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The Critical Method of F.R. Leavis

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THE CRITICAL METHOD OF F. R. LEAVIS

By
Ilene Schoenau Tello

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LIFE

Ilene Schoenau Tello was born in Chicago, Illinois, September 2, 1928.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Certain comments in David Daiches's obituary of Scrutiny will serve to summarize the reputation of F. R. Leavis and Scrutiny, the English critical quarterly with which Leavis was intimately connected during the twenty-odd years of its existence. Daiches speaks of Leavis's "brilliant critical gifts" and calls him "one of the great critics of our time."¹ Of Scrutiny Daiches writes:

It has published some of the most acute literary criticism of our time. . . . "Scrutiny" has not always been right, even if its writers have written as though they alone and they always were right, but it stood for discrimination, it believed in real standards, it preached and practiced the most searching normative analysis of literary works and reputations. If it caused annoyance and bad tempers it has also provoked critical thought, and done so to a greater degree than any periodical of our time.²

Not only are Daiches's judgments on Scrutiny fully applicable to Leavis's own criticism, but "annoyance and bad tempers" are without any doubt reactions shared by many of his critics, both friendly and hostile. At any rate, Daiches's comments indicate that


²Ibid.
a detailed study of Leavis's critical method, the subject matter of this thesis, is an undertaking of value.

Despite the importance ascribed to Leavis by Daiches and others, the quantity of secondary material concerned with his criticism in no way approaches the amount available on, say, the criticism of T. S. Eliot. Though there have been a goodly number of articles dealing with his criticism, and a number of references descending to the level of personalities, the majority of articles have been reviews of a single book, most notably The Great Tradition or D. H. Lawrence: Novelist; and none has attempted to evaluate Leavis's critical method at any length with specific reference to all aspects of his work. The articles listed in the bibliography of this thesis are excellent and have been of great assistance to the writer, but they are more or less partial in approach in the sense just noted. A notable exception is Ian Gregor's 1952 Dublin Review article, which traces Leavis's central critical tenets with reference to all of his books.3

No discussion of Leavis's critical method would be complete without at least a cursory look at the man, his place in English educational and cultural life, and the critical journal Scrutiny. Leavis is still very much alive and still a controversial figure in English letters.

F. R. Leavis was born in Cambridge, England, in 1895, and was educated there: first at Perse School and later at Emmanuel College. In an article deploiring the idea of the "Great Books" program, Leavis outlines his own early classical education:

I left school with a very good start in French and German. I spent a great deal of time as a schoolboy writing Latin proses. . . . I could in those days (so soon left behind!) explain in Greek, observing quantity, stress, and tonic accent. . . . that I was late for school because I had a puncture in my back tire. . . . I worked enough at history . . . to win a university scholarship in that subject. At the university I took the Historical Tripos Part I and the English Tripos, both successfully. Then I was able to spend three years in post-graduate research.  

This résumé is accompanied by an expression of doubt as to his ability to profit from a study of the "Great Books" curriculum, the whole idea of which, with its "Syntopicon," he classifies as "academic." The following remark from the same essay—not unique of its kind in Leavis—may serve to balance the common charges against him of arrogance and dogmatism: "I have a strong (it is often a painful) sense of my limitations."  

Leavis is a Fellow of Downing College, Cambridge, and director of literature studies in that college, which is young enough, incidentally, to have been founded by the grandson of the second Harvard graduate. Lionel Trilling remarks that Leavis made the

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4Cf. pp. 48-49 below.

5F. R. Leavis, "The 'Great Books' and a Liberal Education." Commentary, XVI (September, 1953), 228.

6Ibid.
"relatively new and obscure Downing College a dissident center" of English studies at Cambridge, and Leavis, together with I. A. Richards, has been assimilated into what has been called the "Cambridge School" of criticism. Scrutiny, moreover, was launched from Downing College.

Trilling's "dissidence" introduces the topic of Leavis's reputation in his own university and the related topic of his place in English cultural life in general. Marius Bewley (an American Catholic member of the Scrutiny group) recalls a time when many Cambridge dons "used to display varying degrees of ferocity... at the mention of Leavis and Downing English--the Corrupter of the Young, the Academy of the Corrupted." (At least one critic--J. B. Priestley--had not advanced beyond that view when he published in 1956 what might be considered a classic in the line of personal ferocity.) The proximate cause of this attitude at Cambridge, Leavis himself notes, was his championing of D. H. Lawrence: "But I ought at this point to add that I speak as one who, when years ago...

7Lionel Trilling, "The Moral Tradition," New Yorker, XXV (September 24, 1949), 98.


9Dr. J. B. Priestley, "Thoughts on Dr. Leavis," The New Statesman and Nation, LII (November 17, 1956), 579-80. Dr. Priestley's attack brought a large response, including a letter from Leavis. The whole series of letters (pp. 625-26, 670, 702, 746, 791, and 819 in the same volume) makes interesting documentary reading on the Leavis "case."
Mr. Eliot wrote in *The Criterion* of the frightful consequences that might have ensued if Lawrence had been a don at Cambridge, rotten and rotting others, was widely supposed—at Cambridge, anyway, where it mattered—to share the honour of the intention with Lawrence.\(^\text{10}\)

Leavis has himself been amusingly described as a completely Lawrencian character. An admirer describes his appearance to lecture at an English provincial university where back issues of *Scrutiny* had been looked up and a great dinner prepared. Leavis finally appeared, "having (it was rumored) hitchhiked. He was wearing a shirt open at the neck and carrying over one shoulder a haversack which had been purchased at an army-surplus store; in appearance he was austere, and he had a manner of Lawrencian downrightness." Leavis talked his way through the dinner and consumed only a few tablets; but the writer does not take the opportunity—which he remarks on—of connecting stomach trouble and criticism.\(^\text{11}\)

The causes of the feeling against Leavis go much deeper, however, than an antipathy to the writings of D. H. Lawrence. Leavis has, all through his career, waged war on the attitudes of what is loosely called "Bloomsbury," "though it is something wider than


that—the people who tend to regard the practice of criticism, literature, or literary scholarship as a dilettante activity" and indulge in "the bland assumption that Culture is Culture No Matter What." The writer of this gloss, Malcolm Bradbury, includes the ancient universities in "Bloomsbury" so defined. Leavis's attitude, Bradbury adds, lies firmly in the best of the English Puritan tradition, which "Bloomsbury" considers provincial and despises.

In 1950 Marius Bewley noted an increased recognition in the preceding years, "however unwillingly granted," of Leavis's work, and called him—"by a count of heads"—"easily the most popular lecturer in the University." Bradbury in 1956 found that Leavis's reputation had risen considerably since the death of Scrutiny (in October, 1953), and he documents that rise in prestige. Now, he says, "it is permissible to admit oneself impressed by the review; one can even hear it said, 'I got my first on Scrutiny.'" For

12 Ibid., p. 476.
13 Ibid., p. 470.
15 Bewley, p. 286.
16 Bradbury, p. 475.
"Scrutiny," of course, one can in the context substitute "Leavis."

Leavis is not, however, a simple sufferer at the hands of his detractors. The following sentences appear in the letter (written in 1953) which I have from Mr. Martin Green, who at one time attended Leavis's public lectures. The lectures, he says, are "excellent pieces of high comedy. He enjoys to the full his state of siege and excommunication and his own raids and sorties; while at the same time--really at the same time--suffering and protesting."

Malcolm Bradbury refers to the "acrimonious correspondence" between Leavis and the editor of The Times Literary Supplement which Leavis "is only too pleased to show interested visitors."17

Ian Gregor notes that from his earliest writings Leavis is seen as "essentially a teacher."18 Leavis himself does not make a distinction between his teaching and criticism: "the concern of the university teacher to make something of his job proved to be not in the least at odds with the aspiring critic's endeavour."19 Trilling attests to his success as a teacher in referring to the students "who have devotedly carried his ideas to the secondary schools and provincial universities of Britain."20 The following

17 Ibid., p. 473.
18 Gregor, p. 286.
20 Trilling, p. 98.
material on Leavis the teacher is taken from Mr. Green's letter.

Very briefly, Leavis has two methods of teaching: (1) by lectures delivered to all English students at the University, which in fact amounts to anyone who wishes to attend; and (2) by tutoring, given to English students at Downing College. The title of the lecture series usually offered is "Appreciation and Analysis," although Leavis has also a series on the novel and one on criticism. Printed sheets containing poems, passages from poems, or passages of prose are handed out at the lectures; the passages generally are selected to contrast with one another, and the contrast is bad—good. An example is the use of the "Ay, but to die, and go we know not where" speech from Measure for Measure to contrast with Shelley's Cenci speech of Beatrice, "O/ My God! Can it be possible." Concerning Leavis's lecture method, Mr. Green says:

He says exactly the same things about these passages as he does in his books, and says it every year. But there is no sense of monotony or stagnation because he means it every time. He is a very good lecturer despite obvious disadvantages. One has little sense of progression—one never knows what to expect on a particular day. Also when he reads out the passage, as he always does before commenting on it, he has an adenoidal Australian Cockney voice, the very reverse of, say, Dylan Thomas. Nevertheless, he tears the heart out of the passage by the intensity of his reading. Intensity, as you would expect, is the characteristic virtue of his lecture—method, but a very controlled and self-conscious (in the good sense) intensity.

The tutoring is an "intensified version of the lecture," and Leavis, unlike most Cambridge tutors, "has all his pupils together and talks to them."22

Necessarily there is more interchange here and he is more conscious of his audience, but, necessarily, he has more to give than to receive. I don't imply any egotistic ignoring of them. He is an extremely polite man and very considerate of other people's opinions. But he has, after all, a mission. He preaches rather than converses. . . . One gets put through various Leavisian attitudes, and gradually one learns to do the tricks himself. Or, of course, to dismiss the whole thing.

Little will be said here regarding Leavis as an educational reformer, though reference should be made to Culture and Environment,23 originally published in 1932 and intended as a textbook, the subtitle of which is "The Training of Critical Awareness"; and to Education and the University, which discusses problems described as "my main preoccupation for twenty years."24 The following summary of Education and the University from Leavis's introduction to Mill on Bentham and Coleridge provides a succinct and precise idea of his aims in that book:

I contend there that, while, on the one hand, if the study of literature is to play its central part it must be informed and governed by a more athletic conception of criticism as a discipline of intelligence than it

22Cf. Leavis's views on the superiority of organized discussion groups over the lecture system in Education, especially pp. 47-48.

23F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, Culture and Environment (London, 1950). The 1950 printing of this book is the sixth impression.

24Leavis, Education, p. 7.
commonly is, on the other a serious study of literature inevitably leads outward into other studies and disciplines, into fields not primarily literary, and that the problem of liberal education at the university level, particular discipline being duly provided for, is to exploit this outward leaning to the best advantage.25

This dual emphasis in Leavis's criticism on "particular discipline" and literature's "outward leaning" (which saves him from the implications of "art for art's sake") will be discussed more fully in Chapter II of this thesis.

While concerned in Mill on Bentham and Coleridge with making Mills's otherwise almost inaccessible essays on Bentham and Coleridge "current classics," Leavis admits he is also concerned to "take a propagandist opportunity": that of suggesting what he considers the best approach to and organization of a study of the Victorian Age,26 in line with what he calls exploiting literature's outward leaning. And in an essay only a few years old Leavis proposes in summary form the same sort of program for a study of American literature as a substitute for what he considers the wrongness of the "Great Books" approach to a liberal education.27

The proposed study of Huckleberry Finn is given in some detail.28

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26Ibid.

27Leavis, Commentary, XVI, 232.

28Ibid., p. 231.
All the preceding remarks have brought this discussion to a brief consideration of the critical quarterly Scrutiny and its place both in Leavis's career and in English cultural life in general. A discussion of Scrutiny inevitably includes a discussion of Leavis, and one cannot talk at any length of Leavis without mentioning Scrutiny, which David Daiches so well described as "immitigable."

In his introduction to The Importance of Scrutiny, Eric Bentley gives an excellent account of the rise of the New Criticism and of Leavis's place in the movement. In discussing the literary magazines during the period immediately preceding the appearance of Scrutiny in October, 1932, Bentley remarks that none of them exercised "quite the central function" of The Athenaeum and The Calendar of Modern Letters (which by that time had both expired) and that there was, therefore, a place for a magazine like Scrutiny, "a critical organ that simply and sheerly criticizes old and new literature without naughtiness, without solemnity." In "Valedictory," which appeared in the last issue of Scrutiny (October, 1953), Leavis briefly summarizes the Scrutiny group's attitude in 1932:

In the immediate background was Fiction and the Reading Public, representing a new realization of the cultural crisis to which any serious effort to perform the function of criticism must be addressed. Further (chronologically) in the background was the Calendar of Modern Letters, the last impressive offer, it seemed to us, to

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make an intelligent critical organ maintain itself by dint of its intelligence and its liveliness. . . . we hadn't judged the Criterion to be anything but a depressing failure to justify its name. 30

A fuller explanation of the aims of Scrutiny is given in Leavis's 1933 essay "The Standards of Criticism," 31 to which he himself refers the interested reader; and the three Scrutiny editorials reprinted in The Importance of Scrutiny 32 will provide further information. In their "After Ten Years" editorial, the editors declared that their purpose was "aimed (short of paying 'staff' and contributor) at discharging the function of a metropolitan critical review." 33

Scrutiny depended, it should be noted, from the very beginning, on a group of collaborators who were at that time for the most part young research students at Cambridge. When Scrutiny stopped publication, it was not for want of funds or a public; its very success had brought about the insoluble problem: "the writers it has trained, their value recognized, have been in request elsewhere; 34 and Scrutiny after the war was never able to form again "anything like an adequate nucleus of steady contributors." 35

30 F. R. Leavis, "Valedictory," Scrutiny, XIX (October, 1953), 254.
31 Bentley, pp. 393-406.
32 Ibid., pp. 1-11.
33 Ibid., p. 10.
34 Leavis, "Valedictory," Scrutiny, XIX, 259.
All work for Scrutiny was done without payment, and the magazine survived "without secretary, without business-manager, without publicity manager, and without publicity, for two full decades."³⁶

What, more specifically, did Scrutiny attempt, and with what success? Here is how Scrutiny, in the person of F. R. Leavis, viewed both the attempt and the accomplishment at the end of its career:

In so far, then, as the function of criticism (which, for a full performance, demands interplay between different centres) can be performed in one organ, Scrutiny represents a sustained attempt, over the past twenty years, to perform it in relation to contemporary England, and for the performance, in spite of all deficiencies (of which the Editors would perhaps give a severer just account than anyone else), this sober claim can be made: the volumes offer an incomparable literary history of the period, and at the same time, in such consonance as to be an organic part of the whole coherent critical achievement, what will be recognized to amount to a major revaluation of the past of English literature. That is because Scrutiny was concerned to determine the significant points in the contemporary field and to make, with due analysis, the necessary judgments, and because its judgments have invariably turned out to be right.³⁷

Here we have what Lionel Trilling calls Leavis's forthrightness and downrightness.³⁸

The summation of David Daiches (quoted on the first page of this thesis) substantiates Scrutiny's own claims and can serve as the considered judgment of a disinterested party who neither published in Scrutiny nor belonged to that group. Eric Bentley wonders

³⁶Ibid., p. 259.
³⁸Trilling, p. 98.
after working over the whole file of *Scrutiny* to 1948 in preparing his anthology, *The Importance of Scrutiny*, whether "any other magazine contains so much useful analysis of literature—and by a useful analysis I mean simply one that helps you to grasp a work for yourself, as most of the 'critical' works at present cluttering our libraries do not."39 And, while presenting excerpts in his anthology, he remarks that *Scrutiny* is not "the kind of magazine that is shown off to best advantage by excerpts" but is "distinguished, rather, for the standards it has consistently maintained through thousands of pages."40

The bulk of Leavis's criticism was originally published in *Scrutiny*. Hardly an issue, in fact, in the nineteen volumes was without at least one of his contributions. An index of his importance to *Scrutiny* is seen in the fact that a third of the material reprinted in Bentley's anthology is Leavis's. He has, moreover, appeared on occasion in such journals as *The Kenyon Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, and *The Southern Review*. An interesting group of essays is the half dozen or so he has published in *Commentary* on American subjects for a specifically American audience. Little of the content of these articles is new although one deals specifically and at length with the "Great Books" theory and program for education. It is in one of these *Commentary* articles, moreover, that he

39 Bentley, p. xxvi.
40 Ibid., p. 407.
he first explicitly includes American names among the great practitioners of the novel in English (and explicitly finds Tolstoy the greatest of all novelists).

Because so much of Leavis's material has been reprinted in one or another of his books, bibliographical references to the original publication have not in these cases been made. The summaries of the contents of the various books will take the place of a complete bibliographical history. A small number of very brief unreprinted articles or articles incorporated into the matter of Leavis's books have not been listed in the bibliography.

Two groups of unreprinted essays are of especial interest. Three essays were not reprinted as had been originally intended. In Education and the University Leavis referred to a manual on literary appreciation and analysis that he was working on, but the manual has not been published. His "Notes in the Analysis of Poetry" essays--"Imagery and Movement," "Reality and Sincerity," and "'Thought' and Emotional Quality"--were obviously intended, together with some pages from Education and the University, to be included in that manual.

The four unreprinted essays listed in the bibliography which concern the work of Henry James, one of the three novelists considered in The Great Tradition, fill out the discussion in that book.

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41 Education and the University, pp. 73-84.
The bibliography is not complete in one or two other respects. First, since this study was not intended to include a history of Leavis's reputation or influence, no attempt was made to assess or document the extent of either. The writer did, however, consult a number of major works on writers Leavis has dealt with in order to fill out the somewhat meagre number of reviews and essays dealing specifically with his work. F. O. Matthiessen, for example, was found to deal with Leavis's criticism in The Achievement of T. S. Eliot. Leavis, in turn, comments both on Matthiessen's Eliot book and on his Henry James: The Major Phase. Second, the bibliography is incomplete because the writer has not incorporated every brief or minor critical note or book review although it is felt that all important or major reviews of books and evaluations of method and achievement have been represented both there and in the matter of the thesis.

An investigation of Leavis's influence could yield interesting results since specific references and quotations from his writings in all manner of critical and scholarly works, some of which have been of help to the writer, are very common. R. S. Stallman, for instance, justifies his inclusion of the Shelley essay in his

critical anthology, Critiques and Essays in Criticism, 1928-1948, as follows: He notes that this "epoch's" revolution in the conception of poetry was accompanied "by strategic onslaughts against two poets: Milton and Shelley. Of these two repudiations I have chosen to represent the case against Shelley because, here, especially as F. R. Leavis presents it, we obtain a much sounder criticism." Leavis himself considers the Shelley piece a key essay, and Ian Gregor singles it out as showing his moral interest and mode of making moral judgments at its best. Abrams quotes from the Wordsworth essay in The Mirror and the Lamp. Lionel Trilling in his edition of Keats's letters recalls Leavis's insistence that the letters and the poetry are two different things. Robert Penn Warren made extensive use of Leavis's essays on Conrad--partly for disagreement--in his introduction to the Modern Library Nostromo. Morton Zabel carefully includes key judgments of Leavis in his introductions to the Viking Portable Library's Conrad and James.


This kind of reference, however, could be extended indefinitely.

Another aspect of his influence, which Leavis himself somewhere considers a profitable research project on Scrutiny, is indicated by his "confession" of being "touched" by Cleanth Brooks's "generous acknowledgements" to New Bearings in English Poetry, "that pioneer book" which "has suffered more pillaging than acknowledging."48

Four of Leavis's books are not primarily practical literary criticism. For Continuity, the first of these, published in 1934, contains reprints of certain of Leavis's essays from the first two volumes of Scrutiny. The key essay, however, "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture," was published separately in 1930 as a pamphlet. All the other essays in the book, Leavis writes on the first page, "illustrate, develop and enforce" the "preoccupation" and "argument" of this essay, the enemy both of the essay and the book being a "vast and increasing inattention" to the cultural crisis.49 Among the essays are one on Marxism, "What's Wrong with Criticism?" (Sinclair Lewis's) "Babbitt Buys the World," "Arnold Bennett: American Version," "John Dos Passos," essays on D. H. Lawrence and Irving Babbitt, a "Restatements for Critics," "This Poetical Renaissance"—an analysis of the declining reading public—and a negative

48 The Common Pursuit, p. 236.

49 "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture" is summarized below, pp. 41-45.
essay on Joyce's *Work in Progress*, the positive aspect of which is a consideration of the social conditions of Shakespeare's greatness.

Leavis's introduction to *Determinations* (also published in 1934), reprints of *Scrutiny* articles from the same first two volumes, analyzes once again the contemporary sensibility, sets forth his standards of criticism and the function of literature in establishing the contemporary sensibility, and ends with an optimistic hope for the future (a hope which, incidentally, Leavis has never realized).

**Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness**, written with Denys Thompson and published in 1933, is a most practical application of Leavis's preoccupations. It is a textbook meant to combat the "vast and increasing inattention" referred to above by training the critical awareness of the young to the cheapening and leveling influences of advertising, the films, and the popular press, as well as to make conscious the change that had come over England with the loss of "the organic community." Interesting evidence of this change is found in George Sturt's books, *Change in the Village* and *The Wheelwright's Shop*.

The aims of *Education and the University* and *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge* have already been discussed. *Education and the University* contains reprints of "T. S. Eliot's Later Poetry," "How to Teach Reading"—an answer to Ezra Pound's pamphlet, "How to Read"—and "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture."

Four of Leavis's other five books—*New Bearings in English*
Poetry (1932), Revaluation (1937), The Great Tradition (1948), and D. H. Lawrence: Novelist (1955)—are practical literary criticism. The Common Pursuit (1952), an anthology of essays, is somewhat mixed.

New Bearings in English Poetry was Leavis's assessment in 1932 of significant contemporary English poetry, the "new bearings" being the poetic and critical achievement and re-orientation of T. S. Eliot. The first chapters consider the state of the reading public, deal briefly with the poetic climate of the Victorians and Georgians, and briefly consider the poetry of Yeats, Blunden, de la Mare, Edward Thomas, and Hardy. The bulk of the book is concerned with Leavis's three great modern poets, T. S. Eliot, the Pound of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, and Hopkins. The 1950 "Retrospect" finds little to add to the list of serious poetry written in England since the original publication of the book.

Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry is a companion volume to New Bearings, the later book, Leavis says in his introduction, being planned at the time the earlier book was written. This book, like the other, took its bearings in the present as well as the past. There are general chapters on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and separate essays on Milton's verse, Pope, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats, as well as the highly idiosyncratic end-of-chapter "Notes." The contexts in this book are exceedingly close-woven and intricate—more so than any other of his books—and the book does much more than this simple summary of
its contents can indicate. The essay on Keats, for example, finds him the one aesthetic of genius (though he is found to be much more than that); and Leavis at the same time assesses the whole aesthetic poetic movement by using the aesthetic poets mainly as a foil to demonstrate the poetical superiority of Keats.

The Great Tradition is essentially a study of three novelists: George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad. There is an introductory essay revaluating the English novel as a whole, an analysis of Hard Times, and an appendix giving evidence of George Eliot's influence on The Portrait of a Lady. The importance of the other two great English novelists in Leavis's scheme—Jane Austen and D. H. Lawrence—is asserted but not demonstrated.

D. H. Lawrence: Novelist. Leavis's last book, completes the work of The Great Tradition. It disengages Lawrence's lesser novels and assesses the achievement represented by The Rainbow, Women in Love, and the tales. Lawrence's importance to Leavis is shown in the fact that this is the only one of his books devoted to a single artist. His "Note: 'Being an Artist!" enlists Tolstoi (and, more briefly, Dickens) as an ally (in the form of an incident from Anna Karenina where Vronsky, at loose ends in Italy, decides to become a great painter) in explaining the differences between the real, creative artist and the "playboy" writer. The "Mr. Eliot and Lawrence" appendix summarizes his twenty-five year battle with Eliot over D. H. Lawrence and gives the palm to Lawrence.

The Common Pursuit, while an anthology, is not a mere mass of
odds and ends put together between covers but is very carefully organized. Most of Leavis's theoretical pronouncements, in fact, are contained in this book. The book opens with two essays dealing with the Milton controversy. There are two essays on Hopkins, the first a centennial "summing-up" of the poetry, the second a consideration of Hopkins's letters. He reprints for the second time "The Irony of Swift," partly as a foil for the Dunciad note which follows. A review of Joseph Wood Krutch's Samuel Johnson and a note on Johnson's poetry are followed by an essay using elements of Santayana's essay, "Tragic Philosophy," to expand the treatment of Johnson's inability to appreciate the workings of Shakespeare's poetry begun in the Johnson essays. This essay, "Tragedy and the 'Medium,'" considers the creative use of language as a necessary condition of tragic impersonality and may be considered a theoretical essay--at any rate, Leavis deals as much directly with theory here as he does in any place in his criticism. Macbeth is treated in passing, and the next three essays consider Othello, Measure for Measure, and, briefly, three late plays--Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest. This takes care of about half the book.

The second half of The Common Pursuit is just as carefully organized. There are essays on D. H. Lawrence and a note on Bunyan showing how popular English culture could, at one time, produce a masterpiece of the order of A Pilgrim's Progress. There are essays on the opportunities literature offers to the sociologist, the
economist, and the historian. He answers "fundamental criticism" by Rene Wellek ("Literary Criticism and Philosophy") and at the same time sets forth his own critical position. "The Function of Criticism" expands the discussion of a legitimate use of extraneous material in judging a literary work begun in the answer to Wellek. Two essays—"Christian Discrimination" and "The Progress of Poesy"—represent his continuing battle against the English literary powers. There is an essay on T. S. Eliot's achievement and a piece on E. M. Forster characterizing him as representative of the finer consciousness of our time.

All the essays in Rovaluation and all of The Great Tradition except the introduction and the first part of the Henry James evaluation and the appendix are Scrutiny reprints. Five of the chapters in D. H. Lawrence and the appendix are reprints. All of the Common Pursuit articles are reprints except one or two.

A number of important essays are reprinted in Bentley's The Importance of Scrutiny, notably essays on the criticism of Johnson, Arnold, and Coleridge; a note on Eliot's Essays Ancient and Modern; "Joyce and the Revolution of the Word;" and the introduction to the 1934 The Calendar of Modern Letters anthology, "The Standards of Criticism." Bentley also includes, in an appendix, a list of the contents of the first fifteen volumes of Scrutiny (1932 to 1948).

The writer has discovered no investigation similar to this thesis which is essentially an independent analysis rather than a study of primary sources with an emphasis on evaluating a large
body of secondary material. For this reason, the writer placed
great reliance on previous systematic analysis of critical methods
in the graduate course The Major Critics and on the work of the
Chicago critics (in their Critics and Criticism) in analyzing the
principles underlying the criticism of certain classic and con-
temporary critics. Abrams' The Mirror and the Lamp was both a
guide in the understanding of romantic criticism and a help in
formulating the problem and method of this thesis.

The body of this thesis is divided into three parts. Chapter
II discusses Leavis's fundamental position toward the function of
literature, which is, of course, essential to any discussion of a
critic's methods of dealing with artists and works. Chapter III,
the longest in this study, treats the principles underlying his
criteria concerning the artist, who is at the center of his criti-
cism. Finally, Chapter IV deals with his adequacies or inadequacies
as a critic of the work of art.
CHAPTER II

LEAVIS ON THE FUNCTION OF ART

It was the Romantics who asserted the high status of the artist and made him, for the first time in English critical history, the final artistic arbiter. M. H. Abrams suggests that the disappearance of a "homogeneous and discriminating reading public" encouraged Romantic criticism in its shift from the traditional emphasis on the audience to the poet.\(^1\) Bentley follows the process through the "rather Allstonian" Victorian sage poet,\(^2\) and everyone remembers the opening to Arnold's "The Study of Poetry," which predicts such an exalted future for poetry. At any rate, Johnson's Common Reader and the old aristocratic culture of which he was part and which took the arts for granted have long since belonged to history.

Although Leavis does not go so far as Arnold in his ascription of importance to literature, he does accord it a very high place in today's world, as is evident in the following remarks. "Poetry matters," he says, "because of the kind of poet who is more alive than other people, more alive in his own age." This kind of poet is, as it were, at the most conscious point of the face in his time. The potentialities of human experience in

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\(^1\)Abraham, p. 25.
\(^2\)Bentley, p. xxii.
any age are realized only by a tiny minority, and the important poet is important because he belongs to this (and has also, of course, the power of communication) ... And poetry can communicate the actual quality of experience with a subtlety and precision unapproachable by any other means. 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."

This chapter will consider, first, Leavis's relation to the major English critics, particularly T. S. Eliot and Matthew Arnold. It will examine common charges brought against him and his place in the contemporary English literary world. Since it is a key essay --though his first published-- "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture" will be examined in detail. Finally, since Leavis is essentially a teacher, his ideas concerning the function of art in our time will be examined by way of his educational program.

Leavis's work, like the bulk of modern criticism, was largely derived from T. S. Eliot's The Sacred Wood. Leavis took over, with the work of I. A. Richards and Middleton Murray in the background, Eliot's major premise of "the loss of spiritual authority in the modern world" and "translated it into his own terms as a loss of continuity." And Ian Gregor, from whom the preceding remarks are taken, adds that Leavis's "reduction in explicitness is characteristic." To show the closeness in Leavis's formulation to Eliot, Gregor calls attention to the following remark: "The culture in

4Gregor, p. 56.
question, which is not indeed identical with literary tradition but will hardly survive it, is a sense of relative value and a memory—such wisdom as constitutes the residuum of general experience. It lives only in individuals, but individuals can live without it, and where they are without it, they do not know what they miss."\(^5\)

Leavis himself describes his debt to Eliot as "immense." The Sacred Wood, which Leavis came upon soon after its publication in 1920, ten years before his first appearance in print, received the attention of several "pencil-in-hand" readings a year. What Leavis got from The Sacred Wood were orientations, particular illuminations, and critical ideas of general instrumental value. But if I had to characterize the nature of the debt briefly I should say that it was a matter of having had incisively demonstrated, for pattern and incitement, what the disinterested and effective application of intelligence to literature looks like, what is the nature of purity of interest, and what is meant by the principle (as Mr Eliot himself states it) that 'when you judge poetry it is as poetry you must judge it, and not as another thing'.\(^6\)

Eliot, of course, went on to other things. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" he had proposed "to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism, and to confine [himself] to such practical conclusions as can be applied by the responsible person interested in poetry." This was in 1920. In his preface to the 1928 edition of

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5F. R. Leavis, *For Continuity* (London, 1934), p. 64.

The Sacred Wood he announced that he had passed on to the "larger and more difficult" subject of "the relation of poetry to the spiritual and social life of its time and of other times." At this point Leavis parts company with Eliot and finds in the later writings "less discipline of thought and emotion, less purity of interest, less power of sustained devotion and less courage than before." Although the decline appeared, for Leavis, at the same time that the religious preoccupation became evident, he does not consider them in a cause-effect relation. 8

The same fate overtook Murry and I. A. Richards, whom Bentley lists with Eliot as the founders of the New Criticism, and Leavis inherited the "garden of criticism" which was "theirs by right." Bentley finds Leavis's devotion indicated by the fact that "he began and continued his critical work in the decade of all decades when men were distracted from such things: the thirties." Though Ian Gregor finds instances showing that Leavis sometimes has difficulty in keeping to his side of the "frontier," he has essentially remained in Eliot's early position.

A second line of critical descent is intimated in remarks like the following: "For to insist that literary criticism is, or should

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7 Quoted in Bentley, p. xvi.
9 Bentley, p. xvi.
10 Gregor, p. 61.
be, a specific discipline of intelligence is not to suggest that a serious interest in literature can confine itself to the kind of intensive local analysis associated with 'practical criticism'—to the scrutiny of the 'words on the page' in their minute relations, their effects of imagery, and so on; a real literary interest is an interest in man, society and civilization, and its boundaries cannot be drawn; the adjective is not a circumscribing one.\textsuperscript{11} The descent suggested by the second series of clauses is from Matthew Arnold. Leavis's work in his Arnoldian vein is shown in such things as "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture" and Education and the University. More specifically, Leavis finds Arnold in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" discussing more than the function of literary criticism—the essay discusses "the general function of critical intelligence in a civilized community: Arnold is defining a function that extends the habit, the methods and the qualifications of a good literary critic to the more general field.\textsuperscript{12} In fact, Leavis's educational and critical ideals might be viewed as the production of as many Arnolds as possible for our own age. "The flexibility, the sensitiveness, the constant delicacy of touch for the concrete in all its complexity, the intelligence that is inseparably one with an alert and fine sense of value"—\textsuperscript{13} these are

\textsuperscript{11}The Common Pursuit, p. 200.
\textsuperscript{12}Will on Bentham and Coleridge, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.
the qualities, however severe the criticism to be brought against him, that Leavis finds exemplified in Arnold; and these are the same qualities which it has been the aim of his teaching and criticism to develop in his students and to make part of the modern sensibility under the handicap of a loss of "continuity."

In an earlier essay on Arnold's criticism, Leavis discusses "The Study of Poetry." He finds the famous opening, in which Arnold suggests that poetry is going to take the place of religion, the element which "dates" the essay in the worst sense. Yet Leavis insists that, though we may disagree with Arnold's terms, it becomes correspondingly more important, as other traditions relax and social forms disintegrate, to preserve the literary tradition. He also considers the much-canvassed "criticism of life" tag. Arnold does not, Leavis says, mean to define poetry by means of the phrase, but, while insisting in the essay that there are different degrees of importance in poetry, he uses it to remind us of the nature of the criteria by which comparative literary judgments are made. Leavis explains the intention behind the famous phrase in the same terms he himself uses in *Education and the University*: "we make (Arnold insists) our major judgments about poetry by bringing to bear the completest and profoundest sense of relative value that,

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15 *Education and the University*, p. 35.
aided by the work judged, we can focus from our total experience
of life (which includes literature), and our judgment has intimate
bearings on the most serious choices we have to make thereafter in
our living." The Arnoldian "serious," which appears in the pre-
ceding line, is one of the most frequently used adjectives in
Leavis's vocabulary.

Leavis has essays on the other major English critics, Coler-
ridge and Johnson,17 but their influence on his critical thinking
and practice is in no sense as important as that of Eliot and
Arnold. Johnson is important for Leavis not only for his criticism
but for his relation to Augustanism, with its complete contrast to
present cultural conditions. Leavis finds Johnson "a genius of rob-
ust and racy individuality, notably direct and strong in his appeal
to firsthand experience," who nevertheless "finds himself very much
at home in a cultural tradition that lays a peculiarly heavy stress
on the conventional and social conditioning of individual achieve-
ment, and is peculiarly insistent in its belief that individual
thought and expression must exemplify a social discipline, and
enlist tradition as a collaborator, or be worthless."18 This

16Bentley, pp. 92-93.

17Reprinted in Bentley: "Samuel Johnson," pp. 57-75, and
"Coleridge," pp. 76-87. The quotations that follow on Johnson are
taken, however, from "Johnson and Augustanism," The Common Pursuit,
pp. 97-115.

18The Common Pursuit, p. 104.
quotation indicates Leavis's preoccupation with the problems of our age. Leavis finds Johnson strong as a critic where his Augustan training is in place, notably in discriminating between the weak and strong in the eighteenth century, his limitations appearing when the training manifests itself as unjustifiable resistance.\textsuperscript{19} He moreover uses Johnson's limitations in Shakespeare criticism, notably his bondage to "moralistic fallacy," to set forth, as Gregor notes,\textsuperscript{20} what he himself considers a legitimate moral interest in literature. Johnson cannot understand, Leavis says, that works of art "enact" their moral valuations. It is not enough that Shakespeare, on the evidence of his works, 'thinks' (and feels), morally; for Johnson a moral judgment that isn't stated isn't there.\textsuperscript{21}

In discussing Coleridge's criticism Leavis stresses the great critical gifts evident in "characteristic utterances and formulas," which he quotes, "that promise the literary critic's own concern with principle"\textsuperscript{22} and voices disappointment at the producible achievement, both theoretical and practical. While acknowledging the part that intellectual inquiries had in making him Shelley's "subtle-

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 112-113.

\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Gregor}, p. 60.

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{The Common Pursuit}, pp. 110-111.

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Bentley}, pp. 78-79.
souled psychologist," Leavis stresses rather the qualifications brought from Coleridge's "constant wide and intense cultivation of literature." He finds that locally, even in the best places of, say, the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge "fails to bring his thoughts to a sharp edge and seems too content with easy expression." Indeed, he finds no essential difference between the writings and the reported discourse, both coming from "that inveterate talker," and suggests that Coleridge's experience in the lecture-hall may account for such unsatisfactory things (for Leavis) as the definition of a poem in Chapter XIV of the Biographia.25

So much for Leavis on the major critics. His own conceptions concerning the function of art have been sharply and recurrently criticized as being narrow, puritanical, and dogmatic. A sympathetic critic, Arthur Mizener, finds in him "all the thorniness and some of the real defects of the man who is hell-bent on doing us all good." Two favorable reviews of The Great Tradition, those of V. S. Pritchett and Lionel Trilling, bring up the most common charges; and Trilling, moreover, in referring to Bloomsbury, raises the question of Leavis's relation to the contemporary English

23Ibid., p. 76.
24Ibid., p. 83.
25Ibid.
Here is the opening of V. S. Pritchett's review:

One of the foibles of the puritanical mind is that it inclines to argue with the Lord rather than to praise Him, but it prefers to ferret out the Devil. Hence an obsession with the errors of other sects, which the believer surveys from cantankerous crags of self-righteousness and little hillocks of snobbery on his ever-upward way. Such a Gospel Hall air has been noted before in the literary criticism of Dr. Leavis; all outside the chapel were "light and chaffy" members, to be ground down by a prose that dragged along in the tuneless and often incomprehensible groan of the chapel harmonium.

All this, Pritchett says in his next sentence, is just to show that Leavis is an unattractive writer. Pritchett finds Leavis justified in insisting on his great tradition at the present time "not because it is the great tradition but because the other tradition is bankrupt. It has lost its verve and nonchalance; it has lost its power of narrative." Leavis's tradition, he notes with initial distaste, is intellectual. Commenting on the exclusion of the eighteenth-century novelists, he notes: Those writers have nothing to teach us and surely we ought to be taught?"

Lionel Trilling finds more graceful expression for essentially the same view: "The Cromwellian revolution never really came to an end in England, and we can say of Mr. Leavis that he has organized the lofty intellectual expression of its late, endemic form."

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Here is Leavis commenting on the only acceptable definition of the several Lord David Cecil offers concerning George Eliot:

She might not believe in heaven and hell and miracles, but she believed in right and wrong, and man's paramount obligation to follow right, as strictly as if she were Bunyan himself. And her standards of right and wrong were the Puritan standards. She admired truthfulness and chastity and industry and self-restraint, she disapproved of loose living and recklessness and deceit and self-indulgence.' I had better confess that I differ (apparently) from Lord David Cecil in sharing these beliefs, admira
tions and disapprovals, so that the reader knows my bias at once. And they seem to be favourable to the production of great literature. I will add (exposing myself completely) that the enlightenment or aestheticism or sophistication that feels an amused superiority to them leads, in my view, to triviality and boredom, and that out of triviality comes evil...29

It is, however, misleading to call Leavis a Puritan, for his writ
ings indicate that he is not a Christian,30 though he has no trouble acclaiming the genius of a Hopkins, a Herbert, or a T. S. Eliot. On the other hand, he has only contempt for the Aesthetic religion of art, which he uses as a foil in commenting on Hopkins's religion.31 His position might be indicated by recalling the Arnoldian moral code based on a divorce of ethics from dogma.

Trilling explicitly does not repeat the common charge of nar
rownness, but he instead accuses Leavis of "a basic error about the nature of art--and of life." The challenge comes when Dickens is

29The Great Tradition, p. 14, footnote.

sity, p. 87.

excluded from the great tradition. Though *Hard Times* is admitted, that is only because the book "drives directly and unremittingly at its point of moral attack." Leavis errs in assuming that "art has its true being only in tension and direction, only in completely organized consciousness and moral clarity"; and he "takes no proper account" of other kinds of art: "the art that delights—and enlightens—by the intentional relaxation of moral awareness, by its invitation to us to contemplate the mere excess of irrelevant life" and "the impulse of sheer performance, even of virtuosity, which, whether we respond to it in acrobatics or in the ballet or in music or in literature, is of enormous human significance."32

Yet Leavis does find these things of importance in life itself, as his comments on Dickens’s use (in *Hard Times*) of a traveling circus to represent elements of life that find no place in the "Utilitarian calculus" indicate. The circus athletes represent "human spontaneity" and "at the same time highly developed skill and deftness of kinds that bring poise, pride and confident ease." These skills "express vital human impulse, and they minister to vital human needs." Sleary’s Horse-riding brings the machine hands of Coketown "what they are starved of"—"not merely amusement, but art, and the spectacle of triumphant activity that, seeming to contain its end within itself, is, in its easy mastery, joyously

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32Trilling, pp. 99-100.
Trilling misses in the discussion of *Hard Times* what Leavis insists on: "It has a kind of perfection as a work of art that we don't associate with Dickens"—though he deplores the corollary: the "perfection" is at "one with the sustained and complete seriousness for which among his productions it is unique." This perfection leads Leavis to find affinities with Shakespearian drama (his highest praise) in "concentration and flexibility in the interpretation of life." In general, however, though Dickens was "a great genius" and is "permanently among the classics," his genius was that of "a great entertainer." But the very use of "genius" and "entertainer" in the same breath should indicate that for Leavis, too, there is more than one kind of art, though he rarely occupies himself with the other kinds.

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33*The Great Tradition*, pp. 231-233.

34Ibid., pp. 19-20.


36Ibid., p. 19.

37And here is Leavis defending the possible seriousness of comedy (He is discussing *The Europeans*): "And it is true that Henry James's touch in what must be admitted to be a short novel is light, and that the mode belongs decidedly to comedy. But that is not to say that a light touch cannot be sure or comedy profound, or that a serious burden cannot be conveyed in two hundred pages." ("The Novel as Dramatic Poem (III): 'The Europeans'," *Scrutiny*, XV (Summer, 1948), 209.)
David Daiches's definition of Leavis's place in the English critical scene accounts in part for Leavis's neglect of certain aspects of art. Leavis, in his relation to the English critical scene, "defines that scene with remarkable precision." Leavis's interest "lies in discrimination" and challenges the English view that "stringent evaluative criticism is not as important in a culture as the writing, reading, and enjoying of books, the view that the critic plays agreeably on the surface of literary appreciation and by doing so reflects and communicates enjoyment rather than passes sentence." Further, the English critic "has always had a weakness for the competent minor writer" who writes "agreeably and entertainingly."38

Finally, Trilling finds that Leavis's "error" is caused by an antipathy to Bloomsbury. It is not the actual qualities of Congreve, Sterne, Dickens, and Meredith, Trilling says, "that Mr. Leavis is responding to when he dismisses them but rather the simulacra of these qualities as they have been used in, say, Virginia Wolff's 'Orlando' and as they there suggest the social qualities he dislikes." This "failure to be explicit about even the disproportionately small social issue of Bloomsbury has led to his assimilating a social antagonism into his general critical sensibility, where it works to distort his perception of an important aspect of literature." Leavis, Trilling says, to take one specific example,

suggests that 'The Egoist' has no value at all." Though one could certainly bring this impression away from The Great Tradition remarks, Leavis says the following about the novel (in another essay in another book): "The Egoist tries only to do something simple (as we are bound to feel if we think of The Portrait of a Lady), but, apart from faults of over-writing, over-thronging, and prolixity, The Egoist is entirely successful." (The adjective successful is regularly employed to designate poems or novels that do not fall into the class of the supremely great.) He further adds that the "fashionable term 'myth' could be for once justifiably invoked for The Egoist." And this opinion is given at the expense of E. M. Forster, who is also Bloomsbury but whose A Passage to India is a "classic," a "truly memorable work of literature." In fact, Leavis refers to Forster's comments on Meredith in Aspects of the Novel, remarking that Forster, who "belonged to the original milieu in which Meredith was erected into a great master, enjoys peculiar advantages for the necessary demolition-work." Whatever the disadvantages or inequities of comparing the qualities of authors, it is one of the constants in the critical mode Leavis


40The Great Tradition, p. 12.

41The Common Pursuit, p. 263.

42Ibid., p. 277.

43The Great Tradition, p. 23.
practices. His essential critical impulsion, moreover, is not negative; he is interested in advancing the claims of artists whose accomplishment, he feels, has not been fully valued against those who have perhaps been overvalued at the greater artists' expense. On the other hand, he himself often leaves the impression, as trifling notes, that artists he considers less important have no value at all.

Here is his account of the waste occasioned by what V. S. Pritchett calls the "sociable, extroverted and humanist tradition"\textsuperscript{44} in the English novel, of which Leavis remarks: "The business of the novelist, you gather, is to 'create a world,' and the mark of the master is external abundance—he gives you lots of 'life.' The test of life in his characters (he must above all create 'living' characters) is that they go on living outside the book." But expectations "as unexactining as these are not when they encounter significance, grateful for it, and when it meets them in that insistent form where nothing is very engaging as 'life' unless its relevance is fully taken, miss it altogether.\textsuperscript{45} The disastrousness of the tradition is that it "undoubtedly accounts for the misdirection and waste of much talent." This is probably why Gissing wrote only one "memorable" novel, \textit{New Grub Street}, though he produced many negligible ones. "To pass from talent to genius, it accounts for the

\textsuperscript{44}\textit{Pritchett, p. 59.}

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{The Great Tradition, p. 227.}
neglect—ultimately disastrous for his art)—suffered by James, and it accounts, to stop at this point of history, for "the neglect that embittered Conrad's life as a writer."46

This is the spirit in which he criticizes the English cultural world of today: "The Golenishevs47 in alliance with the playboys (there are professionals as well as amateurs), through the British council, the Third Programme, the organs of literary opinion and the universities, form a comprehensive system which has successfully brought the function of criticism—to distinguish the real artist and secure backing for him, to place the uncreative and to maintain critical standards—into abeyance." The consequence: "There is no need to ask why English literature for so long has had so little new life to show."48 These conditions account, to give a concrete recent example, for the "arrest of Mr. Auden's remarkable talent at the stage of undergraduate 'brilliance.'"49

If this is his last word, "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture" is his first.50 This key essay discusses what Gregor called

46Ibid., p. 153.

47Golenishev is a character in Anna Karenina, the critic whose vocation it is to back "the uncreative 'social' pseudo-artist" against the "real artist." Leavis uses an episode from the novel to illuminate "the growing emancipation of the literary world from critical standards as the educated public disintegrated." Cf. "Note: 'Being an Artist,'" D. H. Lawrence: Novelist, pp. 297-302. The quotations are on pp. 297 and 299.

48Ibid.

49The Common Pursuit, p. 295.

50Reprinted in Education and the University, pp. 143-171.
 Eliot's main tenet—"the loss of spiritual authority in the modern world"—as translated into Leavis's "loss of 'continuity.'" The first part of the essay is general—the second half applies the general implications of the cultural plight to literature.

In this essay Leavis sees himself as continuing the work of Culture and Anarchy, although the situation had very much worsened. Though a commonplace that culture is at a crisis, Leavis begins, there is a common lack of concern which is itself a symptom. Our modern crisis is unprecedented because of the machine, which has brought about change in habit and the circumstances of life at such an unprecedented rate that "the delicate traditional adjustments, the mature, inherited codes of habit and valuation" have been largely replaced by improvisation. The real villain is the "breach in continuity" that threatens: "what has been inadvertently dropped may be irrecoverable or forgotten."

The worst aspects of mass-production and standardization are not symbolized by Woolworth's but are seen in such things as the levelling-down process that accompanies the processes of mass-production and standardization in, say, the newspaper. The same "deliberate exploitation of the cheap response" is found in the films and broadcasting. An unprecedented use of applied psychology in these media and in advertising has had its effect on literature. He considers Arnold Bennett as a maker of literary reputations and finds that his surprising pronouncements went unchallenged because the discriminating reading public had disappeared. At a time when a
strong current of criticism was needed as never before, there was not a large enough public to support a serious critical organ. The general reader solved his problem through the book clubs, which themselves tend to produce standardization. With the majority cut off as never before from the powers that rule the world and the process of literary standardization furthered by, say, the book clubs, it becomes more and more inevitable that work "expressing the finest consciousness of the age" will become so specialized as to be accessible only to the minority. If attempts to standardize the language ("Basic English") should come to pass, the "living subtlety of the finest idiom" of the language would be lost and with it the culture that depends on it.

The future seemed dark to Leavis in 1930—the date of this essay. What was his solution?

Are we then to listen to Spengler's . . . admonition to cease bothering about the inevitable future? That is impossible. 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. 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 will yet be made a tool.

It is for us to be as aware as possible of what is happening, and, if we can, to "keep open our communications with the future."

"Mass Civilization and Minority Culture" had no positive program, but one can be seen to be taking shape in the 1933 introduction to the Calendar of Modern Letters anthology, Towards Standards
The Calendar was the critical journal Leavis referred to in "Mass Civilization" as being unable to find an audience to support it. Founded in 1925, it expired two-and-a-half years later. Considering its failure to find a sustaining audience, Leavis asks rhetorically whether "worry about a moribund literary tradition" does not "condemn itself as patently futile?" Must not the intelligent concern themselves with economic and political revolution--the Marxist platform? Noting that, "in face of the situation recognized above, only the kind of aseriousness that drives directly at practice, and invites that test, has the right to persist in hope," he proposes "a campaign for standards in literary criticism, together with the relevant attention to contemporary civilization in general . . . effectively associated with a movement in the educational field."

His direct drive at practice resulted in educational reform at Downing College and Scrutiny. Here is Trilling's summary of the achievement. He speaks of

the energy of his protestantism, which has made him so notable and stormy a figure in English letters--a man of disciples and enemies, the teacher who has made the relatively new and obscure Downing College a dissident center of English studies at Cambridge, training the students who have devotedly carried his ideas to the secondary schools and provincial universities of Britain;

51 "The Standards of Criticism, reprinted in Bentley, pp. 393-406.

52 Ibid., pp. 398-400.
Eric Bentley calls Leavis one of the few people who welcomed English as a serious subject when it was introduced a generation ago into the ancient universities. While Leavis agreed with dilettantes that literature is an art and with pedants that it is a legitimate area for hard work, he alienated both by insisting that the "hard work was to be applied precisely to understanding the art." Hard work reveals the extent, the greatness, and the complexity of English literature that the dilettante is unaware of; the very effort to rescue the modern mind from contemporary confusion and disorder becomes "an arduous and educative process"; and learning to read well provides the necessary discipline, a discipline of the intellect and the feelings taken together.54

Here is Leavis on the importance of the study of literature at the university. A "serious interest in the possibilities of the study of literature at the university," he begins, "can hardly fail to become a preoccupation with the problem of devising a humane education to take the place of the old, now, in the face of modern conditions, so patently inadequate."55 Exactly how does Leavis envisage the problem? On the one hand, he finds "the enormous

53Trilling, p. 98.
54Bentley, p. xxii.
55Education and the University, p. 9.
technical complexity of civilization, a complexity that could be
dealt with only by an answering efficiency of co-ordination—a co-
operative concentration of knowledge, understanding and will." On
the other hand, "the social and cultural disintegration that has
accompanied the development of the inhumanly complex machinery is
destroying what should have controlled the working. It is as if
society, in so complicating and extending the machinery of organi-
zation, had incurred a progressive debility of consciousness and of
the powers of co-ordination and control—had lost intelligence,
memory and moral purpose."56

It is, therefore, more than ever the raison d'etre of a univ-
ersity to be "a focus of humane consciousness, a centre where,
faced with the specializations and distractions in which human ends
lose themselves, intelligence, bringing to bear a mature sense of
values, should apply itself to the problems of civilization."57
Leavis does not say that the method he is concerned with is the
only way of making such a center possible; but he finds the kind
of English School with which he is associated eminently suitable
for producing the man "of humane culture who is equipped to be in-
telligent and responsible about the problems of contemporary civil-
ization."58

56 Ibid., p. 9.
57 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
58 Ibid., p. 30.
This is because of the essential literary-critical discipline of the English School, which trains the intelligence at the same time that it trains the sensibility. It is "a discipline of thought that is at the same time a discipline in scrupulous sensitiveness of response to delicate organizations of feeling, sensation and imagery." These "delicate organizations" are, of course, the works of the great literary artists. "Without that appreciative habituation to the subtleties of language in its most charged and complex uses which the literary-critical discipline is, thinking--thinking to the ends with which humane education should be most concerned--is disabled."59 This training is not "merely a matter of 'practical criticism' work upon short poems and odds and ends": the more advanced the work "the more unmistakably is the judgment that is concerned inseparable from that profoundest sense of relative value which determines, or should determine, the important choices of actual life." This discipline can, moreover, "in its peculiar preoccupation with the concrete, provide an incomparably inward and subtle initiation into the nature and significance of tradition,"60 the tradition threatened by a "breach in continuity."

The literature in question is English literature, which is called the greatest of all literatures. Although the successful graduate of Leavis's ideal English School will be expected to have

59Ibid., p. 35.
60Ibid.
a wide knowledge of, say, Greek literature and the French (in the original languages) and to have made a study of Dante, his critical sensibility will be trained and developed in the literature of his own language and country. Leavis's essential argument with the Great Books approach to a liberal education is essentially that voiced by T. S. Eliot in his criticism of Irving Babbitt: "in his interest in the messages of individuals—messages conveyed in books—he has tended merely to neglect the conditions. The great men whom he holds up for our admiration and example are torn from their contexts of race, place and time." Leavis doubts whether anyone could ever get through the whole of the Great Books and its Syntopicon and disapproves of its "typical product"—"that large, never-at-a-loss knowledgeableness, that articulate intellectuality, that happy confidence among large ideas, which condemns the possessor to essential ignorance of the nature of real—that is, of creative—thinking." What the English-speaking student will bring away from the study of the English literary tradition is exemplified in this summary of the value of T. S. Eliot's poetry in our own time, the essay on which is reprinted in Education and the University because of its relevance to his argument:

The genius, that of a great poet, manifests itself in a profound and acute apprehension of the difficulties of this age. Those difficulties are such that they certainly cannot be met by any simple reimposition of traditional frames. Eliot is known as professing Anglo-Catholicism

61Quoted in Education, p. 18.
62Commentary, XVI, p. 230.
and classicism; but his poetry is remarkable for the extraordinary resource, penetration and stamina with which it makes its explorations into the concrete actualities of experience below the conceptual currency. . . . With all its positive aspiration and movement, it is at the same time essentially a work of radical analysis and revision, endlessly insistent in its care not to confuse the frame with the living reality, and heroic in its refusal to accept. . . .

To have gone seriously into the poetry is to have had a quickening insight into the nature of thought and language; a discipline of intelligence and sensibility calculated to promote, if any could, real vitality and precision of thought; an education intellectual, emotional and moral. From such a study it would be impossible to come away with a crudely simplifying attitude towards the problems facing the modern world, or without an enhanced consciousness of the need both for continuity and for 'fresh starts.'63

This, then, is the serious function of literature, which qualifies it to take the place of the old humane education. But the study of literature cannot be justified as constituting the whole of a humane education. One of the virtues of literary studies, Leavis notes, is that "they lead constantly outside themselves;"64 and the completion of a literary education, that which would justify its importance, would be a disciplined exploitation of literature's "outward leaning."65 He explores in Education and the University the profit of a "seriously and sedulously pursued" study of the Seventeenth Century as a whole, considered "as a key phase, or

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63 **Education**, pp. 103-104.
64 **Ibid.**, p. 35.
65 Cf. pp. 9-10 above.
passage, in the history of civilization." 66

The following brief survey attempts only to indicate where
the stresses fall in Leavis's discussion. The student would con-
sider in advance the problems of a humane education and the reasons
for making the Seventeenth Century a subject of special study. 67
The whole would be a study "in concrete terms of the relations be-
tween the economic, the political, the moral, the spiritual, reli-
gion, art and literature, and would involve a critical pondering
of standards and key-concepts--order, community, culture, civilization, and so on." 68 The "literary mind" would be manifested not
only in a "use of the literary evidence" but also in "a tact and
delicacy of interpretation, an awareness of complexities, and a
sense of the subtle ways in which, in a concrete cultural situation,
the spiritual and the material are related." 69

All the student's work would be done in the light of a domin-
ant preoccupation--Leavis's dominant preoccupation--"a summing-up,
an evaluating survey, of the changes taking place in the period--
the changes as they affect one's sense of England as a civilization,
a civilized community, a better or worse place to have been born in,
to have belonged to, to have lived in." 70 And in this "evaluating

67 Ibid., p. 51.
68 Ibid., p. 49.
69 Ibid., p. 56.
70 Ibid., p. 54.
piece of work'" the "literary mind finds its proper development—
the completer activity towards which its training tends and which
its habit implies." Finally, the "summing-up" of the century will
not be "a simple business, yielding up an obvious quantity as a
result:"

Just as the most anti-modernist in bias will hardly be
able to feel that the changes that produced toleration
and the Augustan order were mere loss and decay, so the
student most impressed by toleration, the advance of
science and industrial skill and the triumph of reason-
ableness as human achievements will not be able to
ignore the loss remarked on by Mr. Eliot ["The age of
Dryden was still a great age, though beginning to suffer
a certain death of the spirit, as the coarsening of
its verse-rhythms shows." and the loss entailed in a
new separation between polite and popular culture."]

The aim, however, is not to draw "lessons" from the Seventeenth
Century, but, characteristically,
to produce a mind that will approach the problems of
modern civilization with an understanding of their origins,
a maturity of outlook, and, not a nostalgic addiction
to the past, but a sense of human possibilities, dif-
cult of achievement, that traditional cultures bear
witness to and that it would be disastrous, in a breach
of continuity, to lose sight of for good."

The aim of this chapter has been to examine in detail exactly
what Leavis means by his fundamental premise of a "loss of 'con-
tinuity,'" which is at the root of his conception of the function
of literature (at least in our time); and his program for combating

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., p. 56.
73 Ibid.
its consequences in his criticism and teaching. However, even critics sympathetic to his effort and achievement feel that his concentration on the "serious" has led to at least an undervaluing of other, equally vital kinds of literary art.
CHAPTER III

LEAVIS AND THE POET OR ARTIST

We have already seen that poetry—literature—matters to Leavis because certain poets belong to the tiny minority in any age that realize "the potentialities of human experience" in their time and that an age will be "lacking in finer awareness" if "the poetry and the intelligence of the age lose touch with each other." The same paragraph in which these generalizations appear discusses the qualities of the important poet.

...[H]is capacity for experiencing and his power of communication 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. He knows what he feels and knows what he is interested in. He is a poet because his interest in his experience is not separable from his interest in words; because, that is, of his habit of seeking by the evocative use of words to sharpen his awareness of his ways of feeling, so making these communicable. And poetry can communicate the actual quality of experience with a subtlety and precision unapproachable by any other means.2

Leavis's criteria for distinguishing the great novelists are similar. The major novelists count in the same way, "in the sense

1Gf. pp. 25-26 above.

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. The great novelist's interest in art is, "brought to an intense focus, an unusually developed interest in life;" and they are all distinguished by "a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity."3

Leavis's essential concern in his criticism is, therefore, with what he calls the "pre-eminent few;"4 though that "few" make a rather long list. He does not mean to say that there are no other poets or novelists worth reading, as many of his commentators acknowledge; but he sees his task, as Mizener puts it, as that of "discriminating the supremely good . . . from what is merely good. It is not an interest which entails, as Daiches suggests, "rejecting anything less than the best," however.6 Leavis's preoccupation may be seen in his comments on the "superiority" of "A slumber did my spirit seal" over "Break, break, break." The reader who cannot see that Tennyson's poem "yields a satisfaction inferior in kind" to that represented by Wordsworth's, "cannot securely appreciate

3 The Great Tradition, pp. 2, 9.
4 Ibid., p. 3.
5 Mizener, Partisan Review, XVI, p. 547.
the highest poetic achievement at its true worth." 

Leavis does not say that "Break, break, break" and Tennyson have no value at all and distinguishes, for example, among the Victorian poets, finding Tennyson much better than any of the Pre-Raphaelites. The same aim of appreciating "the highest poetic achievement at its true worth" is, to give one more example, present in the essay in which he takes Emily Bronte's "Cold in the earth" and Hardy's "After a Journey"—both on the subject of irreparable loss and both of which he greatly admires—and carries his discriminating process still further, finding the Hardy poem more "sincere" and therefore a higher achievement.

Leavis is notorious for those discriminations which topple famous names from their places of pre-eminence. One of the signs for the "Chicago Critics"—who discriminate on the efficacy of critical systems—of the inadequate critical system which pretends "to omit nothing essential" is the tendency "to set up restrictive canons of poetic excellence and, in the name of these, to 'revalue' negatively large parts of the established tradition."  

Leavis is

7"Thought' and Emotional Quality: Notes in the Analysis of Poetry," Scrutiny, XIII (Spring, 1945), 55.

8Revaluation, p. 6.

9"Reality and Sincerity: Notes in the Analysis of Poetry," Scrutiny, XIX (Winter 1952-1953), 90-98. Leavis's comparison of the poems is examined in some detail on pp.88-89 of this chapter.

not named; but "revaluation" is his own word, and specific references in *Critics and Criticism* make it probable that he would be included in this category of inadequate critics. Leavis, however, uses the word "tradition" in T. S. Eliot's sense and justifies his "revaluations" on the grounds that an account of the past of English poetry must be from the point of view of someone living in the present (though, "if he is a critic, he will endeavour to be as little merely individual as possible.")\(^\text{11}\) He specifically traces his revaluation of nineteenth-century poetry to T. S. Eliot, who, he says, "re-orientated criticism and poetic practice, effecting a profound change in the operative current idea of the English tradition," in the achievement of which "his critical writings have played an indispensable part."\(^\text{12}\) Leavis finds a like alliance of creation and criticism in Wordsworth and Coleridge and adds that such an achievement can be expected whenever tradition has failed the artist.\(^\text{13}\)

Two famous series of writers play a very small part in his accounts of tradition in poetry and the novel: the eighteenth-century *novelists* and the Victorian poets. "Out goes, then," says Pritchett, "the whole of the eighteenth-century novel into literary history."\(^\text{14}\) Out goes, one might add, the whole of Victorian poetry;

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\(^{11}\) *Revaluation*, pp. 1-2.


\(^{13}\) *New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 196.

\(^{14}\) *Pritchett*, p. 59.
for Leavis finds only one major poet in the period: Hopkins. What
does he offer in the place of these adversely "revaluated" groups?

In the work of the great novelists from Jane Austen to
Lawrence—I think of Hawthorne, Dickens, George Eliot,
Henry James, Melville, Mark Twain, Conrad—we have a
creative achievement that is unsurpassed; unsurpassed by
any of the famous phases or chapters of literary history.
In these great novelists (I do not offer my list as
exhaustive of the writers who might be relevantly adduced,
but confine myself to those who present themselves as the
great compelling instances) we have the successors of
Shakespeare; for in the nineteenth century and later the
strength—the poetic and creative strength—of the English
language goes into prose fiction. In comparison the formal
poetry is a marginal affair. And the achievement of
T. S. Eliot, remarkable as it was, did not reverse the
situation.15

While Leavis's criticism is part, essentially, as all our
most influential modern criticism is, of that great re-orientation
of criticism in the nineteenth century toward the artist, his con-
ception of literature is not, for example, Carlyle's or Sainte-
Beuve's. In Carlyle's system the artistic product becomes almost a
by-product of the artistic personality. A "true classic" for Sainte-
Beuve, is "an author,"16 and he acknowledges, moreover, that he
finds it difficult to judge a work independently of a knowledge of
the man himself: "To me, literature—literary production—is not at
all distinct or at least separable from the rest of the man and his
nature."17 A classic for Leavis is not an author, but a work: the

16"What is a Classic?", quoted in Walter Jackson Bate, ed.,
17"Sainte-Beuve on His Own Method," Quoted in Bate, p. 497.
literature of England is "a long-established literature, where (that
is) we expect the field to be more or less strictly delimited in
accordance with the conception of literature as a matter of memor-
able works." Nevertheless, he does not discuss the works which he
finds significant in isolation, for they are treated also as signs
of the instrumentality or artist who produced them.

This brings us to a few brief remarks on "Tradition and the
Individual Talent," because it is primarily from this essay that
Leavis derives his method of dealing with artists. Eliot here sets
forth his "Impersonal" theory concerning both the work of art and
the artist. First, Eliot's "tradition" may be briefly recalled:
"The existing monuments" of literature "form an ideal order among
themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the
really new) work of art among them." The other aspect of this "Im-
personal theory of poetry," the relation of the artist to his work,
may be indicated by these dicta: "the more perfect the artist, the
more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the
mind which creates"; and the poet expresses not "a 'personality
... but a particular medium." The effect of both aspects of im-
personality is to direct the attention of the reader and critic
away from the artist to the work and to put the work into a definite

18"The Americanness of American Literature," Commentary, XIV

19T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays (London, 1951, 3rd enlarged
and impersonal frame of reference. These criteria Leavis has made the center of his critical method, and "impersonality" is undoubtedly the most important word in his critical vocabulary.

One or two other remarks from Eliot are often alluded to by Leavis. Tradition "cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour." The acquisition of Eliot's "tradition" might be considered Leavis's great critical effort, notably in Revaluation and The Great Tradition, where he offers his accounts of "tradition" in English poetry and the English novel respectively. The second remark comes from Eliot's general essay on the eighteenth century: "Sensibility alters from generation to generation in everybody, whether we will or no; but expression is only altered by a man of genius." Eliot, of course, is considered such a poet, as was Wordsworth, for example, a century before. Although Arnold came closest among the Victorians in explicit references in his poetry to dealing with the world he lived in, his most serious interests do not inform his poetry; he did not "alter" expression, as the rest (except Hopkins) did not; and he is, therefore, not a major poet.22


21 The essay was originally printed as the introduction to an edition of Johnson's satires. The whole pertinent paragraph is reprinted in Education and the University, p. 140.

22 Revaluation, pp. 186-191.
Though Leavis's artist is not the "man who suffers" but the "mind which creates," his criteria come directly from life and do not represent a unique set of aesthetic values. His gloss of Arnold's "criticism of life" has already been quoted. Leavis, however, has never considered Eliot's religious standards. He notes, in the negative essay, "The Logic of Christian Discrimination": "If Christian belief and Christian attitudes have really affected the critic's sensibility, then they will play their due part in his perceptions and judgments, without his summoning his creeds and doctrines to the job of discriminating and pronouncing." Leavis finds that in Eliot's later criticism religion had taken the place of earlier critical virtues. Indeed, his over-all criticism of Eliot, particularly of the plays and the later criticism, is negative. Leavis's "fundamental division from Eliot" as well as the "ultimate curve" in his criticism, as Ian Gregor notes, is seen in their positions concerning D. H. Lawrence.

Leavis had adduced Flaubert in The Great Tradition (quoting from D. H. Lawrence) as "figuring to the world the 'will of the writer to be greater than and undisputed lord over the stuff he writes.'" This attitude in art "is indicative of an attitude in life—or towards life." Flaubert, Lawrence comments, "stood away from life

23 Cf. pp. 30-31 above.

24 The Common Pursuit, p. 250.

25 Gregor, p. 63.
as from a leprosy."26 In D. H. Lawrence Leavis finds that Eliot's attitude towards life is, "not less than Flaubert's, one of distaste and disgust." Although Eliot has his Anglo-Catholicism rather than the "religion of art" to "complement the distaste for life and humanity," so Flaubert had his "romanticism of the exotic." Leavis concludes that, "if we think of the total case of each of the writers," there is some analogy between Eliot's religion and Flaubert's romanticism "bearing on the nature of Eliot's Christianity."27

The discussion arises because of Eliot's inability or refusal to see the qualities that make Lawrence, for Leavis, the true creative artist.28 Lawrence, and all of Leavis's great novelists, are the "servants of life"29 rather than undisputed lords of what

26The Great Tradition, p. 8.
28In answering Eliot's charges of "some defects of knowledge about religion and theology" in Lawrence, he answers: "I am not, then, impressed by any superiority of religious and theological knowledge in a writer capable of exposing what is to me the shocking essential ignorance that characterizes The Cocktail Party—ignorance of the possibilities of life. . . ." He goes on to comment about the effect the play must have on a kind of reader or spectator of whom Eliot seems unaware: "the reader who has, himself, found serious work to do in the world and is able to be unaffectedly serious about it, who knows what family life is and has helped to bring up children and who, though capable of being interested in Mr. Eliot's poetry, cannot afford cocktail civilization and would reject it, with contempt and boredom, if he could afford it." D. H. Lawrence, p. 308.
they write. The "possibilities of living" that Leavis so often mentions cannot be separated from "direct vulgar living and the actual"—the great artist brings into his work "his most serious interests as an adult living in his own time."30 Seymour Betsky (a member of the Scrutiny group) finds the novelists that interest Leavis those "who explore with concrete notation those non-dogmatic, traditional civilized values which engage our mature respect."31

Here is Gregor's summary of the difference between Leavis and Eliot, which leads him to characterize them, respectively, as romantic and classic: "For Leavis, Lawrence matters only because he was a literary artist, his 'philosophy' does not exist to be discussed in any serious way apart from that, 'his gift lay not in thinking, but in experiencing, and in fixing and evoking in words the feelings and perceptions that seemed to him most significant.' If he is approached in this way, his work will be seen as an unmistakable expression of courage, health and vitality, 'he has an unfailingly sure sense of that which makes for life and that which makes against it.'"32

For Eliot, Leavis's criteria are not "sufficiently explicit, he himself has written of Lawrence's speaking again and again against the living death of modern material civilization, and yet he

32Gregor, pp. 62-63.
reaches a total estimate which is heavily qualified (that would hardly be possible for Leavis)—one must go further in definition of value and to go further is to find that 'Lawrence was an ignorant man in the sense that he was unaware of how much he did not know.'

Gregor fixes the difference between Leavis and T. S. Eliot by using T. E. Hulme's distinction between the classical and romantic views, for which, he notes, the words religious and humanist can be substituted. The romantic views man as "intrinsically good, spoilt by circumstance," while to the classic, man is "intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent." The romantic views the nature of man as a "well"; the classic, a "bucket." Man, to the romantic, is a "reservoir full of possibilities," while to the classic he is a "very finite and fixed creature." Though such a distinction would probably seem to Leavis, "nearer to caricature than characterization," it nevertheless, he adds, "like caricature, seizes an essential truth."  

Leavis is a critic, as R. S. Crane observes, "primarily of poetry or the poet rather than . . . of poems."  

Revaluation, especially the chapters on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is a study of poetry; and The Great Tradition is primarily a study of "poets" (James, for example, is specifically called a "poet-

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
35 Cf. pp. 95-96 below.
novelist." Leavis makes no distinction between the method to be employed in discussing poetry and poets:

But no treatment of poetry is worth much that does not keep very close to the concrete: there lies the problem of method. The only acceptable solution, it seemed to me, lay in the extension and adaptation of the method appropriate in dealing with individual poets as such. In dealing with individual poets the rule of the critic is, or should (I think) be, to work as much as possible in terms of particular analysis—analysis of poems or passages, and to say nothing that cannot be related immediately to judgments about producible texts.

In discussing the relation of individual artists to tradition, he notes: "[T]he less important poets bear to tradition an illustrative relation, and the more important bear to it the more interesting kinds of relation: they represent significant development. One deals with the individual poet in terms of representative pieces of his work; one deals with tradition in terms of representative poets." Prose, Leavis elsewhere notes, "demands the same approach" as poetry though it "admits it far less readily," and the novelist "is to be judged an artist (if he is one) for the same kind of reason as a poet is." 39

Seymour Betaky finds Leavis's great distinction to be an ability "to define, to fix by delicate and scrupulously legitimate

36 The Great Tradition, p. 12.
37 Revaluation, p. 3.
38 Ibid.
39 Education and the University, p. 125.
analysis and comparison within the context of a single writer's work, or within the context of the work of related writers, the distinctive and distinguishing qualities of that work." He chooses "key points, significant foci, where the characteristic strength or weakness of the work is exhibited in analyzable ways." The novelist (or poet) must exhibit a full command of all the details necessitated by his theme, a mastery of the "facts," and must communicate that complex theme with a concrete realization. With "full command" of the facts (which represents the "strength" of the writer) must go a "specificity and completeness in the rendering." 40

The following, central (and longest) section of this chapter, which examines in concrete analyses key terms relating to the artist, follows, for the sake of convenience of organization, the artist-man dichotomy already used. The discussion of the artist includes a survey of the relation between "technique" and sensibility and a more lengthy examination of the term impersonality in action. The second part of the section, concerning the "man who suffers," considers Leavis's views on the use of biography, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and his general stand on the critic's use of information extraneous to the work of art. The section ends with an extensive survey of aspects of the important topic of the artist's relation to his own time since in Leavis's system it is this awareness that makes him a great artist, if he is one.

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40 Betsky, pp. 527-528.
Leavis's use of the word "technique"—in a general sense—provides a good introduction to a more detailed study of his method of dealing with artists. Although "technique" must be spoken of as something distinct from "sensibility," it "can be studied and judged only in terms of the sensibility it expresses." He contrasts the techniques of Shakespeare and Joyce; and, while Shakespeare's is justified, that of Work in Progress condemns the work. In the mature and especially the late plays of Shakespeare, "it is the burden to be delivered, the precise and urgent command from within, that determines expression—tyrannically." Shakespeare's greatness is "the complete subjection—subjugation—of the medium to the uncompromising, complex, and delicate need that uses it. Those miraculous intricacies of expression could have come only to one whose medium was for him strictly a medium; an object of interest only as something that, under the creative compulsion, identified itself with what insisted on being expressed: the linguistic audacities are derivative." Joyce's development is seen to be the other way. Though, for example, the description of Stephen Dedalus walking over the beach has a "Shakespearian concreteness" ("the rich complexity it offers to analysis derives from the intensely imagined experience realized in the words"), "it is plain" that in Work in Progress "the interest in words and their possibilities comes first." Even in the best parts, "we can never be unaware that

43 Education and the University, p. 113.
the organization is external and mechanical." The medium is unjustifiable because Joyce has no "commanding theme, animated by some impulsion from the inner life capable of maintaining a high pressure." In fact, the development of the medium is correlated with and is the consequence of the lack of a theme.44

The same sort of distinction is employed to distinguish the significant in the poetry of Ezra Pound, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley alone establishing his claim to being a major poet. In this poem there is "a pressure of experience, an impulsion from deep within." The Cantos, however, are dismissed: "The methods of association and contrast employed in The Waste Land subserve an urgency pressing from below; only an austere and deep seriousness could have controlled them into significance. But the Cantos appear to be little more than a game—a game serious with the seriousness of pedantry."45

"Hypertrophy of technique" is a term that comes into play with the late James and with Hopkins. The peculiar development of Hopkins's interest in pattern or "inscape" is related to a "certain restriction in the nourishing interests behind [his] poetry. It is as if his intensity, for lack of adequately answering substance, expressed itself in a kind of hypertrophy of technique, and in an excessive imputation of significance to formal pattern."46


45 New Bearings in English Poetry, p. 149.

46 The Common Pursuit, p. 52.
conditions of this restriction and hypertrophy and James's hypertrophy will be dealt with under the discussion of "isolation" below, but the method by which Leavis places the Hopkins poems should be noted here, "His supreme triumphs, unquestionably classical achievements," are the last sonnets, which in their "achieved 'smoother style' triumphantly justify the oddest extravagances of his experimenting." Characteristically, "Technique here is the completely unobtrusive and marvellously economical servant of the inner need, the pressure to be defined and conveyed." At the other extreme are such poems as Tom's Garland and Harry Plowman, where, in the absence of controlling pressure from within, the elaborations and ingenuities of 'inscape' and of expressive license result in tangles of knots and strains that no amount of reading can reduce to satisfactory rhythm or justifiable complexity. 47

On the other hand, Leavis defends Pope against the view that he is concerned in his poetry only with technique--with "the mere perfection of a regulated line of verse." 48 In commenting on "the key" to his "command of the sublime, and to his mastery of transition"--his mastery of technique--he points to the word "Order" in the following couplet from Book IV of the Dunciad:

Then rose the Seed of Chaos, and of Night,
To blot out Order, and extinguish Light.

47 Ibid., p. 57.

48 Revaluation, p. 92.
"Order" for Pope is "no mere word, but a rich concept imaginatively realized: ideal Augustan civilization."49

"Need," it will have been noticed from the discussion on technique, is a key word. It is "need" that makes "the man who suffers" the "mind that creates" and the word recurs throughout Leavis's writings. The title of one of the essays in analysis, "Thought and Emotional Quality," neatly brings together two of his three most important critical terms concerning the artist. The third, and most important, impersonality, reconciles the others. His characteristic use of the terms is clearly seen in the general comparative comments on three of his great novelists and in the discussion, in the essay just referred to, of Metaphysical poetry.

To make his essential discriminations concerning George Eliot, Leavis compares her first with Conrad and then with Jane Austen. Though the stress has been on her massive intellect and moral preoccupations, Conrad cannot be said not to have moral preoccupations; the "questions that animate" Nostromo are "what do men live by? what can men live by?", and his "dramatic imagination" is "intensely moral." An essential difference cannot be found in her intellectual distinction either, for Conrad is "clearly a man of great intelligence and confirmed intellectual habit." But what can be said is that Conrad "is more completely an artist." Conrad ("novelist and seaman") "achieved a wholeness in art" not characteristic of George

49 The Common Pursuit, p. 92.
Eliot ("novelist and high-level intellectual middleman"). Her fault is not "patches, say," in her novels, "of tough or drily abstract thinking undigested by her art," but (and the statement is carefully qualified) "an emotional quality, something that strikes us as the direct (and sometimes embarrassing) presence of the author's own personal need." The evidence that Conrad had been "in his time hard-pressed is everywhere in his work, but, in any one of the great novels, it comes to us out of the complex impersonalized whole."

A comparative glance at Jane Austen brings the same conclusion. Like Eliot, she, too, is "earnestly moral": "The vitality of her art is a matter of a preoccupation with moral problems that is subtle and intense because of the pressure of personal need." Though the nature of the need and the range of interests are different, the essential difference does not lie in Eliot's "massive intellect" (Jane Austen is found to be very intelligent), but, once more, in "an emotional quality, one to which there is no equivalent in Jane Austen." 50 The emotional need in George Eliot, in other words, is not always impersonalized and brought under the control of her intelligence, but is offered essentially in itself--for itself. 51

50 The Great Tradition, pp. 30-33.

51 Cf. Revaluation, p. 214: "Shelley, at his best and worst, offers the emotion in itself, unattached, in the void. 'In itself' 'for itself'--it is an easy shift to the pejorative implications of 'for its own sake. . . .’"
"Thought" and Emotional quality" uses the same triad of terms. It is impossible to reproduce here the contexts that give Leavis's arguments whatever validity they may have, but it might be useful to list the poems which exhibit "thought" and those which show "emotion." Distinctions, incidentally, are made all down the line—in the nature of the "thought" and in the varying degrees of quality of "emotion." The first group—which poems which exhibit "thought"—consists of Scott's "Proud Maisie," Wordsworth's "A slumber did my spirit seal," D. H. Lawrence's "Piano," a piece from Marvell's "Horatian Ode," Blake's "The Sick Rose," and T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets. The "emotional" poems are Tennyson's "Tears, idle tears" and "Break, break, break," Lionel Johnson's "By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross," and Shelley's "Music When Soft Voices Die." Neither "thought" nor "emotional quality" are found to be simple quantities, and Leavis's essential distinctions will have force—if they do—for the reader, only after a consideration of his close and varied references to the concrete poems. We have already quoted Leavis's judgment to the effect that the "satisfaction" which "Break, break, break" "yields" is "inferior in kind" to that of "A slumber did my spirit seal." Leavis goes on to ask:

52Four Quartets are not analyzed, but the reader is referred to Leavis's essay, "T. S. Eliot's Later Poetry," reprinted in Education and the University, pp. 87-104. In "Burnt Norton" Eliot does "by strictly poetical means the business of an epistemological and metaphysical inquiry." (p. 94)
"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 ... of spiritual health." 53 The entire argument is developed at length and very carefully in the analysis of Shelley's poetry in Revaluation, 54 but the essential criteria emerge sufficiently in the discussion of the Metaphysical "habit." The "standards" invoked inevitably and explicitly bring up the topic of impersonality. "Impersonality" finds expression in the following analysis of Metaphysical poetry, which suggests at the same time that there are many kinds of poetry.

The part of "thought" in the Metaphysical strength deserves, Leavis says, more consideration than that indicated in the head "Metaphysical wit": "there is more to it than subtle ratiocination—the surprising play of analogy. The activity of the thinking mind, the energy of intelligence involved ... means that, when the poet has urgent personal experience to deal with it is attended to and contemplated—which in turn means something of separation, or distinction, between experiencer and experience." This distinction is impersonality. Leavis continues: "Their attempts were always analytic—to analyze your experience you must, while keeping it alive and immediately present as experience, treat it in some sense as an object." 55

And here is the relation of Metaphysical poetry to all types of good poetry: "That is, an essential part of the strength of good Metaphysical poetry turns out to be of the same order as the strength of all the most satisfactory poetry: the conceit, the Metaphysicality, is the obtrusive accompaniment of an essential presence of 'thought' such as we have in the best work of all great poets."\(^{56}\)

Leavis remarks in the introduction to Revaluation that Wordsworth "illustrates a relation between thinking and feeling that invites the critic to revise the limited view of the possibilities that is got from studying the tradition of wit."\(^{57}\)

The distinction of the Metaphysical "habit" is that it favors the presence of "thought." But it has its own inclinations toward vices, vices "antithetical to those attendant on the habit" represented in "'Thought and Emotional Quality" by Shelley and the Tennyson of "Tears, idle tears"--"they are a matter, not of the cultivation of emotion for its own sake, but of the cultivation of subtlety of thought for its own sake; we find ingenuities of analogy and logic (or quasi-logic) that are uncontrolled by a total imaginative or emotional purpose."

Finally, he distinguishes between "great" and "successful" Metaphysical poems in terms of "thought" and "emotion": "And in a great many successful Metaphysical poems the emotion seems to have

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\(^{56}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{57}\text{Revaluation, p. 8.}\)
a secondary and ancillary status: without some fulcra of emotional interest the ingenious system of tensions--the organization of 'wit' couldn't have been contrived; and that says pretty much all there is to say about the presence of emotion." But when a poet of the metaphysical habit, the Donne, say, of the Nocturnall, is "personally moved and possessed by something profoundly experienced ... then we have poetry of very exceptional emotional strength."58 The profound experience is the "personal need" that insists upon expression.

Another important word used in the preceding paragraph is "organization"--here, of the poem, but used more generally (and regularly) of the artist himself. In discussing "emotion recollected in tranquility," he finds that Wordsworth's spontaneity "involves no cult of the instinctive and primitive" but is a spontaneity "supervening upon complex development, a spontaneity engaging an advanced and delicate organization." The essential difference between Wordsworth and Shelley is not a difference of poetic gift but the absence of such an organization in Shelley, which left him only poetical habits to fall back upon. Wordsworth's "emotion," unlike Shelley's, was the product of "emotional discipline, critical exploration of experience, pondered valuation and maturing reflection." Commenting on Wordsworth's decline, Leavis finds that "the

exquisitely fine and sensitive organization of the poet no longer informed and controlled his pen.\(^5^9\) In combating the idea that Pope is superficial and concerned only with technique, he remarks: "His technique, concerned as it is with arranging words and 'regulating movements, is the instrument of a fine organization."\(^6^0\)

The divorce between emotion and thought is not limited to the poetry of Shelley, the Victorians, and the Aesthetes, but occurs, for example, in the "bad" half of Daniel Deronda and in The Plumed Serpent, which might be described—in terms he uses of Shelley—as the products of "switching off" the "critical intelligence."\(^6^1\)

Both artists are concerned with religion. D. H. Lawrence is "single-mindedly intent on imagining . . . a revival of the ancient Mexican religion."\(^6^2\) George Eliot, "too intelligent to be able to offer herself the promptings of Comtism, or of the Victorian interest in race and heredity, as providing the religious exaltations she craved," is able in her imaginative use of the Jewish problem "to play with daydream unrealities so strenuously as not to recognize

\(^5^9\) The quotations on Wordsworth and Shelley come from Revaluation, pp. 170, 212, 183. (Italics mine.)

\(^6^0\) Ibid., p. 84. (Italics mine.)

\(^6^1\) Revaluation, p. 215.

\(^6^2\) The quotations concerning The Plumed Serpent come from D. H. Lawrence, pp. 67-68.
them as such."63 All in *Daniel Deronda* that issues "from this inspiration is unreal and impotently wordy," and Leavis speaks of the "wastes of biblicality and forvid idealism." In the same way, Lawrence's "evoking of the pagan renascence . . . is monotonous and boring." Just as "the religion of heredity or race is not, as a generalizable solution of the problem, one that George Eliot herself, directly challenged, could have stood by," so in *The Plumed Serpent* the "deeper governing intention or impulse" is to escape the inevitable "complexities of attitude" "which would have made sustained imaginative conviction in such an enterprise . . . impossible." Both judgments, in Leavis's full account, are somewhat amplified and qualified; and he finds in both unsatisfactory performances evidences of the great intelligence of their creators.

If the relation between sensibility and technique and between "thought," emotion, and impersonality belong to "the mind which creates," the following topics pertain to "the man who suffers." Leavis is essentially concerned with the artist, and any judgments regarding the works must be made independently of the man. This does not mean, however, that information concerning the man must never be used in discussing the work, though he regrets the knowledge we have of Pope's life and personal character because of the temptation it offers the reader to think in terms of envy, venom.

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63 The quotations concerning *Daniel Deronda* come from *The Great Tradition*, pp. 80-81, 85.
malice, and spite. There is evidence in the satires of strong personal feelings; but "even—or, rather, especially—where these appear strongest, what (if we are literate) we should find most striking is an intensity of art." Interestingly enough, Dryden's personal qualities are found partly responsible for his inferiority to Pope as a poet. The end of the Dunciad Leavis finds "finer" than anything in Dryden, its "greater intensity" being something that Dryden, "with his virtues of good humour and good nature, was incapable of."

When Leavis makes his severely limiting judgments concerning the poetry of Shelley—"the usual Shelleyan emotionalism . . . indulgence, insistence, corrupt will or improper approach"—he adds that he is not attacking the man: "Shelley, of course, had ideas and ideals; he wrote philosophical essays, and it need not be irrelevant to refer, in discussing his poetry, to Plato, Godwin and other thinkers." The last six pages of the thirty-page essay are devoted to recalling what might be said to explain "how he should have been capable of the worst."

In general, the facts of the artist's life are adverted to only if there is a failure of creation. George Eliot's great weakness for Leavis is a tendency toward the "direct presence" of the author.

64 Revaluation, p. 22.
65 Ibid., p. 86.
66 The quotations are from Revaluation, pp. 223-230, 210, 227.
Her Maggie Tullivers, Romolas, and Dorothea Brookes are products of her own immaturity, which she has not learned to impersonalize. Of Romola, who is no more than an idealized George Eliot, Leavis makes such remarks as certain situations recalling "the yearning translator of Strauss," "we can hardly help being pryingly personal in our conjectures," and "Dr. John Chapman? we ask." This "close-ness of relation between heroine and author is no more here than elsewhere in George Eliot a strength." The point at which she becomes "one of the great creative artists" is in her handling of the Transome theme in *Felix Holt*. Discussing the "new impersonality" of this theme, Leavis finds lacking from it the "directly personal vibration--the directly personal engagement of the novelist" that is felt in the treatment of Maggie Tulliver, although the theme is realized "with an intensity certainly not inferior to that of the most poignant autobiographical places" in her work.67

Our increased knowledge of psychoanalysis, Trilling notes, can recover for our appreciation many things that might otherwise be lost to us in a work of art.68 This interest, a main and obvious impulsion in much modern criticism, is entirely absent from Leavis's work, though he is not as a result obviously less psychologically perceptive. James's psychological analysis of the relationship between Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant in *The Bostonians*, one

67 Quotations from *The Great Tradition*, pp. 33, 49, 55, 54.

more proof of his genius, was done, he notes, "decades before the impact of Freud had initiated a general knowingness about the unconscious and the subconscious."69 Though the writings of Swift exhibit "probably the most remarkable expression of negative feelings and attitudes that literature can offer" and though "psychopathology and medicine" could no doubt offer an interesting commentary, their help is not necessary since "Swift's genius belongs to literature, and its appreciation to literary criticism," which stops in its discussion of Swift's "case" "well on this side of pathology."70

A general statement of Leavis's stand on the use of material extraneous to the work of art is contained in "Henry James and the Function of Criticism." Quentin Anderson established that James had a strong and sympathetic interest in his father's system which is present "to such effect [in the late works] that, unadverted and uninformed, the reader is without the key to the essential intention--the intention that makes the given book what it is and explains what James saw it as being." Although knowledge of James's interest helps the critic to account for many things, extraneous information cannot be brought to the judging of the work because the literary critic "is concerned with the work in front of him as something that should contain within itself the reason why it is so

69The Great Tradition, p. 135.
70The Common Pursuit, pp. 85-86.
and not otherwise. The more experience—experience of life and literature together—he brings to bear on it the better, of course; and it is true that extraneous information may make him more per-cipient." But the business of the critic is to "determine what is actually there in the work of art" and to what extent intentions are realized. The "tests of realization" are a "matter of his sense derived from his literary experience, of what the living thing feels like—of the difference between that which has been willed and put there, or represents no profound integration, and that which grows from a deep centre of life.\(^{71}\)

Exactly what Leavis means by this is strikingly exhibited in comments on the attitude that we are to take toward Isabella in Measure for Measure. He is denying that we are to regard her "with pure uncritical sympathy":

To begin with, we note that the momentary state of grace to which her influence lifts Lucio itself issues in what amounts to a criticism—a limiting and placing criticism:

Lucio: I hold you as a thing ensky'd and sainted; By your renouncement an immortal spirit, And to be talked with in sincerity, As with a saint.

Isab.: You do blaspheme the good in mocking me.

Lucio: Do not believe it. Fewness and truth, 'tis thus: Your brother and his lover have embrac'd: As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time That from the seedness the bare fallow brings

\(^{71}\)Ibid., pp. 223-225.
To teeming foison, even so her penteous womb
Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.

[I, iv, 34]

This is implicit criticism in the sense that the attitude it conveys, while endorsed dramatically by the exalted seriousness that is a tribute to Isabella, and poetically by the unmistakable power of the expression (it comes, we feel, from the centre), is something to which she, with her amoured virtue, cannot attain.72

This is not the whole of the argument concerning Isabella; but it shows the way in which the critic's sensibility, as expounded generally above, works. The "deep centre" of the general statement is echoed in "from the centre" in the particular analysis.

An unusual word often used with the same intention as "deep centre" is "sap." Thus he speaks of the art "that seems truly to draw its sap from life" (the element of Adam Bede represented by Mrs. Foyser is in view here). The Portrait of a Lady belongs to "the sappiest phase of James's art."73 The Proserpin passage in Paradise Lost is "something alive with sap that flows from below," while "no rich sap flows" in the first Hyperion.74 Finally, The Winter's Tale is superior to The Tempest because of its "effect as of the sap rising from the root."75

72 Ibid., pp. 167-168. (Italics mine.)

73 These quotations are from The Great Tradition, pp. 36, 111.

74 These quotations are from Revaluation, pp. 63, 268.

One head which might be placed under that of "extraneous material" is essential in Leavis's system: the artist's relation to his own time. The important or major artist, we have several times noted, "is more alive than other people, more alive in his own age," he "is, as it were, at the most conscious point of the race in his time." Leavis puts Conrad among those creative geniuses "whose distinction is manifested in their being peculiarly alive in their time--peculiarly alive to it; not 'in the vanguard' . . . but sensitive to the stresses of the changing spiritual climate as they begin to be registered by the most conscious." He contrasts him with Jane Austen, whose problem "was not to rescue the highly conscious individual from his isolation, but much the contrary." Conrad's "Robinson Crusoe cannot bear a few days alone on his island, and blows out his brains." 76

Rene Wellek--who finds that "the romantic view of the world . . . underlies and pervades the poetry of Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley, elucidates many apparent difficulties, and is, at least, a debatable view of the world"--charges that Leavis's lack of interest in philosophy makes him unfair to the Romantics. Leavis, however, denies the usefulness of a philosophic approach to the poetry of the Romantics for the literary critic, whose primary interest is in poetry, because of the radical differences between the three poets. Defending his comparison of Shelley's "Mont Blanc"

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76 The Great Tradition, p. 22.
and Wordsworth's "The Simplon Pass," Leavis remarks that he regards the two poets "not as stating epistemological propositions or asserting general conceptions, but as reacting characteristically to similar concrete occasions." Concerning Wordsworth's philosophy, he holds that it is as a poet that he matters, and "if we remember that even where he offers 'thought' the strength of what he gives is the poet's, we shall, as critics, find something better to do than supply precision and completeness to his abstract argument."77

Leavis has his own explanation to offer instead of a philosophical system: "What they have in common is that they belong to the same age; and in belonging to the same age they have in common something negative: the absence of anything to replace the very positive tradition (literary, and more than literary—hence its strength) that had prevailed till towards the end of the eighteenth century."78 That tradition is Augustanism.

The Augustan Age is a period in which Leavis has always been very much interested, its significance being that the very individual and idiosyncratic Samuel Johnson found himself at home in it.79 Leavis's treatment of the period is useful here because he illustrates concretely what happens when "the poetry and the intelligence of the age lose touch with each other."80 Contrasting the poetry of

77 The Common Pursuit, pp. 216-222.
78 Ibid., p. 185.
79 Cf. p. 31 above.
80 Cf. pp. 25-26 and 53 above.
the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Leavis comments that
the tradition developed "unluckily--in the sense that the prevail-
ing 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;' only the poetry of Pope, who is
both Augustan and more than Augustan, embodies this "full vitality."
The Augustan tradition had failed for those coming after:

But there was nothing in the nature of a revolution, a
reversal or a jolt--no impulsion adequate to the creat-
ing of a new idiom and new forms such as might replace,
or seriously challenge, the Augustan. . . . [Poetry] now
decidedly tended towards a merely 'literary' super-
ficiality. . . . The tradition that associated poetry
with the central interests of the civilized mind having
(for them) failed, they naturally sought poetry in the
poetical--in specialized (and conventional) sentiments
and attitudes representing, as it were, a solemn holiday
or Sabbath from the everyday serious. 81

But there were two important later poets, Johnson and Crabbe,
to whom the Augustan tradition was congenial. Johnson was both like
enough Pope and strongly unlike enough, civilization having altered,
to "effect decided positive alterations in that very positive idiom."
Johnson was able, in T. S. Eliot's phrase, to "alter expression" as
Arnold later, in Leavis's view, could not.

Crabbe is--or should be--in the Tales, "a living classic."
"His strength is that of a novelist and of an eighteenth-century
poet who is positively in sympathy with the Augustan tradition, and
it is one strength." His matter and outlook have close affinities

81 The quotations are taken from Revaluation, pp. 116, 125,
and 128-129.
with Jane Austen's, and although he produced no work of art of the order of her novels, "he has a range and a generous masculine strength that bring out by contrast her spinsterly limitations." Despite his distinction, however, Crabbe "was hardly at the fine point of consciousness in his time. His sensibility belongs to an order that those who were most alive to the age—who had the most sensitive antennae—had ceased to find sympathetic." For those, the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge showed the way to "congenial idioms and forms." And though Byron had strong sympathies with the Augustan tradition and wrote successful satiric poetry, his form and manner have none of the Augustan virtues—"decorum, order, elegance, consistency." He is, even in his satire, "outside society—a rebel," and, in this, "representative of the age in which Crabbe is a survival." 82

Finally, Leavis holds that the same fate overtook the Victorians that the eighteenth-century poets experienced. Viewing the Victorians as latter-day Romantics, he finds an essential difference in their attitudes toward their poetry and the world. It was possible for the Romantic poets "to believe that the interests animating their poetry were the forces moving the world, or that might move it. But Victorian poetry admits implicitly that the actual world is alien, recalcitrant and unpoetical, and that no protest is worth making except the protest of withdrawal." 83

82 The quotations are taken from Revaluation, pp. 116, 125, 128-129.
Isolation, as an aspect of the artist's relation to his own time, is an important topic in the treatment of a number of writers beginning with Blake and including, for example, Hopkins, Henry James, Conrad, and D. H. Lawrence. Indeed, Conrad's aliveness to his age resulted in his favorite theme of isolation. But the aspect of isolation that will be glanced at here is its limiting effect on the creativity of great artists. First, however, no artist can ever be completely individual. Blake, who "may be said to have reversed for himself the shift of stress that occurred at the Restoration," was not; for he did not use the English language as "a mere instrument": "His individuality had developed in terms of the language, with the ways of experiencing, as well as of handling experience that it involves. The mind and sensibility that he has to express are of the language." But the "measure of social collaboration and support" represented by the English language "didn't make Blake prosperously self-sufficient": he needed something more which he didn't get--an audience. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to know whether what one has in front of one is a poem," a private blow-off," or something "that seems to be neither wholly private nor wholly a poem." The carelessness of the later prophetic books is a second aspect of Blake's isolation.84

Hopkins's "radically metaphorical habit of mind and sensibility"

together with the "concrete strength from which it is inseparable" relates him to Herbert and the seventeenth century. But his "'metaphysical' audacity" lacks Herbert's "fine and poised social bearing" because of his poetical isolation: "But behind Hopkins there is no Ben Jonson, and he has for contemporaries no constellation of courtly poets uniting the 'metaphysical' with the urbane." Hopkins was, moreover, "isolated in a way peculiarly calculated to promote starvation of impulse, the over-developed and ingrown idiosyncrasy, and the sterile deadlock, lapping into stagnation; for from the "all-important religious context" he got no social endorsement as a poet. Finally, the lone enthusiasm of Canon Dixon was "hardly transmutable by Hopkins's kind of need (or Hopkins's kind of humility) into an impressive critical endorsement or an adequate substitute for a non-existent public."35

Leavis is an early Jamesian; and his major texts are The Europeans, The Portrait of a Lady, The Bostonians, Washington Square, The Awkward Age, and What Maisie Knew. Although the last two novels are late works, the three novels of "the major phase" are found to be, in varying degrees, unsatisfactory. Leavis finds, for example, in the treatment of the Ververs, "a partial inattention--an inadvertence. It is as if his interest in his material had been too specialized, too much concentrated on certain limited kinds of possible development, and as if in the technical elaboration expressing this specialized interest he had lost his full sense of life and let his

moral taste slip into abeyance." What had happened to James? Essentially "in quest of an ideal society," he eventually learned that neither England nor America could offer him anything approaching his ideal. In addition, he never found an audience. As a result:

The same conditions, then, that drove him back on his art made him profoundly aware that his art wasn't likely to be appreciated by many besides himself. So he came to live in it—and not the less so for living strenuously—the life of a spiritual recluse; a recluse in a sense in which not only no novelist but no good artist of any kind can afford to become one... His technical preoccupation... lost its balance, and, instead of being the sharp register of his finest perceptions, as informed and related by his fullest sense of life, became something that took his intelligence out of its true focus and blunted his sensitiveness.86

Leavis's comparative remarks on poems by Emily Bronte and Hardy ("Cold in the earth" and "After a Journey") provide a good summarizing introduction to the final section of this chapter, which examines typical ways of indicating artistic weakness. The emotion—"thought"—impersonality triad is employed, the comments on Hardy's superiority to Emily Bronte's "talking about" recall the opening generalities of this chapter (particularly the unexcelled "subtlety and precision" of poetry in communicating the "actual quality of experience"), 87 and the last quoted sentences illustrate Leavis's typical attitude of reverence for the great artist.

Emily Bronte "conceives a situation in order to have the satisfaction of a disciplined imaginative exercise: the satisfaction of

86 The Great Tradition, pp. 163, 165.
87 Cf. p. 53 above.
dramatizing herself in a tragic role—an attitude, nobly impres-
sive, of sternly controlled passionate desolation." Dangerous
temptations might seem to be represented by the "emotional sweep
of the movement, the declamatory plangency." But, "in responding
to the effect of passionate intensity we register what impresses
us as a controlling strength": this "resolute strength of will,
espousing the bare prose 'existence,' counters the run of emotion.
However, when compared with Hardy's "After a Journey," the poem is
found to have "declaratory generality—talking about—in contrast
to Hardy's quiet presentation of specific fact and concrete circum-
stance." Hardy's "detailed complexity" evokes "a total situation
that, as merely evoked, carries its power and meaning in itself."
Its superiority in reality is a superiority of sincerity: "It is a
poem that we recognize to have come directly out of life; it could,
that is, have been written only by a man who had the experience of
a life to remember back through. And recognizing that, we recog-
nize the rare quality of the man who can say with that truth 'I
am just the same,' and the rare integrity that can so put the truth
beyond question."88

Leavis's discriminations are concerned with finding the charac-
teristic strengths and weaknesses of individual authors. Since excel-
lence is more varied in its manifestations and its evaluation more
difficult to summarize, this final glance at the artist through
Leavis's eyes will concentrate on his criteria of failure.

88"Reality and Sincerity," Scrutiny, XIX, pp. 94, 90, 91, 94-98.
The following examples show characteristic ways of indicating weakness. George Eliot's great weakness, the direct presence of the author, has already been discussed. Very often weakness, or failure of creation, is associated with insistence or explicitness. Thus, Lawrence's great fault in *Women in Love* is "an insistent and over-emphatic explicitness, running at times to something one can only call jargon," by which he betrays that "he is uncertain--uncertain of the value of what he offers; uncertain whether he really holds it--whether a valid communication has really been defined and conveyed in terms of his creative art." Though Leavis admires "Cold in the earth," it is found inferior to "After a Journey" because it has "declamatory generality--talking about--in contrast to Hardy's quiet presentment of specific fact and concrete circumstance."

The same essential distinctions are employed in these remarks from the account of Wordsworth's decline. The quality of the sonnets is "a comment on the value to the poet of his new inspiration: the worst of them . . . are lamentable clap-trap, and the best, even if they are distinguished declamation, are hardly distinguished poetry." (The distinction between "declamation" and "poetry" is characteristic.) Wordsworth's new interests of these years belong to the public platform . . . the public voice is a substitute for the inner voice, and engenders an insensitiveness to this--to its remembered (or, at least, to its recorded burden and tone.) The

sentiments and attitudes of the patriotic and Anglican Wordsworth are not "the intimately and particularly realized experience of an unusually and finely conscious individual; they are external, general and conventionally; their quality is that of the medium they are proffered in, which is insensitively Miltonic, a medium not felt into from within as something at the nerve-tips, but handled from outside."\(^9^0\)

The bulk of his discussion of Conrad's fault is an analysis of how his "disconcerting weakness or vice" mars "The Heart of Darkness," which "achieves its overpowering evocation of atmosphere by means of 'objective correlatives.'" In Conrad's art at his best, "the author's comment cannot be said to be wholly explicit. Nevertheless, it is not separable from the thing rendered, but seems to emerge from the vibration of this as part of the tone." But there are places where comment is an exasperating intrusion: "Hadn't he, we find ourselves asking, overworked 'inscrutable,' 'inconceivable,' 'unspeakable' and that kind of word already?--yet they still recur." Even worse, he applies the same vocabulary, "the same adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery," to the "evocation of human profundities and spiritual horrors; to magnifying a thrilled sense of the unspeakable potentialities of the human soul. The actual effect is not to magnify but rather to muffle." The "horror" of Kurtz's last cry "has very much less force

\(^9^0\)Revaluation, pp. 182-184.
than it might have had if Conrad had strained less."\textsuperscript{91}

The limiting criticism of E. M. Forster, finally, is made in terms of impersonality. Although Forster is very highly praised in an essay reprinted in \textit{The Common Pursuit}, is found to be a spokesman "of the finer consciousness of our time," and \textit{A Passage to India} is "a classic"--"not only a most significant document of our age, but a truly memorable work of literature"--he is not among Leavis's "great-tradition" novelists, largely because his works shows a lack of the "impersonality, the presentment of themes and experiences as things standing there in themselves, that would be necessary for convincing success at the level of his highest imagination."\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{91}\textit{The Great Tradition}, pp. 174, 177, 181.

\textsuperscript{92}\textit{The Common Pursuit}, pp. 275, 277.
CHAPTER IV

LEAVIS AND THE WORK OF ART

M. H. Abrams distinguishes four elements that are "discriminated and made salient" in most comprehensive theories of art. First, there is the work, the artistic product itself. Second, there is the artist. Third, the work has a subject, which "directly or deviously, is derived from existing things—to be about, or signify, or reflect something which either is, or bears some relation to, an objective state of affairs." This third element, frequently called "nature," Abrams denotes by the "more neutral and comprehensive term, universe." The final element is the audience. Abrams uses a convenient diagram to show this relationship.

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UNIVERSE
       ↓
WORK
       ↓
ARTIST  AUDIENCE
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Though reference in an adequate theory must be made to all four elements, most theories are orientated toward one only, and from the term he chooses the critic derives his "principal categories for defining, classifying, and analyzing a work of art, as well as

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1 The substance of this and the following page is taken from pp. 6-7, 14, 21-22, 26-27 of The Mirror and the Lamp.
the major criteria by which he judges its value."

There have, therefore, been four main critical orientations, according to which term is most important. Aristotle may be taken as representative of the ancient theory explaining art as an imitation of aspects of the universe. Though Sidney in his Apologie appeals to Aristotle, his orientation has shifted from universe to audience, for to Sidney poetry has a purpose—to achieve certain effects in an audience. This was the first and principal English orientation until the late eighteenth century and, more especially, the advent of the Romantics, when the focus of critical interest shifted from the audience to the artist in the "expressive theory."

The extreme case in this orientation is Carlyle's Poet as Hero, "the chosen one who, because he is 'a Force of Nature,' writes as he must, and through the degree of homage he evokes, serves as the measure of his reader's piety and taste." Finally, notably in the criticism of T. S. Eliot and the work of the "Chicago critics," we have the long-delayed objective approach, which may be indicated by Eliot's dictum that "when we are considering poetry we must consider it primarily as poetry and not another thing." Leavis's criticism can be considered objective in this sense.

Although modern tendencies in criticism can be considered "objective" in contrast to Romantic tendencies, the "Chicago critics" make a different kind of distinction between "objective" criticism as evidenced in Aristotle's Poetics, on the one hand, and the method of all the most influential critics from Hume,
Johnson, and Coleridge down to our own day, which they call "qualitative." Modern criticism, viewed in this light, is the result of the "profound reorientation of criticism" beginning in the eighteenth century "from an emphasis on poetic genres and their rules... to an emphasis on common poetic qualities, no matter in what kinds of works they appear." Using Coleridge's distinction, R. S. Crane, in the introduction to Critics and Criticism, calls it a criticism "primarily of poetry or the poet rather than that of poems."2 Since the common poetic qualities dealt with by the qualitative critics are "immediately discernible in the parts of works," they can be defined and judged "without recourse to specific structural principles." This the Chicagoans see as the great weakness or incompleteness of the qualitative method in general. They advocate a return to the literal method of Aristotle, which considers a work as a whole composed of certain "parts." Crane advances two reasons for the new Aristotelian approach: first, this method acts as a corrective to the tendency of qualitative critics to be content only with "parts" of works while ignoring the whole; and second, it is a method that has seldom been practiced and is capable, used in Aristotle's spirit, of results not possible in other systems.

In this view, Leavis is clearly seen to be a qualitative critic. Whatever the modern reaction against Romantic critical extremes, the contemporary critical orientation did not swing

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completely away from the artist to the work. Leavis is primarily a critic of the artist who emerges from the work (Eliot's "mind that creates" rather than the "man who suffered") and can be distinguished from at least extreme proponents of the Romantic theory. But he is not a critic of the work itself considered in isolation from artist, universe, and audience. The Chicagoans are explicitly displeased with his concepts concerning "wholes." Indeed, he consciously and explicitly breaks down the distinctions among the different literary forms or does not consider them at all, as is evident when he calls Shakespeare's greatest plays "dramatic poems" and uses the same term to distinguish a certain class of novels, which includes The Europeans, The Rainbow, Women in Love, and Hard Times.

The Chicago critics do not, then, like the emphasis in qualitative critics as a whole on "common poetic qualities" and their lack of emphasis on "poetic genres and their rules." Mr. Crane calls attention to pages 60 and 61 of Leavis's Revaluation to show what becomes of the concept of poetic "structure" in such a method. Leavis on these pages indicates what he considers the essential organization of a Shakespeare play and then makes comparisons between Shakespeare's organization and the structure of Paradise Lost. Here are the positive comments on Shakespeare: "Shakespeare's

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3Ibid., p. 14, footnote.
5Ibid.
marvellous faculty of intense local realization is a faculty of realizing the whole locally. ... A Shakespeare play, says Professor Wilson Knight, may be considered as 'an extended metaphor,' and the phrase suggests with great felicity this almost inconceivably close and delicate organic wholeness." Regarding Milton, Leavis argues first that his verse characteristically exhibits a lack of "local realization" and then states (but does not demonstrate) a similar lack of realization in the whole. 6

The reader is also referred in the same footnote that calls attention to pages 60 and 61 of Revaluation to pages 95 and 96 of Critics and Criticism, where Cleanth Brooks is brought to task for not dealing in poetic wholes. The positives which Leavis and Brooks, among others, fail to deal adequately with are intimated in the following: "But this is to shut our eyes to a whole range of questions, turning on specific differences in poetic ends and the means suitable for their realization." Crane remarks specifically on the choices and problems facing the artist:

[A] poet does not write poetry but individual poems. And these are inevitably, as finished wholes, instances of one or another poetic kind, differentiated ... primarily by the nature of the poet's conception, as finally embodied in his poem, of a particular form to be achieved through the representation, in speech used dramatically or otherwise, of some distinctive state of feeling, or moral choice, or action, complete in itself and productive of a certain emotion or complex of emotions in the reader.

6In "Mr. Eliot and Milton," The Common Pursuit, especially pp. 20-27, Leavis moves on from local to more general deficiencies—in the conception of Hell, the treatment of Satan and God the Father, the war in Heaven, and so on.
The principles of the artist's reasoning are ends or effects to be accomplished, and his principles will differ according as he is writing a simple lyric of feeling or a moral lyric of character, a tragedy or a mock-epic. Finally, a "sign of the adequacy to its subject of any theory of poetry which aims to treat poetry as poetry and not another thing, is surely the extent to which it is able to cope, in specific terms, with problems of this nature."

Before discussing Leavis's conceptions concerning "wholes" and their adequacies or deficiencies, there are a number of topics to be covered. First, something must be said about Leavis's range and the specific problems that he concerns himself with in individual essays and books. Unlike many contemporary critics—and even Eliot and Arnold—Leavis has confined himself almost exclusively to the literature of England except for brief references to foreign authors, as Tolstol and Flaubert. Even his rather recent incursions into American literature in Commentary are unusual. He does not write on American literature because he is not an American. He observes that to be able to judge a work at first hand one must have a critical sensibility in that language: "If (being English-speaking) you cannot see how impossible it is to read Aeschylus (in English or Greek) as you read Shakespeare, then you cannot really read Shakespeare, and if you cannot read Shakespeare, then your intelligence has missed an essential training." Leavis writes on

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7Critics and Criticism, pp. 95-96.
8Education and the University, pp. 37-38.
English literature from the seventeenth century to the present but does not by any means consider at any length a goodly number of those whom he himself considers major artists. Shakespeare is a case in point. There is no book on Shakespeare and relatively few articles considering the constant references to his supremacy both in his use of the language and in the organization and significance of his greatest plays. Leavis nowhere, to my knowledge, mentions Chaucer except in his reference to Arnold's questionable though thought-provoking placing and in the list of poets which follows. He explicitly cautions against the attitude that finds disapproval in absence of comment. Here he answers an assumption that Spenser and Shelley are on his poetical index: "This is Dr Tillyard's way of referring to the fact that I have criticized Shelley adversely and to the deduction that I set a lower value on Spenser than on Chaucer, Jonson, Pope, Blake, Crabbe, Wordsworth, Byron, Yeats and Eliot." This list, however, is not a complete one.

H. N. McLuhan notes that Leavis "is not a critic of isolated comments" and finds that the function of both *New Bearings* and *Revaluation* "is, with reference to particular poets and poems, to show what has happened to that existing order of traditional poetry, of which Mr. Eliot speaks, once genuinely new work has arrived."

9In Bentley, p. 93.

10The Common Pursuit, p. 38.

11McLuhan, p. 272.
But Leavis never has aimed at "exhaustiveness" but at "strict economy," hoping by such "asceticism" to "insure a cleaner impact." In *New Bearings* he remarks that "an absence of an insistently and rigourously discriminative spirit in comment and reference does tend to merge into a laxity of essential judgment." On the other hand, this "rigourously discriminative spirit" tends to undervalue --intentionally or accidentally--any number of artists and works. Though he has a whole book at his disposal for D. H. Lawrence, Leavis does not there aim at "comprehensiveness." Moreover, the tasks he sets himself in individual essays do not necessarily exhaust all that he has to say about an author; there are, for example, the four major unreprinted *Scrutiny* essays on James that amplify the *Great Tradition* account.

By what authority does a non-theoretical critic like Leavis pronounce on the value and place of a poet or poem? First, however, Leavis's critic is "the complete reader: the ideal critic is the ideal reader." To whom does Leavis address his essays? "The cogency I hoped to achieve was to be for other readers of poetry--readers of poetry as such." This aim makes Leavis notable in the

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12 *Revaluation*, p. 2.
13 *New Bearings*, p. 231.
14 *D. H. Lawrence*, p. 17.
way Bentley indicates when he wonders if any magazine other than Scrutiny "contains so much useful analysis of literature—and by a useful analysis, I mean simply one that helps you to grasp a work for yourself."17 Is Leavis to be characterized as "narrow" and "dogmatic" or as writing, in his own favorite Johnsonian phrase, "not dogmatically, but deliberately"? Here he is on the function of the critic:

'What I have here not dogmatically but deliberately written' . . . illustrates a conception of the business of criticism and an associated conception of the importance of poetry. I think it the business of the critic to perceive for himself, to make the finest and sharpest relevant discriminations, and to state his findings as responsibly, clearly, and forcibly as possible. Then even if he is wrong he has forwarded the business of criticism—he has exposed himself as openly as possible to correction; for what criticism undertakes is the profitable discussion of literature.18

Not only does Leavis not elaborate a critical theory; he will neither defend or even state his critical assumptions. René Wellek, following the publication of Revaluation, supplied (in a letter to Scrutiny) Leavis's missing "'norm' with which you measure every poet." Leavis, however, finds that the reading of poetry demands a kind of responsiveness that is "incompatible with the judicial, one-eye-on-the-standard approach suggested by Dr. Wellek's phrase." He then elaborates on the difference:

Words in poetry invite us, not to 'think about' and judge but to 'feel into' or 'become'—to realize a complex experience that is given in the words. . . . The critic's

17Bentley, p. xxvi.
18Revaluation, pp. 8-9.
aim is, first, to realize as sensitively and completely as possible this or that which claims his attention; and a certain valuing is implicit in the realizing. As he matures in experience of the new thing he asks, explicitly and implicitly: 'Where does this come? How does it stand in relation to...? How relatively important does it seem?' And the organization in which it settles as a constituent in becoming 'placed' is an organization of similarly 'placed' things, things that have found their bearings with regard to each other, and not a theoretical system or a system determined by abstract considerations.

... Of course, the process of 'making fully conscious and articulate' is a process of relating and organizing, and the 'immediate sense of value' should, as the critic matures with experience, represent a growing stability of organization (the problem is to combine stability with growth). What, on testing and re-testing and wider experience, turn out to be my more constant preferences, what the relative permanencies in my response, and what structure begins to assert itself in the field of poetry with which I am familiar? What map or chart of English poetry as a whole represents my utmost consistency and most inclusive coherence of response? 19

Leavis, then, derives his artistic criteria not from theory but from the whole of English literature. What he means by "experience of the new thing" is strikingly indicated in the following remark: "Perhaps I had better put it on record that the pocket Milton I have referred to in writing this essay is falling to pieces from use, and that it is the only book I carried steadily in my pocket between 1915 and 1919." 20

Here are the reasons for his refusal to argue abstractly. He doubts whether


20 Ibid., p. 43.
any reader of my book [has] been less aware of the essential criteria that emerge than he would have been if I had laid down . . . general propositions . . . If, as I did, I avoided such generalities . . . it was because they seemed too clumsy to be of any use. I thought I had provided something better. My whole effort was to work in terms of concrete judgments and particular analyses. . . . I feel that by my own methods I have attained a relative precision that makes this summarizing seem intolerably clumsy and inadequate. 21

But more is needed than the most inclusive study of English literature to make a critic. That "more" is indicated in his remarks on Krutch's discussion of Johnson as a critic. Here is Mr. Krutch on Johnson:

There are no unique literary values. No specialist conceptions, no special sensibilities, no special terms, even, are necessary. Anyone who has the equipment to judge men and manners and morals has the equipment to judge literature, for literature is merely a reflection of men and manners and morals. To say this, of course, is to say that for Johnson there is no realm of the exclusively aesthetic.

And here is Leavis's qualification. The important word is the oftener-repeated relevance:

I don't think that for the critic who understands his job there are any 'unique literary values' or any 'realm of the exclusively aesthetic'. But there is, for the critic, a problem of relevance: it is, in fact, his ability to be relevant in his judgments and commentaries that makes him a critic, if he deserves the name. And the ability to be relevant, where works of art are concerned, is not a mere matter of good sense; it implies an understanding of the resources of language, the nature of conventions and the possibilities of organization such as can come only from much intensive

21 Ibid., p. 215.
literary experience accompanied by the habit of analysis. In this sense it certainly implies a specially developed sensibility. I know of nothing said by Johnsen that leads me to suppose he would (unless in 'talking for victory') have disputed this.  

Leavis consistently aims at a certain kind of relevance. First, he has a particular audience in mind: "readers of poetry as such." Second, as is clear in his answer to Wellek, he is essentially a judge of "value." His aim is to put in front of the reader, in a criticism that keeps as close to the concrete as possible, his own "developed 'coherence of response'" in a way intended to get the reader to agree--"with, no doubt, critical qualifications"--with him. His essential aim is that of Eliot's "interpretation": "putting the reader in possession of facts which he would otherwise have missed." Those aspects of the critic's equipment which make possible the ability to be relevant in discussions--a knowledge of the resources of language, the nature of convention, and, especially, the possibilities of organization--will be examined later in this chapter.

Leavis is very specific concerning "the habit of analysis!" Analysis . . . is the process by which we seek to attain a complete reading of the poem--a reading that approaches as nearly as possible to the perfect reading. . . . we can have the poem only by an inner kind of possession; it is 'there' for analysis only in so far as we are responding appropriately to the words on the page. In pointing to

22Ibid., p. 114.

23Ibid., p. 214. Cf. also Education and the University, p. 70.
them (and there is nothing else to point to) what we are doing is . . . to dwell with a deliberate, considering responsiveness on this, that or the other node or focal point in the complete organization that the poem is, in so far as we have it. Analysis is not a dissection of something that is already and passively there. What we call analysis is, of course, a constructive or creative process. It is a more deliberate following-through of that process of creation in response to the poet's words which reading is. It is a re-creation in which, by a considering attentiveness, we ensure a more than ordinary faithfulness and completeness. 24

Leavis's "analysis" aims to develop the reader's skill in doing more than "ejaculate approval or disapproval, or dismiss [a work] with vaguely reported general impressions." 25 It is an attempt to avoid what Robert Roth calls "groping after metaphorical equivalents of the ineffable" or the "absolute dependence upon individual critical sensibilities." 26 By calling attention "to this, that or the other detail" one can commonly make the nature and force of a judgment plain. 27

Leavis's account of the organization of Shakespeare's greatest plays illustrates the essential relation between "part" and "whole" in his system. The pertinent remark here is that "Shakespeare's marvellous faculty of intense local realization is a faculty of

24Education and the University, p. 70.


26Education and the University, p. 71.

27Ibid.
realizing the whole locally." This "marvellous faculty" is, for
Leavis, the supreme type of organization, and the novels in which
he is most interested have the same essential organization. But
even Shakespeare's success is not invariable. Those plays which
Leavis specifically finds among the very greatest (he nowhere places
or even mentions all of them) are Macbeth, Measure for Measure, and
The Winter's Tale, and he has qualifications concerning Othello and
The Tempest. He finds, moreover, that in Cymbeline, in spite of
the many "vigorously realized passages," there is no "unifying
significance such as might organize it into a profound work of
art." 29

Exactly how Shakespeare realizes the whole locally is set
forth in the chapter on analysis in Education and the University.
The passage quoted below shows how, "after dealing with examples of
the ostensibly simple simile that turns out to be something more
complex, one might illustrate the wider bearings of this local anal­
ysis on method in Shakespeare criticism." His text is the first
speech in Act I, Scene vii, of Macbeth ("If it were done, when 'tis
done. . . "). He starts by stopping at "pity, like a naked new-born
babe" and asking what kind of simile that is.

Or rather, we might ask if we found the line (under Pity)
in a dictionary of quotations. For actually, in reading
the speech, we shouldn't stop at the end of the line, but

29 Ibid., p. 178.
go on at least to the next phrase,

Striding the blast,

by when the effect would so have complicated itself that we should hardly start by commenting (as we might if the line stood by itself) that the "naked new-born babe" is really not pity, but the object of pity: the disturbing strangeness of

a naked new-born babe

Striding the blast

carries us on beyond such a consideration, and, indeed away from "pity." In fact, the passage, in the movement and structure of its sense, forbids us to stop before the end of the sentence, three lines further on, by when it has become plain that 'pity,' whatever part it may play in the total effect, is certainly not at the centre—certainly doesn't represent the main significance. To bring out fully what this is it is necessary to quote the speech from the beginning: [Here follows the whole of the soliloquy]

.....

It is a speech that exhibits Shakespeare's specific genius—an essentially poetic genius that is at the same time essentially dramatic—at its most marvellous. The speech is that of the intensely realized individual, Macbeth, at the particular, intensely realized moment in the development of the poem. Analysis leads us directly to the core of the drama, its central, animating interests, the principles of its life. The whole organism is present in the part. Macbeth, weighing his hesitation, tells himself that it is no moral or religious scruple, deriving its disturbing force from belief in supernatural sanctions. His fear, he says, regards merely the chances of lasting practical success in the world. His shrinking from the murder expresses, he insists, a simple consideration of expediency. Then he proceeds to enlarge on the peculiar heinousness of murdering Duncan, and as he does so that essential datum concerning his make-up, his ignorance of himself, becomes plain. He supposes that he is developing the note of inexpediency, and picturing the atrocity of the crime as it will affect others. But already in the sentence invoking the sanctity of hospitality another note begins to prevail. And in the next sentence the speech achieves its unconscious self-confutation: [Here was quoted the sentence beginning "Besides, this Duncan"])
The "angels trumpet-tongued" (which is taken up in "heaven's cherubin") and the "deep damnation" (clearly expressing Macbeth's own innermost feelings) explain the uncanny oddity of

pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast... .

What we have in this passage is a conscience-tormented imagination, quick with terror of the supernatural, proclaiming a certitude that "murder will out," a certitude appalling to Macbeth not because of consequences on "this bank and shoal of time," but by reason of a sense of sin—the radical hold on him of religious sanctions. The "pity" and the "babe" carry on the "meek," combining to express Macbeth's horrified sense of the unforgivable heinousness of the murder. The vision that inspires the passage is not, though Macbeth (so maintaining a formal continuity from his initial cool self-deception to his imaginative self-exposure) suggests with his "pity" that it is, the anticipated reaction of the multitudes whose "tears shall drown the wind": it is a vision, dread and inescapable, of an outraged moral order vindicated by supernatural sanctions.30

The analysis of the final sentence ("I have no spur") is not quoted. Although, Leavis remarks, Shakespeare has his own "miraculous complexity," nevertheless the effects examined in the speech serve to enforce a general point: "What we are concerned with in analysis are always matters of complex verbal organization." Metaphors, images, and other local effects, he concludes "are worth examining—they are there to examine—because they are foci of a complex life, and sometimes the context from which they cannot be even provisionally separated, if the examination is to be worth anything, is a wide one."31

30Education and the University, pp. 78-82.

31Ibid., p. 82.
The "Chicago critics," we have seen, find that, because the common poetic qualities that qualitative critics deal with can be defined and judged without recourse to specific structural principles, qualitative critics have a tendency to be content only with "parts" of works while ignoring the whole. Leavis is a qualitative critic, and his criticism exhibits this tendency. He explicitly remarks: "The differences between a lyric, a Shakespeare play, and a novel, for some purposes essential, are in no danger of being forgotten; what needs insisting on is the community."\(^32\) And he does insist on "the community," the differences sometimes being lost. Although he speaks, for example (in the passage from Macbeth just quoted), of Shakespeare's "specific genius--an essentially poetic genius that is at the same time essentially dramatic," and of the "essentially novelistic way" in which George Eliot presents a scene, he nowhere distinguishes specifically among the different literary types. He does comment on differences between poetry and prose: although "everything that the novelist does is done in words, here, here and here" and "he is to be judged an artist (if he is one) for the same kind of reason as a poet is," poetry works by concentration, while prose depends "ordinarily on cumulative effect."\(^34\) Again, writing of T. S. Eliot's The Portrait of a Lady, he notes

32In Bentley, p. 403.

33The Great Tradition, p. 99.

34Education and the University, pp. 125-126.
that the "formal verse medium makes possible a concentration and a directness, audacities of transition and psychological notation, such as are forbidden to the novelist."35 On the other hand, he finds that Hard Times "affects us as belonging with formally poetic works."36

The literary form of the last century and a half that particularly interests Leavis is the novel as handled by his selected novelists. His own designation for these works is "dramatic poem," though a few--on a smaller scale--such as The Europeans and Hard Times, are called "moral fables." These great novels group rather with Shakespeare's great plays in organization than with, say, Thackeray, Fielding, and Trollope. A Shakespeare play, he finds, is "poetic drama, a dramatic poem, and not a psychological novel written in dramatic form and draped in poetry."37 He finds further, specific affinities between the forms. He notes that Shakespeare's blank verse is "a convention (so subtle that we forget it to be one) that enables him to play upon us, not merely through our sense of the character speaking, but also, and at the same time, directly; and the question, how much of the one and how much of the other it may be in any particular case, does not arise."38 He finds

35New Bearings, p. 78.
36The Common Pursuit, p. 233.
37Ibid., p. 136.
38Education and the University, pp. 122-124. This generalization is made after an analysis of the opening lines of Act I, Scene vi, of Macbeth, the scene under the battlements at Dunsinane.
in the presentation of Gwendolyn Harloth's reactions to Grandcourt's note (Chapter XXIII of Daniel Deronda) no better illustration of George Eliot's "peculiar genius as a novelist," the whole of which "is (in an essentially novelistic way) so dramatic that we don't distinguish the elements of description and commentary as such." In the same way, he comments on the "extraordinary dramatic quality" of The Europeans, the whole of which seems "asking to be staged." The "culminating twelfth chapter, in which the various constituents of the comedy of personal relations are brought together in a dénouement, rivals the admired and comparable things of Shakespeare and Molière." Leavis is not a critic in the Aristotelian sense, as the "Chicago critics" make clear, and his "part" and "whole" are not Aristotle's. He does, however, sometimes in an incidental way mention "parts" of a work. For example, there is no "commanding significance" in Cymbeline to penetrate the whole, inform, and order everything—"imagery, rhythm, symbolism, character, episode, plot." The organization of The Portrait of a Lady is found to "inform" everything in it: "the wit, the dialogue, the plot, the characterization."
Although Leavis does not deal in specific terms with the different literary forms but tends to ignore or collapse the distinctions among them, he nevertheless employs a wide variety of terms in his discussions, some only once or twice. Trouvaille is used only once of lines in "East Coker." 43 Coup de théâtre is used to describe Othello's suicide and the statue business in The Winter's Tale. 44 Hubris and Nemesis are used in discussing George Eliot's works and rarely elsewhere. He speaks of James's scènes à faire in The Portrait of a Lady. 45 There is the "thrilling nick-of-time peripeteia" of Nostromo. 46 Peripeteia sounds Aristotelian, as does the commonly used inevitability. But inevitability depends, in Leavis's sense, on a complex theme grasped and realized: the resolution of Victory hasn't "the finer inevitability" of the "incomparably more complex and ambitious Nostromo." 47

Just as Leavis distinguishes between talent and genius—and degrees of talent as well as genius—so he distinguishes between the different values of works. In the discussion of individual pieces, four frequently used adjectives are successful, memorable, great, and supreme. "The Egoist tries only to do something simple."

43 Education and the University, p. 99.
44 The Common Pursuit, pp. 152, 176.
45 The Great Tradition, p. 112.
46 Ibid., p. 198.
but "is entirely successful." We have seen how, in discussing the "vice" of the Metaphysical "habit," Leavis finds many of the Metaphysical poems in which emotion plays only a secondary role to the wit merely successful. New Grub Street is a "memorable" novel. 

Although A Passage to India is a "classic," memorable in the following phrase is somewhat limiting: a "truly memorable work of literature." He places a number of Conrad's novels: The Secret Agent is one of his "two supreme masterpieces" (the other is Nostromo), "one of the two unquestionable classics of the first order that he added to the English novel." The same place cannot be claimed for Under Western Eyes, "though it is a most distinguished work." Darkness at Noon is "very distinguished." Leavis would keep Vanity Fair current as, "in a minor way, a classic." Adam Bede "is unmistakably qualified to be a popular classic," and Silas Marner is a "charming minor masterpiece." With all its "brilliance and poignancy," Othello "comes below Shakespeare's supreme--his very greatest--works," while Measure for Measure is "one of the very greatest of the plays, and most consummate and convincing of

48 The Common Pursuit, p. 263.
49 The Great Tradition, p. 227.
50 The Common Pursuit, p. 277.
51 The Great Tradition, p. 220.
52 Ibid., p. 22.
53 Ibid., pp. 36, 46.
Shakespeare's achievements."

In his qualification of Krutch's description of Johnson as critic, Leavis remarks on three things the literary critic must be master of in order to be relevant in his discussions: the resources of language, the nature of convention, and the possibilities of organization. Yet it is on this last head, the "possibilities of organization," that the "Chicago critics" find his critical method seriously deficient. Leavis's method makes "comparative judgments based on criteria of literary 'greatness' or 'seriousness' that transcend differences of kind." What he does not provide adequately for is the appraisal of "a writer's performance in a given work in relation to the nature and requirements of the particular task he has set himself, the assumed end being the perfection of the work as an artistic whole of the special kind he decided it should be." R. S. Crane, who makes such an appraisal of Tom Jones and concludes that "there are not many novels of comparable length in which the various parts are conceived and developed with a shrewder eye to what is required for a maximum realization of the form," finds the following judgment by Leavis "surely somewhat insensitive":

55Cf. pp. 104-105 above.
56R. S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of "Tom Jones," Critics and Criticism, p. 646.
Fielding's "attitudes and his concern with human nature are simple, and not such as to produce an effect of anything but monotony (on a mind, that is, demanding more than external action) when exhibited at the length of an 'epic in prose.'

The following remarks on Dryden, however, show that Leavis realizes that achievement must be measured at least in part in relationship to aim, while making at the same time his characteristic comparative value judgments. He calls Dryden a great representative poet of his time rather than a great poet: "He may be a greater poet than Marvell, but he did not write any poetry as indubitably great as Marvell's best." Comparisons between Dryden's and Pope's satirical poetry are unfair to the former: "Dryden's effects are all for the public ear—for the ear in public (so to speak). . . . Dryden's satiric pamphlets were, we can see, magnificently effective for their purpose; and, read in the appropriate spirit, they are magnificently effective now." But the spirit is not that demanded by Pope: "we are not to strain the inner ear . . . as if, behind the immediate effect, there were a fine organization."

Eliseo Vivas, in his review of the Lawrence book, criticizes Leavis from another quarter: he finds that Leavis's "strong emotional ties" to D. H. Lawrence "tend to make him see virtues that are not

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57 Ibid., p. 646. Leavis's quotation is from The Great Tradition, p. 4.

58 Revaluation, pp. 31-33.
there, and to overlook flaws." He finds, also, that Leavis's "critical practice" can be characterized succinctly by saying that "it consists of extended exhortations, whose formula can be expressed in two imperatives: "Look at that, see how well it is done," and "Look at that, that is not well done."60

The final two topics to be surveyed in this chapter are important in Leavis's critical writings: the "creative" use of language, and the "possibilities of organization." Shakespeare represents, at its most marvellous, the distinctive strength of the English language. Indeed, Leavis distinguishes, in his discussion of Johnson's inability truly to appreciate Shakespeare's achievement and by means of Johnson's poetry, the "creative use of language. Although he finds The Vanity of Human Wishes "great poetry," it is a "poetry of statement, exposition and reflection: nothing could be remoter from the Shakespearean use of language." Johnson, and he is here representative of his age, "has neither the gift nor the aim of capturing in words, and presenting to speak for themselves, significant particularities of sensation, perception and feeling, the significance coming out in complex total effects, which are also left to speak for themselves; he starts with general ideas and general propositions, and enforces them by discussion, comment and illustration." The Vanity of Human Wishes is great poetry because Johnson is able "to give his moral declamation the weight of

lived experience and transform his eighteenth-century generalities into an "extraordinary kind of concreteness." But his radically undramatic habit made Irene the dismal piece it is. 61

In the preceding essay ("Johnson and Augustanism"), Leavis compares Shelley's and Johnson's use of language, taking Shelley, whose language "might seem to be as far removed from the stating use as possible," as representative of the reaction against the Augustan use. Yet Shelley is not the antithesis of Johnson in practicing "the dramatic use of language," his use being as far removed as Johnson's, but on the other side:

His handling of emotion may not be 'statement'; but in order to describe it we need a parallel term. It is a matter of telling us; telling us, 'I feel like this,' and telling us how we, the audience, are to feel. Intended intensities are indicated by explicit insistance and emphasis. While Johnson starts with an intellectual and moral purpose, Shelley starts with an emotional purpose, a dead set at an emotional effect, and pursues it in an explicit mode that might very reasonably be called 'statement' in contrast with the Shakespearean mode, which is one of presenting something from which the emotional effect (or whatever else) derives. 62

The Shakespearean use of language is found also in certain prose. As we have already seen, the great novelists in the English language are "the successors of Shakespeare; for in the nineteenth century and later the strength—the poetic and creative strength—of the English language goes into prose fiction." 63 An analysis of

61 The Common Pursuit, pp. 118-119.
62 Ibid., p. 111.
63 Cf. p. 57 above.
Hard Times (which "affects us as belonging with formally poetic works") would reveal an "extraordinary flexibility" in its art, which is found in the dialogue, passages of which could have come from an ordinary novel, others from a work "as stylized as Jonsonian comedy," while still others are "literary." Asking how the "reconciling" is done (and he finds more diversity than that in the dialogue), he points to the prose: "Out of such prose a great variety of presentations can arise congenially with equal vividness. . . . His flexibility is that of a richly poetic art of the word. He doesn't write 'poetic prose'; he writes with a poetic force of evocation, registering with the responsiveness of a genius of verbal expression what he so sharply sees and feels." The final stress falls on Dickens's "command of word, phrase, rhythm and image: in ease and range there is surely no greater master of English except Shakespeare. This comes back to saying that Dickens is a great poet: his endless resource in felicitously varied expression is an extraordinary responsiveness to life." 

A remark that Leavis made regarding The Waste Land—"for unequivocal aid, one can't do much more than . . . commit oneself in clear and challenging terms of the necessary critical judgments, and indicate the nature of the essential organization"—can be

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64 The Common Pursuit, pp. 233-234.
65 Ibid., p. 246.
66 Ibid., p. 287.
extended to cover the whole of his critical effort, whether he is concerned in an essay with a single text, an aspect of a writer’s work, an entire œuvre, or the poetry of a century. Elucidation, he notes, is not criticism, and exhaustiveness has never been his aim. His discussions of works are governed by his sense of relevance to his essential purposes, but his criteria do not commit him to the adequate discussion of literary works “as finished wholes, instances of one or another poetic kind.” There is, in general, more complete discussion of novels than of poems.

The brief summaries which follow contain key terms and are typical of his analyses of the “work as work.” First, however, for contrast, here is Leavis on the typical Dickensian whole: “Ordinarily Dickens’s criticisms of the world he lives in are casual and incidental—a matter of including among the ingredients of a book ["melodrama, pathos and humour"] some indignant treatment of a particular abuse.” (The exception is Hard Times, whose “perfection as a work of art” is characteristically correlated with “the sustained and complete seriousness for which among his productions it is unique.”

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67Ibid., p. 237.
68Cf. pp. 96–99 above.
69The Great Tradition, p. 228.
70Cf. pp. 36–37 above.
Leavis's criticism of Adam Bede (a "popular classic") is that it is "too much the sum of its specifiable attractions... too resolvable into the separate interests" that the artist started with: Mrs. Poyser, Dinah, and Adam. Although the unity the author "has induced in her materials is "satisfactory at its own level," there is at work in the whole no pressure "from her profounder experience to compel an inevitable development." For this reason, there is "no sense of inevitability to outrage" when Dinah marries Adam. The finest kind of inevitability, however, is found in that part of Daniel Deronda that deals with Gwendolyn Harleth: "when we reflect critically and relate the scene to what goes before and what comes after we discover more and more reason for admiring her moral and psychological insight, and the completeness with which she has grasped and realized her theme." So superior, indeed, does he find this half of the novel that he would publish it separately and call it Gwendolyn Harleth.

His remarks on the resolution of Victory indicate his interest in technical questions. Leavis finds that, convincing as Heyst is, "the extreme case that he is offered as being really amounts to a kind of Morality representation of the human potentialities he embodies." As a result, it can be argued that he is "fittingly

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71 The Great Tradition, pp. 36-38.
72 Ibid., p. 112.
73 Ibid., p. 122.
brought up against" Jones and Ricardo, "the embodiments of counter-
potentialities, whose function is "to precipitate Heyst's predicament to an issue in a conclusive action." But it is possible to reflect, on the one hand, that Heyst had "shocking bad luck in the coincidence of Jones and Ricardo with Schomberg; and, on the other that the antithesis of lust in Ricardo and woman-loathing in Jones on which the dénouement depends has no irresistible significance in relation to Conrad's main theme." Chance is seen to invite the description "technical triumph" in a way that Nostromo and The Secret Agent do not, because his "essential interest here didn't yield him anything like so rich a pattern."

The last two examples will be from Shakespeare: his judgments on Othello and The Winter's Tale. The essay on Othello is a dissent from the "traditional" version which sees the play as the "undoing of the noble Moor by the devilish cunning of Iago." Though from Coleridge down Iago has commonly been the main focus of attention, Leavis finds him "subordinate and ancillary," "a mechanism necessary for precipitating tragedy in a dramatic action." Iago's "prompt success" with Othello is not so much due to his "diabolic intellect" as to Othello's "readiness to respond." Although Othello is "truly impressive, a noble product of the life of action," he has and retains even at the end a habit of "self-approving self-dramatization."

74 Ibid., p. 208.

75 Ibid., p. 223.
a "self-centredness" that doesn't mean "self-knowledge." Othello as a man of action has never had need of self-knowledge, the lack of which leads to his downfall in his new married situation. Othello does not "learn through suffering," however; and he dies "belonging to the world of action in which his true part lay." This is (simplified) Leavis's reading of Othello, and the essay is essentially an analysis confirming and developing this view.

He remarks of Iago that "Shakespeare's genius carries with it a large facility in imposing conviction locally" and that before we ask for more than this "we should make sure we know just what is being offered us in the whole." The focus is found to be on Othello. Iago is not unbelievable as a person with enough, at least in suggestion, in the way of grievance and motive. Although Leavis finds that no development of Othello would be acceptable--such have been the expectations set up--"unless the behaviour it imposes on him is reconcilable with our notions of ordinary psychological consistency," this consistency need not be extended to other characters, not even to Iago, whose "combination of honest seeming with devilish actuality" can be accepted at least partially as a matter of "tacit convention" acceptable because of the "convincingly handled tragic theme to which it is ancillary." In the same way, the trick of "double time" cannot be quarreled with because, although it involves impossibilities by the criteria of actual life, it is necessary to the plausible conduct of the intrigue. But the attempt to justify Othello's behavior in terms of the convention
of "the slanderer believed" would be unacceptable.76

On the other hand, Leavis finds that the imposition of sudden jealousy by convention on Leontes in The Winter's Tale is acceptable because Shakespeare does not ask the reader to "endorse dramatic illusion with the feeling of everyday reality." The convention is admitted for the "sake of an inclusive effect." In fact, all the "fairy-tale characteristics" of The Winter's Tale—the sudden jealousy of Leontes, the use of the oracle, the casting-out of the child, the time-gap, the pastoral scene, and the statue coming to life with the final reconciliation—are "the conditions of a profundity and generality of theme." Indeed, The Winter's Tale is found superior to The Tempest despite the difficulty that the statue business, for example, might offer to a total unromantic response and the achievement by which the time-gap is eliminated in The Tempest: "With the absence of the time-gap goes also an absence of that depth and richness of significance given, in The Winter's Tale, by the concrete presence of time in its rhythmic processes, and by the association of human growth, decay and rebirth with the vital rhythms of nature at large."77

In the discussions of the Shakespeare plays, the third thing needed to make a critic relevant in his discussions, an understanding of the nature of convention, is introduced. Further, what is

76The Common Pursuit, pp. 136-159.
77Ibid., pp. 175, 180.
here allowed Shakespeare—the freedom to use whatever means are deemed necessary to achieve his artistic end—is allowed to any artist: "one is reminded of les jeunes who discuss whether Mr. Eliot's methods in The Waste Land are 'legitimate' or not, when the only question worth discussing is, Do they work?" It is the responsibility of the critic to grasp the whole and to make the necessary judgments concerning the means. In Leavis's case, judgments concerning formal success or failure are intimately bound up with judgments of value.

78 New Bearings in English Poetry, p. 78.
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The thesis submitted by Ilene Schoenau Tello has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 20, 1960

Date

Signature of Adviser