

F. R. LEAVIS:

A Study in Bourgeois Criticism.

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Criticism

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This paper does not pretend to be an in-depth and total revaluation of Leavis's literary criticism, and it is not my intention to examine the significance of his work exclusively as criticism. The purpose, on the other hand, is to start from the implicit recognition that Leavis is a very important and influential critic, and then attempt to scrutinize some of the basic presumptions and preoccupations that are fundamental to Leavis's practice as a critic. It is inevitable that these presumptions and preoccupations should have ideological - that is political, social and cultural implications. In this paper I attempt to challenge these implications and contend that, ultimately, it is in terms of these concerns that the value and significance of Leavis's literary-cultural criticism can be truly appreciated.

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"And if democratic equality of opportunity requires that the standards be lowered, then I am against democracy".

-- F. R. Leavis.

"There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses".

-- R. Williams.

"It is not the consciousness of men which determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being which determines their consciousness".

-- Karl Marx.

Preoccupations. Chapter 1.

The contemporary notion of the intellegentsia as a class — its role and position in society — is part and parcel of the growth of modern capitalism. For the lack of a better and more accurate date, both of these developments, may be said to have become implicit in the aftermath of the French Revolution of 1789 when the ultimate emergence of the bourgeoisie as the largest and the most powerful class of the new society, paves the way not only for the rise of the modern capitalism, but also, as a result, for the contemporary form of alienation. Such is the original motivation in the nature of Wordsworth's romantic revolt, and his poetry which is its expression. Wordsworth's plight is perhaps the first conscious expression of the alienation of the artist in the new society, and his definition of the poet as a man of higher sensibility, of a "more comprehensive soul", than is "supposed to be common among mankind"¹ already hints at a qualitative distinction between the poet and the common man even though his understanding of the poet-society relationship is still rooted in the classical tradition. The alienation of the artist-intellectual was a romantic phenomenon, and "romanticism was essentially a middle-class movement".²

¹William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, 1800".

²Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), Volume III, p. 166. The same point is also made by Ernst Fischer in The Necessity of Art, (Penguin, 1963), pp. 52-62. The fact is that the romantic thought reflects the underlying contradictions of the capitalist society, but in a completely unproductive way, for even while it

It is important to keep this link in mind. The artist-intellectual who in the French Revolution had been comrade-in-arms of the bourgeoisie against the decadence of the prevailing order of society, is gradually to be profoundly disillusioned, so much in fact as to be "filled with hatred and contempt for the very class to which [he owes his] intellectual and material existence".³ Thus for instance, Shelley's poet as against Wordsworth's is no longer a "man speaking to men" but rather he is man above and culturally superior to man. He is the "unacknowledged legislator of the world".⁴ The "two generations" of romantics, that is Wordsworth's and Shelley's, differ in so far as the consciousness of their own existence, and the respective roles in society that they envisage for themselves are vastly different.

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protested against what it analyzed as the growing mechanization of social relations owing to the rapid industrialization in England and on the continent, it nevertheless clung on to "the old security of rank and order" (Fischer, p. 53). The assumptions implicit in Leavis's critical/cultural thinking, are, as Raymond Williams points out in his Culture And Society, firmly rooted in romanticism -- a romanticism for which the "social reality was, if not 'abolished', then at least extravagantly distorted". (Fischer, p. 60)

³A. Hauser, The Social History of Art, (London, 1962), Vol. III, p. 166.

⁴P.B. Shelley, A Defence of Poetry, 1821. Although it can be argued that the roots of Shelley's thought can be traced back to the neo-classicism of Samuel Johnson, or even farther back to Sidney, I think it is important to bear in mind the structural difference that the concept assumes when it is seen as a counter-force in the face of the growth of the twin developments of democracy and the industrial revolution.

And yet the emergence of the intelligentsia as a class, completely alienated from and contemptuous of the new society, is slow to take shape, and does not become self-conscious until the middle of the Victorian age. The artist-intellectual, seriously disillusioned with social reality, is increasingly forced to refer back to himself, and for the first time the quest for self-identity is defined in entirely a-social terms. The inner 'psychological' life, rather than society, becomes the locus of his attention. George Eliot's 'intellectualism' in this respect, may be said to be concomitant with the growth of the psychological novel in England. "The psychological novel" as Hauser has argued, "is the literary genre of the intelligentsia as the cultural stratum in process of emancipating itself from the bourgeoisie..."⁵ On the other hand those who were concerned with social reality, found it almost impossible to come to terms with the growth of industrialism and the resultant concept of democracy. They became very suspicious of and deeply opposed to democracy, and thus sought refuge in mystified social analysis, and division of society along new classes.⁶

⁵A. Hauser, The Social History of Art, (London, 1962), Volume IV, p. 124.

⁶For instance, Basil Willey referring to M. Arnold, comments that "everyone knows his classification of English society into Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace" (Nineteenth-Century Studies, Penguin, 1964, p. 266). And one remembers Carlyle's contention in his Hero And Hero-Worship, that aristocracy is the only hope for the re-establishment of order. One could of course go on citing evidence. And in that I am not trying to simplify or overlook several

However, this most significant shift of emphasis, at least in England, does not become a self-conscious ideology until Matthew Arnold's division of the society into two classes: mass civilization and minority culture. Of course, the movement towards this direction is implicit in the very birth of romanticism and Raymond Williams, it seems to me, is correct in tracing the modern usage of terms like 'culture' and 'democracy' to the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century⁷ but the point that I am trying to make here is that "the emergence of culture as an abstraction and an absolute"⁸ with its implicit division between intellectual and manual labour, and the notion of the former as being superior form of activity, does not manifest itself as a conscious ideology until the middle of the Victorian period when such an analysis of society in terms of cultural classes establishes itself as the new intellectual tradition. This is essentially a reactionary tradition. For, while, in one direction it leads to a fundamentally faulty and inadequate understanding of the causes determining the alienation of the intellectual, in another sense, it attempts to erect a new hierarchy

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differences of detail -- and sometimes significant ones -- rather what I am trying to emphasize, is the basic anti-democratic bias which they all seem to share, and which seems to be their only response to the challenge of vast extension of democratic equality.

⁷R. Williams, Culture and Society, (Penguin Press, 1961), pp. 15-16.

⁸The Same, p. 17.

of social classes based upon some abstract and vague conception of culture and a somewhat mystical analysis of social relations. The roots of this sensibility, as I have suggested before, go back to the birth of romanticism. Thus what started out as a protest against the Industrial Revolution and its effect upon human relations, gradually, gets transformed into a mystified critique of democratic values and ends up by directly leading to modern nihilism. Matthew Arnold, of course, represents an early stage in this evolution, but he is nevertheless its founding exponent in England who sets up the basic ideological framework for the division of society between minority culture and mass civilization. It is, essentially, Arnold's exposition that flows down into our times as the relevant critical tradition mainly through the influence of such major culture-literary critics as T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis. With them the protest against the inhumanity of modern capitalism becomes compounded with their inherent temperamental and/or ideological fear of socialism^m. Their isolation is total and fundamental. Thus as Georg Lukacs puts it in another context, "the opposition to socialism gathered momentum and was soon transformed into an ideological crusade, which, though nominally concerned with the preservation of democracy, was really nourished by a growing fear of the threat which mass society poses to the ruling elite".⁹ What is at issue here, is not the

⁹G. Lukacs, Realism in Our Time, (Harper & Row, 1962), p. 62.

direct social or political belief of these pundits of culture (for Leavis may passionately profess a belief in democracy, and Eliot speak out against Nazi-ism even while his mentor broadcasted from Mussolini's Italy), but the issue is their inherent underlying ideological position in terms of which they diagnose the mal du siecle.

As these critics see it (explicitly or otherwise) the root-cause of all our contemporary troubles is the liberal conception of terms like democracy and culture. The position is adequately defined by Eliot's contention that "our society is worm-eaten with liberalism".¹⁰ And as I understand it, by 'liberalism' it is implied, among several other things, the growth of a wider and even mass availability of education and culture. Consequently there has resulted a relatively greater degree of freedom of interpretation which has caused the disintegration of what they believe to have been a 'homogenous' and 'organic' culture.

As Hauser puts it:

Nothing is more typical of the prevailing philosophy of culture of the period than the attempt to make this 'revolt of the masses' responsible for the alienation and degradation of modern culture and the attack which is made on it in the name of the mind and spirit. Most of the extremists profess a belief in the usually somewhat confused cultural criticism which underlies this philosophy. . . . The majority are consciously or unconsciously reactionary and prepare the way for Fascism. . . . The new 'Middle Ages', the 'New Christendom', the 'new Europe', are all the old romantic land of counter-revolution, and the 'revolution in science', the mobilization of the spirit against the mechanism and the determinism of the natural

¹⁰ T.S. Eliot, After Strange Gods, see also footnote on p.26

sciences, nothing but the beginning of the great world reaction against the democratic and social enlightenment.¹¹

And, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness".¹² In any case, it is against this background that the birth of Scrutiny and the value and function of Leavis's criticism -- as the principles underlying it -- must be examined.

¹¹A. Hauser, The Social History of Art, (Routledge & Kegan Paul 1962), Volume IV, p. 216.

¹²T.S. Eliot, "Gerontion" Four Quartets.

Each section of the public has its own literary organ, and the mass of the public is without any suspicion that the value of these organs is relative to their being nearer a certain ideal centre of correct information, taste, and intelligence, or farther away from it.

-- Matthew Arnold in Culture and Anarchy.

The quotation above, from one of the best-known works of Matthew Arnold, reveals an inner confidence in the audience to which the remark is addressed. Presumably, everyone knows where the trouble lies and how one is to go about correcting it. The attack upon general complacency in and about the contemporary state of culture was shared by the mutually acknowledged and recognized pundits of culture. Everyone considered it to be their task to restore culture to its customary high pedestal. There was no fear of the intrusion from the barbarians. Unlike Coleridge and Johnson before him,¹³ with Arnold, the domain of literary scholarship and culture, became the private property of an inner group from which the philistines and the masses were to be permanently excluded. The 'ideal' centre was mutually defined and recognized; and once that was done it was safely assumed that the mass of the public would be without any suspicion as to what the ideal centre was all about. Arnold's Culture and Anarchy was published in 1869. The task, for his times appeared to be reasonably clear, and the nature and function of literary criticism fairly well-defined. But Arnold was followed by

¹³In this context see Raymond Williams, Culture And Society, (Penguin 1961), pp. 124-136; and George Watson, The Literary Critics, (Penguin 1962), pp. 151-52.

what can appropriately be described as a great 'cultural revolution' which saw the rise of mass literacy and a phenomenal increase in the popularity and influence of the mass-media. Thus gradually, each section of the public not only came to have its own literary organ, but it also acquired its own ideal centre. The very existence of any one ideal centre came to be doubted. In place of the one recognizable literary and cultural tradition, different critics set out to erect several others. Thus for all those -- like Leavis and the Scrutiny group -- who nostalgically clung onto some mythical cultural homogeneity of a bygone era, the task of restoring tradition seemed to have become evermore urgent and acute. In accordance with the foregoing analysis of society and culture, the most important task before the concerned critical intelligence was, therefore, seen to be the business of getting together a group of like-minded people and establishing a centre of intelligence and communication, such as would dedicate itself to the necessity of restoring tradition, and thus attempting to reestablish the homogeneity of culture that seems to have existed in some mythical past. Scrutiny was instrumental in bringing together precisely such a group of people. As F. W. Bateson in his essay "The Alternative to Scrutiny" points out:

The nucleus of Scrutiny's contributors was a small group of Cambridge graduate students -- with one or two Oxford disciples like H. A. Mason and D. A. Traversi -- who met regularly at Leavis's house and formed a tight inner circle of self-conscious academic 'outlaws'. As the magazine prospered the more miscellaneous contributors disappeared, and most of the articles and virtually all

the reviews were the work of this inner Cambridge group.¹⁴ Very early in the life of Scrutiny, this inner Cambridge group revealed a common and galvanizing influence of a little-known book called Middletown. The group shared the basic presumptions and conclusions that the authors of Middletown had set out to examine.

Middletown is a study of a somewhat 'typical' small town in Illinois, United States. Although it pretends to come to terms with all the "interwoven trends that are the life of a small American city",¹⁵ yet as the authors themselves recognize and acknowledge in the introductory chapter of the book, their concern in the book was the examination of the rapidly disappearing traditional mode of living and the gradual emergence of an industrial economy brought about through the introduction of the new modes of production:

We are coming to realize, moreover, that we today are probably living in one of the eras of greatest rapidity of change. ; : ; New tools and techniques are being developed with stupendous celerity, while in the wake of these technical developments increasingly frequent and strong culture waves sweep over us from without. . . . The year 1870 was selected as the base line against which to project the culture of today because of greater availability of data from that year onward and because not until the end of 1886 was natural gas struck in the city under study and the boom begun which was to transform the placid country-seat during the nineties into a manufacturing city.¹⁶

The book is a somewhat nostalgic account of the growing pains of a small, self-contained community. It attempts to outline the course of transition from a rural

¹⁴F. W. Bateson, "The Alternative to Scrutiny", Essays in Criticism, (Cambridge University Press, 1964), Vol. XIV, p. 16.

¹⁵R.S. and Helen Lynd, Middletown, (New York, 1929), p. 3.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 5.

and self-sufficient culture into a highly mechanized society of industrial production and the accompanying social change.

However, it needs to be added that Lynds' conclusions in their Middletown are most noteworthy for an over-all paucity of supporting evidence and documentation. The book's evidence, whatever and whenever it does appear, will not bear up to any kind of historical and sociological scrutiny. It is suspect, to say the very least, that Lynds' general conclusions based upon an altogether insufficient scholarship were not only swallowed without even a seeming sense of discrimination, what is worse, on their evidence¹⁷ along with the strangely confused cultural criticism of men like Matthew Arnold, a whole big theory about society, culture, language and education was propounded which formed the basis of most of the critical standards that Leavis and his group were to popularize.

Armed with such a theory, Scrutiny in almost

¹⁷It is only fair to point out that Middletown was not the only book of its kind. Similar work was being done in England by George Sturt especially as evidenced in his books like Change in the Village, and the Wheelwright's Shop. All these books seem to have confirmed the insufficiently investigated tenets characteristic of the romantic age: that the old cultures of harmony and more primitive modes of production were being rapidly replaced by modern organized industrial economies. It would therefore be incorrect to suggest that the influence of Middletown upon Leavis and his band, was anywhere near as totally determining as my discussion of it, may sometimes make it seem. Middletown as an example was picked only because for one, it is fairly characteristic of the general attitude, and secondly because Leavis himself was frequently referred to this book in his criticism.

self-conscious righteousness, implicitly rejected Marxism;¹⁸ denounced the mass-media, declared mass-literacy to be the major threat to the preservation of the contemporary culture, and consequently, with the most passionate single-mindedness set out for the formation of the elite that would seek to restore the 'ideal centre' -- the literary tradition which was claimed to be our only link with the heritage of the past and thus the only hope for salvaging the currency of finer living.

It is all very well to have thought that the fashionable Marxism of the thirties was inadequate in discipline and looked for an easy -- even seemingly thoughtless -- way to salvation, but not to have recognized that even those fashionable Marxists had at least correctly diagnosed the disease even though their cure seemed suspect; and in any case to have dismissed all Marxists analysis as being worthless on the evidence of the 'fashionable' Marxists of its time, Scrutiny, as in the case of the whole-sale swallowing of the Middletown, once again, revealed a pathetic susceptibility to accepting as true, all that was palatable to it with its characteristic lack

¹⁸This implicit rejection of Marxism (see "Manifesto" Scrutiny Vol. I no. 1) gradually developed into a stubborn opposition as the cardinal point of assumption in Scrutiny's attempt to see "tradition" as being, in some sense, independent of the political and social action, gradually grew into a kind of conscious ideology. The change is very apparent from Leavis's essay "The Literary Mind", Scrutiny Vol. I, no. 1 pp. 20-32, to for example "Sociology and Literature" published later in his volume The Common Pursuit. Also see p. 26.

of sufficient scholarship and investigation.¹⁹ In this the Scrutiny group clearly displayed what Kenneth Trodd has called the "backwardness of vision".²⁰ Thus Leavis, who had set out to challenge the usurpation of culture by the existing elite -- symbolized in the university dons, the Bloomsbury group and the British Council -- who paraded 'scholarship' and purely textual analysis in the name of critical judgement, ended up by seeking to replace one form of elite by another. His conception of literary and cultural criticism was far from being 'revolutionary' although judging from the tone of his criticism, he may well have thought it so.

Another book that seems to have exercised an equally determining influence upon the birth and the general direction and orientation of Scrutiny was Fiction and the Reading Public by Q.D. Leavis -- Leavis's wife. Published just about two years before the first issue of Scrutiny (May, 1932), Fiction and the Reading Public recounted the history of general popular taste during the past hundred years or so, particularly in relation to fiction. The book is a damning account of the general laziness and the shoddy character of the middle-class reading habits. All this was taken to point towards a

¹⁹For Leavis's attack on the 'fashionable' Marxists of his time, see 1) "Under Which King, Bezonian", Scrutiny, II. pp. 193-201 and 2) "Literature and Society", The Common Pursuit, (Penguin, 1962) pp. 182-194.

²⁰K. Trodd, "From Younger Generation", Essays in Criticism, (Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 31.

general decline of standards in literary arts and culture. Furthermore, it seemed to confirm the conclusions reached independently by Lynds' in their Middletown. Just to attempt at a more balanced list, another important and major influence needs to be mentioned here: I.A. Richards. Richards is perhaps the most influential theoretician of literary criticism in our time and his influence has been varied and widespread. There can be no doubt, for example, that his theories and experiments in his Practical Criticism proved to be the generative spirit behind the growth of the New Criticism. He provided the theoretical framework for its methodology and practice. Such, however is not the nature of his influence upon Leavis, although it has often been construed to be precisely that by several different authorities.²¹ Leavis has been thought of as a 'practical critic', involved in a close verbal analysis of the words on the page. There is little evidence of that in Leavis's own criticism. Indeed it can be argued that Richards had a more genuine influence upon Leavis than upon the New Critics.²² His Practical Criticism itself was an excellent example of the dangers inherent in a totally a-historic approach to the study of literature. Yet for the New Critics, it became an ideal to be strived ~~for~~ ^{for}. Richards himself was more aware of the experimental

²¹ See Laurence Lerner, "The Life and Death of Scrutiny", London Magazine, (London), January 1955; And S.E. Hyman, The Armed Vision, (New York, 1948).

²² Another example that strikes one immediately is William Empson.

character of his study. As he explained in his introduction to the Practical Criticism, his objectives were more concerned with the contemporary state of culture, the general sloppiness of the popular reading habits and educational reform.²³ The similarity of purpose is striking when one considers Leavis's concerns in his own criticism. It was essentially against this background that the Scrutiny group sought to define the practice and function of literary criticism in our time. Of this group perhaps the most important and influential member -- with whose name, almost, the Scrutiny came to be identified -- was F.R. Leavis without whom the magazine's "continuance for even half its actual lifetime would have been out of question".²⁴

Leavis explained that the function of literary criticism is inseparable from the "problem of making the study of literature a discipline -- not a discipline of scholarly industry and academic method, but a discipline

²³"I have set three aims before me in constructing this book. First, to introduce a new kind of documentation to those who are interested in the contemporary state of culture whether as critics, as philosophers, as teachers as psychologists, or merely as curious persons. Secondly, to provide a new technique for those who wish to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry (and cognate matters) and why they should like or dislike it. Thirdly, to prepare the way for educational methods more efficient than those we use now in developing discrimination and the power to understand what we hear and read". I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism, (New York, 1929), p. 4.

²⁴Boris Ford edited The Pelican Guide to English Literature, (Penguin, 1964), Volume VII, p. 363.

of intelligence and sensibility".²⁵ The statement obviously indicates irritation with the school of 'practical critics' like Cleanth Brooks and William Empson (in Seven Types of Ambiguity) who take the verbal analysis of poetry -- the words on the page -- as a kind of be-all and end-all of literary criticism. The statement also reveals exasperation with the 'scholars' and the 'specialists' of literature who confuse criticism with literary knowledge and scholarship. As Leavis was to go on to explain, the problem was to make "literary criticism something more like a disciplined and relevant use of intelligence than the current books, essays and studies, academic and other, and current reviewing, seemed to represent".²⁶ Leavis's attack was, therefore, directed at the existing system of education -- an education, which, as he put it:

tends to foster a glib superficiality, a 'literary culture' too like that of those milieux in which literary fashions are the social currency -- milieux of which the frequenters cultivate quickness in the uptake, knowingness about the latest market quotations, and an impressive range of reference, all at the expense of real intelligence and disinterested understanding, or interest in anything but kudos.²⁷

Confronted with what Leavis considered to be a general dissolution of standards and a pronounced decline in the Western civilization, the main function of literary criticism seemed to him, to be not the verbal analysis of

²⁵F.R. Leavis, Education and the University, (London, 1961), p.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷F.R. Leavis, Education and the University, (London, 1961), p.

the words on the page but one of comprehensive evaluation, a "common pursuit of true judgement",²⁸ imbued with an immediate sense of urgency and relevance to what was seen as an impending cultural crisis. As Leavis was to say in a latter volume of Scrutiny:

. . . to insist that literary criticism is, or should 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".²⁹

It was taken as "axiomatic that concern for standards of living implies concern for standards in the arts",³⁰ for literature is "the storehouse of recorded values, and, in consequence, there is a necessary relationship between the quality of individual's response to art and his general fitness for a human existence".³¹

The emphasis, obviously, was placed a bit too one-sidedly on the arts. After all, the arts (or more specifically, literature which was the immediate concern of these critics) are not the only storehouse of human values. The humanities in their own way, may well be

²⁸F.R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit, (Penguin Books, 1962), p. v.

²⁹F.R. Leavis, Scrutiny, (Cambridge University Press, 1963) volume XIII, p. 78.

³⁰Scrutiny, (Cambridge University Press, 1963), Volume I, p. 2.

³¹The Same, p. 5.

said to further the possibilities of a humane existence. And so do the sciences, one might argue. But Leavis seems to have dispensed with everything except literature. It was⁵ indicative that from the very outset, Leavis with his band of cultural warriors set out for a lop-sided and insufficiently investigated course -- and that notwithstanding the fact that the central point that Scrutiny was trying to make was an important one. Leavis was timely in his expressed concern: literature did seem to be in the danger of being swamped over by the more utilitarian sciences; but, as Raymond Williams puts it, "to put upon literature, or more accurately upon criticism, the responsibility of controlling the quality of the whole range of personal and social experience, is to expose a vital case to damaging misunderstanding".³² A fundamentally faulty and sociologically incoherent diagnosis that sought to explain the root cause of the contemporary state of culture in terms of the ever-increasing scienticism of the age, inevitably led to the altogether unreasonable demand for establishing the study of literature as the primary -- and only -- step towards the preservation of cultural health.

Now, here was a group of people seriously concerned with literature who believed that "literature means something, that the meaning or content is bound up with style or form, and may therefore be discovered by the

³² Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, (Penguin, 1961), p. 249.

trained sensibility. Literature means letters, humane letters, men's words";³³ but who also believed that they had "trained themselves in the discipline of a central but non-specialist cultural activity: they were in short one centre of the elite upon whose existence the survival of humane values has come entirely to depend".³⁴ The two critics quoted above have found Leavis's work relevant and very valuable. They both praise Leavis in his concern for culture without for a moment considering why should this culture need to be preserved. If, as it seems to have been well recognized, the very survival of this culture depends upon the continued existence of a minority elite, why is such a culture so much worth preserving? Furthermore, if such a culture feels itself threatened by the very likelihood of wider participation in determining its quality and importance, how could the survival of humane values depend upon it? This contradiction was at the very heart of the inner group controlling Scrutiny, and yet it assiduously managed to avoid resolving it. The explanation of this admirable feat is to be found in the fact that the method of argumentation and analysis used by the Scrutiny group never allowed them to face this contradiction. This can be explained.

In very simplified terms, it may be argued that

³³Eric Bentley, edited, The Importance of Scrutiny, (G.W. Stewart, New York, 1948), p. xxii.

³⁴Boris Ford edited, The Pelican Guide to English Literature, (Pelican, 1964), Volume VII, p. 360.

there are two ways of getting to appreciate the significance of a writer like, say Shakespear: 1) The reader is against the feudal order of society; Shakespeare is seen to be against feudalism, and so, Shakespeare is a significant writer for the reader. 2) Shakespeare is a great writer, according to the current beliefs of the reader which remain unenunciated -- sometimes even for himself -- and he refuses to discuss them; Shakespeare is seen to be the product of a feudal culture, and so feudalism is a great culture which must be preserved at all costs.

Admittedly, this is a very simplified analogy but it makes the necessary point: either one can move from social concern, to erect a particular tradition of significant literature; or one can move from what is considered to be a significant tradition of literature and seek to establish a commensurate order of society. There can be no doubt as to which order the Scrutiny group belonged.

Thus, whenever Leavis talked about the necessity of maintaining links with the heritage of the past, this heritage was predetermined in terms of a fixed view of society and culture. And as I have mentioned earlier, it was a minority heritage, as culture was considered to be the domain of a concerned minority. Logically it follows, therefore, that so long as it is a minority that produces, guards and preserves culture, culture must always appear to be in the danger of being swamped over by the philistines and the barbarians. The problem was even more complicated

for Leavis and his band. There was the growth of the penny-press to contend with. Mass-literacy and mass-communication, advertising, films and radio, seemed to have made the task of guarding literature and culture even more urgent. It seemed obvious that the old culture was decaying. The causes of this decay, insufficiently investigated and placed in the industrial revolution, were lost in a mystified analysis of social relations. Literary tradition itself seems to have been usurped by the 'gang',³⁵ who had set themselves up as its guardians. Even as literary language -- the only instrument of maintaining links with the tradition -- decayed, the 'gang' of the literary elite pretended to take no notice of it. The atmosphere was one of a general lack of seriousness about the state into which language and the literature had fallen.

It was in such an atmosphere that F.R. Leavis, passionately convinced of the Arnoldian dogma that poetry is a criticism of life, tried to inculcate a serious interest in poetry and literary criticism.

As he saw it the state of literature was indicative,

³⁵ The term 'gang' used by William Walsh in his book Use of Imagination, refers to the existing elite at the time when Leavis made his appearance on the literary scene. More particularly, it referred to the pseudo-intellectualism of the Bloomsbury group, and its counterparts at the British Council and the BBC, whose job it was to 'sell' British culture at home and abroad. It is characteristic that in terms of his analysis of the causes behind the increasing decay of culture Leavis should have chosen to attack the 'gang' and the British Council.

not only of an inadequacy of language, but of something that went back much further to an "inadequacy behind the words, an inadequacy of experience; a failure of something that should have pressed upon them [that is, the words and the language] and controlled them to a sharp significance".³⁶ This something that had failed the writers, was soon diagnosed to be the lack of a living tradition. As Leavis argued it, it seemed that the people had, in general, lost their contact with the soil;³⁷ that tradition had decayed, and so far as its use to the artist is concerned, it had

³⁶F.R. Leavis, Scrutiny, (Cambridge University Press, 1963), Volume 1, p. 22.

³⁷The similarity with the New Critics and the Agrarian movement is striking. It is significant to observe how often one discovers similarities between Leavis and the New Critics -- and those, sometimes, in the least likely places. In their own separate ways, one can trace them back to I.A. Richards and the new era of criticism that he seems to have ushered in with his Practical Criticism and other books like Coleridge On Imagination and Meaning of Meaning. Although Richards's Practical Criticism seems to have symbolised for the New Critics, at least in the earlier phase of his influence, an ideal of disinterested verbal analysis for its own sake, and an analysis of the texture and the structure of a work of art, revealing its inner coherence, completeness and organization; yet as they have developed, the other emphases in their criticism have uncovered concerns that are fundamentally similar to those displayed by Leavis. A discussion of metaphor, irony, ambiguity etc. follows in its appropriate place on pp. 41-43. Here, what I wish to point out is that Leavis's and the New Critics' concern with culture and their separate analyses of the causes underlying its decline are not as far apart as they on the first sight may appear to be. In this regard J.C. Ransom's quotation on p. 56, is of particular interest.

almost disintegrated.

As Leavis saw it, the problem was not merely one of art, rather it seemed to involve issues that are central to the very style of existence of a people; they seeped down to the way of life of the community. Thus, although the political revolutionists seemed to be full of passionate conviction about the future, for Leavis, no social or political commitment that did not take the restoration of literary tradition seriously into account, ever seemed likely to overcome the ^ageneral malaise into which culture had succumbed.

In an age when extreme political polarization was the prevailing fashion of the day (and for good reasons), it needed laudable courage -- as also sociological incoherence and intellectual short-sightedness -- for F.R. Leavis to stand by his convictions and reject political and social action alone as adequate remedies for the malady of his times. As Leavis put it:

To revive or replace a decayed tradition is a desperate undertaking . . . some readers of Scrutiny will agree that no social or political movement unrelated to such an attempt could engage one's faith and energy. The more immediate conclusions would seem to bear upon education. No one aware of the problem will entertain easy hopes, for, inevitably, the machinery of education works in the process of the modern world . . . the concern for 'tradition' that I have in mind will not be that commonly associated with formal education. Everything must start from and be related to the training of sensibility . . . the study of literary history -- of periods, developments and relations -- must be directed to producing a real grasp of the idea of a living tradition. Sensibility and the idea of tradition -- both concerns are essential.³⁸

³⁸F.R. Leavis, Scrutiny, (Cambridge University Press, 1963), Volume 1, p. 30.

It needs to be pointed out that Leavis's use of the term 'tradition' is not identical with that of T.S. Eliot. This, it seems to me is no place to go into a detailed account of the differences and the significant shifts of emphases between their respective uses of the term, for inevitably, that would involve discussion of such views as are beyond the scope of this paper. I do wish to suggest, however, that Eliot's notion of 'tradition', at least in the more significant of his earlier criticism, is synonymous with an essentially literary tradition even though, and Eliot himself makes this quite clear, the literary tradition that he speaks of reflects and draws upon the way of life of a people.³⁹ In contrast, Leavis's conception refers to something that is more of a socio-cultural entity than literary. Whereas Eliot's tradition lays emphasis upon an objectively existing literary order, Leavis's stress falls, more unequivocally upon an objec-

³⁹It is surprising, therefore, to see Leavis praise Eliot for what he considers to be a "purity of interest" in Eliot's criticism. Talking of his debt to Eliot Leavis comments: "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 . . ." The Common Pursuit, (Penguin, 1962), p. 280. A very brief comment regarding Eliot's influence upon Leavis may be pertinent here. All that I wish to say is although Leavis began his career, apparently, under the strong influence of Eliot, the progress of his criticism "can be traced in terms of his alienation from his influence". George Watson's The Literary Critics, (Penguin, 1962), p. 210.

tively existing social and cultural order. And no matter how misunderstood this order may be, for Leavis it contains within itself all the spiritual, moral and emotional modes of being of a people. This change in emphasis may, in part be explained by the fact that Eliot was a poet, and as he has himself somewhere admitted, all his criticism is essentially a "by-product of his poetical workshop".

I am aware that this very brief discussion of the distinction between Eliot's and Leavis's uses of the term tradition is far from being adequate. The point that I am trying to drive at here, is that Eliot's concern with tradition is bound up, primarily, with his functioning as a poet, while by contrast Leavis's concern stems from his occupation as a teacher-critic. I would like to suggest nevertheless that their respective analyses and the basic socio-cultural assumptions that are implicit in them, reveal underlying similarities which by far, outweigh the distinctions that I have tried to establish.

However, it is important to bear the distinction in mind. For purity of interest, Leavis's criticism is exemplary. He has never expressed any desire to indulge in 'creative' literature. Leavis, indeed has always remained a great teacher -- a great teacher of a great university. It were therefore the current standards in education which set Leavis going. His concern for tradition stems, properly speaking, from his alarm at the steadily declining quality of literary training and his desire for educational reforms. As he was quick to discover, to control the standard of existence the correct

arena for combatting the decline in culture, was education. As Leavis himself has pointed out: literary order is nothing more than a substitute. Literary education and literary tradition is important because it is on them that the task and "the office of maintaining continuity must rest".⁴⁰ Yet, as he has emphasized, it ought not to be forgotten that the literary tradition and "literary education is to a great extent a substitute".⁴¹ The word 'substitute', in the last sentence is of crucial importance, for it explicates clearly the central emphasis in Leavis's concern for literature. Literature is important because it is the storehouse of human values, and the study of literary tradition is or should be the central aspect of higher education because it is the way of maintaining links with the heritage of the past. The major writers are significant "in the sense that they not only change the possibilities of art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of that human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life".⁴²

It is clear that Leavis takes it to be self-evident that culture is in a rapid process of decline, and since culture is the manifestation of the ⁱfinest part of human sensibility, its decline needs to be urgently checked.

⁴⁰F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, Culture and Environment, (Chatto & Windus, London, 1933), p. 73

⁴¹Ibid. p. 84

⁴²F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, (Penguin, 1962), p. 10.

Furthermore, since literature is the finest part of human culture -- and literary tradition its finest expression -- the starting point, according to him, must of necessity, be an intensive study of the literary tradition, directed towards the training of sensibility. Hence Leavis's stress upon education, at the very centre of which must be the study of English Literature, for as I shall try to show, it is in these terms, according to Leavis, that the function and value of school and university education must be seen. In this paper I shall try to argue that these concerns are fundamental to Leavis's practice as a critic, and it is, ultimately, in terms of these concerns that the value and significance of his literary-cultural criticism can be truly appreciated.

Chapter II. The Intellectual Aristocracy.

"For the tragedy of the decade of the thirties was that it paradoxically vaccinated British culture against Marxism".⁴³

-- Perry Anderson.

One of the most unfortunate developments -- so far as a fresh and original look at the British culture of the twentieth century, both in terms of its theoretical formulation as well as its practice, is concerned -- was the indiscriminate growth of what came to be known as the fashionable Marxism of the thirties. Not only did its "passionate intensity" stifle the very possibility of a rational and progressive discussion of the growing and new situation in England -- as, indeed, all over the world -- what is worse, it allowed the traditionalists and conservatives to assume an easy air of superiority and the "correctness" of their own theories of culture and civilization. In an age of growing political and social polarization, any extra-political definition of culture and spcial relations appeared to be quite 'radical' even while in fact it represented or may have represented the most 'conservative' position.

It is indicative of the general paucity of any 'new' thinking in England that the task of re{defining terms of such crucial significance as culture, society, community, civilization etc. should have become the monopoly of the literary critics who themselves had nothing better

⁴³Perry Anderson, New Left Review, July-August, '68, p. 11.

to offer than the thoughts of another literary critic of an older century: that is Matthew Arnold's. This is not to suggest that the whole tradition of culturally concerned literary critics from Coleridge down to Leavis, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, is totally bankrupt and has nothing to offer. Indeed as the last two examples quoted are an indication, they may well have something really significant and original to contribute to the discussion on culture and society, and of course to the relevance of literature in our time. But, and this needs to be emphasized, that would require a more serious interest in the sociology of culture and less 'purity of interest' in literature than Leavis and most of the other concerned critics are willing to allow. However, as the tradition of significant literary critics/thinkers from Coleridge to Carlyle, Ruskin Morris and Arnold, and their counterparts in the twentieth century, makes abundantly clear, literary criticism by itself cannot be expected to generate an epistemological system that explains all the latent developments in bourgeois capitalism, no matter how revolted and incensed the critic may feel about them. It is, therefore, characteristic of the period that F.R. Leavis should seek to establish the validity of his own curious notions of mass civilization and minority culture by poking holes in the current Marxist theories of culture. Thus it is in his review of Trotsky's Literature and Revolution that Leavis mounts his characteristic attack on the fashionable Marxists of his time. Leavis accuses Trotsky of practicing, like all Marxists, "with the

familiar air of scientific vigour, the familiar vague, blanketing use of essential terms".⁴⁴ In a rather provocative analysis of the book, Leavis reveals, it seems to me quite correctly that Trotsky's use of the term 'culture' precludes sufficient thinking on and comprehension of what precisely constitutes culture.

Now it is obvious that culture is a very difficult term to define. It can be taken to mean radically different things for different people, for its conception involves a fundamental consideration of one's social and political commitment. It can be argued that although T.S. Eliot, for instance, is not a Fascist, yet his definition and conception of the term culture, directly leads to a Fascist order of society. And Leavis who has always spoken out rather contemptuously of all forms of social and political action, does not have anything better to offer as far as an alternative definition of culture is concerned. In the same review, for instance, what Leavis himself proposes in return, can hardly be said to illuminate the issue to any perspective:

⁴⁴F.R. Leavis, "Under Which King, Bezonian", Scrutiny, (Cambridge University Press, 1963), Volume I, p. 207.

⁴⁵It is well-known that Eliot's earlier position enunciated in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent", gradually became much widened to include forces and motives other than purely literary. His conviction that poet should adhere to tradition, and that he should not consider poetry to be the expression of personality -- original and new emotions -- is commensurate with his subsequent realization that the contemporary society is "worm-eaten with

. . . it is true that culture in the past has borne a close relation to the 'methods of production'. A culture expressing itself in a tradition of literature and art -- such a tradition as represents the finer consciousness of the race and provides the currency of finer living -- can be in a healthy state only if this tradition is in living relation with a real culture, shared by the people at large. The point might be enforced by saying (there is no need to elaborate) that Shakespeare did not invent the language he used. And when England had a popular culture, the structure, the framework, of it was a stylization, so to speak, of economic necessities; based, it might fairly be said, on the 'methods of production' was an art of living involving codes, developed in ages of continuous experience, of relations between man and man and the environment in its seasonal rhythm. This culture the progress of the nineteenth century destroyed, in country and in town; it destroyed the organic community. And what survives of the cultural tradition in any important sense survives in spite of the rapidly changing 'means of production'.⁴⁶

This is an important enough statement to deserve quoting at such great length for it is characteristic of Leavis's position and it explicitly states most of the

Footnote 45 contd. from previous page
 liberalism". It needs to be noted that a general rejection of liberalism with a progressively Marxist attitude of mind involves dangers indicated by the fact that the starting point of Fascism has always been the rejection of liberalism. Furthermore, as Eliot makes plain, his Notes Towards the Definition of Culture (1948) is only an attempt to define one word: culture. Eliot's definition, as it is only natural, involves a definition of society. And although Eliot explicitly denies any claim to outlining a social and political philosophy, it is hardly any other thing. That the logic of his analysis leads to a Fascistic order of society becomes more apparent when Eliot argues not only for an elitist culture, but when he points out that this elite is not to be a product of talent and education but it is rather to consist of superior members and superior families (Notes), the family being "the primary channel of transmission of culture" (Selected Prose) p. 23.

⁴⁶F. R. Leavis, "Under Which King, Bezonian", Scrutiny, (Cambridge University Press, 1963), Volume I, pp. 207-208.

preoccupations and fundamental concerns that motivate all of Leavis's literary and extra-literary criticism. It is also suggestive of the strong influence that Marxism, he so contemptuously dismisses, had had upon his concepts and phraseology. It is often forgotten that Scrutiny "was born in close relation to Marxism -- its predecessor, The Callender of Letters, was edited by a communist -- and it developed in a permanent tension with it thereafter".⁴⁷

However, the statement is most notable for Leavis's customary vagueness and generality. In defining culture Leavis takes refuge in vast generalities and such expressions as "the finer consciousness of the age" and the "currency of finer living" without ever explicating what precisely he means by them. The characteristic tone of the statement is reminiscent of the Romantic nostalgia of a past of harmony and homogeneity of culture. It also bears the typical stamp characteristic of ^{Lynds'} ~~Stead's~~ remarks in ^{their} ~~his~~ Middletown, as it suffers from a painful lack of any supporting evidence. A knowledge of society that has nothing better for evidence than the quality of its literature, cannot but seek the explanation of some myth of "popular culture" in the vague relationship of man with "environment in its seasonal rhythm". It seems to be too convenient to assume that the real culture of this society is synonymous with the literate and essentially urban culture that Leavis is talking about. Whenever

⁴⁷Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", New Left Review, (London) July-August 1968, p. 53.

Leavis stoops down to the specifics, he blandly comes up with such generalities as the "organic community".

Furthermore, he lays the blame for the disappearance of this "organic community" on the disintegration of the popular culture.

What is one to make of the so-called "organic community"? The elusive answer to that question is contained in another book, Culture and Environment which Leavis wrote in collaboration with Denys Thompson who also was one of the original editors of the Scrutiny.

In the golden age of the organic community, Leavis says:

It was in their work for the most part that the folk lived. Their use of leisure was according. The modern labourer, the modern clerk, the modern factory-hand live only for their leisure, and the result is that they are unable to live in their leisure when they get it. Their work is meaningless to them, merely something that they have to do to earn a livelihood, and consequently when their leisure comes it is meaningless and all the uses that they can put it to come almost wholly under the head of what Stuart Chase calls 'decreation'.⁴⁸

To Leavis, it should be clear, the 'organic community' seems to be indistinguishable from the rural community, and it is the loss of this rural community that Leavis mourns in his works. As he puts it: "It is not merely that life, from having been predominantly rural, has become urban and industrial: when life was rooted in the soil, town life was not what it is now. Instead of community, urban or rural, we have, almost,

⁴⁸F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, Culture And Environment, (Chatto & Windus, London, 1933), pp. 68-69.

universally, suburbanism".⁴⁹ And further on he says:
 ". . . the great agent of change, and from our point of view, destruction, has, of course, been the machine applied power which has been aggravated by cheap commercialism and mass media catering to cheap taste and conventional responses".⁵⁰ Thus the loss, as Leavis registers it, is the disappearance and the disintegration of the "organic community with the living culture it embodied".⁵¹

All this amounts to a fairly comprehensive statement of Leavis's position. As it is obvious, Leavis is here, all passionate conviction. According to him, all of the modern man's activities are 'decreation', and all of his work is meaningless to him.

Now, if, as Leavis argues, the man in the organic community lived in his work -- so much in fact, that he couldn't have had any time for or any concept of leisure whatsoever -- then, surely, Leavis can't be implying here, that he grudges the modern man -- "the modern labourer the modern clerk, the modern factory-hand" -- the extra time that he uses (or wastes according to Leavis) in activities other than those that he must in order to earn his livelihood. If Leavis is merely objecting to the manner in which the modern man spends his leisure, then, one must be quite clear, he is least responsible

⁴⁹F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, Culture And Environment, (Chatto & Windus, London, 1933), p. 2.

⁵⁰The Same, p. 3.

⁵¹The Same, p. 1.

for it. After all it is not he who has sought to divide culture into low-brow and high-brow entities, neither, one might add, has he understood society as being divided between mass civilization and minority culture. Just because man in a comparatively older society or some mythical 'organic community', spent all his life, attempting -- generally, quite unsuccessfully -- to earn a living, it does not necessarily mean that he lived 'in' his work, except in a very disparaging sense, in which case, one is tempted to argue, the modern man's decreation - so called - is better than nothing at all; at least he has leisure now which his counterpart in the earlier times never had. And this deprives Leavis -- a spokesman and representative of the high-brow culture -- of the right to deny others the privilege of leisure and their own wilful use of it, even if it all seems 'decreation' to Leavis.

In any case, what does Leavis mean by the organic community, and its disintegration? When did this community actually exist -- if it at all did -- and when did it start to disappear? Leavis, of course, is very clear about this. For him, this terryfying and momentous change came about after man had started to lose his touch, with the primary "modes of production", a touch, or more appropriately the contact, that, apparently, provided a purpose and a meaning to the rural man's existence:

The more 'primitive' England represented an animal naturalness but distinctly human - - - [people] satisfied their human needs, in terms of natural

environment; and the things they made -- cottages, barns, ricks and wagons -- together with their relation with one another constituted a human environment, and a subtlety of adjustment and adaptation, as right and inevitable. . . . The modern citizen no more knows how the necessities of life come to him (he is quite out of touch, we say, with the 'primary production') than he can see his own work as a significant part in a human scheme (he is merely earning wages or making profit).⁵²

To me, there does not seem to be much doubt in that the modern man is quite out of touch with 'primary production' -- whatever that phrase may mean -- but that does not necessarily mean that he no longer knows where the necessities of life come from. It seems, quite on the contrary, that the modern man is better equipped to know all this today than at any other time in history. Also, eversomere, today, man is least likely, if he so wishes, to spend his life earning wages and counting profit. And as far as the historical existence of the organic community is concerned, suffice it to say that

If there is one thing certain about the "organic community", it is that it has always gone. Its period in the contemporary myth, is the rural eighteenth century; but for Goldsmith, in The Deserted Village (1770), it had gone; for Crabbe in The Village (1783), it was hardly 'right and inevitable'; for Cobbet, in 1820, it had gone since his boyhood (that is to say, it existed when Goldsmith and Crabbe were writing); for Sturt it was there late in the nineteenth century; for myself (if I may be permitted to add this, for I was born in a village, and into a family of many generations of farm-labourers) it was there -- or the aspects quoted, the inherited skills of work, the slow traditional talk, the continuity of work and leisure -- in the 1930s.⁵³

⁵²F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, Culture And Environment, (Chatto & Windus, London, 1933), pp. 91-92.

⁵³Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, (Penguin, 1961), p. 253.

It is obvious that the kind of organic community that Leavis so passionately talks about has never really existed. His hypothesis is a perfect example of the typical bourgeois myth full of nostalgic longing for the past, signifying nothing. It is, as Raymond Williams puts it, a "surrender to a characteristically industrialist, or urban nostalgia".⁵⁴ Further, all this talk about organic community and homogeneity of culture smacks a bit too much of the "reaction of the liberal elements to the industrial revolution"⁵⁵ that characterises English Romanticism. In Leavis's organic community, conceivably there is no aristocracy, no upper to lower middle-class, neither is there any such thing as a gentry and a working class. His social sense is, in fact, completely a-social, for it does not take the elementary enough realities of any society into consideration. Similarly, his historical sense like that of Eliot, is completely a-historical. As he might argue, according to him, the class-distinctions in the organic community -- or even in the "un"organic community for that matter -- either donot exist, or if they do at all, they exist in terms of cultural distinctions and not as a matter of economic and social realities. The very real politico-economic barriers are completely ignored as being irrelevant.

⁵⁴ Raymond Williams, Culture And Society, (Penguin, 1961), pp. 252-53.

⁵⁵ A. Hauser, The Social History of Art, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), Volume III, p. 195.

It is indicative of the fact that not only Leavis has had no training in sociology as a discipline, but that, essentially, he is totally incapable of observing people and situations in any non-literary sense. After all, if, as according to him, it is only the quality of one's response to literature that determines the quality of one's existence, how else is he to understand society and its class divisions except in purely literary terms.

This is the central intellectual matrix from which all of Leavis's practical criticism, with its built-in social and cultural implications, springs. From a sociological -- or even a historical view-point -- as I have tried to argue, there is little of substance in Leavis's theories, and yet his formulations were received with fairly wide-spread sympathies. Indeed Leavis as a literary and cultural critic, well within his life-time, became somewhat of a cause célèbre -- a distinction rare and perhaps unprecedented. Within a decade or so, there grew schools of Leavisites and anti-Leavisites -- something that Leavis must have watched with some embarrassment, the pride notwithstanding.

But, and this is significant, Leavis's influence -- as the reaction against him -- was confined only to the English-speaking world.

It is no secret that Leavis's sympathies function well only within the English milieu. His criticism is most conspicuous for almost the complete absence of any criticism of non-English writers - with

perhaps the only exception of Tolstoy. That, by itself, limits the appeal and relevance of Leavis outside of the English-speaking world. But that is not its main cause. It is in the analysis of the reasons for Leavis's overwhelming popularity in Britain and the Commonwealth, that the causes for the lack of his influence in the outside world become clear.

There is something in the intellectual climate of Britain and the Commonwealth which finds Leavis very acceptable, for he seems to it, to be the most coherent spokesman for its own situation. The explanation for this climate are too sociological to go into detail, here; however, some of these are well documented in Perry Anderson's analysis of the "Components of the National Culture" and can be briefly mentioned here.⁵⁶

The lack of sociological investigation and depth, that I have alluded to, are, as Anderson points out, native to the British character; they are not exclusive to Leavis. Britain has produced no Marxist or anti-Marxist sociology of significance. It therefore lacks a basic centre of reference. Further, twentieth century Britain is characterized by foreign white immigration which has assumed the role of local intellectual centre. As it happens, most of these immigrants flocked to Britain in search of a stabilising tradition, the lack of which in their native countries, in the first place, had motivated

⁵⁶Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", New Left Review, July-August, 1968, London, pp. 5-57.

their flight. Amongst literary figures, in this category, T.S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad and Henry James, particularly, are worthy of note. It is no co-incident that all of these writers feature very prominently in Leavis's 'Great' tradition of literary culture. This created a natural climate for conservatism in the national thinking.

Secondly, the native fashionable Marxists were over with their short flirtation with Marxism thus paving the way for the ready acceptance for any anti marxist theoretician, no matter how flimsy or short-sighted he may have been. And finally, the vagaries of individual concepts not withstanding - particularly if their validity remained unquestioned -- there was a basic coherence at the heart of Leavis's thinking that made him appear very provocative and even original. But Leavis's whole argumentation and methodology depended, for its coherence, upon an audience that basically shared Leavis's moral and cultural outlook. Although this audience had been in the process of disappearing since Arnold's time, there were socio-cultural factors in the mid-twentieth century Britain that went into the temporary re-creation of this audience for F.R. Leavis.⁵⁷ It is obvious that in the

⁵⁷ The topic in fact may be too broad and controversial to be gone into in detail here. It can reasonably be argued that the disintegration of this unified audience had in fact begun much before Leavis even started his career; yet there are socio-historical reasons as to why the process was severely and even unnaturally checked in the thirties and the forties -- particularly, in England. Perry Anderson's study of the Components of the British Culture is particularly relevant in understanding the reasons behind this phenomenon.

absence of this unified audience, Leavis's apparently coherent substructure becomes inaccurate and finally meaningless. For example, from a 'rationalist' point of view, it is easy to illustrate the mythical and illusory character of Leavis's notion of the organic community and the homogeneous culture, yet the notion is not merely a "whimsical ideal, but a validating reference for the actual operation of the criticism".⁵⁸ And this is what I referred to as the central coherence at the heart of Leavis's criticism. As it should, Leavis's peculiar understanding of history and society is implicit in the tradition of the literary culture -- and the writers he selects as being genuinely representative of it -- that he holds out as the model of all that is significant in the heritage of the past.

It, nevertheless remains true that his evaluations are most notable for Leavis's customary vagueness and generality. In defining culture, he takes refuge in vast generalizations and such expressions as the 'finer consciousness of the age' and the 'currency of finer living' without ever explicating what he means by them. The main trouble with these formulations is that (as Leavis never fails to point out, and rightly so whenever he comes across such generality in words) Leavis himself has not given sufficient thought to the issue. The meaning of such phrase as 'living relation' and 'real'

⁵⁸ Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", New Left Review, London, July-August, 1968, p. 52.

culture is never defined. Need it be said that the point cannot be enforced merely by saying that Shakespeare did not invent the language that he used, and "the stylisation, so to speak, of economic necessities . . . an art of living involving codes" are only convenient generalizations that gloss over the complicated business of examining a society in its totality and concreteness. Leavis, as has been noted before, despises scholarship, and thus would refuse to have anything to do with academic sociology. In this, as in nearly all other matters, Leavis desperately clings to his 'commonness' as the sign of ultimate sanity that specialization defeats.

Leavis never tires of saying that to be able to talk, profitably, of the sociology of literature, it is not enough to have a second-hand knowledge of literature from the literary histories;⁵⁹ true enough, one might argue, but equally well it is dangerously inaccurate to talk about sociology from one's response to literature, no matter how first-hand and trained that response may be.

⁵⁹F.R. Leavis, "Literature and Society" Scrutiny, Volume XII, No. 1; and "Sociology and Literature" The Common Pursuit. "If you are to conduct a profitable argument about the 'sociological medium of literature' you must have a more inward acquaintance with the works of literature from which you argue than can be got from a literary history or a textbook" (Penguin 1962), p. 195.

Language: Media And/Or A Conceptual System

I have explained earlier that Leavis presumes too conveniently that the most significant and relevant parts of a culture are retained and preserved in its literature. This vastly exaggerated importance ascribed to literature is only too unfortunate if the case that Leavis builds up regarding the importance of literature is not given a serious consideration. As Raymond Williams puts it: "To put upon literature, or more accurately upon criticism, the responsibility of controlling the quality of the whole range of personal and social experience, is to expose a vital case to damaging misunderstanding".⁶⁰ Leavis's exaggerated emphasis upon the importance of literature is inseparable from his revolt against and the condemnation of the mass-media. The unifying concern here, according to him, is the supreme function and significance of language. For language, not merely as a communication media, but as a conceptual system -- that is, as a mode of thinking -- is at the very heart of our culture. And the decline in the quality of literature is tied up with the growth of the mass means of communication -- with all its inherent implications of catering to the popular taste and consequently an inevitable decline in the quality of language -- all of which have led to a severe limitation in the possibilities of life. As he put it: "while we have our language, tradition is, in some essential sense still alive. . . .

⁶⁰ Raymond Williams, Culture And Society, (Penguin, 1961), p. 249.

Largely conveyed in language, there is our spiritual, moral and emotional tradition, which preserves the 'picked experience of ages' regarding the finer issues of life".⁶¹

However, how exactly does one define language? Further, how and in what terms is one to distinguish between the language of literature and that of say mathematics or biochemistry? In other words, how does one co-relate the function of language as a communication media and its value as a conceptual system. Such are the fundamnetal questions regarding language and literature, which, as I would try to argue in this chapter, Leavis, in his characteristic manner, simply glosses over. And hence the fact that he ascribes absurdly exaggerated importance to literature which leads him into petty infighting and squabbles with C.P. Snow on the issue of the Two Cultures. I will have a bit more to say about the Leavis Snow controversy in my next chapter but here I wish to deal with the language issue and the implicit simplifications that are inherent in Leavis's attitude towards language and the function that he sees it performing in the human organization of experience.

What I intend to observe here is that although Leavis sometimes reveals himself to be aware of the way in which language works as a conceptual system -- almost sub-consciously as it were -- yet his stress, it seems to me, falls more unequivocally upon language as a

⁶¹F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, Culture and Environment, (Chatto & Windus, 1933), p. 81.

communication media. In my opinion, Leavis's understanding of how language works, involves a disastrous separation between language as a mode of thinking and as a medium of expression.

Words, according to Leavis, for their vigour and life, depend upon their being associated with the 'traditional' modes of production.⁶² And now, since those modes of production are largely extinct,⁶³ the use of language has shifted towards cheap commerciality symbolized in modern-day advertising, best-sellers, cars and cinema. Consequently, as reflected in the language of our best-sellers and advertisers, there has come about a general decline in the style and precision of our sensibility. Thus, for all those concerned with the increasing deterioration of our cultural heritage and civilization, Leavis argues, there is felt to be the evermore need and awareness of the importance of literature. For literature helps the renewing of language and keeping it alive thereby maintaining the continuity of the literary and the cultural tradition. As Leavis puts it: ". . . for if language tends to be debased . . . instead of invigorated by contemporary use, then it is to literature alone, where its subtlest and finest use is preserved, that we can look with any hope of keeping in touch with our spiritual tradition - with the picked

⁶²F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, Culture And Environment, (Chatto & Windus, 1933), pp. 81-82.

⁶³It is interesting to note how close Leavis's formulation of "vigour and life" in language, comes to Wordsworth's conception of the so-called "language of the common man" in his Preface to the Second edition of the Lyrical Ballads.

experience of ages".⁶⁴ The debasement of language, therefore, as Leavis has explained, is not merely a linguistic problem, for "what we diagnose in expression, an inadequacy in the use of words, goes back to inadequacy behind the words, an inadequacy of experience. . . ." ⁶⁵

What Leavis suggests here, from the manner of his statement, is that there is a valid distinction to be drawn between the experience that is communicated and the language that communicates it. In other words, according to him, experience and its organization in the human psyche is independent of language, and may even be said to precede it. It should be obvious that language conceived of in these terms is not -- at least consciously -- understood to be a conceptual system; rather its primary importance is seen to lie in its function as a medium of communication.

Therefore, Leavis shows little patience with those who choose to play word-games in their use of language. And, for him, this applies to the petty advertisers just as well as it does to serious artists like James Joyce. It is made quite explicit in his review of Joyce's later work.⁶⁶

⁶⁴F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, Culture And Environment, (Chatto & Windus, 1933), p. 82.

⁶⁵F.R. Leavis, Scrutiny, (Cambridge University Press, 1963), Volume I, p. 22.

⁶⁶F.R. Leavis, "Joyce and the Revolution of the Word", Scrutiny, (Cambridge University Press, 1963), Volume II, pp. 193-201.

In his essay "Joyce and the Revolution of the Word", Leavis analyses Joyce's later work as being motivated not by that inner compulsion -- "the precise and urgent command from within, that determines expression - tyrannically"⁶⁷ -- as in the case of Shakespeare, but from a pure and solitary interest in words and their 'wordy' possibilities. While reviewing a book on Joyce, he despairs that "we are explicitly told that 'words evoke in him (Joyce) more intense emotions than the phenomenon of the outer world'".⁶⁸ As Leavis goes on to explain, Joyce's use of language indicated that he (Joyce) ascribes to words a kind of freedom from "inner compulsion" that is detrimental for both language and what Leavis calls "the possibilities of life".

In opposition Leavis argues that words are the "servants of an inner impulse or principle of order; they are imperiously commanded and controlled from an inner centre" (underlinging mine).⁶⁹ Characteristic of Leavis, the 'principle of order', the 'inner impulse' or the 'inner centre' like the 'organic community' of the earlier occasion remain undefined terms. But the point that I am driving at, here, becomes sufficiently clear.

In a very provocative analysis that follows in that essay, Leavis compares the Shakespearan use of language and its verbal innovations with those of James

⁶⁷The Same, p. 194.

⁶⁸The Same, p. 195.

⁶⁹The Same, p. 200.

Joyce. The main point which has already been touched upon concerns the issue of language as a medium: whereas, Leavis explains, the changes and innovations that Shakespeare brought about in the language of his day were governed and controlled by his intention of equipping language in such a way as to make it capable of serving its primary function -- that is communication -- Joyce's efforts, on the other hand, according to Leavis, do not seem to derive from any such motivation;⁷⁰ rather they reveal precisely the lack of any such concern as being the determining factor behind his 'enriching' of the language. To Shakespeare, Leavis argues, language must have seemed inadequate, not only in any purely literary sense, but also in terms of its potential for the experience that he sought to organize and communicate. And, therefore, changes in language were necessitated from the intention of making language into a capable enough media for the expression of the subtler shades of his sensibility. Thus, consequently, the attention was firmly focussed upon the sensibility emphasizing thereby the character of words essentially as a medium. Joyce's innovations, on the contrary, implicitly recognized the words to be an end in themselves. It was a kind of sport, and no matter how intellectual its pretensions, it was a sport nevertheless. In this light, Leavis's 'inner centre' may be defined as the sheer

⁷⁰ Ibid., the material on this and the following page closely draws upon the aforementioned essay by Leavis on "Joyce and the Revolution of the Word".

necessity of having something to say -- something to organize, which, in turn, compels verbal innovation. After all, a medium must justify itself -- "why it is so and not otherwise" -- and the necessity of developing a new medium or bringing about changes in the old one, must be indicative of the necessity of re-organizing human experience. That can be its only justification. It is precisely this that Leavis finds lacking in Joyce's later work.

It is needless to debate here whether or not Joyce's verbal innovations are the product of some inner compulsion, or, on the other hand whether Leavis has failed to recognize Joyce's 'inner compulsion'. However, the point that Leavis is making here merits attention. Changes in language are not merely a literary matter and they donot depend upon the whims and fancies of an individual writer; rather they derive from fundamental changes in sensibility. No wonder, then, that T.S. Eliot is applauded for the changes that he brought about in the poetic style, and for his enriching and rejuvenating of the language of poetry, while W.H. Auden is derided for what on surface appear to be the same reasons. Auden's poetry Leavis argues, was "flatteringly modern and sophisticated", and it seemed to offer "an intellectual and psychological profundity that didn't challenge them to any painful effort or discipline, and assuring them that in wearing a modish leftishness they could hold

up their heads in a guaranteed rightness".⁷¹ Thus, for Leavis, Auden's linguistic gymnastics indicate nothing deeper than a "modish leftishness"; they are not governed and controlled by any inner compulsion. The changes in sensibility and the corresponding innovations in language are organically bound up in one another.

It would, of course, be too much to expect that a literary critic should correctly point out when and why such changes in sensibility occur. Thus, inevitably, whenever Leavis ventures into this territory, his thoughts tends to become vague and full of generalities. In reflecting for instance upon the inner necessities that compelled Shakespeare into linguistic innovations, Leavis reverts to his peculiarly blanketing use of essential terms. Shakespeare, to him, represents, "of course, the power of the Renaissance"; he belonged to a "genuinely national character, to a community in which it was possible for the theatre to appeal to the cultivated and the populace at the same time".⁷² All this is too easily presumed: what is the power of the Renaissance, and whatever is the genuinely national character? So far as the latter is concerned Leavis has this to offer in explanation: the genuinely national character is that which is rooted in the soil. According to Leavis, during Shakespeare's time "the popular basis of culture was

⁷¹F.R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit, (Penguin, 1961), p. 294.

⁷²F.R. Leavis, "Joyce and the Revolution of the Word", Scrutiny, (Cambridge University Press, 1963), Volume II, p. 199.

agricultural . . . and how much richer the life was in the old, predominantly rural order than in the modern suburban world. . . . It is an order that is gone".⁷³

It should be clear that the passage cannot sustain any sociological or critical scrutiny. Everything is bathed in the romantic aura of a glorious past of harmony and the organic community that makes one imagine a world completely devoid of the real distinctions that divide men in an actual society. Shakespeare of King Lear and Tempest would, himself, surely be surprised to hear such an account of his times. The depth of investigation is of the same order as in those suppositions that make one imagine that the middle-ages were exclusively populated with gallant knights who spent their lives chivalrously helping the damsels in distress, and who, of course survived miraculously without ever needing victuals or the people who produce it.

It is needless to labour upon the point. F.R. Leavis is least clear about the socio-cultural factors that produce changes in sensibility, and the corresponding changes in the language of literature. However, this need not prevent one from appreciating the relationship between sensibility and language that he is trying to uncover. Of course, it would be incorrect to suggest that Leavis, in his haste to stress the importance of language as a communication media, totally overlooks

⁷³F.R. Leavis, Scrutiny, (Cambridge University Press, 1963), Volume II, pp. 199-201.

the function of language as a conceptual system. Indeed it is precisely this function that he alludes to when he says that literature does not so much explicitly 'state' its moral judgements as it 'enacts' them. He reproaches Samuel Johnson for not recognizing that moral judgement in art exist not as explicitly stated evaluations but as 'realized' and 'enacted' judgements.⁷⁴ "Johnson cannot understand", says Leavis, that "the works of art enact

⁷⁴Leavis's critical vocabulary is incredibly limited and small for a major critic of his significance and influence. A source of continuous amazement to me is that how often Leavis manages to extract new and very emotional responses by his dextrous manipulation of certain turns of speech, phraseology and key-terms that have become the hallmark of his criticism. 'Enactment', 'realization' and 'relevance' are such terms that over the years have grown into a kind of Leavis-patent. Typical of him, that these words are never defined, but equally typically within the total body of his critical out-put they acquire reasonable boundaries that one can grapple with. For the two terms under discussion at the moment, two essays of significant interest concern Johnson whom Leavis demonstrably admires. First is his essay on "Johnson And Augustanism" in The Common Pursuit, and the second his essay on Johnson's criticism in Scrutiny, (Volume XIII, Summer 1944). As Leavis explains in both of these essays, works of art enact their moral judgements because they use words not to enforce a didactic purpose, but to 'enact' this purpose by a poetic-creative use of language. Enactment, therefore, explains the manner in which language works in poetry, according to Leavis. For instance Leavis finds Pope's use of language -- as that of Keats -- creative, in the sense that it enacts its evaluations. On the other hand Shelley's language, as that of Milton, does not realize, within the form of the work of art, the judgements that it seeks to promote. The language in poetry, according to Leavis, presents the 'moral' way of 'experiencing' reality. And, thus, to be successful, it must bring us into a very direct and immediate contact with the reality that is evaluated. Another essay of significance in those context is his discussion of Macbeth in his Education And University, (London, 1948, pp. 76-78).

their moral evaluations. It is not enough that Shakespeare, on the evidence of his works 'thinks' (and feels), morally; for Johnson a moral judgement that isn't stated isn't there".⁷⁵ Nevertheless, I think that it would be accurate to say that Leavis's stress upon language as the storehouse of human values, falls more because of its nature as a communication media rather than as a mode of thinking. For, as it may be pointed out, the whole air of mysticism that seems to surround all his pronouncements about the 'inner centre' and 'inner compulsion' suggest that these work in a way that is beyond conscious will and desire, and where the limitations of language as a mode of thought are not realistically recognized. It is in this sense that the basic differences between him and the New Critics, I think can be appropriately understood.

The essential point of contention between the New Critics and F.R. Leavis, as I understand it, has little to do with the social value and function of art. To suggest that theirs is a purely formal criticism, or that the New Critics are exclusively concerned with form at the expense of content is to simplify the whole issue. Indeed if the New Criticism was all so naive, it is difficult to see how it could have succeeded in attracting the literary and critical brains that adorn its movement today. As a matter of fact, there is enough evidence to

⁷⁵ F.R. Leavis, "Johnson And Augustaniam", The Common Pursuit, (Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 110-111.

convincingly argue that the New Critics' concern for poetry and literature, and its relevance to society is at least as passionate as that of F.R. Leavis. At this point, I think, it would be pertinent to put in a word about how I understand the role of such concepts as paradox, irony, tension, ambiguity, in New Criticism.

Cleanth Brooks states in his Preface to The Well-Wrought Urn: "If literary history has not been emphasized it is not because I discount its importance, or because I have failed to take it into account. It is rather that I have been anxious to see what residuum, if any, is left after we have referred the poem to its cultural matrix".⁷⁶ Of course, Brooks is nowhere able to show how such a separation could be made, but the point is well-taken, at least in so far as it explains and justifies the critical criteria that Brooks and his fellow-travellers were to emphasize in their criticism. Such ideals as paradox, irony, etc were held up as the basic tools for comprehending and exploring the language of poetry. Now, paradox, wit, tension, irony, ambiguity etc. are all very shifty terms, and it is almost an impossible task to attempt an adequate definition of their meaning, yet I think it is not too much of a simplification to argue that, basically, they all imply a juxtaposition -- or organization -- of disparate experiences. Behind all this is the Eliotan concept of

⁷⁶C. Brooks, The Well-Wrought Urn, (Harvest Books, New York, 1947), p. X.

the poetic mind as a catalyst. The chief criteria, therefore, implicitly recognized, is one of inclusiveness, the possibility of multiplicity of experience. Here I.A. Richards's influence becomes more genuine than his Practical Criticism, for in his own way Richards is also arguing for the same. The poet, as Brooks himself acknowledges,

Explores, consolidates, and "forms" the total experience that is the poem . . . out of the experiences of many May mornings and out of his experiences of Catullus, and possibly out of a hundred other experiences, he fashions, probably through a process akin to exploration, the total experience which is the poem.⁷⁷

The tools for achieving this consolidation -- the formulation of experience -- in the case of a poet, are, according to Brooks, paradox and irony. ". . . paradox is the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry"⁷⁸ because "the poet has to work by analogies. All of the subtler shades of emotion as I.A. Richards has pointed out, necessarily demand metaphor for their expression".⁷⁹ The word 'subtler' is significant. At a latter point in the book, Brooks argues that the inclusiveness of varied human experiences, embodied in irony and paradox, constitutes the "maturity" of a poem. As should be clear, "maturity" and "subtler shades of emotion" are demands that cannot be explained in purely literary terms. Irony and paradox, both seem to validate, by

⁷⁷C. Brooks, The Well-Wrought Urn, (New York, 1947), p. 75.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 9.

testing in extra-literary terms and standards, the kind of attitude that the poem formulates. Maturity suggests evaluation and organization in a way such as to make Brook's total position fairly close to that taken up by many moralists, including F.R. Leavis.

As has been suggested in an earlier chapter, the New Critics' concern with the agrarian movement, and their almost Romantic revolt against all that modern technology and science imply, further reveal the similarity of concern and analysis of social relations that they share with F.R. Leavis. The difference I think, can be explained more accurately in terms of the different functions that they separately assign to language, and consequently, by implication, different conception of knowledge and 'maturity'. I am not trying to suggest that these functions are consciously assigned to language, but that Leavis and the New Critics differently understand the ways in which the language of poetry works in the general organization and expression of human experience. Ambiguity, tension, irony etc. are all such terms as attempt to explain the exclusive quality of the language of poetry.

It has already been noted in this review of the book on Joyce that Leavis thinks that the fundamental importance of language should be seen essentially in its being a medium of communication. Language for him, exists, in essence, as a vehicle. It is necessary that the artist should have something to say, and this 'something' ought to be possible and meaningful in some significant extra-

literary sense. From the manner of his statement, it seems that Leavis implicitly considers the thought to be completely separable from ~~the~~ ^{and} indeed independent of language; and that in such a way that it must make ^{it} very difficult for him to adequately realize the limitations of thought and analysis which the structure of any given language imposes upon the possibilities of a culture. It is only fair to observe that in the best of Leavis's criticism, it is precisely the function of language as a conceptual system that he implicitly recognizes and applauds. This is evident in his essays on Alexander Pope and John Keats. For instance Leavis notes that in Pope's poetry, the presence of wit and the "changes of tone and attitude imposed on the reader . . . result in an alertness; a certain vallety of critical reserve in responding"⁸⁰ which constitutes

a readiness for surprise that amounts in the end to an implicit recognition, at any point, in accepting what is given, of other and complementary possibilities. It becomes plain, in the light of such an account, why we should find ourselves describing as 'mature' the sensibility exhibited by verse in which wit is an element, and also why, in such verse, a completely serious poetic effect should be able to contain suggestions of the ludicrous such as for Gray, Shelley, or Matthew Arnold would have meant disaster.⁸¹

The judgement reveals Leavis's grasp of the manner in which language works as a conceptual system controlling the organization of experience, indeed

⁸⁰F.R. Leavis, Revaluation, (Peregrine, London, 1964), p. 65.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 5-6.

ordaining the very mode of perception. Further, the relationship that Leavis seeks to establish between Pope's mode of perception, and the general style of sensibility in his time, reveal an underlying similarity of manner and method. The developments that one encounters in Pope's poetry, as Leavis points out, are a by-product of the developments "in English life, and the 'correctness' of Pope's literary form derives its strength from a social code and a civilization".⁸²

Several other examples can be cited from Leavis's essay on Keats to illustrate the point. Yet in his less sensitive criticism, as in his fairly coherent sub-system, Leavis's emphasis falls more unequivocally upon the function of language as a communication media, and that at the expense of its function as a conceptual system.

Leavis does correctly emphasize the way in which language undergoes changes owing to the changes in sensibility, but that the structure of any one given language itself helps and conditions -- and limits -- the changes in sensibility, he does not adequately recognize.

Further, from all his stress upon the inner centre, it seems that for Leavis this centre exists independent of the limitations of the possibilities of organization that are implicit in the very structure of the language. To Leavis, it is the urgency of the experience -- freshly organized -- that ultimately holds the words into a sharp significance and makes them alive;

⁸²Ibid., p. 68.

but what controls the urgency, as Leavis puts it, of experience, and on what factors depends the fresh organization of experience, are questions that Leavis does not adequately examine. As Leavis argues language is the 'storehouse' of human values, but it is so not only as a communication media -- communicating whatever is considered most valuable in the experiences and the evaluations of the past ages -- but also as a system of thinking that hands down concepts which form the basic instrument of thought, and are implicit in the structure of the language. For Leavis, however, the media and the message seem to be radically separable entities.

In contrast, while the New Critics do recognize the function of language as a communication media, they find it equally important to emphasize its function as a conceptual system. The central belief or assumption that characterises the criticism of men like Allen Tate, John C. Ransom and Cleanth Brooks, is that poetry constitutes a kind of knowledge that is as valid and correct as that of a science. The language of poetry, like the language of science in its own way, represents a set of terms in which man thinks; therefore, poetry attempts to recreate that part of human experience which cannot be expressed in any other terms -- be they moral, scientific or mathematical. That is why the New Critics lay so much stress upon the close verbal analysis of the words on the page. It seems obvious that the New Critics do recognize the language of science to be no less of a conceptual system than the language, yet the terms in

which they choose to establish the distinction between the two, are rather perplexing and to me inexplicable. The source of this confusion, I think, is Richards's "The Two Uses of Languages" and the distinction that he establishes between the 'emotive' and the scientific uses of language.⁸³ As Richards points out, there are expressions which may "be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude produced"⁸⁴ and thus are not subject to the same standard of correctness and 'truth' as are to be found in sciences. Thus the poetic use of language concerns a truth which is "equivalent to 'internal necessity' or rightness. That is 'true' or 'internally necessary' which completes or accords with the rest of experience. . . ."⁸⁵ As has been suggested by several critics, on close examination one discovers that "the function that Ransom accords to "statement" or "structure" in poetry resembles very closely that accorded to statement in poetry by Richards".⁸⁶

Now both Brooks and Wimsatt recognize the validity of the language of science as a conceptual

⁸³I.A. Richards, "The Two Uses of Language", Principles of Literary Criticism, (Harvest Book, NY. 1925), pp. 261-271.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 267.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 269.

⁸⁶W.K. Wimsatt and C. Brooks, Literary Criticism, (NY. 1957), p. 629.

system,⁸⁷ yet as Brooks points out in his Well Wrought Urn, it is felt that the "poet does not use notation at all -- as the scientist may properly be said to do so. . . . The tendency of science is necessarily to stabilize terms, to freeze them into strict denotations";⁸⁸ and that "it is the scientist whose truth requires a language purged of every trace of paradox; apparently the truth which the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox".⁸⁹ The implication seems to be that not only is the language of poetry different, significantly, as a conceptual system, from the language of science, but that different laws of organization and perception of human experience operate in "the two cultures".

The essential point is that the language of poetry is no more or less conceptual than the language of the sciences; and what is more, all conceptual systems, be they scientific or literary, must by definition deal in abstractions. Yet most New Critics tend to argue, as I have illustrated, that the language of sciences deals in abstractions, while the literary use of language approaches and speaks of reality in more concrete terms. For all their emphasis upon metaphor, irony, ambiguity,

⁸⁷The chapter on Richards and the one on "the Semantic Principle" is significantly illustrative of the point that I am making here; it is also relevant to the argument that I advance in the next few pages.

⁸⁸C. Brooks, The Well-Wrought Urn, (Harvest Book, NY, 1925), p. 9.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 3.

tension, etc., they, I think, inadequately realize the level of abstraction at which all these concepts become operative. To take just one example, what precisely is a metaphor, and how does it function in poetic language. I do not propose to go into a detailed discussion of the issue, but I do wish to emphasize that all the existent definitions of the term have at least this much in common: they all recognize that metaphor functions in terms of comparison. The obvious implication is that the concrete experience is abstracted and formulated in such conceptual terms as to render it comparable to another similar abstraction. Now, no matter how elementary, pragmatic and inherent in human nature, this tool of comparison may be in the organization of human experience, it needs to be recognized that even the most elementary process of formulating and organizing an experience is inevitably to abstract it; and what is more, comparing it with another such formulation is to deal in abstractions.

The term "abstraction" is not used perjoratively but only as an indication of necessary course that demands recognition as such. Also as numerous critics have stressed repeatedly, metaphor for its life does not entirely depend upon its internal and autonomous coherence, but derives its sustenance from its dialectical relation to the reality as perceived. From its very nature, all language is metaphoric, and this applies as much to the language of science as it does to that of poetry, for the two in their own separate ways are only conceptual systems that are equally abstract or concrete

as their relation to the 'reality' as it exists is structurally similar. It is therefore, unreasonable to deny the language of science its own potential for connotative possibilities. As I have tried to very briefly indicate, the mutual lack of trust between the sciences and the arts is based upon a simplistic and naive understanding of the basic processes of perception that are deemed to be fundamentally different in the two activities. After all science is nothing else than an exclusive form of language which, in essence, speaks of environment and reality in concepts that are structurally similar to the concepts implicit in the language of poetry. As such the New Critics seems to be creating a curious situation by suggesting a polar opposition between science and literature. The point is that the relation of both the languages -- as indeed of any other language -- to reality is structurally similar; and all conceptual systems are -- be it technology in the modern times, or 'ritual' in the older cultures -- simultaneously an explanation and a confirmation of the physical phenomenon. It is relevant to emphasize that the function of metaphor, irony, ambiguity and all such terms is structurally similar, for

. . . the laws of logic which ultimately govern the world of the mind, are, by their nature, essentially invariable; they are common not only to all periods and places but to all subjects of whatever kind, without any distinction even between those that we call the real and chimerical;

they are to be seen even in dreams. . .⁹⁰

Brooks himself alludes to a similar awareness when, while discussing Richards, he observes that "even the world of Aesop's fables or of the fairy tale or of "science fiction" has not cut all connections with a world of our experience".⁹¹ Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer in their separate philosophies of symbolic form, as Claude Levi-Strauss in his "structural anthropology" have made similar assertions. But this new fad for structuralism can and has, as Sartre has demonstrated, in his discussion of Levi-Strauss, lead to a new form of transcendentalism.⁹² Indeed, it is significant to observe that Brooks notes that Ernst Cassirer's "Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (1923-29) is Kantian in its general orientation"⁹³ and another critic has analysed Kant's influence upon the New Critics.

The subject is, of course, too wide and at the moment too confusing to be gone into detail. The central point that I am trying to make here, is that the conviction

⁹⁰Comte, from Levi-Strauss's book Totemism, (Beacon Press, 1963), front piece.

⁹¹W.K. Wimsatt and C. Brooks, Literary Criticism, (NY. 1957), p. 626.

⁹²See Levi-Strauss, the last chapter in The Savage Mind, (Chicago, 1963).

⁹³W.K. Wimsatt and C. Brooks, Literary Criticism, (NY. 1957), p. 700.

that the language of poetry deals in concrete situations and describes them in a way that brings us into an immediate and sensuous contact with the reality as it is, while the language of science is abstract, seems to me totally naive. It is disappointing to see the exaggerated importance that the New Critics attach to poetry, while, in the same breath, pronouncing the sciences to be concerned with an inferior form of knowledge: "A scientific definition of the object is not false in the sense that it is not the truth, but only in the sense that it is not the whole truth";⁹⁵ or that "It is my contention here that the high forms of literature offer us the only complete, and thus the most responsible, versions of our experience";⁹⁶ or that the terms of science "are pure (or aspire to be pure) denotation; they are defined in advance".⁹⁷

I donot wish to get involved in the age-old controversy regarding the connotative and the denotative uses of language. However, I do think that the distinction between sciences and the arts, explained in these terms is a gross simplification. To suggest that not only do the sciences and the literature speak essentially different languages, but that they speak even of different

⁹⁵ John C. Ransom, God Without Thunder, (Harcourt Brace & Co, 1930), p. 259.

⁹⁶ Allen Tate, On the Limits of Poetry, (Swallow Press, 1948), p. 4.

⁹⁷ Cleanth Brooks, Well-Wrought Urn, (New York, 1947), p. 232.

forms of languages, involving essentially different structures, that is, to separate the sciences from the arts as being mutually exclusive, is to attempt to foster a distinction between the two that is impossible. A scientific and an 'artistic' mind do not after all have different nerve-structures. It is reasonable to argue that the kind of motivation that leads to the development of a 'scientific' mind, is, in essence, identical to that which leads to the growth of an 'artistic' mind. Cleanth Brooks says that "the artist does not intuit his object and then find the appropriate medium. It is rather in and through his medium that he intuits the object". Of course, one is tempted to say, but so does the scientist, the theologian, the philosopher and about anyone that one would care to name. As it is, this is no place to go into sufficient details of the matter, but the point that I am trying to drive ought to be sufficiently clear. To differentiate between the sciences and the arts in such terms as the New Critics choose to do, is ultimately to perpetuate a simplified distinction that was initially popularized by the romantics. If the literary mind works in a way that it suggests an effort that seems to go beyond conscious will and preoccupation -- although confined even in that by the inherent built-in limitations of the structure of the language -- then, and it needs to be emphasized, so does that of the scientist. To define the two minds in mutually exclusive terms, is to confuse the issue

altogether. Unfortunately, Leavis, no less than the New Critics, is guilty of this simplification when he dis-credits the sciences and holds out literature to be the most valuable form of human activity.⁹⁸ But Leavis derives his notion from another aspect of the romantic thought that seems to be much more native to the English character than the borrowings from Kant -- which seems to have been the primary source and influence of the New Critics -- and that, the protest against progressive urbanization -- or as Leavis would put it, sub-urbanization -- and consequently the dis-integration of the organic community. It is interesting to note that almost as a rule, the British critics ~~have~~ almost en masse have refused to recognize the legitimacy of science due to reasons that have little in common with those advanced by the New Critics towards the same end.

⁹⁸In this regard, of particular interest would be Lionel Trilling's essay on the "Leavis-Snow Controversy" in his book Beyond Culture.

Conclusion.

In a social structure so defined by Leavis as to equate culture with literature -- or more accurately with literary criticism -- it is inevitable that the role of the literary critic should assume unprecedented importance, not merely as a critic, but also as the high-priest of culture, fulfilling a most valuable social and moral function. It is equally inevitable that the literary arts should get to be taken as, by far, the most important and relevant form of human activity, controlling and cultivating all the 'finer issues' of life. Furthermore, society itself may be understood as being qualitatively divided along two altogether new kind of classes: those who read and appreciate good literature, and those who don't. It is in terms of such an understanding that the concept of mass civilization and minority culture has gained so much favour among its liberal followers. As a concept it has concerned every 'important' critic within the bourgeois framework of ideology and democracy. Ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century through to Richards, Leavis and the New Critics, all major literary critics -- and especially those who have found it necessary to go beyond the scrutiny of the words on the page -- have very painfully felt the impossibility of reconciling their bourgeois democratic idealism -- if they ever believed in one -- with their understanding of culture and society. As Raymond Williams puts it: ". . . it has been difficult for any observer to feel that the care of intellectual and imaginative work could be safely entrusted to, or identi-

fied with, any existing social or economic class".⁹⁹

Almost invariably, they all have sought refuge in this curious division of society into 1) the masses that are too preoccupied with the 'ordinary' business of existing to be left with any spare time or energy to grapple seriously with what are called 'the finer issues of life'; and 2) the small minority which alone is considered capable of and consequently responsible for maintaining the continuity of cultural tradition upon which all the finer issues of life depend. As I have said in an earlier chapter, in the case of Leavis, such an understanding of culture and society is implicit in the very tradition of literature that Leavis sets up as the model of value and significance. The more one is convinced of the value of such a tradition, and the more one pretends to profess a belief in the democratic order of social relations, the more impossible one is to find these two ~~ir~~reconcilable. Hence, mark the tone of painful desperation in Leavis's comment: "And if the democratic equality of opportunity requires that the standards be lowered, then I am against democracy". As Leavis argues, it is only a small minority that participates in literature wherein tradition is vitally alive; and in "any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is (apart from the cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are

⁹⁹Raymond Williams, Culture And Society, (Pelican Book, London, 1961), p. 309.

capable of unprompted, first-hand judgement".¹⁰⁰ It is, according to Leavis, upon this minority that the task of maintaining the continuity of tradition depends -- the minority that is capable

not only of appreciating Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire, Conrad (to take major instances) but of recognizing their latest successors who constitute the consciousness of the race (or a branch of it) at a given time. For such capacity does not belong merely to an isolated aesthetic realm; it implies responsiveness to theory as well as to art, to science and philosophy in so far as these may affect the sense of the human situation and of the nature of life. Upon this minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and the most perishable parts of tradition. Upon them depend the implicit standards that order the finer living of an age, the sense that this is worth more than that, this rather than that is the direction in which to go. . .¹⁰¹

For Leavis this minority is essentially a literary minority, mainly concerned with literature, and although in the above quotation Leavis, somewhat begrudgingly, allows science and philosophy to invade the sacred domain of the 'finer issues' of life, yet even there he is cautious, and the tone of his remark suggests that philosophy and science, according to him, would not profoundly affect the "the sense of the human situation and of the nature of life". As the list of the "major instances" at the head of the quotation makes abundantly clear, for Leavis, the minority is to be almost exclus-

¹⁰⁰F.R. Leavis, "Mass Civilization And Minority Culture", Education And the University, (Chatto and Windus, 1948), p. 143.

¹⁰¹F.R. Leavis, "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture", Education And the University, (Chatto and Windus, 1948), p. 144.

ively composed of those capable of appreciating literature. It is in terms of the cultivation of this minority that Leavis values the significance of the university, for as Leavis understand it, university ought to see its role as the periodic and continued turning out of this culturally concerned minority. In other words, the university education should be geared towards the cultivation of the elite, and therefore must not confuse its function with some strange notion of democracy and equality of opportunity.

In terms of such an understanding of society and culture, for Leavis, the role of the university education becomes crucially important.

Now Leavis's concern with education and the university, is too broad and complex to be gone into detail within the scope of this paper. His influence in the field has been determining, and very far-reaching, and I donot pretend to, adequately deal with the essence of Leavis's concern. The point that I am trying to make here is rather simple and limited. The issue is this: in terms of Leavis's analysis of society and culture -- and for those who agree with its basic assumptions -- I realize that the significance and value of his contribution to education, must appear to be vitally and urgently important. However, as I have tried to argue, to me his thinking appears to be curiously confused, and his sociology of culture without any substantiation from historical evidence. It is quite inevitable that the function of

the university, as Leavis sees it, should be commensurate with this analysis. All that I am wanting to suggest here, is that the role that Leavis ascribes to the university, and the kind of mind that he expects it to train, forms a part of the context that I have, I believe, already established in the paper so far. The concern seems to me, to be inseparable from the other pre-occupations in Leavis's criticism that I have so far tried to deal with, as it is bound up with Leavis's peculiar analysis of society and culture, and like most other aspects of his thought, it is rooted in the British 'liberal' tradition.¹⁰² If, as has been established, according to Leavis, the new technological advancement and planning has made available increased time to the masses for leisure, and the cultural tradition has declined, then, in order to counteract this deterioration, how should the university view its function? The logic of this development and its impending consequences for the so-called homogeneity of culture were seen clearly by most of the concerned nineteenth century thinkers.

Thus, as Leavis argued, ^{uni}~~un~~iversities were to see their function in terms of the periodical turning out of the minority elite that would concern itself with the preservation of all that was alive in the tradition

¹⁰²In this regard see R. Williams, Culture and Society, and more significantly The Long Revolution by the same author. The chapter entitled "Education and British Society" makes exactly the same point, although without any direct reference to Leavis. Also see Four Hundred Years of English Education, by W.H.G. Armytage, (pp. 13, 127-128, 214-216, 237-238). Of interest in this regard is, also Perry Anderson "Components of the British Culture", New Left Review, (London, July-August, 1968) pp. 3-57.

and prevent it from being lost under the onrush of the philistine masses. This minority was to decide what was worth preserving in a culture and what was not.

In a statement of position that makes mockery of our present day demand for the universal accessibility of education, Leavis proclaimed that "it is disastrous to let a country's educational arrangements be determined, or even affected, by the assumption that a high intellectual standard can be attained by more than a small minority".¹⁰³ The point had been made, a bit more tellingly, by Robert Morant in 1899, in the form of a long question

Is not the only hope for the continued existence of a democratic state to be found in an increasing recognition, by the democracy, of the increasing need of voluntarily submitting the impulses of the many ignorant to the guidance and control of the few wise, and thus to the willing establishment and maintenance, by the democracy, of special expert governors or guides or leaders, deliberately appointed by itself for the purpose, and to the subordination of the individual (and therefore limited) notions to the wider and deeper knowledge of specialized experts in the science of national life and growth, having their outlook over the whole field of national growth?¹⁰⁴

An un-natural reversal of logic is involved here. From a given style of education which is geared to the cultivation of a minority, it is argued that the democracy support this education for its own supposed benefit and welfare. In stead of moving from the

¹⁰³ F.R. Leavis, "The 'Great Books' and a Liberal Education", *Commentary*, 1954, as quoted by William Walsh in The Use of Imagination, (Chatto & Windus, 1959), p. 73.

¹⁰⁴ As quoted by W.H.G. Armytage in Four Hundred Years of English Education, (Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 183.

desirability of universal education, and proposing concomitant changes in the direction and control of the school and university education, Leavis, like Morant in 1899, starts from a given tradition; and without radically challenging its basic implications, challenges instead what are obviously more humane ideals in terms of social relations. As he puts it: "The business at the moment is to suggest, in what ways a serious effort in education must be conceived as the effort of a cultural tradition at maintaining continuity . . .".¹⁰⁵ The validity or the value of such a tradition is no questioned. The important activity is to maintain its continuity. And since, as has been suggested before, for Leavis, society is to be divided along cultural lines it is imperative for the continuity of this tradition that the study of literature should assume the most sacred spot. "At the centre of the work [that is maintaining continuity] . . . would be a study of the literature . . . the most intimate kind of study, that is, of a concrete tradition, And a study of tradition in literature involves a great deal more than the literary".¹⁰⁶ This "great deal more" is explained. "The study of literature" Leavis argues, "necessarily leads the student by a variety of approaches, to consider the relation of human culture to religion, and the place of religion in civilization",¹⁰⁷ as if all

¹⁰⁵F.R. Leavis, Education And the University, (Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 17.

¹⁰⁶The same, p. 19.

¹⁰⁷The same, pp. 19-20.

that was needed to correct the general malaise of our contemporary situation, was the focussing of the very urgent attention of all thinking people, at religion and its place in relation to the "human culture" -- whatever that term may mean. However that may be, universities are found by Leavis, to be its most urgent/instruments. As he put it:

The universities are recognized symbols of cultural tradition -- of cultural tradition still conceived as a directing force, representing a wisdom older than modern civilization and having an authority that should check and control the blind drive onward of material and mechanical development with its human consequences.¹⁰⁸

According to Leavis, the university should exercise this authority and check this invasion of the philistines into the temple of culture. The university must motivate and direct itself towards the regular production of the necessary quota of the so-called intelligentsia -- the cultural elite. The university ought to go about training "a certain kind of mind, and through a community of such minds to establish a centre, a centre of intelligence and communication".¹⁰⁹ Of course, anticipating may be, a charge of elitism, this centre according to Leavis was not to be confused with an elite clique like the Bloomsbury group. As he quite rightly observed the quality of culture was fundamentally dependent upon the

¹⁰⁸ F.R. Leavis, Education and the University, (Chatto and Windus, 1948), p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ William Walsh, The Use of Imagination, (Chatto and Windus, 1959), p. 82.

quality of education, and consequently no improvement in the culture could be expected without the initial change in the university education. It would be quite irrelevant for me to discuss the actual changes that Leavis affected in the university curriculum in English. What I am merely examining is the basic motive -- and analysis of social relations -- that in fact governs these changes. The general changes in the direction and the content of university education for Leavis followed from his expressed intention to see university education addressed to the cultivation of the culture-conscious elite. As Leavis himself put it: ". . . everything must start from the training of sensibility together with the reequipping of the student against the snares of the "technique". Everything must start from and be associated with the training of sensibility".¹¹⁰ Yes, but what kind of sensibility? For Leavis, as I have tried to show, it is the concern for the preservation of the existing literary and cultural tradition that controls and guides all the suggested changes. He does not realise that "We cannot in our kind of society call an educational system adequate if it leaves any large number of people at a level of general knowledge and culture below that required by a participating democracy and arts dependent on popular support".¹¹¹ Instead of determining the

¹¹⁰F.R. Leavis, Education and the University, (Chatto and Windus, 1948), p. 120.

¹¹¹R. Williams, The Long Revolution, (Pelican, 1965), p. 174.

rationale of the suggested changes in terms of the requirements of an educated and literate member in a democratic society, Leavis starts out from a tradition that is for its preservation admittedly dependent upon a minority and what is more seeks to formulate his demands for education in terms of the needs of this minority. As Raymond Williams has very tellingly argued:

. . . if more favourable learning environments are perpetuated by the social inequality resulting from previous inequalities of real opportunity, natural inequalities are again magnified and take on a direct social relevance . . . we have to face the really hard fact that we are now meeting this problem in a particular way which serves in the end to magnify the differences and then pass them off as a natural order.¹¹²

Thus leavis who had set out to challenge the established canons of authority, ended up by replacing one type of outmoded and gang-like authority by another. And what is worse, he sought the preservation of this authority by attempting to control in a very totalitarian manner, the only institution which could educate people into challenging this illegitimate authority, this continuation of the elite.

Now, it should be obvious from Leavis's quote at the head of this paper that Leavis himself is not unaware of the anti-democratic bias in his conception of the role and the function of the university. William Walsh, in agreeing with Leavis, makes a curious distinction which, I think, can also be applied to the self-styled liberalism of F.R. Leavis. "Democracy has", says

¹¹²The Same, p. 168.

Walsh, "much to tell us about the equality of moral value of man, but very little to say about the equality of intellectual capacity. And capacity, intellectual capacity, is to be the sole measure regulating the composition of the elite".¹¹³ As a measure of proof, Walsh quotes Matthew Arnold as saying (in Function of Criticism) that "the mass of mankind will never have any ardent zeal for seeing things as they are; very inadequate ideas will always satisfy them".

Leavis, I think, would agree with this analysis, although neither Leavis nor Arnold would find it pertinent to question why the masses should -- if they do -- remain satisfied with inadequate ideas and truths. In this very significant tradition of literary criticism from Arnold, through to Leavis and Eliot, it does not seem to have struck anyone that the reason why the masses always seems to be satisfied with insufficient knowledge, and the reason why the society has come to be divided between the cultured minority and the indiscriminating masses, could have been, apart from several other quite complex factors, that the education as we know it has never been accessible to the vast 'uncultured' majority that they all speak so contemptuously of. Indeed, education has somehow, always remained the private monopoly of the cultured elite, anyway. And it is this that the democracy is expected to preserve. And now, when for the

¹¹³William Walsh, The Use of Imagination, (Chatto & Windus, 1959), p. 77.

first time, the universities are being thrown open to the general public at large, the literary-culture pundits like Eliot and Leavis complain about the dissolution of standards and tastes.

The larger availability of education, it should be clear, amounts to the first major challenge to the self-appointed cultural monopoly of a very small section of people that have reigned supreme in the field of culture and its relevance to the people at large. Once this threat is realized, the minority becomes afraid of losing its grip upon the so-called culture and what it deems to be valuable in it. Thus the very vague bogey of a general dissolution of the cultural standards is hoisted. How wide-spread this fear is, can be gauged from the fact that it is not confined to the critics in the British Arnoldian tradition. What follows, is an example of the New Critics' cultural criticism:

At any rate, the old ways of life have been disappearing much too rapidly for comfort, and we are in a great cultural confusion. Many millions of underprivileged persons now have income and leisure which they did not have before . . . I am in the education business, and I can report my own observations on that. It is as if A sudden invasion of barbarians had overrun the educational institution . . . So, with the new generation of students, Milton declines in the curriculum; even Shakespeare has lost heavily; Homer and Virgil are practically gone. The literary interest of the students today is ninety percent in the literature of their own age; more often than not it is found in books which do not find entry into the curriculum, and are beneath the standards which your humble servants, the teachers of literature are trying to maintain. . . . Our literary culture for a long time is going to exist in a sprawling fashion, with

minority pockets of old-style culture . . .¹¹⁴ (Underlining mine)

This rather lengthy quotation speaks for itself. To Ransom just as to Leavis, the availability of culture to the society at large, constitutes a threat to the heritage of the past. To them, in essence, it creates a problem, rather than a solution to the exclusiveness of culture. In conforming to the position enunciated by Arnold and Eliot, Leavis capitulates to the traditionally conservative culture -- the very culture that he ought to have revolted against, and against which, he often thinks, he is revolting. To Leavis, as to his predecessors Arnold and Eliot, the decay of capitalism appears as the loss of all order and culture. And the real threat to culture, comes not from the outmoded and exploitative social relations which "restrict and stultify 'literary' culture and condemn the workers to the penny-press and Hollywood",¹¹⁵ but from the steadily increasing number of the educated masses who, hopefully, challenge the whole social order with all its implicit assumptions which inevitably divide the society along cultural divisions. As I have tried to explain, earlier, the very literary tradition that Leavis erects as being

¹¹⁴ J.C. Ransom, as quoted by S.E. Hyman, Culture For The Millions, ed. Norman Jacobs, (Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 139-140.

¹¹⁵ This quotation is from an old issue of the Modern Quarterly, now defunct magazine. I neither remember its author, nor its topic.

one of significance, depends for its continuation, upon the division of populace in terms of the mass civilisation and minority culture. And, for a moment, it is worth pondering whether or not, in the recent past, this literary tradition has declined all so much as its detractors claim.

That there are no Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare or Racine, Tolstoy Dostoyevsky or Flaubert, there is no doubt. But, of course, these are the high points of literary culture, and their absence in our time, does not necessarily mean that a great and general cultural decline has set in. And yet, amongst the 'intellectuals' there seems to be an undeniable fear of some kind of an impending doom. How is this to be explained?

The point is that the modern intellectual feels that he carries much less weight and influence than ever before. He senses a severe decline in his own position, and feels that he no longer enjoys the same respect and sympathy that he believes to have always enjoyed in the past. He, in effect, feels cut-off from all the political and scientific forces that have taken control of our modern life. Here, it may be relevant to observe that the intellectual elite, or the cultured minority has never exercised the kind of influence upon the society at large, that it has always wanted to and believed that it did. Never, in fact, has any culture been a homogeneous one -- even in the sense of F.R. Leavis. Never, that is, has any culture been a mass culture, not even in the

organic community. What is more, discrimination and first-hand judgement is at least, as much available today, if not very much more, than it has ever been in any previous society. However, the important difference is that today, the first-hand judgement no longer comes from any one coherent intellectual community or centre, but from a vastly disjointed and differently orientated intelligent individuals. Thus, for example, F.R. Leavis may erect one tradition of English poetry that he considers significant, while Cleanth Brooks may go about setting a different one, and another critic, still another. As it often happens, there is not much that is common between these traditions; and further, whatever may be common, it is so owing to completely different reasons and criteria. Behind all this, is the growth of the mass accessibility of education and the consequent alteration in the position of the intellectual within the community. Thus, perhaps, the greatest development in our time, and to me the most hopeful one, has been the common man's discovery of a mind of his own, that he considers to be as valid and meaningful as that of the intellectual or the cultural minority.

The single important feature, therefore, of the mass availability of education, is the diminished sacredness of authority. The masses do not feel the intellectual elite to be as awesome as it had always seemed to be. There is a general loosening of the power of tradition. Of course, tradition still remains as the most determining

influence but it becomes open to several divergent interpretations, providing perhaps the healthiest ever milieu for the progress of human culture and civilization. For it allows for a genuine controversy, and the evolution of judgement such as involves a much greater degree of participation on the part of those individuals who have due to numerous reasons, been denied this participation and determination in the past.

It seems to me therefore, that the threat to the tradition is built-in part of the very tradition that is considered to be the valuable tradition. F.R. Leavis, and his fellow-travellers, seem to be incapable of realizing that so long as this concept of minority culture and the mass civilization is adhered to, so long, that is, as the preservation and maintenance of whatever is valuable in a tradition remains the responsibility of the so-called intellectually advanced minority, this minority must feel its existence threatened by the invasion of the barbaric and the commercialized masses. And further, this minority, and the cultural tradition -- whatever it may mean -- must always appear to be in the danger of decaying and dying. On the other hand, ethically speaking, any concept of culture that refuses to acknowledge the active participation of the masses in the growth of culture (though the masses may be less self-conscious of it than the self-avowed pundits) is worse than merely being incorrect. For it leads to cultural divisions within the society, thereby replacing

the outmoded and unfashionable economic exploitation by a cultural one. It attempts to justify and validate the preservation of a small minority as the high-priests of culture, and what is worse, requires, as Leavis clearly explicates, the continuation of an educational system that is geared to the regular production of an intellectual elite, thus, forcibly and by design, wanting to keep the masses out of the main-stream of human culture. It, therefore, continually must seek to invent new arguments for excluding the masses from an advanced education and for retaining specialized forms of selection to recruit the elite who alone are deemed fit to enjoy and contribute to the advancement of human culture.

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