nor Shall My Sword, p 20.

as 'emerging newness'.²⁷ The burden placed on the concept of 'life' signifies that this was as close as Leavis was likely to get to an absolute critical concept. As such, the term 'life' occupied a place in his critical structure that gave it an essentially 'religious' connotation.

For example Leavis found the use of his terms 'ahnung' and 'nisus' illuminating when discussing T.S.Eliot's 'religious poetry'. They describe the movement from the 'destitution' of 'The Hollow Men' to the 'affirmation' implied in the "Incarnation" of 'The Dry Salvages'. What Eliot was attempting to assert, Leavis, said, was a 'transcendental spiritual reality'.²⁸ 'Life' in Leavis's criticism was the central concept in an attempt to establish a similar 'reality' in the practice of literary criticism in order to evoke a concrete sense of what was implied in the notion of 'responsibility towards what can't be possessed'. The use of this concept sets Leavis apart as a critic:

These latter critics [Eliot, Richards, the New Critics] have offered a set of terms in which to think, true; but these have been sets of terms which bore only on literary criteria: Impersonality, Tradition, synaesthesia, irony, paradox, ambiguity, etc. Leavis alone has upheld Realist criticism, struggling to establish a set of terms which intersect with the real world, which 'correspond' to life, rather than to accept terms which set up amongst themselves, very harmoniously no doubt, a merely pleasing 'coherence'. Leavis . . . adopts a rigorous fidelity to Reality as an initial stance in which the ethics of the whole critical enterprise consists.²⁹

27. Ibid, p 20.

28. Cf. ibid, pp 25-26.

29. Roger Poole, 'The Affirmation is of Life: the later criticism of F.R.Leavis', Universities Quarterly XXIX (Winter 1974) p 85.

This 'struggle' to uphold a 'Realist criticism' emerged in Leavis's study of Four Quartets. The material of that poetry meant that both the poet and the critic had to explore speculative ideas about the world and the individual's place within it. Leavis attempted a discursive exposition of Eliot's poetic argument in his discussion of these poems; but judgement and analysis (as the central section of The Living Principle argued) are not separable activities. Analysis of the poetry and exposition of the ideas inevitably involved an evaluative judgement on both. To formulate such a judgement regarding such predominantly metaphysical poetic material required of the critic that he produce (or have in the background) a coherent metaphysic of his own, which was capable in itself of legitimising the value-judgements it presented. The critique of Four Quartets differed from that of Dickens in this one fundamental respect: the text under scrutiny, because of the need to enforce an adverse judgement, could not be used to substantiate the values implied in the criticism, in the way that textual evidence from Little Dorrit had been exploited to give concrete form to the values that the criticism claimed to have discovered. The critical procedure with regard to Four Quartets is therefore different in a significant way from that of Little Dorrit. In his discussion of Eliot's poetry Leavis was required by the need to pass an ultimately negative judgement to be more explicit than before about his own metaphysic; it stood apart from, rather than being absorbed into, the text under discussion. Leavis's study of Four Quartets therefore forced him to develop and establish an independent metaphysic from within which he could approach the poetry.

3. Reading 'Four Quartets': criticism, metaphysics and the 'living principle'.

The problem for Leavis in The Living Principle (1975) was to find a way of stating the unstatable, of defining the indefinable. This was a problem of method and it manifested as a search for a set of value-terms capable of carrying the weight of references and inexplicit apprehensions necessary to the formulation of a criticism that could meet the poet of Four Quartets in the realm of the metaphysical, and substantiate itself as a convincing moral and philosophical alternative. Leavis's reading of Four Quartets was unable simply to present an exposition of its metaphysic or an elucidation of its allusions and references. The teleology of 'creativity' and critical practice that Leavis had developed meant that exposition and analysis not merely implied but were the same thing as evaluative judgement. This was because of the nature of Leavis's critical language, in which to say what something was or meant, or to describe how a line of poetry achieved its effect, was to evaluate the thing described; Leavis's expository and descriptive terms were his terms of value.

On the other hand, 'the living principle is a concrete something apprehended but indefinable'; that is, the 'principle' which 'the whole of this book . . . is devoted to defining'(14)³⁰, may be said to be the deepest qualitative criterion informing not just art and literature but the whole of life itself. It was not accessible to

30. Figures in parentheses refer to page numbers in The Living Principle (1975).

'definition' in a pure sense. It was something that could be pointed to only indirectly, thrown into shadow, so to speak, by the surrounding material until its form was apparent from its context, but remained inexact, unstated. As Leavis recognised, this was a difficult problem - 'it needs a collaborative reader'(14) - and in pursuing it Leavis became explicit about his own position and beliefs to a degree that was unprecedented since the 1962 Richmond lecture on the 'Two Cultures' theme. Complex questions were raised and the polemical aspect of Leavis's critical enterprise was subsumed into the philosophical. The function of the university and the present 'crisis' of civilisation were reiterated themes, but essentially Leavis was taxed with concepts of meaning and the nature of language. In his attempts to understand 'language' Leavis amplified his notion of 'collaboration'. He found in the critical discussion of a literary text an analogue of the means whereby 'meaning' is generated in language in general; and how this was above all a process that is historical and chronological - that takes place in time. This insistence had its consequences when he came to deal with Four Quartets.

Leavis, in the opening chapter of The Living Principle ('Thought, Language and Objectivity'), sought to establish that a statement of fact is simultaneously a value-judgement and he used propositions from Marjorie Grene's The Knower and the Known (1966)³¹ to support

31. For example: 'there can be no purely factual statements, ie, statements which do not even presuppose evaluation, because there can be no intelligible discourse except on the ground of evaluation or appraisal. There are, in other words, no descriptions wholly independent of prescriptions.'

The Knower and the Known, p 160.

And: 'All knowledge, even the most abstract, exists only within the fundamental evaluation, first of the total community, which permits and respects such knowledge, and second, within this totality, of the special community whose consensus makes possible the existence of this special discipline'.

Ibid, p. 180; quoted in The Living Principle, p 34.

his argument. This was a principle crucial to his whole critical practice of 'judgement and analysis'.³² Leavis developed ideas from Grene and Polanyi to refute what he called 'Cartesian-Newtonian dualism'³³ and to advocate 'the precondition of language, thought and objectivity'.

(41) The collaborative process that engenders language is the same as that which adduces critical judgement. The 'creativity' that, in the essay on Little Dorrit, was shown to be the same thing as 'life' in Dickens's aesthetic, manifests itself as essentially part of human activity at whatever level of complexity of behaviour: the 'day-to-day work of collaborative creation includes the creating of language, without which there couldn't have been a human world'.(44) 'Life' is the 'basic unstatable' which Cartesian logic is unable to recognise but which is fundamental to 'the human world'. In language, which received its 'fullest use' in the great works of literature, the 'basic unstatable' is most 'open to recognition'.(44) Through the study of language in its literary forms it is possible to approach a definition of the indefinable (Leavis talked of 'creative imprecision'(34) and 'intelligently unsatisfactory answer[s]'(37) in relation to the study of this theme) and to come to as complete as possible an understanding of what 'life' is and how it is made manifest. Leavis denied the reduc-

32. Leavis reprinted in The Living Principle, with some additions, his earlier Scrutiny articles, 'Notes in the Analysis of Poetry'; an essay on 'prose'; and the comparison between Dryden and Shakespeare, 'Antony and Cleopatra and All for Love: A Critical Exercise', Scrutiny V (1936). These were included under the general heading 'Judgement and Analysis'.

33. Leavis was borrowing the phrase from the philosophers: see for example, Grene, The Knower and the Known, p 157, in the chapter 'Facts and Values' recommended by Leavis to his students (The Living Principle, p 29).

tivism of the disciples of Wittgenstein³⁴ or the linguisticians³⁵ and proposed a concept of language that was more open and inexact than pure logic would allow. The conception had behind it the history of Leavis's struggles to give substance to his critical apprehensions:

a language is more than a means of expression; it is the heuristic conquest won out of representative experience, the upshot or precipitate of immemorial human living, and embodies values, distinctions, identifications, conclusions, promptings, cartographical hints and tested potentialities. It exemplifies the truth that life is growth and growth change, and the condition of these is continuity.(44)

It is almost as if a conception of language had been construed specifically to refute the premises of the first section of 'Burnt Norton'. However, it is essential to notice that this conception derived from the positive appreciation of Dickens, Blake and Lawrence, as well as in opposition to Eliot. It is necessary to recap the special references and sources that have been accruing in this later work of Leavis's. Much of his argument was cyclical and iterative, the force of some of the fundamental points being dependent upon their incremental allusive repetition. At the same time, the recurrence of a reference was often minimally explicit, relying on the recall of the reader to supply it with its full retrospective significance. Key references which appeared in the discussion of Four Quartets included Blake, Polanyi, the dichotomy of 'selfhood' and 'identity' and the imposed vocabulary of 'ahnung' and 'nisis'.

34. Cf The Living Principle, p 13.

35. Cf ibid, p 58.

Leavis quoted Blake's referral to his designs and paintings: "Tho' I call them Mine, I know that they are not Mine"³⁶; and his declaration that "Jesus was an artist".³⁷ These reflections were associated with Tom Brangwen's sense that "he knew he did not belong to himself". All three referents, when extrapolated out of their minimised encapsulation, summoned up for Leavis the spiritual dimension of literature and art. The idea of belonging, or having responsibility to, something 'other' had its more explicit form in the opposition of 'selfhood' and 'identity'. Leavis, arguing against criticism which saw this vocabulary as merely 'jargon'³⁸, said that the distinction was 'basic to the realisation that the "human world" on which both our sense of reality and our attainment of objectivity depend is a product of collaborative human creativity'. (59) The difference is therefore one of attitude and perspective. In 'Justifying One's Valuation of Blake' Leavis described the 'selfhood' as that which 'seeks to possess' from within its 'self-enclosure' thus advancing an egocentric viewpoint involving responsibility only to itself. 'Identity', in contrast, was manifested as 'the individual being as the disinterested focus of life':³⁹ its perspective was apersonal, engaging, or rather existing as, responsibility to something 'other'. This 'other' appeared in, though did not wholly constitute, the 'collaborative creativity' that

36. Cf. ibid, p 44; Leavis has a footnote to the effect that the letter was 'To Trusler, 16 August, 1799'.

37. Cf. 'Justifying One's Valuation of Blake', loc cit, p 59.

38. Cf. Ian Robinson, The Survival of English (1973), p 239; quoted in The Living Principle, pp 58-9.

39. 'Justifying One's Valuation of Blake', loc cit, p 59.

emerged, for example, as 'language'.⁴⁰ The vocabulary of 'selfhood' and 'identity' became a kind of shorthand for this conception. Each reference gives a further shading to the terms themselves, and introduces the concept of 'responsibility to something other' into the particular context.

'Ahnung' and 'nibus' were supposed to operate in a similar manner, though they are not so directly explicable. 'Ahnung' can be glossed by Polanyi's phrase 'anticipatory apprehension', but its meaning remains obscure. Leavis noted that Lawrence's word was 'inkling',⁴¹ but felt that this lacked the weight that 'foreboding', another possibility, had.⁽⁶³⁾ Leavis acknowledged the difficulties associated with the word, but insisted on his need for it, which, he said, derived from his sense of the implications of 'anticipatory apprehension'.

'Nibus' was preferred to 'effort' or 'impulse', both close synonyms, because they implied the presence of 'will'. The 'creative nibus' was not willed, but ineluctable (Blake's paintings were, and yet were not, 'his').⁴² Discussion has focused on the question of whether these

40. Cf: 'Thought about language should entail the full and firm recognition that words 'mean' because individual human beings have meant the meaning, and that there is no meaning unless individual beings can meet in it, the completing of the element of 'intend' being represented by the responding someone's certitude that the last condition obtains.'
The Living Principle, p 58.

41. In Study of Thomas Hardy: cf. The Living Principle, p 63.

42. The Oxford English Dictionary (1933) has a reference that gives the sense as Leavis intended: '1899 Allbutt's Syst[em of] Med [icine] [1889-99] VIII 248: "When the nibus of web-spinning dominates the spider, when the nibus of nest-building dominates the bird".

words have been assimilated satisfactorily into Leavis's critical vocabulary so as to advance his argument,⁴³ and certainly the collaborative tolerance required of the reader with regard to them is high. What is more interesting, though, is what Leavis's need of such a vocabulary reveals. This need is associated with his dependence upon the ideas of the philosophers Collingwood, Grene and Polanyi. A specialised, almost technical, vocabulary and extensive borrowing from explicitly philosophical sources: these are two features of Leavis's late criticism that demonstrate a marked change in critical habit. The reasons for the change are twofold: Leavis's field of inquiry had expanded; and recourse to particular texts for substantiating evidence in the concrete of abstract statements was not available to him when it came to dealing with Four Quartets.

In the 1967 Clark lectures Leavis had to acknowledge a problem of subject-matter: discussing 'East Coker' in particular he wrote that 'this poetry is insistently religious in preoccupation in a way that raises for a commentator like myself a problem of delicacy' because of 'the way in which it depends on the creative presentation of what compels a response that is recognition, recognition that is not distinguishable from assent'.⁴⁴ The problem was that the poem could not be read detachedly, as in 'the mastering of a logical disquisition; the whole being is involved, and one is compelled, in the

43. Cf. Robinson, op cit, pp 239-40; Andor Gomme, 'Why literary criticism matters in a technologico-Benthamite age', Universities Quarterly XXX (1975) pp 43-45.

44. English Literature in our Time and the University: the 1967 Clark lectures, (1969), p 125.

taking, to achieve a new realisation of the nature of experience . . . involv[ing] one's basic attitudes and one's habits of thought and valuation'.⁴⁵ In The Living Principle Leavis said that the poetry 'compels one to determine and verify one's own ultimate beliefs'.(178)

This sense of compulsion was not lightly suggested. Eliot had presented a lifelong challenge to Leavis, and Four Quartets, unlike, say, Eliot's literary criticism, formulated that challenge in the realm of a complex metaphysic. It was not until Leavis had developed and established an equivalent metaphysic that he was able to meet the demands made on the critic by this poetry. The extrapolation of critical values into the social sphere that characterised, for example, the essay on Little Dorrit, was later transformed into a consideration of the deeper spiritual nature of human existence. The criticism increasingly found itself constrained to articulate a cogent metaphysic; that metaphysic certainly had its expression in the essays on Dickens and Blake but it came more and more to depend on the positive concepts of 'selfhood', 'creative nisus' and the anti-Cartesian vitalism of Polanyi to fulfil itself in the notions of 'responsibility', 'disinterestedness' and 'creativity': terms which were to be set against Eliot's explicitly theological "Incarnation".

Leavis's use of these philosophers illustrates a further adjustment in his critical practice that was caused by the changed context of this later criticism. This problem of formulating a cogent metaphysic with which to counter Eliot's vision meant that Leavis could not be

45. Ibid, p 129.

content simply to assert that '"life" is a necessary word'. In the essay on Little Dorrit this tactic was capable of producing coherent critical observations because Leavis was able to illustrate his theme with concrete examples from the text. There were limitations to the cycle of interdependence that this engendered, the terminology of evaluation being legitimised by examples from the text under scrutiny. However, a convincing critique of Dickens's novel did become available through the exploration of the terms and their concrete textual analogues. When Four Quartets was in question, the fact that Leavis's ultimate disposition towards the poetry was negative, together with this sense that determination and verification of 'one's own ultimate beliefs' was involved (compellingly), it was necessary for him to be able to exercise a metaphysical perception that was independent of the analysed text. There was no legitimate way that Leavis could utilise a terminology of evaluation for Four Quartets that aspired to substantiating itself by example from a text that was in itself an autonomous complex metaphysic towards which Leavis was intellectually and spiritually hostile ('I am sure . . . that my answers to those questions are not Eliot's' (178)).

Greene and Polanyi especially were of assistance to Leavis in his assertion that 'the "living principle" - the principle implicit in the interplay between the living language and the creativity of individual genius' (49) was 'apprehended but indefinable'. (14) Whilst complete explicitness in the discussion of these ideas was not possible ('finality is unattainable' (49)), this incompleteness enhanced rather than diminished the strength of the argument. Polanyi wrote that

the ideal of a strictly explicit knowledge is indeed self-contradictory; deprived of their tacit co-efficients, all spoken words, all formulae, all maps and graphs, are strictly meaningless.⁴⁶

In acknowledging this premise Leavis increased the authority of his own propositions and gave validity to the seemingly paradoxical ambition to 'define' what was essentially, and necessarily, 'indefinable'.

The passages Leavis quoted from Collingwood, Grene and Polanyi, apart from demonstrating an ancillary point regarding the value to the student of 'English' of some familiarity with philosophical ideas, were not mere external augmentation to an already established line of argument. Rather they were the necessary 'sub-text' of Leavis's case, replacing and fulfilling the role of the substantiating sub-text of his literary criticism. The philosophical proposition performs explicitly the function previously given to, say, Amy Dorrit or Daniel Doyce in the essay on Dickens's novel⁴⁷ - that of giving concrete form to an abstract statement. Without the philosophical propositions that were interwoven into the text, Leavis's thesis would have been adrift in the vague assertiveness of its terminology. To contend that the 'moral sense' in humankind was equivalent to 'human responsibility' and that 'human responsibility' was 'the manifest potency of life' (48-9) would have been unavailing without the support of an analysable literary example (such as Leavis found again in Lawrence for his last

46. Knowing and Being (1969), P 195; quoted in The Living Principle, p 39.

47. The example of Doyce recurs in other contexts as well. his usefulness as an exemplification of a critical point not being limited to the study of Dickens: we even on occasion have the adjective 'Doycean' (The Living Principle, p 238, 249).

book⁴⁸) or explicit philosophical parallels. Leavis found support in Collingwood -

The world of nature or physical world as a whole, or any such view, must ultimately depend for its existence on something other than itself⁴⁹ -

and Grene: 'Knowing is essentially temporal activity, directed temporal activity, drawn by the future pull of what we wish to understand'.⁵⁰ It was in this context that Leavis's critical terminology had its place. It drew on this reasoning when it approached Four Quartets prepared with an antagonistic evaluative metaphysic with which to analyse the poetry. The tenor of the analysis was indicated in the introduction to The Living Principle. Leavis discussed the 'paradox' Eliot represented, and the developed terminology gave shape to Leavis's description:

He has genius (which is of the 'identity'), and the creative nisus works impressively in him, but something in him too makes him deny human creativity - he recoils from being responsible. The denial . . . comes from the selfhood.(63)

The vocabulary of this paragraph is highly specialised and would be practically meaningless were it not for the supporting semantic and

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48. Thought, Words, Creativity: art and thought in Lawrence, (1976).
49. Collingwood, R.G., The Idea of Nature (1945), p 155; quoted in The Living Principle, p 65.
50. Grene, The Knower and the Known, p 244; quoted in The Living Principle, p 65. 'The future pull of what we wish to understand' would be a further way of interpreting Leavis's notion of 'ahnung'

and philosophical accretions that the terms employed have gained during this later period. The introduction to The Living Principle summarised and enforced the significances and implications of the developing terminology and concurrently formulated a strategy for the 'judgement and analysis' of Four Quartets which followed.

Leavis's dissatisfaction with Eliot dated from the publication of After Strange Gods (1934) but it emerged for the most part in increasingly hostile commentaries on Eliot's literary criticism. These comments culminated in the rejection of many of Eliot's main ideas in 'T.S.Eliot's Stature as Critic: a Revaluation' (1958)⁵¹. This rejection had become a settled conviction by the time of Lectures in America (1969)⁵². The criticism was the focus of Leavis's doubts because in dealing with the matters raised by it he was able to argue from a position of strength. He had himself established a coherent method of critical practice which enabled him to make comparative judgements on Eliot's work. With Four Quartets, though, Leavis was not, until much later, thus prepared. He lacked, clearly, the resources of a critical vocabulary of evaluative terms and metaphysical concepts that were of a sufficient weight to counter those of Eliot. In an early review of 'The Dry Salvages'⁵³ Leavis found Eliot's poetry

51. Cf. Commentary (November 1958), pp 399-410, reprinted as 'T.S. Eliot as Critic' in 'Anna Karenina' and other essays (1967).

52. Cf. 'Eliot's Classical Standing', Lectures in America.

53. 'Eliot's Later Poetry', Scrutiny XI (1942), pp 60-71; reprinted in Education and the University (1943).

remarkable for the extraordinary resource, penetration and stamina with which it makes its explorations into the concrete actualities of experience below the conceptual currency; into the life that must be the raison d'être of any frame - while there is life at all.⁵⁴

In his review of 'Little Gidding',⁵⁵ he said that 'a critical account of any poetry can only point, or draw a line round. It must always be left to each reader to grasp for himself what is concretely presented'.⁵⁶

This gives the impression of a criticism slightly in awe of its subject, the second statement especially seeming, to have abdicated the obligation to evaluate via the 'critical account'. Leavis's poetry criticism up to that point (Revaluation, for instance) certainly had not been context with impartial circumscription. It appears that Leavis's criticism faltered in the face of the breadth of the issues raised by Four Quartets. The Living Principle was not simply a summing up of previous ideas, as, in many ways, Thought, Words, Creativity was. It was a wholly new inquiry into Eliot's later poetry set against the background of the philosophical development of Leavis's later criticism. For even if in 1969 Leavis could say that Eliot's poetry was not born of 'rich human experience' but came out of 'a decided poverty',⁵⁷ he was not in a position to focus that observation on

54. Loc cit p 71.

55. 'Reflections on the above' (a response to D.W.Harding's review of 'Little Gidding' in the previous number), Scrutiny, XI (1943) pp 261-67.

56. Loc cit p 267.

57. English Literature in our Time and the University, p 144.

Four Quartets and base a comprehensive critique of the poetry upon it. Only when Leavis's critical terminology was fully commensurate with the demands of the poetry could he stage a full-scale critique.

At the centre of the discussion was the attempt to demonstrate 'the Eliotic self-contradiction - the paradoxical will to deny human creativity'(65) and to show how this contradiction undermined the 'affirmative' aspirations of the poetry. Leavis could only achieve this if he could give a convincing account of what 'human creativity' consisted of and what 'affirmation' resided in, given that Eliot's own account, in Leavis's estimation, was misguided and incomplete.

Leavis was unable to 'endorse'(164) Eliot's "humankind/Cannot bear very much reality" because of the conception of 'reality' that was in question and because the declaration was 'a perverse judgement on mankind'. The conception of 'reality' that was invoked Leavis had to 'repudiate' because of its specific fixture in a Christian tradition.⁵⁸ The attitude towards mankind which he rejected would later recur in 'East Coker' in the lines from Thomas Elyot's Boke of the Governour. Leavis saw the lines

The time of the coupling of man and woman
And of beasts . . .

Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter
Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes . . .

58. Leavis adduced as further evidence for his argument the lines:

. . . the enchainment of past and future
Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
Protects making from heaven and damnation
Which flesh cannot endure. ('Burnt Norton', Section II)

as 'reductivist', reducing 'matrimonic' to mere sex and revealing an 'innocent' assumption that disgust is the 'normal' attitude towards sex (195-6); and reducing the Tudor agrarians to 'yokels, clumsy, crude and gross'. (196) Leavis, reading this against the background of his conception of the 'organic community' and the process of cultural change attendant upon its loss, could not fail to find it antipathetic. Those Tudor yokels, he said, 'created the English language - robust, supple, humanly sensitive and illimitably responsive and receptive' (196) and made possible in their turn Shakespeare, Dickens and Eliot himself. Eliot could not comprehend that 'the English language participated decisively . . . in the higher intellectual and spiritual continuities, so that it had the power to ingest the Renaissance cultural inflow'. (197) Eliot's 'American blankness' was mirrored in the Americanisation of English and European culture that Leavis saw as a feature of contemporary history. The paradox Eliot presented was symptomatic of a general cultural malaise: 'consideration of the plight his poetry reveals sharpens our understanding of our civilisation'. (197)

Eliot was a 'case' to be diagnosed, and the diagnosis could not be confined to Eliot. Its implications ramified into a universal context. Clearly, though, objections such as those raised against Eliot's attitude towards bucolic Tudor society might have been anticipated from the earliest period of Leavis's criticism. The phraseology, in fact - 'a language is a cultural life, a living creative continuity' (197) - echoes that of his first essays in cultural diagnosis. The difference that this later criticism exhibits resides in the way it moves effectively from the 'social' to the 'spiritual'. The critique

of contemporary civilisation which Leavis had reformulated in this later period (as in the polemical essays of Nor Shall My Sword (1972)) was not contained within the frame of social-cultural analysis. A specifically spiritual dimension was introduced. The 'cultural crisis' was characterised not merely as a reductive process of 'mass-production, standardisation and levelling-down' but as manifesting as a profound 'spiritual philistinism'. Eliot's poetry offered a demonstration of this trait that was revealingly limited in its own version of 'spiritual values'. For example, Leavis called the opening of section III of 'East Coker' 'a magnificent piece of Eliotic poetry' because of its evocation of 'the actual presence and process of the world we know'.(203) His great importance was his 'using a major poet's command of the English language to bring home to us the spiritual philistinism of our civilisation'.(205) On the other hand, the adverse judgement on the poetry (and the poet⁵⁹) derived from Eliot's 'fear of life and contempt, which includes self-contempt, for humanity'. This combination resulted in 'a frustrating and untenable conception of the spiritual'.(205)

59. 'It's impossible to say with complete convincingness and accuracy what [Four Quartets] is without some account of its relation to Eliot's earlier poetry and to his curiously (and significantly) contradictory record as a literary critic - all of which involves some observations about the kind of man Eliot was'.

'Mutually Necessary', Universities Quarterly, XXX, no 2 (1976), p 144; a reply to Michael Tanner, 'Literature and Philosophy', Universities Quarterly XXX no 1, pp 54-64.

This statement should be compared with the one quoted above: 'a critical account of any poetry can only point, or draw a line round'.

It is a measure of the advance that Leavis had made in his critical thinking that he was able to argue that 'a conception of the spiritual' was 'untenable'. Such a claim had to be supported by a positive notion of what kind of spiritual conception would be tenable and on this point Leavis was explicit and emphatic: 'there is no acceptable religious position that is not a reinforcement of human responsibility'.(236) This was the direct antithesis of Eliot's assertion of 'human abjectness and nullity' and in order to give the statement of principle substantial force (it was the principle upon which the whole analysis rested) Leavis's familiar allies were invoked. Blake's oft-quoted comments, and all that they had been shown to imply, were used against Eliot's 'spiritual values'. The 'true' (Blakean) artist maintains 'supreme respect for his creativity' and thus 'demonstrates his allegiance to what he knows to be other than himself'. This demonstration was 'the assertion of spiritual values, spiritual significance, spiritual authority'.(205) Thus, any art that was genuinely 'creative' was a positive affirmation of 'human creativity': that is, art did not represent or express the affirmation, it was the affirmation.

This theme in turn was based upon Polanyi's 'vitalism' - at any rate, Leavis's interpretation of it. Leavis found a reaction in Eliot away from 'life's essential creativity' in the lines from section III of 'Burnt Norton':

This is the one way, and the other
 Is the same, not in the movement
 But abstention from movement: while the world moves
 In appetency, on its metall'd ways
 Of time past and time future

The 'appetency' is made 'an inhuman meaningless drive' that is a 'recoil from mechanistic determinism' but which also 'denied life's essential creativity'.(181) To make sense of this Leavis alluded to his interpretation of Polanyi's declaration:

If all men were exterminated, this would not affect the laws of inanimate nature. But the production of machines would stop . . . ⁶⁰

That is, even mechanistic energy was not self-generated but depended on active human initiation: it also was 'a manifestation of that vital creativity which has so wide a range of modes'.(181) Eliot insists, in his search for a 'spiritual reality' on the 'unreality . . . of life in time'(179); but Leavis denied that such a 'reality' could be more than a mere phrase 'unless apprehended out of life, in which we are, and in terms of our human livingness'.(181) (This was followed by a repetition of Blake's "Jesus was an artist".)

The one place in Four Quartets where Eliot, according to Leavis, acknowledged this fact himself was in the terza rima section of 'Little Gidding'. This 'unquestionably major' passage of poetry was the exception in a quartet that evinced on the whole 'a poetic inferiority too sustained to be doubted'.(250) The 'All Clear' section, Leavis argued, had a 'vivid precision' which was 'an involuntary recognition on Eliot's part of the reality of life, life in time'.(250) Eliot's experience as an air-raid warden 'was a rude and salutary exposure to life - a kind of exposure necessary to a life-fearing potential

60. Knowing and Being, p 225; quoted in The Livign Principle p 65. 181 and passim.

major poet'.(256)⁶¹ This underlines Leavis's overall attitude towards Four Quartets. The explicitly 'theological affirmation' ('the hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation') meant that 'the disinterestedness of major creative genius' was not available to Eliot; his 'inner contradictions and irreconcilabilities[were] incapacitating'.(249) Leavis himself was only in a position to hold this judgement because he had organised a supporting alternative critical and metaphysical perspective out of which to argue his comparative (as opposed to merely elucidatory) evaluation.

The comparison centred on the question of 'affirmation' - 'art' for Leavis had an 'affirmative' effect or propulsion before it could aspire to the condition of 'great' art. Since Eliot's invocation of 'Incarnation' was explicitly theological in an orthodox Christian sense, it was seen by Leavis as undermining the claims of the poetry to represent an original inquiry into the individual human condition. Eliot had, as it were, betrayed his originating creative impulse (or 'nisis') by abandoning his individual private search for an adequate 'affirmative' orientation in favour of the answers provided by orthodox Christianity.

The effect of this was to concentrate Leavis's sense of Eliot as a 'life-fearing potential major poet' into a general rejection of the mode and tenor of Four Quartets. Leavis's developed critical terminology, and the now more explicit metaphysical background that

61. It is impossible on reading this not to be reminded of Leavis's experiences in the First World War. (Cf. Hayman, Leavis (1976) p 2.)

supported it, produced this somewhat inflexible account of Eliot's poetry. Leavis's own search for 'significance', 'intelligence', 'affirmation' in the work of art was a search conducted along increasingly strict and limited lines and one that despaired of finding its consummation anywhere other than in the novels of D.H. Lawrence. The changing ethos of contemporary civilisation was not congenial to Leavis nor was he able (intellectually or morally) to adjust to it. His last book, (Thought, Words, Creativity: art and thought in Lawrence 1976)) reverted - in a sense, withdrew - to a discussion, a reiteration, of the values Leavis held to exist in Lawrence as the epitome of the 'great creative artist', but this also represented a reversion or withdrawal away from contemporary society and its literature. The rigour of Leavis's critical attitude - while capable of analyses of problems as complex as those represented in Four Quartets - was limited in its interest in contemporary literature and was obliged to prescribe the creative values of a previous generation (ie Lawrence) as being relevant to the contemporary situation. Even an analysis of why Leavis so totally ignored current literature may have been more valuable than evocation of a writer of an earlier age. In this last period of Leavis's career, the critical vocabulary and its metaphysical substantiation - still largely a matter of a specialised grammar, rather than a philosophical system - proved themselves capable of generating a significant and illuminating critique of something as difficult as Four Quartets, but unable to transcend the constraints of its own moral perspective. This has the consequence, for example, that 'Little Gidding' received only 14 pages of commentary in The Living Principle (compared with 37 for 'Burnt Norton' and 32 for 'The Dry Salvages'), the book seeming to tail off uninterestedly after

the discovery (the disappointment) of Eliot's Christianity. By its very nature, Leavis's critical attitude to the poem was unable to see through its own limitations to represent this kind of 'affirmation' as positive and valid in spite of its orthodoxy. Such were the consequences of Leavis's exploitation of a critical vocabulary determined on elucidating the moral significances (or absence thereof) in the creative work.

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(Note: place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.)

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