

F.R. Leavis

Birth Centenary Essays

Editors:

C.D. NARASIMHAIAH
C.N. SRINATH



A DHVANYALOKA PUBLICATION

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The F.R. Leavis Birth Centenary

Dhvanyaloka announces

a one-day seminar on 10 November 1995

OUR DEBT TO F.R.LEAVIS: TEACHER AND CRITIC

Some of the topics participants may address themselves to:

- a) Where Leavis stands in relation to critics of the past: Johnson, Coleridge and Arnold and
- b) His contemporaries: I.A. Richards, Middleton Murry and T.S. Eliot;
- c) Indian traditional Poetics: Indian opportunity today?

An inquiry into the literary ethos that made Leavis

- a) a vital force to reckon with as well as
- b) 'the great detractor'

**The Importance of Scrutiny
Leavis's major revaluations**

His distinctive contribution to

- a) The Critical Function: case studies of Hopkins and D.H. Lawrence
- b) English as a centre of humane consciousness

**His debates on
Literary History and Literary Criticism
C.P. Snow's Two Cultures.**

Those interested are advised to write to me early.

Director

Leavis's Handwriting

My dear Mrs. Leavis. Sept. 29. 1961.
You ought to have
had something from me before now, but I have
had to be much disttracted. Very tired too,
longing for a chance to relax. It's impossible
for me to do all this off. What I meant to do
was to send you something that I could do as a
by-product of my introduction to the report
of Scrutiny (the C. & B. Report on democracy).
I have produced something you might find
suitable for the Criterion. The trouble is to
get it typed. My wife always does my typing.
But for various reasons, I must now let her do
it. I've tried the ~~standard~~ ^{new} ~~standard~~ ^{new}
Typing Office, but they're full up, & won't
keep me waiting some weeks. I've tried a few
of ordinary business offices: these typeset? They all
ask for cash. If I can't get it typed



For an old friend and pupil, C.D. Narasimhaiah;
F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, engaged in 'Creative quarrelling', 1975
In memorium sent by Q.D.L. April 14th 1978.

F.R. Leavis: Personal Reminiscences

C.D. Narasimhaiah

I admit to being a Leavis admirer but make a point of emphatically denying that I am a ‘Leavisite’, a term which mostly his foes have coined to belittle his admirers and offend Leavis himself. It is another matter for one to be credited or even charged with having Leavision leanings or outlook in one’s attitude to life and literature. Nearer home I am reminded of a former student of mine, now no longer in teaching, who told me in course of conversation, ‘Sir, we respect you, but don’t wish to be your carbon copies’, a clarification which I cherish as he felt free to let me know where he stood in relation to me. It carried an undoubted implication that despite the possible admiration he also had differences with me. It’s just a matter of keeping one’s self-respect in tact in any relationship between two human beings, teacher and pupil not excepted.

Let me recall an incident in support of what I am at pains to put across. William Walsh, D.J. Enright and I thought way back in the seventies it would be appropriate to put out a volume of essays in honour of Leavis as there was no book *on* him. It was agreed I should be editor as Walsh and Enright, being English and known to be close to Leavis should not figure prominently. Chatto and Windus, Leavis’s publishers, agreed in writing to bring out the volume and it was understood I could go ahead inviting contributions. Before long, however, the publishers’ representative came to see me in Leeds with the frustrating news that Leavis wouldn’t like any book on him during his life-time. I took it as a personal insult and wrote Leavis a strongly worded letter that while I admired him and was proud to be his pupil I considered it derogatory to my self-respect if he thought I tried to promote myself by any dishonourable means. It turned out it was not I, but Leavis that was truly hurt at the unintended discomfiture

caused to me and so wrote back to say ‘Believe me, I felt a brute’, the unpleasant episode passed off and left no scar on either of us.

I should like to think his goodwill towards me had its origin in something larger than merely personal, at least that is how it came home to me. At my first encounter with him consequent on my being assigned as his tutorial pupil in 1947 he recalled: ‘when Gandhi and Nehru had been fighting for Indian Independence, you know I held my heart like this, like this,’ he said feelingly with his tight fist on his chest’. No Englishman could have paid a warmer compliment to an Indian at the first flush of Indian Independence in 1947. I later discovered that the compliment came from someone who, like D.H. Lawrence, was proud of his Englishness — the Englishness of vision which stood apart from the degrading political relationship between England and India. Parenthetically I should add Leavis had occasion at one of his tutorials to bring up the case of a German soldier captured when the war was still on with Nazi Germany. One of the two British tommies guarding the prisoner said to the other ‘ hey, ask the bloke ‘who will win the war?’ ‘Poor fellow’, said the other, no, don’t ask he will be hurt’. Leavis raised his voice to affirm that represents the essential Englishness. His own father, standing in the market place, he said proudly, refused to take off his hat when the King passed that way, because he was a Republican!

There I was, an Indian with a Colonial past, but eager to acquire a Cambridge education and looking forward to sitting at his feet for two years. I felt like surrendering to him at once because he could inspire trust in me to work with him and look upto him for stimulus. Which helped one like me from a village background in no small way to fight against my incurable shyness, assert myself intellectually to the extent of showing off at his tutorials attended by a dozen Englishmen against the 3-4 officially permitted. The English reticence was my opportunity and so

sought to impress Leavis in every possible way. It paid dividends. Before term ended this world's most rigorous critic surprised me by volunteering to ask if I cared to change over to research and he would be glad to recommend to the University. I felt inebriated and at once dashed off a note to my English head of Department at Mysore (W.G. Eagleton, now living in Malta) hoping he would be impressed by Leavis's high estimation of my abilities, but Eagleton, himself a I class Tripos from Cambridge, knew better and insisted I would do well to continue with my Tripos if I intended to be a teacher and acquire a handle to my name later, if it pleased me. Leavis wanted to guard his pupil against the newly developed Indian euphoria for Ph.D. --there was in Cambridge at that time an Indian from Madras enjoying Tillyard's patronage. Leavis had earlier dismissed his I class as of little consequence — 'he got a first and like most firsts he didn't deserve it', he had said. He had done his Ph.D. on Milton and spoke on T.S. Eliot with the same enthusiasm as though the two were shaped by the same sensibility.

Tillyard and company controlled the politics of the English Faculty at Cambridge and had showed Leavis his place: he was Assistant Lecturer at 35, Lecturer at 50, and elevated to a Readership at 65 just before retirement -- how could anyone say he wasn't treated well! Before I would make my choice, because lectures are optional at Cambridge - I sought Leavis's advice on attending lectures on the 'English Moralists - a course given by an academic called Potts, that year. Leavis was in a fury: Potts, fantastic, Potts, preposterous, Potts, death' Potts was the kind of man who would start a sentence with 'A good book', break off abruptly, withdraw into himself, knit his brows in becoming thoughtfulness and, after an agonizing minute, resume his sentence, 'A good book', is better than a bad book. Profoundly aphoristic. And Leavis said in self - defence, people call me arrogant. How can I help it when I see such pathetic faces around me? But he was forgiving - perhaps because of his own devotion to his father - in

respect of Quillercouch of an earlier generation who refused to include Samuel Butler in the English Moralists Syllabus, because Butler had turned against his own father! If this or its like was, for some reason contrary to the Aristotelian canon, Leavis quipped: ‘Why do people start with Aristotle and not with T.S. Eliot, unless it be for chronological reasons?’. That was the beginning of my own anti-Aristotelian stance because it has been my conviction that the West by rejecting Plato in preference to Aristotle brought upon itself all its misery - it was a fatal choice in world’s history, as there was good chance of the East and the West coming together through Plato.

Leavis’s tutorials were free-wheeling ramblings bringing before us all the world’s wealth in one fetch both because making connections is the hall mark of an educated imagination and because a University for him is the focal point of humane consciousness and literature is there to train the student’s intelligence and refine the sensibility.

At the year’s end he brought with him a bunch of previous years’ question papers to alert us to the coming examination. When he came to the last question in one of them the tired examiner’s safe bet, ‘Write Short Notes on one of the following’ he picked on ‘Sincerity in Literature’, ‘Sincerity’, ‘Sincerity’, he burst out; ‘Aren’t we all sincere? And yet we don’t produce readable books. I should rather rephrase it ‘Insincerity in Literature’. Leavis’s argument was something to this effect if you are insincere, whatever your other credentials, you are very likely to be let down. Now a platitude for the low-brows: Need I say the way to hell is paved with sincerity. Which called for something for the highbrows too: A quotation from Othello, that self-styled hero

Think of me as one who loved not wisely. But too well.

After his brutal strangling of Desdemona, Othello was out to

impress with his ‘Sincerity’, while he was patently labouring to cover up his hypocrisy. Leavis was the first to divert our attention from Iago as the cause of Othello’s undoing and fix the responsibility for the tragedy on Othello himself -- he was the culprit. From literature to life: think of his classic statement, ‘literature matters because life matters. And to drive home the like of it Leavis recalled a French woman who went to an English restaurant to have her lunch. The waitress, fishing for a compliment, asked, ‘Madam, how do you like our food? ‘*Tra sincere*, very sincere (with the vegetables overboiled till all the vitamins were flushed out!) I must hasten to add he didn’t link them all to strengthen his argument. These were sparks which flew out of the smithy of his fertile brain at odd places which I have tried to connect.

Lionel Trilling’s essay ‘Sincerity and Authenticity’ in Literature came to have added meaning for me in the light of Leavis’s inquiry. It is not enough to be sincere; the more important thing is to be authentic. By the way, Trilling had paid a generous tribute to Leavis in *New Yorker*, a high -brow periodical. And when I asked him if he was going to see Leavis as he was visiting Cambridge that week, ‘No, thanks, I’ll salute the great man from here. I won’t see him’. I was not surprised as Leavis had come down heavily on ‘the famed and flattered American critics’ (surely Trilling was among them) who didn’t know how to read English classics. Could Leavis swear that better-known British critics knew how to read American classics or for that matter how to read their own classics? Anyhow I was angry with Leavis because at the International Seminar on Criticism held at Princeton critic after critic invoked Leavis’s name for praise. And I had shared this American euphoria for him in a letter I wrote to ask if I could come to Cambridge on my return home from America as I wished to show my College to my wife and meet the Leavises. An envelope marked QMS in his bold legible hand was waiting for me at my London hotel with an amusing hint that I run down America as much as I could, -he would be

'delighted'! he added. Because, his wife was very keen on his accepting invitations from American Universities. Leavis was strongly opposed to it because he didn't want his children to grow up in America -- he had often mentioned it to me. Marxism he thought, was not the only thing that 'menaced life'; he thought worse of American materialism. Well, I turned out to be a poor player because Mrs Leavis couldn't have forgotten my generous references to American critics hardly a month ago. The Leavises ultimately did go and a book appeared jointly by husband and wife, *Lectures in America*. Leavis was found to be unforgiving, though: 'Americans don't know how to make bread, you know:' he observed when I met him on his return. India to which he was kindly disposed could not have escaped his critical eye what with our numerous short comings: My friend Sarup Singh, (now Governor of Gujarat) then Vice-chancellor of Delhi University, invited Leavis to receive an honorary degree from Delhi University and asked me to add my voice to persuade Leavis to come. Leavis felt grateful at this Indian gesture but excused himself because his wife who loved India could not make it owing to her illness and Leavis would not come unless she could accompany him. Leavis had every reason to defer to her wishes. Suffice to say Queenie Leavis, that formidable intellectual, wrote to me soon after his death 'I now see why some women commit *sati*. She said she couldn't leave the body in that 'cold place' (graveyard) and so cremated it and brought the ashes to bury them under the apple tree where he used to sit and work in the garden. I took my younger son and his wife to show them Leavis's home in 1984 in which a painter was then living - she had apparently bought it but let the names of Leavises stand on the wall out of deference to their fame. I saw a little sign under the apple Tree "F.R. Leavis, Teacher and Critic", his ashes lie buried here. Our taxi driver told us he had seen him riding a rickety bicycle - he looked like an eccentric, he added.

I must not forget to share with you Leavis's magnanimity towards his pupils. I had finished my exams and was nursing my aching bones by allowing myself the luxury of an extended stay in bed. It was about 8.30 in the morning. There was a knock on the door. Thinking it was the servant who had come to clean up the room, 'Leave me in bed a little longer, I pleaded. 'Narasimhaiah, it's me', said a voice with which I had been familiar. I took a leap from the bed to the door and opened it to find the great man standing there. Look, there is someone I want you to meet, dress up quickly and come to my room.' It could have been someone from Mars, I couldn't guess. As I materialised there ensued a quick formal introduction: Dr. Stevenson, Director of the Rockefeller Foundation; Narasimhaiah, my pupil from India', so saying he disappeared from his room leaving the two of us. Conversation was meandering and I vaguely guessed after more than an hour Dr. Stevenson was harbinger of some unsuspected luck. He took me to lunch in a restaurant at the end of which he came out to bid good bye with a polite, 'Let's hope we'll meet in one continent or the other'. I knew I wasn't in his continent! I moaned : Why this Much ado about Nothing? for I feared I had let down Leavis. And didn't have the courage to face him and so wrote a farewell note saying I was going to London to wait for my boat to Bombay. Meanwhile my Cambridge College office redirected a cable, which looked like a letter announcing -I class airfare from Bombay to New York and back with such other attractive terms. At once I rushed to the telephone to call Leavis and tell him of the good that had come my way. 'I knew it a fortnight back' was his disarming reaction. He didn't want me to feel obliged to him, though the fellowship was entirely his gift — he had nominated me for it and in the characteristic Rockefeller way there were neither applications nor prolonged intrigues. It was all settled with a quiet informality, hard to believe in these days of flamboyant announcements, regional and national interviews by grey eminences with all the humiliation that goes with the exercise.

England, even Cambridge, did at no time produce a man of his calibre in English Studies, someone highly respected beyond the bounds of his own country and his own discipline. For that matter Cambridge could not boast of a succession of men of such eminence in any discipline but the British were unsurpassed in consolidating the scattered gains of gifted individuals from across the English Channel. Mention a great name in Science after Newton. Einstein is German. Great name in philosophy? Kant is German again, so is Wittgenstein. Leavis had thought him a genius but said in the same breath, Russell is no comparison, he is a populariser (like Radhakrishnan in our own country), Great names in Poetry? Gerard Manley Hopkins is Irish, so is Yeats. Eliot the American felt impelled to turn to the French Symbolists for stimulus. Freud, the Psychologist isn't English, nor Jung. Picasso, the painter isn't English and none of the great composers of music were English. There is no great name in criticism after Johnson, Coleridge and Arnold. England couldn't boast of the like of the American R.P. Blackmur. England was self-contained and self-sealed - menacingly insular. 'We are in everything Earth's first' was an empty boast of Wordsworth's, so unbecoming of a poet.' I.A. Richards, one possible candidate for attention repudiated his claim to greatness as he was emphatic in saying 'I refuse to be judged by my juvenile work; he said to me in Mysore in 1954 when I put up his *Principles of Criticism* as the book which made an epoch. His *Practical Criticism* was a misnomer and *Speculative Instruments* on which he bet was a non-event. Well, that is in passing, for I still think highly of England because of a combination of rare virtues which placed the English, for me, at the top of the Western world.

Among its second-rate critics, L.C. Knights turned to Anandavardhana and M.C. Bradbrook to Abhinavagupta, both great by any standards, but to neither of these could they respond adequately. Leavis was the one critic, in whose utterances we find

analogues of the influential Indian critics of the first millennium. Consider Leavis's 'collaborative approach' to a work of art! 'This is so, don't you think?' with 'yes, but' for an answer, the precise counterpart of our *sahrdaya* concept given to 'the common pursuit of true judgement', *sakala jana samvada bhaja*, because it is grounded in shared assumptions of a tradition *sakala sahrdaya maulibhutam anandam*.

When you are so engaged you look for Leavis's 'discussible particularities' in the work in front of you, what Rajashekara, the 10th century critic called *Karayitri pratibha* or Eliot's objective correlative which will act upon the reader's *bhavayitri pratibha* basic emotions inherent in everyone of us with which to respond to the work when awakened by objective correlative, *sadharanikarana*.

The response assumes the form of close engagement or interaction with the work which Indians called *hrdaya samvada* dialogue between hearts — of poet and reader through what Leavis called 'close reading' *akhanda charvana*, infinite chewing between your teeth until *rasa* flows, *rasanishapattih*: the greater the work the deeper the involvement, *tallinata* leading even to *tatasta tallinata*, total absorption bordering on mystic stillness, what Eliot calls intensity of the fusion when you surrender yourself to the work in front and reach a state of *rasananda* akin to *brahmananda* the reason why young Keats invoked unheard melodies, considered sweeter. This is different from what that master of the sapient throng, the father of all that know miscalled catharsis (someone rightly described it as emotional masturbation) while it is a positive, life-enhancing value which, according to Longinus, can transport you to a blissful state. Keats called it evaporation of disagreeables from their relation to Truth and Beauty, for example *King Lear*, when *shantha*, serenity resides.

A strong reason that weighed with me in deciding on celebration

of the centenary of Leavis's birth is that it provides a rare opportunity for Indians to return to their roots and bring out those marvellous critical concepts lying like museum pieces without our knowing how to use them in analysis. Those who formulated them didn't need to demonstrate their validity, when there were shared assumptions to appeal to in a culture which nourished a tiny minority. Demonstration is a bizarre democratic phenomenon while education by definition is elitist, but percolated downwards through the elite. Hence Leavis's efforts at marshalling 'an educated public', 'a creative minority'-- 'minority culture and mass civilization' are Leavis's terms.. His kind of literary history could only be written by a literary critic focusing attention on 'the pre-eminent few', because 'life is not long enough' to dwell on Sunday paper, dozen-a dime writers. Literary history is not a junkyard.

How, then, does one explain his significant omissions? His *Great Tradition*, for instance which had no place for geniuses like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky in Russia (he made amends late in life by writing on *Anna Karenina*) Proust in France, Melville in the States, but started with Jane Austen, not a footnote to any of these. How could he bring himself to write a whole book on Dickens having called him an entertainer earlier except in *Hard Times*? At least there was no explanation. How could he place W.B.Yeats below Byron and below Marvell? And make no mention of that genius Emily Dickinson comparable to Hopkins? It is Leavis who won attention to Hopkins by his profound insights, but he didn't explain how interchangeable are 'spiritual' and his favourite term 'moral centrality'.

How could he have softened towards Hardy in his last years having rejected him in *New Bearings*? Was it to spite Eliot who as critic Leavis thought had lost his purity of interest and motivation and so turned to Blake in *Nor shall my Sword*, by the

way a lecture he had at first delivered at Bristol and was repeating two years after at York to a conference of Professors of English from Great Britain. This 90 minute after-dinner lecture by a former Reader of English to a galaxy of professors none of whom could come anywhere near him and so heard him with rapt attention. He was introduced by Professor Brockbank of York University as ‘among those who awakened Albion from stupor; Blake would gladly have included Leavis among them, said Brockbank. Leavis had asked me and my son, Srinath, then at Leeds to call at 3’ o clock so we could chat till the lecture began at 8. When his hosts came to take him to dinner, his kindly reaction was: I would rather be with you than go with them; in any case I don’t eat my dinner’. He was Visiting Professor at York to, ‘teach what he liked, whom he liked, when he liked.’ Srinath wished to record his voice and so asked. Would he read some poem? He went in, brought out Eliot’s *Collected Poems* and began to read *Ash Wednesday* with deep feeling which was an experience. A puzzled Srinath asked him ‘how come, you read the poem so movingly after running down Eliot all along.’ Well, one’s attitude to a poet is one of yes and no; in this case, more no than yes’. Besides, you can’t judge me at one sitting like this. You would understand better if you have spent a year or two with me like your father.’ Yes, The father was rather more fortunate for once I had the gumption to ask how he came to call *A Passage to India* ‘a minor classic’ as Kipling knew his India infinitely better. Leavis looked a little apologetic and said in defence that the book came out in the wake of German atrocities. Here was a Liberal. And added cynically: besides, Forster is a good man, you know. But let me assure you I shall not allow the essay to be reprinted’. You see Leavis has come in for his share of the blame at the hands of his admiring pupil. How could I not do it remembering George Woodcock’s remark on the Tagore Centenary Celebration that it was ‘mildly scandalous’. Besides I was confident Leavis could afford this luxury of voice of dissent — he has

practised it against himself at times as when he says in *Living Principle* that the ‘creative conditions that produced the English language which made a Shakespeare possible have vanished on that final triumph of industrialism’ They have gone, utterly gone gone for good, laments Leavis.

What we Indians need to learn from Leavis is what we do not have in our own tradition: we only have *Vyakhyana* interpretation and commentary — not local analysis with all the fibres of our being awake so that we can attain a complete reading of the work. Don’t work around the poem, he would say, but go into it; do not import extraneous considerations, hence Leavis’s italicized ‘it is not *there*’. Do not have a feeling for the words but feel into the words with all your faculties awake with a `finger-tip sensitiveness. His criticism is born of a profound conviction, hence his insistence on integrity, hence also his refusal to start from theories and pre-conceived categories. So done words are quickened into experience which he calls exploratory creative response in which words create what they convey. There is behind words the `totality of immemorial human living'- it is through living authors that the dead become alive, without it it will be mere pedantry. Much of all this in Leavis’s own words. I had not realized when I set out to write this paper that Leavis had left behind such a variety of sophisticated tools of analysis, to approach a work of art and possess it in the only way it should be done: to repeat what I have said elsewhere that in matters of eating and loving no one can do it for you. What are all the theories that rage in the world today like so many epidemics which distort the work and prevent access to it before what Leavis has given us. One sees for oneself that to walk the path with this great teacher is to become the path-in proportion to the resources one brings up in negotiating it.

F.R. Leavis in 1975 and in 1995

L.R. Leavis

I thought it would be a good idea for me to refresh the memory by listening to a tape I had made of the BBC 3 tribute on my father's 80th birthday arranged and controlled by Philip French, in 1975. My father and I were at the time for a while listening to it together in the dining-room of the Bulstrode Gardens house.

It was a characteristic British Establishment kind of 'tribute' to a controversial national figure. Philip French and several of the speakers he had selected for interview meant well and clearly did their best, a couple of them indeed spoke movingly and very genuinely. But English institutions tend to treat their unconventional (*i.e.* anti-establishment) celebrities in a different way from their establishment celebrities. The accepted figures are often extravagantly, even sometimes, depending on the individual and circumstances, flatulently lauded. The 'rogue' celebrities, who often have made their mark by fighting against the assumptions of powerful and respected reputations round them, on the other hand, tend to get a so-called 'balanced assessment', meaning that the hostile attitude is also allowed a prominent voice in the account, which generally infects the quality of the whole proceedings. The established sense of institutional propriety can only accommodate the 'rogue' in this way - if at all. This patchwork mentality swamping the genuine can be seen at its lowest level in many T.V. documentaries, and certainly affected (for various reasons that I won't go into) Ian Mac Killop's recent biography of Leavis. One can view the mentality as being consistent with its obverse in the way that 'liberal' British opinion has frequently supported enemies of Great Britain.

In the case of the 80th birthday broadcast, the enemy allowed

to voice his hostility more than once (as opposed to George Steiner or Muriel Bradbrook, who did not really know what they were talking about) was John Gross, which he did with a barely controlled fury that is plainly audible. My father was contemptuously unmoved by this display, in fact I think that a gushingly facile establishment tribute would have caused a far more open unease. But he responded with restrained irony when a most friendly speaker (whom my father no longer regarded as a friend) suggested that Leavis would abhor the very ceremony of the 80th birthday tribute as being uncongenially ‘cosy’. Finally, somewhat before the middle of the programme, my father left during a very well-intentioned outline of the tradition of English criticism that connected with Leavis’s work. Obviously, it was relevant for the general public to be made aware of the historical context of the line of Coleridge and Arnold behind Leavis, and the length of the programme only permitted a densely compressed summary. At the time, with youthful intolerance, not appreciating the circumstances, I remember protesting that my father’s writing didn’t just slot into a critical diagram, and couldn’t be simply linked to Coleridge and Arnold. ‘No!’ said my father, ‘I’m unique.’ He paused, and then said ‘I’m going off to have a bath,’ - and left without returning for the end of the programme. The ‘I’m unique’ was neither said at all arrogantly, nor in order at all to criticize any individual, but as a quiet, inward statement of truth - which I am still convinced that it is.

We know that the intellectual climate in Britain twenty years later has changed many degrees for the worse, and academic-journalists writing in the English papers on the centenary year of his birth can state without much fear of contradiction that no-one reads Leavis any more. This I’m afraid is in fact probably true in several British universities (and I do not refer to the polytechnics

turned ‘university’). If the typical modern English student has heard of Leavis at all, rather than Derrida, it is frequently from one of those current descriptions of 20th century literary trends, where he may easily be lumped with the so-called ‘New Critics’. Some journalists have even recently jeeringly explained (to celebrate the occasion) that Leavis’s style makes him impossible to read - echoing one of Steiner’s points in 1975, and Steiner naturally wasn’t being original. And of course we all know what a grip Literary Theory and Politics have taken on the Anglo-Saxon world, and how university departments have promoted contemporary creative writing to produce a vicious circle of inbreeding. But it is nonsense to suggest (as has been done this year) that Leavis had not seen the collapse of civilization and of the university coming round the corner before he died. Much of his life’s work, as we know, was a struggle against not only present conditions, but what he saw coming.

Above all, besides being a great teacher, F.R.Leavis was in that exclusive class of literary critic that can be called ‘creative literary critic’. Originality of thought is one consideration, but when it is bound up with an originality of utterance that is a force of personality, then we have great literary criticism which can naturally explore and promote the core of work by great creative artists, who achieve the same combination in creative art. Naturally, this is not to say that such a critic is not concerned with the distinction and value of lesser writers, or in diagnosing the moral weaknesses in flawed or bad art; and his values are to do with life, and are not narrowly literary. Such a critic will always have the effect of awakening and confirming a sense of literature as having a living and enduring presence, even in the most philistine times.

One day one suspects that there will be a reaction in Europe

against the contemporary drive of a scientific materialism, and the destruction of the study of the humanities. It is reassuring that not only are there people in the world who admire and respond to Leavis's work, as now at this seminar, but that the substantial body of his criticism will always survive. And I conclude by saying that following this line of thought, it is most moving that in 1975 Leavis published his *The Living Principle: 'English' as a Discipline of Thought*, which has always seemed to me - more than anything else he has published - a conscious preserving for posterity of the bases and peaks of his teaching and critical discipline, an eternal reminder of the quality of his presence as teacher and critic. The opening pages of the book's 'Preface' introduce the reader to Leavis's sense of the present and past, and of his striving for future possibilities. Here, as in the whole book, a man at the end of his life is presenting his spirit and his beliefs in the face of adverse future conditions.

I thank you for coming to honour my father, as I wish to thank the organizers and all the speakers at this seminar.

Leavis's English

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That Leavis could not write English - or the sort of English his critics considered to be 'good' English and which was for them more often an ideal than something concretely realized in their own writings - had become, in Leavis's own lifetime, a well worn cliche. Yet the early T.L.S. reviews of *New Bearings* and *How to Teach Reading* praised those qualities in Leavis as critic which he could not have achieved without being in possession of an effective prose style - qualities such as his 'single minded precision' in discussing modern poetry (in *New Bearings*), stating what he has to say 'in the simplest terms', and stripping argument 'of everything that is not strictly relevant to', thereby achieving a 'skilful economy of argument.

In the review of *For Continuity*, too, Leavis is praised for stating his critical premises with such clarity as is 'uncommon enough in current criticism'. But then somehow, all of a sudden, Leavis's English fell foul of the critics. For already in his review of *Revaluation*, the T.L.S. reviewer was finding faults with it, describing it as 'laboured', and noting, in respect of his commentary on Pope and on the 'appropriate spirit' with which Pope demands to be read, how 'the combination of delicacy in the point intended and clumsiness of expression is rather characteristic of Dr Leavis'.

But it was while reviewing Leavis's next book - *Education and the University* - (not in the T.L.S., which had described it, in its review, as dealing with a subject which is 'nothing less than the mental health of the nation', but in *English*), that Geoffrey Tillotson, himself a distinguished academic and Pope specialist, came out with a drastic criticism of Leavis's English, the outspokenness of which was reminiscent of the tone of some of the

Scrutiny reviews. He described Leavis's English as 'a third former's translation of Cicero' - which was considerably milder than the original description: 'mouthfuls of ill-chewed war-time food' which he had to drop at the request of the Editor of *English*.

Education and the University was one of Leavis's earlier books. *The Great Tradition*, *The Common Pursuit*, *D.H.Lawrence Novelist* and, later on, *The Living Principle* were still to come - books where Leavis also dealt with such problems as 'the blind, reductive, anti-human automatism of our technologico-Benthamite civilization', standards of criticism, art speech, the educated public and the University. Hence his language became even denser, more complicated and, to use the Poundian phrase, more 'charged'. What Tillotson would have thought of such language is impossible to tell but, knowing the Housmanian flow and clarity of his own English, not hard to surmise.

Nevertheless, in his criticism of what Leavis has to say on Thackeray (in *The Great Tradition*) Tillotson, in his own book *Thackeray the Novelist*, seems to have been, perhaps unwittingly, affected by Leavis's English. Thackeray's attitudes, Leavis tells us, and 'the essential substance of interest, are so limited that (though, of course, he provides incident and plot) for the reader it is merely a matter of going on and on'. Tillotson then refers to Leavis's getting from Thackeray 'the meagre rewards of a mere "going on and on" and comments: "Mere momentum", a going on and on' - for "mere" I suggest we read "sheer", and I can claim the lectoral persistence of Dr Leavis as propitious - either the reader stops or he proceeds, and if he proceeds he is impelled forward with power, the inertia of an unwilling novel-reader being that of an unwilling donkey. But there is enough glad

testimony without resorting to coercion, and testimony, too, from various angles'. Further on in his book, Tillotson tells us that one of the critics he should like to persuade to a more just view of Thackeray is Dr Leavis. "At least he can be commended for trying to see Thackeray whole, for facing him squarely. And yet how painful the encounter for Thackeray. The paragraph accorded him in *The Great Tradition* is a paragraph of dismissal. Dr Leavis drops a slab of concrete on the novels'.

Thus criticism of Dr Leavis's point of view at times took the insidious form of criticism of his style and vice versa. For instance, defending Sir C.P. Snow against Leavis's attack in *Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow*, Edith Sitwell remarked: 'Dr Leavis only attacked Charles because he is famous and writes good English' - obviously implying that Dr Leavis did not.

The T.L.S. review of *The Great Tradition*, although it concluded with the praise that 'it is hardly too much to say that (in *The Great Tradition*) Dr Leavis has thrown more light upon the aims and methods of the novel than any previous critic', criticised Leavis's 'nervous mannerisms of style and his habit of throwing off a condemnatory judgement in an aside', and it went on to ask: 'In a book, would the occasional disparaging references to Flaubert, for example, be likely to persuade anyone not already in agreement? Is the considered judgement behind them adequately presented in this way? And would it not be better to elaborate the case against, say, Hardy, or Meredith more fully?'. In his review of *The Common Pursuit*, too, while admitting at the outset that 'it is not easy to be fair to Dr Leavis' - a critic 'of high and admirable purpose, the evidence of whose integrity is scattered through eighteen volumes of *Scrutiny*' - the T.L.S. reviewer quotes a characteristically Leavision passage from his essay on Milton, with its taut, complex, and thought-laden syntax, as an example of

Leavis's 'ramshackle use of language'. It is not impossible, the reviewer tells us, 'to dig out of his sentence Dr Leavis's meaning', and he does himself set out to do so for our benefit. Prompted by some considerations of Milton's influence in the nineteenth century, Dr. Leavis writes:

What we can say, and must, in so far as we are bent on getting considerations for Keats's greatness, is that, if he had not been capable of putting the beautiful first *Hyperion* behind him, with the remark that "Milton's verse cannot be written but in an artful, or rather, an artist's humour", he wouldn't have been capable of the qualities that are the strength of the Ode *To Autumn* and of the induction to the revised *Hyperion*, that constitute the proof of his major genius, and that make Tennyson's, put side by side with his, a decidedly minor one.

And here is the reviewer's version of what Dr. Leavis is supposed to be saying in his sentence;

that in order to win recognition for a greatness which has not been questioned, we can (and must) say something not susceptible of proof which itself proves that Dr. Leavis prefers Keats to Tennyson.

This is, of course, both as to language and substance, a ludicrously simplistic version of what Leavis has to say - a version which, while simplifying the language, simplifies and improvises the meaning as well, doing away with such implications, nuances, and suggestively hinted aims and intentions as give the sentence its body and character as well as ethos. The subtle cogency of reasoning and the persuasive force behind Leavis's sentence, and therefore behind Leavis's meaning, disappears, and what remains is an inert, skeletal account of what the author intended to

convey. For one fundamental and indispensable element in Leavis's style which makes for its power to convince and persuade is the element of personality which affects the form and presentation of what is being said.

If, in the passages of 'close reasoning' that *The Common Pursuit* abounds in, the T.L.S. reviewer found 'approximations rather than statements', considered Leavis lacking in the 'highly developed powers of accurate expression' and noticed that Leavis's prose, 'far from being the regenerative, incandescent medium required to keep critical thought at a high temperature, is coke-like in its roughness and chill', he merely brought out the hiatus between the kind of prose that Leavis wrote and which was vitally relevant and perfectly suited to his critical thought and perception in all their subtlety, delicacy and complexity, and the kind of prose that the reviewer was capable of appreciating.

In other words, it is the *reviewer's* inability to appreciate any other kind of prose than the one he is normally used to - prose with an easily achieved elegance, fluency, and clarity, that constitutes in part his difficulty in being fair to Leavis. Clarity of expression, Housman says, is not a virtue but a duty. But fidelity to one's thought in all its subtle nuances and in all its conceptual depth and complexity is equally a duty. Moreover, there are as many kinds and degrees of clarity as there are of the content and meaning to be conveyed. The reviewer's difficulty in being fair to Dr Leavis, therefore, was attributed not only to Leavis's 'ramshackle use of language', but also, and perhaps to a greater degree, to what he had to say, which the reviewer dismissed as 'bad temper'. 'Is it too much to hope', he patronisingly concluded, 'that subsequent collections will be purged of imprecise prose and bad temper, so that Dr Leavis's very real analytical gift can be granted a fair showing?'

But for all the praise bestowed on his ‘very real analytical gift’, Leavis must have found such a review at once frustrating and exasperating - and all the more so because of his belief, exemplified in his own practice, that ‘the trained frequentation’ of literature alone can bring what was so highly prized by him; namely, ‘the sensitizing familiarity with the subtleties of language, and the insight into the relations between abstract or generalizing thought and the concrete of human experience’.

Hence, when the text of Leavis’s lecture on *Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow* - perhaps another example of ‘bad temper’? - was published, his English was one of the targets of attack. And yet, apart from being a superb example of polemical skill and brilliance, Leavis’s Richmond lecture is also a prose masterpiece. He told me once that there was no piece of his writing on which he had spent so much time and energy. ‘Thinking’, Leavis points out in this lecture, ‘is a difficult art and requires training and practice in any given field’. Writing the kind of prose that is Leavis’s is also a difficult art - a prose that, far from being glib or vulgar, pompous or pretentious, has the unmistakable authority of first-hand thought and personal judgement behind it. Leavis himself criticised Snow’s style and his manner of writing as exhibiting ‘an utter lack of intellectual distinction and an embarrassing vulgarity of style’. For him criticism of Snow’s style becomes, ‘as it follows down into analysis’, criticism of Snow’s thought and pretensions. And the prose through which such an analysis is carried out is characteristically Leavision in its grip, acumen and inciseness. As to prose style alone, Leavis considered Snow’s lecture ‘a document for the study of cliche’ - cliche not as a matter of style, but as ‘a habit of expression’. And for Leavis a habit of expression ‘that runs to the cliche tells us something adverse about the quality of the thought expressed’.

Even after the furore caused by the publication of his Snow lecture had subsided, attacks on Leavis's English continued from time to time. In 1970, for instance, Geoffrey Grigson used the Letter to the Editor column of the T.L.S. to ask how on earth such a bad writer as Leavis could ever emerge from his 'proper habitat of the lecture-room'. The occasion for Mr Grigson's outburst was the publication in the T.L.S. of Leavis's lecture on "Literarism" versus "Scientism". 'The Misconception and the Menace' which he had delivered in 1970 at Bristol University as the Churchill Visiting Professor. Grigson found the text of the lecture 'pompous and uneducated', and wondered what Leavis's students could make of his English and how they could really be said to have been educated by him. I wrote a letter to the T.L.S. protesting against Mr Grigson's comments, in which, among other things, I said:

Can Mr Grigson show where and how he could improve it (Leavis's prose), without blunting the edge and destroying the nuance of irony and the sophisticated subtlety of intellectual understatement, so characteristic of Leavis's style? One proof that I can cite of the efficacy of Dr Leavis's language is that not only did his Swedish and Italian translators find no difficulty with his style, but also the translations in these two languages came out extremely well. Or does Mr. Grigson resent what Dr. Leavis says and so make the style the first but not the only victim of his wrath? (He is, of course, on record as having insinuated a possible connection between what he considered to be Dr. Leavis's "critical deviations" and "the relation between his physical stature and his psyche").

If Dr. Leavis is such an influential critic as he is - and to me he seems to be even more influential than Eliot

- surely the language he uses must have something to do with that influence.

Lastly, I should like to ask Mr. Grigson if he knows of any important critic who did not have a peculiarly personal style - the peculiarity of style being almost invariably linked with his independence of thought. It was so with Dr Johnson, Coleridge or Matthew Arnold, and it is so with Dr. Leavis, whose place is surely with them - and not with the cultivators or mere lovers of so-called good or elegant English.

In a letter to me Leavis himself had this to say about Grigson's letter:

Grigson's fatuously nasty letter - he has been doing it for 40 years, and I take no notice, which reduces him to transports of rage - is an expression of pure spite: I've given him no grounds, except to *be* what he feels as a menace to his self-esteem, so that his hatred amounts to a flattering tribute. What's in a way significant is that the Editor (who must know him) thought him worth printing - in order to please him and Co. and demonstrate T.L.S.' impartiality (which doesn't exist)...

As for my bad style, that's not Grigson's invention; it's orthodoxy among the boys of the London literary world. The late Blessed Edith Sitwell wrote defending Snow: 'Dr. Leavis attacks *Charles* because *Charles* writes good English'. In my robust complacency, I'm not troubled. How can I *not* know that I'm a creative writer at any rate in the sense that I'm one of those who 'maintain the language', (as T.S. Eliot said of the poets).

The basic flaw in the charge of obscurity and incomprehensibility against Leavis's English can be exposed by asking some very simple questions: How could his criticism, if couched in a 'ramshackle', 'convoluted' and 'incomprehensible' English, have the decisive impact it has had? How could he have been such an effective teacher (and you have Prof. Narasimhaiah, one of Leavis's distinguished pupils in your midst, to bear testimony) and an extraordinarily lively and successful public lecturer or, as he used to call himself, a performer, if his way of using English was what it has been alleged to be? How could he have given to the English language more pithy, pregnant and memorable critical formulations and maxims than any other twentieth century critic - T.S. Eliot included - except Ezra Pound? And, lastly, how can one account for the lasting success and the various editions and reprints over the years of most of his books, if the readers who bought them could not easily make out what he had to say?

'Sensibility alters from generation to generation, whether we will or not, but expression is only altered by a man of genius' - a quote from Eliot that Leavis was fond of and that he used more than any other Eliotian quote. To some extent, this may also be said of the language of criticism. While Leavis did not invent any *new* critical idiom or jargon, his own critical diction is as different from that of the general run of critics as are his critical views, evaluations and convictions as well as the whole ethos of his criticism. His integrity as a critic, the uncompromising severity of his critical standards and judgements and his complete devotion to English literature and to the English tradition which influenced his views and values 'not dogmatically but deliberately' held, could not but determine his style as well. And the same may be said of his superb analytical skill which could not be fully exercised without impinging on the kind of English he wrote in order to express all the subtlety, complexity and relevance of his closely reasoned argument. In

other words, it is what he had to say in all its delicacy, complexity and compactness, and that could not have been said in any other way, that dictated Leavis's style. To paraphrase it in a simpler - or rather simplified - English is not merely to sacrifice part of the meaning and the spirit of what he had to say, but actually to travesty it. Take, for instance, the sentence in which Leavis describes the effect of reading Swift's *Modest Proposal* upon ourselves - an effect "that we are most disturbingly aware of": 'The dispassionate, matter-of-fact tone induces a feeling and a motion of assent, while the burden, at the same time, compels feeling appropriate to rejection and in the contrast - the tension -a remarkably disturbing energy is generated'. How could one, in the interest of 'good', 'lucid' and 'elegant' English, alter not merely a phrase, but even a word in this sentence without altering, sacrificing or even falsifying what Leavis is saying? Behind Leavis's written prose and, to a greater or lesser extent moulding it, is the element of direct spoken speech so characteristic of his lecture-room seminars and tutorials and which undoubtedly adds to the verve and dynamism of his style. The supreme crime in a critic is dullness, says Pound - something which even his severest and most prejudiced critics cannot accuse Leavis of. And this even when he is involved in close criticism and detailed technical analysis of what is under scrutiny. Take, for instance, his comment on the presence of wit and the play of thought and image in Pope's lines in 'To the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady' (starting from 'most souls, 'tis true, but peep out once an age' to 'And close confin'd to their own palace, sleep): 'The changes of tone and attitude imposed on the reader (consider, for instance, that involved in passing from "souls" to "peep" in the first line) result in an alertness; a certain velleity of critical reserve in responding; 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'. So much has been packed into a sentence like this, and in such a forceful, illustrative and analytically detailed way, and yet there is nothing at any point in the sentence to clog the expression of what Leavis has to convey.

In fact, the deeper, Leavis's thinking is, and the subtler his analytical grip on what is before him, the more impressive is his skill in dealing with the complexities of meaning, thought and nuances of expression. The difficulty that untrained readers encountered in coming to grips with such a sentence was largely a difficulty in apprehending the drift and the ethos, of what was being conveyed. Thus, for instance, when Leavis's book on Lawrence was being published in America by Knopf, the publisher's 'stylist' wrote to Leavis to suggest that he clarify a particularly obscure sentence in the book. It was from chapter 3, entitled 'Lawrence and Tradition: The Rainbow' - and ran as follows: 'But his (Lawrence's) insight he brings from life, from his experience and observation, and it is more penetrating than George Eliot's, whose Maggie, the comparison reminds us, is too much Maggie's. The sentence, Leavis wrote to Ian Parsons, Director of Chatto and Windus,

has a content and in the context it's perfectly clear to anyone who is capable of reading the book. In my characteristic (I hope) condensed way I do a good deal of comparing of Lawrence with George Eliot. Focused on Ursula, I say that Lawrence has obviously been impressed by *Mill on the Floss*. But the insight he has shown in presenting Maggie comes not from literature, but from life. And now I pick up a point I developed in *The Great Tradition* ('the comparison reminds us'): George Eliot's Maggie is given too much from Maggie's (the adolescent girl's) point of view -i.e. it's too much as if Maggie and not an adult

mind (the mind of a clairvoyant genius), had herself written the book. With Ursula, I point out, it's different.

I'm *not* going to attempt that kind of paraphrase for the American, or any reader. It's like being asked to have a different kind of mind and to have written a different kind of book. There, I stand, and, as Luther said, 'I can no other'. I tried the sentence on Q.D. Leavis (my severest critic), and she says it would give no trouble to anyone who can read the book.

The sentence can't be 'clarified' by *re-writing* it, as the 'stylist' suggests.

P.S. It wasn't a stylist that was wanted - least of all one from Bronx via Columbia - but someone who could follow the argument, and was intent on that.

Leavis himself was critically aware of the language and style of other critics. When, for instance, E.M.W. Tillyard remarked that Leavis 'is a better critic when he encourages us to read Carew or Pope than when he puts Spenser or Shelley on the index', he rebuked Tillyard for expressing himself in a way that 'no self-respecting critic should permit himself; it should be left to the Sunday reviewers'. He deplored what he called 'the journalistic addiction of our academic intellectuals', adding that 'journalism in one form or another is now the menacing disease of University "English".' In fact, for Leavis, the quality of thought, critical or otherwise, and the quality of writing were, to a large extent, interdependent. Thus, he associated 'critical indolence' with flabby writing in Eliot's *Essays Ancient and Modern*. Reviewing it in *Scrutiny*, he observed apropos of what Eliot had to say about Tennyson that

it is not an occasional vulgarity of phrasing that is the worst offence; far worse is the subtlety of statement that disguises critical indolence and gives endorsement to time-honoured critical (or anti-critical) fallacies.

It is, therefore, both strange and ironic that the incomparably subtle, sensitive and perceptive critic and analyst of the language of prose as well as of poetry - from that of Swift, Dickens, George Eliot, to that of Henry James, Conrad and D.H. Lawrence in prose; and from that of Shakespeare, Pope, Dr. Johnson to that of Wordsworth, Hardy, Hopkins, Yeats, Pound and Eliot - should himself be considered incapable of writing 'good' English. As a matter of fact, Leavis's own criticism, at its best, is what it is at least partly because of the language in which it has been expressed - a language which is creative in its own right, combining, as it does, nerve and suppleness, tact and delicacy, grip and edge. Moreover, however lengthy, elaborate and complex a Leavision period might be, it has a logical as well as a syntactical rigour and compactness about it. You may, at times, have to read it twice in order to grasp the implication of what he is saying, but not in order to see how the various parts of the period - the clauses, the subclauses, the asides and the parentheses all interconnect admirably. It's like being asked to have a different kind of mind - here's the crux of the difficulty between Leavis and some of his readers, represented by Grigson, who value what they call good and elegant English above everything else - above what a mind like Leavis's is capable of offering, the mind that creates its own style of expression in order to do justice to itself and its needs. In fact, one can say that there is an element of determinism about Leavis's style, so that he could not but write as he did, in order to convey fully and faithfully the subtlety and complexity of his thought and perception.

However, in spite of his incapacity rather than unwillingness

to write in a manner that would have pleased an Edith Sitwell or a Geoffrey Grigson - in other words to write English in the manner of Snow - Leavis frequently formulated his key concepts in a manner, style and language with an almost epigrammatic clarity, finish and finality -concepts that are the outcome of subtle reasoning, analytical discrimination and deeply pondered and mature reflection. Here are some comments that have acquired classic status:

A judgement is personal or it is nothing; you cannot take over someone else's.

The only way to escape misrepresentation is never to commit oneself to any critical judgement that makes an impact -that is, never to say anything.

I think of myself as an anti-philosopher, which is what a literary critic ought to be - and every intelligent reader of creative literature is a literary critic.

It is only from the present, out of the present, in the present, that you can approach the literature of the past.

Neither democratic zeal nor egalitarian jealousies should be permitted to dismiss or discredit the fact that only a limited proportion of any young adults is capable of profiting from, or enjoying university education.

Practical criticism is criticism in practice.

And here are some well-known and succinct evaluations of individual poets and writers:

If Eliot owed a debt to Donne it was a debt to Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is not only a greater writer than Racine, but a great kind of writer.

Dickens [is] the Shakespeare of the novel.

Swift is distinguished by the intensity of his feelings, not by insight into them, and he certainly does not impress us as a mind in possession of its experience.

[There is in Shelley] not merely a capacity for momentary self - deceptions and insincerities, but a radical lack of self-knowledge.

Such pithy formulations, scattered throughout his writings, attest to Leavis's triple mastery: his mastery over his thought; his mastery over an infallibly telling mode of expression; and, above all his mastery over himself. Through such formulations Leavis expresses, in a nutshell, the strength of his critical convictions, perceptions and insights; but where, as for the most part, his style is more complex, more elaborate and more 'involved' (not convoluted), he is engaged, whether he is dealing with a poem or a novel, in an elaborate analytical and evaluative exercise, not only dealing with the style, language and technique of a given work, but also with its ethos, with the moral sensibility and values implicitly embodied in it, its relationship to the tradition and what is distinctively modern and original about it. In this sense one can say of Leavis as of very few critics, indeed, that he is a 'whole' critic, and that his English and his style are as strikingly personal and individual as those of Dr.Johnson, Matthew Arnold and, though Leavis himself might not have liked the comparison, Pound.

F.R. Leavis and the Indian Critical Scene

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F.R. Leavis's role in the emergence of English as a discipline of thought has been charted by several commentators. That discipline has had its standing in India and it would be interesting to speculate on Leavis's impact on the critical scene in this country and to arrive at some general conclusions about the future shape of the discipline in India. Such speculation is not inappropriate in a context where we are observing the centenary of one of the most influential critics of our time, and in a context where the discipline is being historicized and English teachers are showing a degree of self-consciousness about their profession never before in evidence.

Leavis burst on the scene at Cambridge at a crucial cultural moment. The Cambridge Tripos constituted in 1917 gave English the disciplinary status it had lacked until then. After Matthew Arnold, English was introduced and taught as part of the ruling class enterprise of spreading sweetness and light and as part of the general strategy to keep mob psychology at bay by humanizing the mob. By the turn of the nineteenth century English which was the poor man's classics now began to be seen as England's answer to philology which was Germanic in origin. England was soon at war with Germany and English began to play a part in promoting Englishness. The early Professors of English, men like Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch at Cambridge and Sir Walter Raleigh (the latter freshly returned from India where he was Principal of the then Aligarh College) at Oxford, were Gentleman Professors, patrician and upper class. They were patriotic and taught English with national pride but ultimately they saw their teaching as only a pleasant pastime or a way of earning a living. It was not a

'serious' business. For them talking of English literature was an act of connoisseurship, not really different from tasting different wines, and criticism was good-natured and genteel gossip. The 'manliness' of these Professors is evidenced by 'Q' (as Sir Arthur was called) addressing a mixed class with the words 'Gentlemen,' and Sir Walter thankfully resigning his teaching position so that he could involve himself with the manly task of producing war propaganda. For both Professors, English was a feminine subject, not a systematic business to be taken seriously.

All this changed when Leavis went up to Cambridge. F.R. Leavis, Queenie Dorothy Roth (later Q.D. Leavis) and I.A. Richards arrived into English from different backgrounds-Leavis from history, Queenie from psychology and cultural anthropology, Richards from the mental and moral sciences. They were, in a sense, zealous like converts to a new religion. They were of a different class background from the patrician Professors. Leavis was the son of a musical instruments dealer, Queenie the daughter of a draper and hosier, Richards the son of a works manager in Cheshire. Their class was middle, if not lower-middle class, and something like the Puritan work ethic informed their earnestness. In shaping the discipline they brought a moral zeal and seriousness quite different from the relaxed ways of Q or Sir Walter. Leavis, in particular, saw English as a discipline of thought, as a profoundly civilizing subject, as a sure stay against the ravages of a technologico -Benthamite civilization, against materialism in all its forms. In America, where Leavis has not had the same vogue, English is a systematic discipline and this has been to a large extent shaped by the formalism of the New Critics, which itself is a combination of Leavision verbal analysis and Richards's linguistic philosophy. Perhaps one could say the same thing about English in India, because we have been brought up on a diet of practical criticism, New critical analysis, and of ideas of English as a civilizing and

humanizing agent, somehow vitally necessary if one is to save one's soul. But of the Indian scene a little later.

As I understand it the main lines of the Leavisian critical tradition may be formulated as follows:

- (a) English is viewed as a touchstone for all cultural progress, as a subject worth studying, if only to demonstrate one's fitness for civilized existence.
- (b) There is such a thing called an 'Organic community' whose origins are probably in Seventeenth - Century England, and from which a steady cultural and social decline has taken place.
- (c) This organic community can be concretely recognized in the language that poets use, and the job of the critic is to explore the language of literary texts and realize their felt life.
- (d) The best writers, the writers who use language well, make up the Great Tradition. It follows of course, that others are out. Thus Donne and Hopkins are in but the Romantics are out, Shakespeare is in, Milton out, Austen and D.H. Lawrence are in, but a good number of others are out.
- (e) Literary criticism to be effective must attend to the concrete and the specific and must not become something else like literary history as Bateson understood it, or philosophy with a framework as Wellek understood it.

Let us now turn to the Indian critical scene and consider what these Leavisian ideas mean for us. Leavis's ideas have been mediated in this country by C.D.Narasimhaiah and his pioneering work. As Leavis's pupil, C.D.Narasimhaiah has assiduously promoted his master's ideas but intelligently fused them with some of his own. C.D.Narasimhaiah too believes in the civilizing influence of literature. He too asks that the critic not speak in

abstraction but attend to the feel and texture of a literary work. He has his notion of the Great Tradition as well which closely follows Leavis, but he has moved beyond Leavis in applying Leavision criteria to literatures in English, American, Australian, Canadian, West Indian, African and of course Indian. Thus he can speak of the multiple heirloom which Commonwealth literature is, an heirloom which actually contests the hegemony of the English greats. Like Leavis, CDN too delivers magisterial judgements, applauding here, dismissive there. Thus in Indian writing in English CDN can speak of Raja Rao in glowing terms but savagely dismiss the likes of Salman Rushdie, and Rushdie's children and grandchildren. For CDN Indian fiction in English is more valuable than the poetry, Nehru a more satisfying autobiographer than Nirad Chaudhuri. At times like Leavis, CDN sounds dogmatic, but a closer look will tell us that he has based his judgements on a concrete and specific apprehension of the written word. We may disagree, we are invited to do so, but we can do so only if we are prepared to argue a case on the basis of concrete and specific textual evidence. The standards set are high and it is no wonder that many have failed. To disagree with CDN is to do so at one's peril.

Many people have chaffed at Leavis's insularity, his Englishness, and his impatience with critics who do not have an 'inwardness' with the English language. CDN has been able to reconcile this English quality in his mentor by pointing to a lesson Leavis's example taught - that every critic has a swadharma, and that s/he must cultivate it. And so for Leavis's 'Englishness', CDN has his 'Indianness.' For CDN, 'Indianness' has more often than not meant first the spiritual India of Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*, and second, the application of the Rasa/ Dhwani aesthetic categories to the study of all literature. The Indian aesthetic categories also imply close reading of literature to extract the essence of it, or to get its

soundings. Thus, in a dramatic way we find Leavisian criteria refracted through the Indian critical prism.

I think I have said enough to show that the Leavis/ CDN line is a formidable force in the Indian context. It has won attention for different literatures in English and above all by its practice of swadharma it has given a local habitation and a name to the Indian tradition of English Studies. However, of late, there have been rumblings and we ought to take note of them, and in the alterations and departures which we are now witnessing, the Leavis/ CDN line has been a point of reference. Two tendencies, I think have to be noted here. One is a strong tendency to Indianize English departments. This has taken the form of deliberately asking for the introduction of translated Bhasha texts as legitimate objects of study in English departments. Thus we have a situation where English students are reading Premchand's Hindi short stories or Karnad's Kannada plays as legitimate English texts. This is quite different from promoting Indian writing in English in English departments. Another aspect of this Bhasha onslaught is to promote comparative studies. Here the ploy is to use as one term of the comparison an English literature text and compare it with say a Hindi or Telugu text. The pressure on English departments to expand the notion of English to include these activities is immense. There does seem to be a notion of English implied here which is making English increasingly unrecognizable and amorphous. And we would do well to accept it.

The second tendency is what goes by the name of Culture Studies. Here the inspiration is Western and its adherents genuflect in the direction of France. They problematize English and make it hold any and every subject, from philosophy and history to Liverpool socks and Coimbatore textiles. The idea is, of course,

to extinguish English departments and I do see this as a reaction to the disciplinary purity which Leavis had promoted. The Culture Studies people insist on seeing the ‘background’ and the ‘foreground,’ the ‘context’ and the ‘text’ as inextricably linked, as aspects of one another. In the process they move from the literary work to the Text, and Text includes practically everything, including the non-literary. My own sympathy is broadly with this movement because for one thing it has released us from the prison-house of words and allowed us once again to move from the word to the world, and for another such background study or culture study was always part of our business as English students. But where I am unimpressed is in the tendency of Culture Studies to appropriate everything towards a particular political or ideological position. They ask for political correctness. One need not accept a Marxist Utopia to practice Culture studies. The Barthians and Derrideans of our academy do not have half the learning of their mentors. What they have is a veneer of scholarship. The spectacle of these ‘drunken helots’ dismissing the traditionalists, and pretending that Theory is their discovery, that it came the other day, is comic. And let us face it, these ‘theorists’ write execrable English. My guess is that theory provides them with a facade to cover up linguistic incompetence.

Having said this, I must quickly recover balance by saying that such a situation has come to pass partly because the establishment has been insensitive to new needs and expectations. Preening itself on its exclusiveness, it has used Leavision ideals for the naked display of power keeping out those who were honestly doubtful. With the stability of the canon behind them and the security of their chairs they have been snobbish and arrogant in their dealings both with literature and their colleagues. And this has provoked the Left to display its own arrogance. Let me straightaway say that snobbery

of any kind, whether of the Right or the Left is to be strongly discouraged. What we must promote, however, is the zeal, earnestness and radicalism which Leavis's ideas promote. The power of his work should inspire us to hold on to our positions with tenacity and sincerity of purpose.

Literature, Science and Culture

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Engaging in immediate debate on each specific point closes one's mind for good and all. Debating gives most of us much more psychological satisfaction than thinking does but it deprives us to whatever chance there is of getting closer to the truth.

- C.P. Snow

While most lectures eventually suffer the fate of cultural obsolescence, it is noteworthy that the 'Two Cultures' Debate, despite a passage of over thirty years, has not lost its ardour and urgency symptomatic of a cultural crisis. If anything, one is struck more than ever before by the lectures' understanding of our milieu and the concern they show of our collective destiny.

This is not to deny that there were elements in the C.P. Snow - F.R. Leavis Exchange that reflected national prejudice and insular attitudes towards the world. Indeed, major arguments in the debate, especially in Snow, simply took the primacy of the West and the model of development associated with the English speaking world for granted. The paradigm seemed to assume that since modern science and industrialism arose in the West, especially in Britain, the rest of the world, especially the former colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America must await the outcome of the ongoing conflict in the West between the scientific and literary cultures. The fact that the clash between the life of imagination and rationality, our Apollonian and Dionysian drives could have had interesting manifestations elsewhere, such as in the Orient, worthy of a fruitful cross-cultural study, does not appear to influence the debate. On the other hand, "paternalism" is disavowed (by Snow). And the unidirectional flow of knowledge from England - West to the Third World ends up in endorsing a paternalistic attitude towards global welfare.

In seeking to understand the significance of the “Two Cultures” Debate today, I propose to first sum up the arguments and counter arguments of Snow and Leavis. Secondly, I shall attempt a review of the answers provided by both, and finally I shall try and formulate an approach towards a cultural synthesis in the light of our changing attitude towards Science, Culture and Literature, and the meaning we attach to development and progress. I realize that I am neither a scientist nor do I have a specialized knowledge of the history of scientific enquiry and progress. However, the debate, when conducted, was not meant for a specialized audience; it operated in the public domain, its precise task was to assess the extent to which both Science and Literature affected the tenor of life the citizens lived in today’s vastly complex world. I shall therefore go beyond the two critics and draw support from alternative systems of thought and civilizational traditions.

II

Beginning the Rede Lecture (1959) in a carefully self-reflexive manner, C.P. Snow declares that “by training I was a scientist : by vocation a writer.” (p.1). He believes that “the intellectual life of the whole Western Society is increasingly being split into two polar groups.” : literary intellectuals and scientists. The fact that the new definition of literary intellectuals does not include scientists like Rutherford or Eddington or Dirac, Adrian or himself deeply bothers him. Though the problem is currently manifest in Britain, there is no doubt in his mind that “by and large this is a problem of the entire West.”

The consequence of the mutual separation and operation is every where there to see. When cornered, some scientists defensively admit that they have “tried a bit of Dickens” “as though Dickens were an extraordinarily esoteric, tangled and dubiously rewarding writer.” The more prejudiced among them

find the mention of books startling and “prefer to use books as tools.” Conversely, Snow also finds ignorance among literary persons equally appalling. Afterall, one’s ignorance of the second law of thermodynamics is as bad as not reading a work of Shakespeare. Similarly, Snow finds scientific terms like “polarised lights” and “refraction” used arbitrarily in poetry. The most unfortunate fact, according to Snow, is that “the clashing point of two subjects, two disciplines, two cultures - of two galaxies so far as that goes ought to produce creative chances.” (p.16). Only, it does not. Instead, we seem to “have set ourselves the task of producing a tiny elite, far smaller proportionately than in any comparable country - educated in any academic skill. (p.19).

There are two major flaws that Snow finds among the members of the literary culture. One is the tendency towards solipsism that he thinks characterizes the literary writers. In his individual self, the scientist too might believe in the essential isolation of man, that “each of us dies alone.” However, the scientist’s social self, Snow argues, is governed by a spirit of optimism that saves him from complacency about the social condition. Indeed, Snow claims to see a pattern here and argues that:

It is hard to think of a writer of high class who really stretched his imaginative sympathy, who could see at once the hideous back streets, the smoking chmineys, (p.25).

Not just a lack of interest in the culture of poverty but a proneness to nihilism or literary fascism seems to be the governing ideal of many prominent literary writers, according to Snow. As he asks :

Why do most writers take on social opinions which would have been thought distinctly uncivilized or demode at the time of lantagenets? Yeats, Pound,

Wyndham Lewis, nine out of ten of these who have dominated literary sensibility in our time, were they not only politically silly but politically wicked? Didn't the influence of all they represent bring Auschwitz that much nearer? (p.7).

Snow concludes by saying that "there is infact a connection which literary persons were culpably slow to see, between some kind of early 20th century art and the most imbecile expressions of anti social feelings."

For Snow, it is clearly Science that provides the answer. Science produces the miracle of industrialism and it is presumably the industrial culture that can eradicate poverty from the face of the earth. Those who claim that the poor do not want factories are simply not telling the truth. For Snow contends that "with singular unanimity, in any country where they have had the chance, the poor have walked off the land into the factories as fast as the factories could take them." (p.26).

However, Snow admits that scientists themselves are not free from their own sub-cultural prejudice. Many good scientists, for instance, tend to believe that "applied science was an occupation for second rate minds." The unfortunate fact is that though much money was spent in promoting the mercantile industrial culture, there was very little attempt to try and comprehend the intellectual implications of the scientific revolution. As a result, today we do not know how to cope socially with science. As Snow observes, "if our ancestors had invested talent in the industrial revolution instead of the Indian empire, we might be more soundly based now. But they didn't."

Four years after the Rede Lecture, Snow takes stock of his early view points. He now feels that some of the criticism of his work "has been loaded with personal abuse to an abnormal extent." This is clearly a reference to F.R. Leavis. Citing examples

from critics, Snow asks : “Do certain kinds of animosity lead to any inability to perform the physical act of reading? The evidence suggests so.” (p.58).

Culture, maintains Snow, is an ambiguous term. It may be defined as “the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties which characterise our humanity.” It may also be used in the anthropological sense, which he defines “as a group of persons living in the same environment linked by common habits, common assumptions, a common way of life.” Thus, scientists belonging to one culture might believe that “research is the primary function of the university whereas literary persons would not think so.”

In sum, concludes Snow, it is dangerous to have two cultures. The answer to the crisis of two cultures is the spread of scientific revolution all over the world. There is no other way. While the ideal of the Renaissance man is admittedly not possible, Snow argues that we must look up to examples such as in America where “scientists of world standing are talking to nonspecialized classes”.

III

In his Richmond Lecture, “Two Cultures : The Significance of C.P.Snow”, Leavis employs a sharp ironical tone to attack the premises, analytical tools and approach of his adversary. The opening sentence is typical:

“If confidence in oneself as a master mind qualified by capacity, insight and knowledge to pronounce authoritatively on the frightening problems of our civilization is genius, then there can be no doubt about Sir Charles Snow’s. He has no hesitations....(p.91)”.

Leavis adopts throughout a caustic tone, demolishing Snow brick by brick. Through a close reading of the text for which he is justly famous, Leavis demonstrates the insufficiency of Snow’s

knowledge of Literature and culture. The latter's sweeping generalizations predictably come in for a sharp rebuke. The view that Ibson was the "only writer of world class who seems to have had an understanding of the industrial revolution" and the casual remark that no British writer worth the name dealt with the social novel of poverty are obviously too inaccurate to merit comment by us.

Going though Leavis' essay, it is easy to see why it came dangerously close to facing the charge of libel. He is amused by Snow's credentials as a novelist. The latter's reputation, according Leavis, is created by "the cultural conditions manifested in his acceptance." (p.91). "He does not know what he means and does not know he does not know." "The Two Cultures" exhibits an utter lack of intellectual distinction and an embarrassing vulgarity of style." "He had done his university much harm." (p.93). His lecture was "conceived and written by some one who had not the advantage of an intellectual discipline of any kind". (p.93). The argument of Snow's Rede Lecture is at an immensely lower conceptual level than even "a pupil's essay" (p.93). "Snow's 'literary intellectual' is the enemy of art and life." (p.94). "It is a pathetic and comic and menacing illusion-illusion on Snow's part that he is capable of thought." (p.94); "he is utterly without a glimmer of what creative literature is, if why it matters." (p.95). Leavis rightly points out that "social condition" cannot be exclusive of the "individual condition." As he asks, "what is the 'social hope' that transcends, cancels or makes indifferent the inescapable tragic condition of each individual? Where if not in individual's, is what is hoped for - a non tragic condition, one supposes to be located?

Similarly, Leavis finds it strange that while Wyndham Lewis is attacked for his denial of life, one of the greatest of the British novelists, D.H.Lawrence is strangely left out. For as Leavis

points out, in Lawrence's *Women in Love* we find "a quintessential presentment of the modern world" and "the Lawrentian maxim that nothing matters but life." (p.96).

Of course, Leavis is careful to tell us that in opposing Snow, he is not trying to put the clock back. Indeed, he says that he is not seeking to defy or reverse "the accelerating movement of external civilization... that is determined by advanced technology." Nor is he against the increase in "scientific education." These are no doubt necessary, but according to him are not enough. To think that technology and productivity can create the miracle of human happiness would only be a false hope. For following Snow, we can see "the vision of our imminent tomorrow in today's America : the energy, the triumphant technology, the productivity, the high standard of living and the life impoverishment - *the human emptiness.*" (p.99) (Emphasis mine).

Thus to Leavis, Science and industrialism cannot be the answer to "two cultures," but Literature and the University can. "For it is in the study of Literature, the Literature of one's own language in the first place that one comes to recognise the nature and priority of the third realm . . . the realm of that which is neither merely private and personal nor public in the sense that it can be brought into the laboratory or pointed to." (p.100). The ideal is to create "a cultural community of consciousness." (p.101).

It is therefore to Literature and the University that we must increasingly turn. As Leavis aptly remarks :

For the sake of our humanity - our humanness - for the sake of human future, we must do with intelligent resolution and with faith, all we can to maintain the full life in the present - and life is growth - of our transmitted culture. Like Snow, I look to the University. Unlike Snow, I am concerned to make it really a University, something (that is) more than a collocation of specialist departments - to make it a centre of human consciousness,

perception, knowledge, judgement and responsibility. (p.101).

It is thus Literature Departments or an English school of a University like Cambridge that could generate “a centre of consciousness (and conscience) for our civilisation. Such units mercifully supplant the current culture of sunday papers. For journalism is “now the menacing disease of the University.” (p.101).

IV

How then do we view the “Two Cultures” Debate today? The conflict between the scientific and literary cultures is far from resolved. Both in the advanced West as well as the developing nations, members belonging to scientific and humanistic domains continue to operate in separate spheres, often with mutual suspicion, disdain and antagonism. Few scientists like Einstein, Openheimer and Snow, or Bhaba, Ramanna or Narlikar can straddle the cultural world with ease. Fewer men of letters have an access to the world of science. It is true that a Jules Vernes, Issac Assimov or Arthur C Clarke can stir at once our scientific and literary imagination. But the legitimacy of fictional writing dealing with scientific fantasies only testifies to the vast power and outreach of science in our every day life. Like the denizens of a *Nineteen Eighty Four or Brave New World*, modern man seems hopelessly trapped by the power of Science. Both the consumer culture and armament industry demand a constant appropriation of Science. As captives, we became soulless victims, fatally lured to our death. We might, in this sense, recall “Rapaccini’s Garden,” that instructive allegory of science and human evil by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Thus, the mystique of Science and the scientific world view are far more pervasive and more complete today. In its military use, the men of Science have perfected a special lexicon of a classic Joseph Heller. Like the diabolical protagonist of a Mary

Shelley or H.G.Welles, today's scientist recognizes no sacred frontiers in his relentless drive for control and conquest covering the embryo and the stellar world.

The claim that Science through industrialism can be the panacea for poverty has been stood on its head. For science - based development : medicine, farming, industry and technology have come to mean today all round denudation and environmental degradation - a holocaust fantasized for ever in Hollywood dystopias.

For, the Affluent Society demands more and more resources that the planet earth simply cannot yield. Its vastly depleted ozone layer threatens to turn us into an arid Mars or Venus.

Scientific epistemology based on the primacy of sense experience considers Man basically as an atomized, sensate being that must forever appropriate inorder to remain happy. Manifest in Late Capitalism, it logically entails a proliferation of desires and constant demand on resources. We might instead reconsider the constitution of the human person as other than just a hungry animal. We need to redefine our very concept of happiness based not on spiralling wants and instant gratification but on the fulfilment of basic economic needs for our vital emotional and spiritual existence. We might, for good measure, turn from a Keynesian to a Gandhian view of life and happiness.

Finally, it is not just the problem of “two cultures” that we face today but that of many cultures whose members seldom talk to each other. The literary world itself is hopelessly balkanized into “high” or “low”, “progressive” and “reactionary”, “elite” and “popular”. The gap between what Leavis called “mass civilization” and “minority culture” has never been wider than today. While democratic compulsions take us to areas traditionally perceived as marginal, we also need to ponder whether or not classics contain

wisdom of universal significance transcending barriers of class, gender and race.

To answer these vexing issues, we must increasingly turn, as Leavis rightly said, to the University. That is his great relevance. But it will not be to the Literature Department as traditionally understood. The world today is far more complicated to allow such easy options. For no discipline today has preserved its pristine form; every branch of learning in the University has taken on multidisciplinary character. The beginning of our search for a synthesis can therefore be made with any discipline. Traditionally, the humanities provided space and rationale for a speculative and reflective task. Today they embrace all discursive practices.

Perhaps it will always be our fate to suffer from the burden of many cultures, constantly. That is what modernity and post-modernity ordain of us. Such fractures and dislocations are inevitable in a multipolar world, increasingly characterized by pluralism and diversity. Only we can decide whether such multicultures can be a source of strength, our moment of glory. Yet the drive towards wholeness and cultural universals must never be abandoned. It must proceed from the solid sense of a centre and recognition of the many different worlds we inhabit at once. That is the ultimate meaning of the “two cultures” debate, their legacy today.

Teaching Leavis a Unique Experience

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My earliest exposure to Leavis was, in a way *via negativa*. He was there on our M.A. literary criticism course, but no teacher was willing / competent to broach this critic. So we were conveniently asked to stop at T.S. Eliot - a recognised name though not fully understood, and leave out I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis "for a later stage", thus facilitating a selective preparation for examinations. A chance browsing of *New Bearings in English Poetry : A Study of the Contemporary Situation*, made me thirst for more from the same pen. The college library had nothing else though it was a state capital. Access to a central university library later, made it possible to go through all his major works. Discussions with Dr. Shivamurti Pandeya who subsequently became my Ph.D. guide, and a desire to grasp the critical assumptions of a critic who was charged with "doctrinal reticence" took three years to evolve into a doctoral thesis. For me the choice of subject was very clear right from the beginning - my master's dissertation was on Dr. Johnson's Shakespeare criticism - but I later realised that one who chooses to explore literary criticism and not fiction, drama, or poetry in that order is often viewed as a person with an odd taste.

Thus armed with a Ph.D. I joined the teaching community at a reputed residential university and was assigned courses in 'Critical Approaches to Literature' from day one. To me, this has always been the most vibrant and variegated course. One can see the continuity, the departures and the revivals, the shifts in emphasis in the various ways of reading / interpreting literature. Each critic emerges from a historical and personal background, makes his contribution, often contradicts himself or remodifies his stance on some issue or another during his career. The contemporary

scene - of free play of signifiers - is almost chaotic - with feminist, reader-response, new historicist, structuralist, deconstructionist, post-colonial theories and others screaming for our attention, which also makes it a particularly rich and fascinating time.

A teacher learns with every batch of students that completes a course. And over the years, "teaching" Leavis in classrooms has been a unique experience. Whenever approaching a critic I emphasize a few things in an attempt to enliven a paper most students find more difficult than others - though I prefer to use the word 'challenging' instead of 'difficult':

1. Study each critic in the context of the tradition inherited; see whether he / she contributed to extend or make a departure from the tradition coming to him/ her. The students are encouraged to make connections, where considered valid.
2. Have a comprehensive view of the critical and creative output of an age, as complementary to each other.
3. In identifying the achievements as well as limitations, if any, of a critic, to frame their own response i.e. to criticise the critic.
4. To try and see the creative and critical work, literary, social, cultural, if any, of a critic as a whole - to look for consistency and contradictions therein; to see whether critics follow their own recommendations or dictates as the case may be. A good example of the former is T.S. Eliot, whose critical essays are best studied as what by self-proclamation they are - "a by-product of my private poetry workshop"; of the latter, Matthew Arnold's historical and personal fallacies seen in operation in his comments on the Romantic poets, (with the exception of Wordsworth), specially in his essay on Keats which exhibits his heavy dependence on Keats's letters to Fanny Brawne, rather than on his work.

5. Ensure that students do not suppress but encourage any inter-connections that are feasible between the Western critical concepts and their Indian counterparts, if any. This regrettably is not part of their course content as far as the syllabus is concerned.

Thus, the students examine the whole critical tradition, from Aristotle and Longinus to Derrida and Barthes in one course. It cannot confine itself to just the ‘English’ critical tradition any more. So obviously, there is some compression. However, the objective is to have a close scrutiny of some representative essays, read and discussed in the class. Students are required to make 10-15 minutes presentations on important essays. This is supplemented by an introduction to the major books / critical concepts of each of these critics.

As far as Leavis is concerned, his critical output seems to have both timely and timeless appeal. He emerges as a very dogmatic, sometimes very persuasive critic; very “provincial” and very British in some respects. On the contrary in some of his observations he seems to be ahead of his time. One of his earliest concerns was to identify and gain recognition for the new directions in which contemporary poetry was to flourish. He hailed the significant contribution made by path-breaking writers in poetry and fiction - T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, also Yeats, Pound and Joyce, at a time when Modernism was controversial. By the time students come to our postgraduate classes, they have read enough by Eliot, to evaluate Leavis on Eliot. Leavis’s self acknowledged debt to Eliot is well-known but it is also interesting to follow his changing attitude to Eliot in his later work, specially in his views on Lawrence. Leavis is studied as one of the modernist critics with Eliot and Richards, as a precursor to the New Critics. In style and content he presents a ‘middle path’ between a largely theoretical defense of literature and criticism as in Matthew Arnold and the so-

called ‘lemon-squeeze’ or ‘technical’ school of practical criticism. For him, critical activity has to begin and end with focus on “words on the page” - on the “concrete particularities” and “actualities”. He repeatedly warns against the temptations to say things about works that cannot be justified by “producible” texts. There is no place for vague generalisation in his work. In one of the finest examples of close scrutiny, he chooses to examine three poems in ‘Judgement and Analysis’ in *The Living Principle*. At the very outset he pronounces a value-judgement and ranks them in the order of merit. What follows is a detailed analysis of what he considered the strong points in the better poems. Reminiscent of Arnold’s plea to sift chaff from grain, to segregate the best from the rest, to expose and condemn charlatanism - and Eliot’s desire to bring some order to the chaotic ‘Sunday part’ situation of critical activity of that time, is Leavis’s insistence on making important discriminations as well as formulating them in a forthright and forceful language.

Like Eliot he visualised this as a collaborative activity where the ability to articulate and accept difference of opinion is a primary requirement. Some critics place him in the English liberal tradition of protest and dissent, and label his lifelong crusade for values in literature and life as liberal essentialism. However in effect, he helped pave the way for the New Critics who wanted to study language, and texts as *The Well-Wrought Urn*, and *The Verbal Icon*. Yet he does differ from them and cannot be considered a pure textual analyst and just that. It is because his interest in the “words on the page” - in literature is inseparable from his interest in ‘life’ - a recurrent word of singular importance in Leavis’s work. He was interested in studying literature as exquisite craftsmanship, but was equally concerned about the message of that medium of expression. *How* words conveyed meaning was important but so was *what* the words conveyed.

This “moralistic” preoccupation had dubbed Arnold, Eliot and Leavis together as in *Poetry and Morality* the famous Vincent Buckley study of these critics, despite the great difference in their interpretations of the word ‘moral’. Eliot’s moralistic strain made him not only exclude Lawrence from any serious attention, but also made him condemn Lawrence as a ‘heretic’. In one of the landmark dissents from Eliot, Leavis set about to gain due recognition for Lawrence, for he spoke for life, for creativity - in the midst of all the filth, decay and disintegration that he depicted in his novels. It was this “reverent openness before life” - both the rosy and seamy sides of life - coupled with “a vital capacity for experience” which increase our awareness about the “possibilities of life” that, for Leavis, constitutes a marked moral intensity in a writer making him/ her belong to the category of the significant few. Literature to him, is for something more than immediate pleasure. This criterion for greatness reminds me of one motive mentioned in the famous sloka of *Kavya - Prakasha* i.e. vyavaharavide. The full sloka goes like this -

*Kavyam yashase arthakrate vyavaharavide shivetarakshataye,
Sadyah paranirvrataye kantasammitatayo upadeshayuje.*

Besides pleasing readers, literature also influences, even moulds impressionable minds of the readers. Even where talking of poetry Leavis focuses his attention on two points. -

1. the kind of demand that a poem makes on the reader.
2. the kind of image, of the persona, that the poem projects.

For instance, a poem may demand that the reader's critical intelligence be “switched off” i.e. the thinking and questioning mind be held in abeyance- a step further from Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief”. The effect of such an expression will be undesirable and the poem inferior and an example of irresponsible composition. If the poem contains either excess or

unjustified emotions, to quote him, “emotional wallowing, sentimental debauchery” of a character who is shown to be a victim of emotions, and its expression lacks “artistic reality” and “poetic sincerity”- the unconvincing and potentially harmful picture is dangerous.

On the contrary, if the protagonist despite all odds, seems to be in control of the situation and tries to make a virtue out of necessity the poem becomes an index of *spiritual poise*. The classic example Leavis gives is of the effect of one particular line in Emily Bronte’s ‘Cold on the Earth’ - “Then did I check the tears of useless passion”. On account of this quality, he considers it superior to the other poems on the same theme of bereavement. Thus apart from the theoretical concerns in Leavis’s work, the actual functioning of those concerns in his fiction and poetry criticism is also examined in the class. It is hoped that the students have a fair exposure to his lifetime concerns and they also get an opportunity to sample his practical criticism.

In the present situation where authors and meanings are banished from the text, where works are lauded for ‘aporia’ and ‘unreadability’, where critics are interested in finding out *how* myriads of responses are evoked by a text rather than what those responses *mean* or do, one needs to identify what a very representative critic like Leavis has, that will still be meaningful to us today. It is a well-known fact that Leavis is as important as a cultural critic as he is as a literary critic, if not more. *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* was written before anything else, even before *New Bearings*. In a 1992 publication he is the subject of a full length study in the series on ‘Modern Cultural Theorists, along with Helene Cixous and Jacques Lacan. To a contemporary reader Leavis’s foresight in warning us of the insidious side effects of mechanisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, automobile, mass media and advertising is one of

the most fascinating aspects of his work. He was not a Luddite and knew that the disintegration in society would be rapid and irreversible. Now we know that the old organic structure of society and its smaller unit - family - is further broken and irrevocably lost. The speed of urbanisation and machination has only accelerated. Mass media, propaganda and advertising have an even more powerful hold on our lives now and affect almost all spheres of existence. The tools of mass media depend for their success on putting in abeyance any questioning or reasoning. They demand that their projections be accepted without any resistance or interference from the thinking mind. Like the soldiers of the Light Brigade "theirs not to reason why". Fully convinced that only a tiny minority will ever be concerned about standards and values in literature and society, he felt the urgent need to form "a defensive minority". Leavis placed this trust and responsibility on the English school. Having been exposed to the best that has been thought and written, being trained to respond to texts genuinely, to accept no critical comment without scrutiny, this minority, he thought was responsive as well as responsible. With this kind of discipline, intellectual training and spiritual refinement it could bring about a "correction of taste" - a pervasive influence of the right kind. Leavis's insistence on the importance of the University in society and even there on the centrality of the English school as the liaison centre, to cultivate and foster an educated public necessary for continuance of culture, is probably one of his most controversial propositions. His views about education - human education - as a defensive mechanism in the "technologico - Benthamite age" makes the students conscious however, of the high expectations he had of students of English literature.

Very often, in the overall assessment Leavis emerges as a critic of singular significance. One may agree or disagree with him on one or many issues, but it is impossible to ignore his work for its

representative content as well as its appeal to contemporary readers. As a link between T.S. Eliot and the New critics he, together with I.A. Richards, is an important figure. Drawing from Eliot's principles, he surveyed poetry and fiction with remarkable insight. His concern for literary standards is consistent with his anxiety over the increasing malaise in the cultural life of that time. Though he generally abstains from theorising, it is possible to glean the recurrent concepts in his work. He also faces some serious charges - for instance, that his criterion for significance is very narrow, too exclusive; that he does not talk about some forms like drama and romance, at all; that he became purely polemical in his later books with his penchant for getting into controversies. His scathing attack on C.P. Snow and titles like *Nor Shall My Sword* are ready examples. In his confrontation with the Establishment, and his employer, his position is aptly described in the phrase "the loneliness of the long distance runner". In the final reckoning, however, his contribution far outweighs his limitations as a critic.

Leavis accredited his students for all the work that he produces. Frankly, I have learnt a lot, since I started teaching. It was in discussion with my students with fresh insights and new perspectives of value and relevance, that my response to Leavis has evolved over the years. For this I am grateful to them.

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Reading the Text : The Example of F.R.Leavis

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In the history of 20th Century Literary Criticism, there is hardly a critic who can match F.R.Leavis in matters of force and directness of critical judgement. His sharp critical vision and unequivocal voice is the strength of his critical practice that enriches the understanding of literature under consideration. One discerns in him a critic who considers only that kind of literature great which represents ‘an inclusive consciousness’ of the times, marked with moral intensity. The present paper is an attempt to highlight Leavis’s approach to the reading of the text: what is it that Leavis demands of great literature and great artists when he comes to read the text, and where does his distinction as a critic lie?

As early as 1932, writing a prefatory Note to his brilliant book *New Bearings in English Poetry*, he assigns himself the task of confining “as strictly as possible to literary criticism and to remember that poetry is made of words.” And it is significant to note that this initial concern has never been subordinated or shifted to any other interest throughout his career as a critic of literature. Whatever it may be - the critical need of the hour or the influence of his great contemporaries - T.S. Eliot and Richards who advocated literary criticism based on the text; Leavis mainly concerns himself with the text. He frankly admits, “There are, of course, other very important conditions, social, economic, philosophical and so on; but my province is that of literary criticism and I am confining myself as far as possible to those conditions which it rests with the poet and the critic to modify - those which are their immediate concern”. Thus, stating the job of a critic in modern times, Leavis stresses reading of the text closely. A brief examination of Leavis’s readings brings forth his critical genius and his distinctiveness as a critic of the text.

Leavis examines the text with a special purpose - his reading of text is not an end in itself - he has some social, cultural and moral expectations from the artist -the author under consideration - those expectations he has to fulfil in the text and a critic has to elucidate it for the good of the readers. He comments, "All that we can fairly ask of the poet is that he shall show himself to have been fully alive in our time. The evidence will be in the very texture of his poetry." So, Leavis dismisses much of Victorian poetry and even the Victorian Romanticism of early Yeats. He is all praise for his genius and the advantages he enjoyed as an Irishman, but sharply opines, "Disillusion and waste were indeed inevitable, but not in the form in which Mr. Yeats suffered them. They might have been more significant. For Victorian romanticism was not the only possible answer to those modern conditions that Mr. Yeats deplores. If it were, poetry would cease to matter. Adult minds could no longer take it seriously. Losing all touch with the finer consciousness of the age, it would be, not only irresponsible, but anaemic, as indeed, Victorian poetry so commonly is."

Here and elsewhere, one notices, in Leavis's literary concern, the literary artist has to be authentic in respect of the finer consciousness of his times; he must represent this consciousness through the text for the good of the readers. In this sense, the artist's job becomes socially and artistically equally important. His creation must bear responsibility to both society and readers and thus the text becomes a link between society and the readers. Leavis's favourite poet or novelist returns to the readers the inclusive kind of consciousness of the age, in matters of his theme and technique and it helps the present generation to solve their problems. While examining the achievement of Thomas Hardy as poet, Leavis comments that he is a naive poet of simple attitudes and outlook, which were the product of the 'neutralization of Nature'. His greatness lies in the integrity with which he believed

and enforced the conclusion that nature is indifferent to human values. Leavis's further comments exhibit his premise more evidently, "He (Hardy) felt deeply and consistently, he knew what he felt and, in his best poems, communicated it perfectly. But there was little in his technique that could be taken up by younger poets, and developed in the solution of their own problems". The same critical attitude is seen when Leavis is examining Edmund Blunden's poem *The Shepherd*. To Leavis, Blunden along with Edward Thomas, deserves to be distinguished from the group of Georgians, because Blunden "has some genuine talent" and Edward Thomas is "an original poet of rare quality" Blunden's poetry is appreciated for "the rich rusticity, the homespun texture and for a frank literary quality." But there is something more than that which appeals to Leavis - "Mr. Blunden was concerned with art, he was making something. And what gives them their interest for us - corresponding to this quality in the form there appeared to be something in the intention behind: out of the traditional life of the English countryside, especially as re-lived in memories of childhood, Mr. Blunden was creating a world - a world in which to find refuge from adult distresses; above all, one guessed, from memories of the war." Thus, a great artist is indebted to his times for acquiring 'consciousness'. And transmuting it into art creating a world of akin sensibility and consciousness, he does a service to his times.

When we come to judge that in Leavis's reading of the text the question of an artist's being *fully alive in our time* assumes the prime importance, it is not for nothing that it is T.S.Eliot's poetry that he finds most satisfactory and rewarding. The critical judgement of the first order suits best the art of the first order, and one finds F.R.Leavis at his critical best when he is examining T.S. Eliot's poetry. Leavis begins by commenting, "we have, here, in short, poetry that expresses freely a modern sensibility, the ways of feeling, the modes of experience, of one fully alive in his own age."

Making a close reading of the text of *Portrait of a Lady*, Leavis praises the poet's command both of his experience and of his technique - the flexibility and the control of modern speech that corresponds with the movement of the verse and ultimately endorses the opinion that "the poet is as close to the contemporary world as any novelist could be, and his formal verse medium makes possible a concentration and directness, audacities of transition and psychological notation, such as are forbidden to the novelist." It is the achievement of a poet who represents to his readers the human consciousness of the day in terms of his language and technique that appeals to F.R.Leavis as a Reader of the text. In the same way, discussing *Gerontion*, Leavis points out the significance of the persona of an old man, embodying a situation remote from that of the poet. Leavis's comments make the meaning richer - "From a position far above his immediate concerns as a particular individual, projecting himself, as it were, into a comprehensive and representative human consciousness, the poet contemplates human life and asks what it all comes to . . ." While elucidating various transitions, associations, the theme and the contrast and fusion of different emotions and feelings in the poem, Leavis is not satisfied and so comments "more than enough has been done to illustrate the method. And only an analysis on Mr.Empson's lines could be anything like fair to the subtleties of the poem; for Mr.Eliot's effects depend a great deal upon ambiguity." It is perhaps the real greatness of art that exhausts the critical activity and moves to limitless appreciation.

While examining briefly Leavis's judgement of Eliot's monumental work, *The Waste Land*, it would be better to see how other critics of his age judged Eliot's poem. In a short note on the poetry of T.S.Eliot in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926). I.A. Richards accounting for the complexity of the *Waste Land* had remarked that, "The items are united by accord, contrast and

interaction of their emotional effects, not by an intellectual scheme that analysis must work out... We can, of course, make a 'rationalization' of the whole experience." Leavis has exactly followed Richards in making a 'rationalization of the whole experience' but in his own way. If for Richards, the poem is valuable because of the unified response which the interaction of items creates in the right reader, for Leavis, it is the anthropological background that plays an obvious part in evoking that particular sense of the unity of life. He comments, "The remoteness of the civilization celebrated in 'The Waste Land' from the natural rhythms is brought out, in ironical contrast, by the anthropological theme. Vegetation cults, fertility ritual, with their sympathetic magic, represent a harmony of human culture with the natural environment and express an extreme sense of the unity of life... No doubt, Leavis owes critical insights to Richards, but here, Leavis's account of the poem's unity is more soundly based than that of Richards. William Empson's analysis of 17 lines of the poem in 1930, is remarkable, for it shows how the linguistic device of using words ambiguously has enriched the meaning of the poem. Empson's analysis would have surely guided Leavis. But when compared with Empson, Leavis seems more convincing, he is not merely satisfied in verbal analysis, he shows why the poem is worth reading - "In it a mind fully alive in the age compels a poetic triumph out of the peculiar difficulties facing a poet in the age. And in solving the problem as a poet Mr. Eliot did more than solve the problem for himself." In the same way, in 1931, Edmund Wilson in his *Axel's Castle* could not give a convincing explanation of Eliot's use of various literary quotations and allusions and commented - "*The Waste Land* like the *Cantos* is fragmentary in form and packed with literary quotations and allusions." While Leavis recognises the positive value of the quotations in the poem and adds significantly to the benefits of the future critics on Eliot that "By means of such references and quotations Mr. Eliot attains

a compression otherwise unattainable: a compression approaching simultaneity - the co-presence in the mind of a number of different orientations, fundamental attitudes, orders of experience.”

One can see Leavis's approach to text is not that of a Cleanth Brooks or a mere verbal analyst. He seems to combine in his critical practice Eliot's moral concern and Empson's' close reading. The New Critics in their readings dropped the moral concern and concentrated on verbal nuances. But Leavis's criticism mainly focuses on the question of human consciousness, and transcends a mere discussion of the Artist's techniques, he is as much aware of an artist's techniques as art's moral value or its relevance to the sensibility of the age. Perhaps it was his searching question of the representation of human consciousness in works of art that made him include only five novelists within the great tradition of English fiction namely - Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad and D.H.Lawrence. He writes “The major novelists who count in the same way as the major poets, in the sense that they not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of that human awareness they promote, awareness of the possibilities of life.” Leavis uncompromisingly associates literature with the moral responsibility of representing human consciousness in the works of art. Believing with Eliot that literary criticism is the ‘common pursuit of true judgement and a critic's business is “inevitably collaborative”, he is always in search of an inclusive kind of consciousness in examining a poem or a novel.

At last, a few words can be said about F.R.Leavis's legacy to the modern reader and critic. Leavis's entire criticism is a spirited plea to ground literature on contemporary scene and imbibe human consciousness with all the subtleties of art so that literature may represent the human consciousness of the age and help solve problems of the present generation.

F.R. Leavis : a post-colonial cultural response.

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I make my presentation in two parts. It is my belief that the two parts are not just necessary for the sake of gaining clarity, but are inevitable when one keeps in mind the very fundamental positions that Leavis advocated as a critic that create certain problems for us today. It is also my feeling that we cannot make a valid response to Leavis at the present moment unless we are acutely conscious of his central preoccupations and correlate our concerns and anxieties as post-colonial individuals with those that Leavis himself was burdened with in relation to his culture. I must hasten to add at this stage itself that we cannot give expression to our important preoccupations until we come to terms with certain basic points of agreement and disagreement that surface between Leavis and us and between Leavis and the modern theories. However, let me make it very clear that in my reading of Leavis and the modern theories - as a post colonial individual, let me add - I see between them neither an irreconcilable antagonism nor an absolute contradiction. Hence, in this paper, I shall also be attempting to show how modern theories by raising certain questions of Leavis do not dismiss him, but only extend certain concepts that he himself had generated in his debates with several kinds of people. I think modern theories equip us to face our situation better and arrange for an honourable meeting with forces of history unleashed by colonialism. To use modern theories as post-colonial individuals is, in my opinion, an indication of our ability to internalise difficult propositions that surface every now and then in the life of communities.

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I begin by trying to place in perspective Leavis's analysis of texts and evaluation of poets and novelists by focussing attention

on his intense commitment to the idea of 'English' as a language and a culture. One sees this from the beginning to the very end in his writings. I would only draw attention to his 'Sketch for an English School' and 'Education and the University' where the study of English is placed in direct relation to the consciousness it generates in the context of a civilization which, among many other things, had to resist the 'Technologico - Benthamite' civilization. This passionate attachment to the concept of 'English' is, in my opinion, the intense force behind all his evaluation of writers. I make no exception, when I make this statement. One can see this in *Revaluation*, *New Bearings*, *The Great Tradition*, *The Common Pursuit*, his works on Dickens and Lawrence and *Nor shall my Sword and The Living Principle*.

It is here that I posit my argument that this position of Leavis is a counter to the vision of people like Arnold and Eliot who were preoccupied with the notion of an all -- inclusive European Consciousness beginning with the Greeks and running through medieval Germany and France, to modern Europe and even the Orient. Leavis was sceptical of this Eurocentric outlook which thrives on universalist attitudes and beliefs. Such broad generalisations were to be viewed with deep suspicion for they tended to submerge local identities. My argument is that Leavis was essentially interested in specificities and particularities of cultures and was rather wary of vague universalist positions that ultimately reduced little cultures into mere curious artefacts. One can see this in his indictment of Eliot in *New Bearings*. All that Eliot does is to borrow from the Eastern Tradition without really making what he borrows 'evoke' anything substantial. Leavis's remarks that no amount of reading of the Eastern text would give the few words in the poem any " Power to evoke the kind of presence of 'eastern and western asceticism' "..... and adds that " they remain, these words, mere pointers to something

outside.” This is why Leavis believes that there is no progression in the Poem which ends where it begins.

Though many might contest the position of Leavis the fact that he rightly believed that anthropological knowledge was not genuine creativity cannot be disguised or hidden - not even by those who question Leavis’s final evaluation of *The Waste Land*. This is the position taken up by post colonial theory which refuses to bracket all cultures together and insists on maintaining and protecting the specificity and vitality of cultures. When Leavis remarks that *The Waste Land* achieves no progression he is in tune with the Post-modernists who believe that Modernism is a self-enclosed system with no open ending. I find it quite remarkable that Leavis took up this position in 1932 when *New Bearings* was first published. For Leavis, culture was specific and local and had its vital life only in its ‘specificity’ and not ‘generality’. Let me add here that it was not modern theory which dubbed Leavis ‘Parochial’ when he took up such strong positions. On the contrary the label ‘Parochial’ was used by the generalising classicists and universalists for whom specificities of cultures hardly mattered. The method of incorporation of Modernism needs to be scrutinised more vigorously today.

It is precisely this regard and respect for the specificities of culture that pushed Leavis at the very end of his life closer and closer towards Blake and Lawrence (*Nor shall my Sword*; (1972), *The Living Principle*; (1975) for, in them, he discovered what he called ‘Nisus’ or Kernel or Essence of a specific culture. I think all his life Leavis was working towards arriving at this ‘nisus’ of a culture, and the path he chose was that of elimination of generalities and vague universals. All this seems so extraordinary today when, in the post-colonial situation, we talk of cultures and not sub-cultures. (I only wish to point out here the profound

apology offered by Levi-Strauss in *Race and History* and Clifford Geertz in *Local knowledge* (both written after the 50's) for quantifying and grouping all kinds of cultures in their earlier anthropological works.) Modern theory is, in this sense, much closer to Leavis's own theoretical formulations. I see the modern theoretical approach at work again when Leavis slights the distinction between mainstream writing of History and Fiction when he remarks that much of our good sense of social history comes from the novelists and their fiction and not actual social historians. (Leavis, *Lectures in America*, 1969). The appreciation of Dickens or James or Lawrence springs from this post-modernist belief in Leavis that fiction and history are not, and cannot be, separate entities. All these, however, are inextricably bound to his notion of 'English' as a discipline of thought and feeling. My strong thesis is that none of Leavis's analysis and eventual evaluation, - either of poets or novelists - has any basis without this central preoccupation with 'English' as a language and a culture. One can see this at a greater intensity in his last lectures — 'Reading out Poetry' (1972) and 'Lawrence after thirty years' (1973). I would take this argument to cover Shakespeare, George Eliot and Conrad where Leavis repeatedly places emphasis on the 'local', the 'specific particularities' that these writers worked with. Each significant remark that Leavis makes with reference to his subject is about English literature, English culture and the sensibility it creates in the context of a civilization.

It is at this juncture that I must turn to Leavis's preoccupation with language which, yet again, mocks at the antagonism that many try to establish between Leavis and the modern theorists. I turn to Leavis's 'Thought, Language and Objectivity' in *The Living Principle* wherein neat distinctions between the personal and the public and facile antithetical positions between the subjective and the objective elements are rejected categorically. Leavis here

establishes the notion of the ‘Third Realm’ which is neither purely public nor totally personal. The ‘Third Realm’ is where “..... “ words ‘mean’ because individual human beings have meant the meaning, and there is no meaning unless individual beings can meet in it, “ and”.. the standard, though personal is not merely personal, it is a product of immemorially collaborative creativity”... “ It is concretely ‘there’ only as I utter the words and phrases chosen by the meaning which they convey and you take them. But that, of course, is only, as it were, a hint at the nature of an intelligently unsatisfactory answer, which is what, at best, one could hope to achieve”. So meaning is.... “there, in the criss-cross of utterance between us.” This should sufficiently register the fact that Leavis did not privilege one kind of language over another (in fact the whole essay is an attack on Whitehead and Russell for privileging “objective scientific knowledge” over “subjective creative experience” and the language of Philosophy over the language of literature) and did not make creativity a purely personal, transcendental affair. This very last position of Leavis of dissolving differences and dichotomies between the Public and the Private, and the finality of meaning does not seem to me to be radically behind Barthes talking of the Death of the author or Derrida talking of difference, and deferring the meaning of the word, or in other words, Barthes and Derrida and the other theorists only seem to be sharpening the distinctions that Leavis had already made.

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What then are the specific problems that Leavis creates inspite of these common elements that he has at one level with the modern theorists? I suggest that in dealing with these problems we also make our responses to Leavis as post-colonial individuals. I had better add that even when we talk of problems we do not mean absolute divergences that are destined to run on parallel lines at all

levels until eternity, but certain modifications and re-alignments that are actually demands made on us by our actual historical experiences and cultural variants.

The major problem in my opinion comes from Leavis's insistence in all his early texts that the great writers have a transcendental vision, a universal core that is "Significant in terms of that human awareness they promote, awareness of the possibilities of life." Leavis complicates matters further by maintaining that the great writer furthers all the possibilities of life. The kind of transcendence and universality that Leavis refers to in his specific analysis subsumes certain variations that are introduced by the specificities of cultures that Leavis is not deeply entrenched in. There are two ways of looking at this problem. One is to see in Leavis a generalised statement that appears to ignore differences that are deeply located in other cultures. This would seem to be a gross error. The other way of looking at it is to adopt the method of rooting Leavis in the context of his culture and relating all his comments on the greatness of the great writers to that specific culture. I adopt this method, for it also gives us the opportunity to open up new areas of looking into texts that are significant to our culture but may not mean much if the Leavision canons are applied directly. This is also one way of looking at the strict definitions that Leavis makes when he talks of the great tradition - by which he certainly means the English tradition. Such an attempt must be upheld by those of us who are conscious of the divergences that our post-colonial experience has registered for us in our consciousness.

The other major problem that Leavis poses is by his refusal to admit conscious political preoccupations in a great work of art. This is best exemplified by his criticism of George Eliot in his "George Eliot's Zionist novel" where he states that George Eliot's conscious working on the Zionist theme has reduced the stature,

universality and human significance of her novel *Daniel Deronda*. Leavis is not prepared to consider the fact that even a consciously held ideological position need not necessarily reduce the stature of a work of art. It is amazing that Leavis does not consider the fact that Shakespeare himself held strong ideological positions and even worked them out in his plays quite consciously without ever dwarfing their significance. This seems to be quite a major flaw in Leavis and is quite consistent with his refusal to theorise or to hold on to a specific philosophical position. The power of this refusal can be seen in his essay ‘Under which King Bezonian?’, where Leavis attacks those who force him to declare his ideological and philosophical position openly.

I state all these to drive home the point that it is not merely the modern theories that force us to ask certain questions of Leavis, for we all know that even during the late 30’s - and for decades after that - Marxist critics and the classical critics had their own sharp differences with him. In fact I must even mention here that Leavis opened up positions of differences with established critical practices and canons. I would point out that a major break was shaped by Leavis in the form of his support to L.C. Knights and others who questioned the validity of Bradley’s method of reading Shakespeare, an event which was far more radical than the one shaped by the modern theorists. The major drawback in Leavis is his refusal to acknowledge the truth that he too had an ideological position in terms of culture and civilizational values, even though not at political and philosophical levels.

For us as post-colonial people the response to Leavis has to be necessarily different. I call this a response and not a problem for it is our historical experience that cause it predominantly and not so much Leavis’s own judgements. For instance, none of us can read *The Tempest* ignoring the outbursts of Caliban. In fact the text -

from the very beginning to the end - throws up Caliban's lines as counter narratives to Prospero's dominant narrative. We don't have to make any extra effort to see them. Shakespeare's text itself situates this very strongly. The western schools of criticism might not see this as a "Problem Play". But for us *The Tempest* remains a "Problem Play" for the simple reason that Caliban's questions remain unanswered and will have to remain so forever. What I am suggesting here is that the reading of a text is a cultural affair with the literary strategies being determined by cultural foundations and problems.

This is the problem that Achebe has with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe's reading of the text is as close as Leavis's reading, but the conclusions are, not surprisingly, different. Leavis's reading of Conrad cannot be the reading of a post-colonial person and, needless to add, the evaluation is bound to be different. When I suggest that the Leavisian canon cannot work, I am positing the view that the act of reading a text has to take upon itself the responsibility of interpreting cultural problems and upholding social tensions of the post-colonial context.

I will illustrate this with three specific examples. Kuvempu wrote "Shoodra Tapasvi" in order to challenge the Brahminical notions of penance and knowledge. He situated a non-brahminical scheme in opposition to a Brahminical world view. This was a direct inter-textual dialectic established within the Indian tradition where a so-called sub-culture was registering its protest against a dominant, hegemonising culture. It was a cultural necessity and not a theoretical construct that created such a radical revision of an earlier epic. Similarly Prof. Murthy Rao questioned the very basis of Rama's act of sending Sita to the forest in his 'Sita Parityaga Prasanga'. No modern theory was at work when Prof. Murthy Rao wrote this piece. This was a cultural questioning of a new kind

which found it necessary to refute the values of an earlier cultural epoch. If such exercises exist within the context of a native culture, is it surprising that Achebe should come up with *Things Fall Apart* to set right the distorted images of his tradition and culture created by alien texts? To deny a human being this right is to be part of the Imperialist, Fascist programme. When I say the Leavision canons do not work totally in our context, I only mean that a different conception of literature and literary evaluation governed by historical factors is at work.

The third illustration relates to Prof.CDN himself. I still vividly remember how during the mid 70's when we were undergraduate students at the Maharaja's College a highly respected Professor of English told us in class that Prof.CDN had terribly let down his mentor F.R. Leavis by prescribing that 'Cock-and-bull' story writer Raja Rao. The Professor did not understand the implications of his statement as we too did not then, but do now. CDN recognised then that the great tradition of Leavis need not be ours and the Leavision canons work differently in our context. In that sense Prof.CDN has been the first great deconstructionist in our cultural context with his choice of American writing and Commonwealth writing. The fact that he turned to Indian Poetics later on is another proof of this. Our Professors who taught *The Tempest* glorifying Prospero and converting Caliban into a monster appear no different from those who uphold racial atrocities even to this day. The change now is not restricted to the reading of texts alone. It is a cultural change. We must reorient our relationship with F.R. Leavis today and form our responses on the basis of this understanding. Not to do so would be to become accomplices of racism and all its attendant cruelties by implication and acquiescence. This, I think, Leavis himself recognised most clearly when he wrote in "Scrutiny: a retrospect" that other cultures had to determine their values

through responses to their important texts. In the essay Leavis talks of how *Scrutiny* functioned to shape an ‘English’ consciousness not even for England or all Universities, but, in particular, Downing College. Leavis could be so modest. But in my view the most important statement of the essay comes in the form of the lines I shall quote at the very end. I am convinced Leavis was anticipating the different schemes that other cultures would evolve for themselves through very serious critics and intellectuals. I have no doubt whatsoever that Leavis had Prof.CDN in mind when he wrote, “I will record here, as a relevant and representative datum, this: We had a great influence - and not the less because *Scrutiny* was known to be an outlaw enterprise - on generations of Cambridge students from the Indian Subcontinent who now form key elites in India and Pakistan. How measure the effect of such influence? And who will pronounce it negligible?”

Leavis did create ‘outlaws’ of people like CDN who have created ‘outlaws’ like us. Leavis did not know how to measure the effect of such influence. But by being proud of our regional texts, of our polemics, by being able to talk of our culture diversities with pride and honour do we measure the great critic’s influence on us. In shaping our perceptions Leavis has also helped us articulate our ‘differences’. And, historically, it was Leavis’s personal disciple who put into practice all this by introducing Indian texts when other learned Professors had nothing but contempt for them. Our ‘different’ response to Leavis is but a tribute to what he has taught us through his writings and, interestingly enough, through the practice of Prof. CDN - after all it was ‘Practice’ that Leavis valued more than pompous theoretical jargon.

F. R. Leavis and a Plea for Liberal Education

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Although I am aware of the fact that in this paper I may be labouring the obvious, I have chosen to discuss Leavis's views on education for two reasons : to stress Leavis's holistic view of culture of which his literary criticism is only one aspect, and to underscore the urgency and relevance of Leavis's views in today's Indian context of emphasis on market economy, science and technology, 'Self-financing educational institutions', and degrees for all through open universities.

Leavis was preoccupied with the issues of education and university as an institution throughout his long career spanning almost half a century. While his first major work in this direction, *Education and the University*, came out in 1943, one of his most important works, *English Literature in Our Time and the University*, was published in 1969. And, in between he wrote, frequently and forcefully, on education and culture, in his influential journal *Scrutiny*. In fact, the 'Manifesto' of the first issue has this to say regarding the concerns of *Scrutiny* : "Scrutiny, then, will be seriously preoccupied with the movement of modern civilization. And if we add that it will direct itself especially upon educational matters the reader will realize that there may, after all, be a fairly close approach to practice." The 'Manifesto' states further : "Related to this kind of analysis are the articles which we have planned on various aspects of education - the teaching of English in Schools and Universities, the training of teachers, and similar subjects."

The nature, kind and mode of education to be given in schools and colleges became a subject of hot debate, mainly in the nineteenth century. While Industrialisation created a vast class of

workers in urban areas, deprived of traditional sources of education and culture, the Second Reform Bill, which gave franchise rights to all workers, and the Trade Union Act of 1871, which gave legal recognition and protection to Trade Unions, thrust a great political responsibility on the semi-literate or illiterate working classes. Hence, naturally, questions of education occupied the sharpest minds of the nineteenth century, from Arnold through Morris and Julian Huxley to Newman. The debate often revolved around a simplistically conceived ‘this or that’ - literary education or scientific knowledge. Whereas, at one level, this debate harked back to the famous Shelley-Peacock controversy, at another level, it anticipated the much discussed Snow-Leavis culture-debate.

Tradition, or ‘cultural continuity’ as Leavis prefers to call it, education, language, literary criticism and good taste - all are inter-related to Leavis. Consequently, it is no surprise that Leavis’s view of a University is analogous to his view of literature. Just as, according to Leavis, literature is not a collection of individual works but “an organic order”, a University is not an assemblage of so many specialist departments. In his *Two Cultures?* he states emphatically : “Like Snow I look to the University. Unlike Snow, I am concerned to make it really a University, something (that is) more than a collocation of specialist departments - to make it a centre of human consciousness : perception, knowledge, judgment and responsibility”. This is actually a paraphrase in 1962 of what he had said earlier, in 1943, in *Education And The University*.

A University of its very nature (or ‘idea’), if it is one at all, asserts a contrary view of cultural tradition to the Marxian : a view of cultural tradition as representing the active function of human intelligence, choice and will; that is, as a spiritual force that can direct and determine. ... it was more than ever the *raison d’être*

of a university to be, amid the material pressures and dehumanizing complications of the modern world, a focus of humane consciousness, a centre where, faced with the specializations and distractions in which human ends lose themselves, intelligence, bringing to bear a mature sense of values, should apply itself to the problems of civilizations.

In *English Literature in Our Time And The University* also, published in 1969, he conceives of a university on similar lines : “The real university is a centre of consciousness and human responsibility for the civilized world; it is a creative centre of civilization - ...”

It is clear that to Leavis a university is something more than an administrative unit, conducting examinations and awarding degrees. It is a living centre, where students are made aware of a past that has shaped the present, where a student imbibes a rigorous sense of values and judgment, where “to ‘learn to read and think’ is to be launched on the acquiring of a distinctive grasp of history”. Such a university is characterised by synthesis and inclusiveness; it doesn’t abhor specializations but brings together different specializations through a non-specialist centre of consciousness. And such a university imparts ‘liberal education’.

Leavis has, in different contexts and in different words, explained what he means by liberal education and why it matters. To start with, liberal education, as conceived by Leavis, is one that is opposed to doctrinal inculcation. “The point is that, whatever else may be necessary”, argues Leavis, “there must in any case be, to meet the present crisis of civilization, a liberal education that doesn’t start with a doctrinal frame, and is not directed at inculcating one”. What is to be noticed here is Leavis’s subtle distinction between doctrinal inculcation and a sense (or awareness)

of religion. Leavis's view of culture, of great literature, and liberal education is deeply imbued with a sense of religion. For the same reasons that he admires Bunyan, Blake and Lawrence, Leavis defines liberal education in these forceful words :

In coming to terms with great literature we discover what at bottom we really believe. What for - what ultimately for? What do men live by? - the questions work and tell at what I can only call a religious depth of thought and feeling.

English Studies (or Study of literature), Leavis contends, constitute the centre of liberal education. Leavis views the study of literature not as a reading of a few scattered texts but as a discipline, which sharpens one's mind and inculcates a vigorous sense of judgment. In an English School, which forms the driving force of a university, English literature exists as a "living reality", as a "real and potent force in our time". "... our time faces us," Leavis writes, "with a new necessity of conscious provision : we have to make provision for keeping alive, potent and developing that full human consciousness of ends and values and human nature that comes to us (or should) out of the long creative continuity of our culture".

According to Leavis, an organic and vibrant community existed in rural England almost up to the Nineteenth century when Industrial Revolution destroyed it. He explains what he means by an organic community in these words :

What we have lost is the organic community with the living culture it embodied. Folk songs, folk dances, cotswold cottages and handicraft products are signs and expressions of something more : an art of life, a way of living, ordered and patterned, involving social arts, codes of intercourse and a responsive adjustment,

growing out of immemorial experience, to the natural environment and the rhythm of the year.

This is not an instance of nostalgia, and Leavis is fully aware that today one cannot set the clock back. One has to accept the change that has taken place. However, one should also be aware of what one has lost, so that such awareness, deeply felt, can help one mould a better future. It is here that the study of literature matters, as Shakespeare, Bunyan and Lawrence make us aware, profoundly, of what we have lost, of the values of an organic community that have to be revived in a new form today.

What is to be emphasized is that here Leavis does not advocate literary studies as another narrow specialization beginning and ending in itself. He often, in different contexts, argues that literary studies should lead eventually to non-literary fields.

... a serious study of literature inevitably leads outwards into other studies and disciplines, into fields not primarily literary ... A liberal education cannot confine itself to the critical study of literature, and the profit of a real literary training will show itself very largely in other-than-literary fields,

Leavis asserts emphatically in his introduction to *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*. For instance, the study of the 17th century literature would, from the study of Bunyan and the Metaphysicals, lead to a study of the religious and social conditions of the 17th century England, with a view to discovering how “the notion of society as an organism gives way to that of society as a joint-stock company; ...” This is a point worth repeating and emphasizing as often, uncritically, Leavis is dismissed by many recent critics as a ‘mere literary critic’, whatever that phrase means.

Liberal education, with literary studies at its creative centre, is the dire need of a modern society, according to Leavis. For, it alone can effectively counter the life-thwarting forces of a technologico-Benthamite society (incidentally it can be mentioned that it is toward that end that India today is rushing in a headlong manner). A technologico-Benthamite society is one, Leavis explains, in which “even at the level of intellectual weeklies, ‘standard of living’ is an ultimate criterion ... so that productivity - the supremely important thing - must be kept on the rise, at whatever cost to protesting conservative habit.”

The problem of a society that measures development only on the criteria of productivity and utility is that it sets up (as C.P. Snow does in his *Two Cultures*) simplistic oppositions such as ‘scientific culture’ and ‘literary culture’ and ‘individual condition’ and ‘social hope’. In an impassioned tone Leavis challenges : “What is the ‘social condition’ that has nothing to do with the ‘individual condition’? What is the ‘social hope’ that transcends, cancels or makes indifferent the inescapable tragic condition of each individual?”

In India, today, we witness, on the one hand, an unchecked inflow of crude Americanism - the principle of laissez faire, market economy, technological advance, and all that. On the other hand, in the field of education, we are opening up not only innumerable institutions of formal learning but also correspondence courses and Open Universities so that anybody can get a degree and be deluded that he/she is ‘educated’. Added to these disastrous policies, of course, we have student unrest and vandalism on the campus, unchecked and tolerated if not actively promoted. In such a context, these words of Leavis have for us, Indians, an urgency and relevance which cannot be exaggerated :

Neither democratic zeal nor egalitarian jealousies

should be permitted to dismiss or discredit the fact that only a limited proportion of any young adult age group is capable of profiting by, or enjoying, university education. The proper standards can be maintained only if the students the university is required to deal with are - for the most part, at any rate - of university quality. If standards are not maintained, somewhere the whole community is let down.

Let me conclude, quoting another memorable passage where Leavis draws a picture of his Idea of a University - an Idea which may serve as a beacon light for all undeveloped and developing countries:

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. The ancient universities are more than symbols; they, at any rate, may fairly be called foci of such a force, capable ... of exercising an enormous influence. ... they are still in more than form representatives of humane tradition.

“Collaboration,” “Corroboration.” or “The Third Realm”?

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Here we have a diagram of the collaborative process by which the poem comes to be established as something ‘out there’, of common access, too, the nature of the existence of English literature, a living whole that can have its life only in the living present, in the creative response of individuals, who collaboratively renew and perpetuate what they participate in—a cultural community or consciousness. More, it gives the nature in general of what I have called the third realm’, to which all that makes us human belongs. (F.R. Leavis, *English Literature in Our Time and the University: Clark Lectures 1967, 1969*, 172.)

Leavis describes above his idea of the critical process. Criticism is a process of establishing the nature of the poem - and by extension literature - as being accessible and renewable through a collaborative participation and creative response of individual speakers of a living language. It is through such a collective participation that they belong to what he terms as “the third realm”. This idea of criticism runs parallel to Leavis’s concept of education and culture which aims at constructing a “civilized community” of educated men who would share a common code of beliefs and interests as those in the “organic community” which is irrecoverably lost. This is also to be achieved through literary criticism in the English School at the University. How can we reconcile the creation of a third realm which seems to encourage a plurality of responses to literature with the attempt to rally round a group of like minded individuals who would determine literary taste?

In their first book, *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*, Leavis and Denys Thompson emphasise the loss of the “organic community” of rural, agricultural England and its slow replacement by an urban, industrial and organized modern state. What characterized the organic community was community awareness and a certain sharing of common interests, goals and beliefs. It represented, for Leavis and Thompson, a “positive culture” in which there was yet no separation between the sophisticated and the popular levels of culture. This had its own consequences for literature. They bemoan the fact that it was no longer possible for great works of art to appeal at different levels of response, due to the increasing gap between various levels of culture and due to the failure of language as a common mode of communication. As an alternative to the organic community which is irretrievably lost, they propose building up a “civilized community” through a conscious and concerted effort. Leavis devises a programme of education (outlined in *Education and the University*) to make the citizens aware of the forces changing their environment and to train them to resist their evil effects. He believes that the only way to counteract the effects of the machine is to profit by the experience of the past.

He invokes I.A. Richards who maintained that other vehicles of tradition like the family and community having dissolved, one has to rely more on language. But since language itself is debased by contemporary use, the burden of the upkeep of the tradition falls on literature where, Leavis believes, “the finest and subtlest use” of language is preserved. “It is literature,” he says, “that gives access to the wisdom of the race, cultural continuity depending for the most part on literature and literary tradition.” Leavis says that we have to depend on the minority “to keep alive the subtlest and finest parts of tradition” because:

[I]n any period it is upon a minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is (apart from cases of simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first hand judgement. (Leavis 1948:143)

Leavis proposes a programme of study of literature through “practical criticism” which develops among the students the ability to discriminate the good from the bad. This “training of critical awareness” forms the essentials of his “English School”. His aim is to produce the educated man -the man of humane culture - who will be equipped to be intelligent and responsible about the problems of contemporary civilization. Leavis believes that it is only by such a conscious effort that the tradition of taste can be kept up. This will form the basis on which his “civilized community” can be built. He points to the unique status of literature in bringing together a diversity of fields of knowledge and thought. Leavis intends to inculcate in the students “a discipline of scrupulous sensitiveness of response to delicate organization of feeling, sensation and imagery” (Leavis 1948:38) through practical criticism. Leavis indicates how local analysis of the nuances of the language can and does lead them to reflect on developments of the world outside.

Leavis also makes it very clear that it is the business of the English School to stress that every great writer belongs to “the one collaboratively creative continuity” and how language makes “a continued and collaborative thought possible” (Leavis : 1975 : 49). Leavis’s own endeavour as a critic is to construct a canon of literary works (his “great tradition”). His attempt is to show how each of these writers contributes to the restoration of the values of the organic community.

At the same time Leavis emphasizes the individual response

of the readers/critics in their analysis of works of art. It is “a genuine personal response” of the reader that takes him a step forward from “practical criticism” to “analysis” and “judgment”. Distinguishing his own terms - “training of perception, judgment and analytic skill” - from what is commonly referred to as “practical criticism” popularised by Richards, Leavis says:

There is nothing in it in the nature of a laboratory method. One can have the poem only by an inner kind of possession. It is not a dissection of something that is already and passively there. What we call analysis is a constructive and creative process. As addressed to other readers *it is an appeal for corroboration*; ‘The poem builds up in this way, doesn’t it? this bears such-and such a relation to that, don’t you agree? In the work of an English school this aspect of mutual check-positively, *of collaboration in the common pursuit of true judgment*’ -would assert itself as a matter of course.

(Leavis 1948: 70; emphasis added)

For Leavis, analysis is the process of re-creation in response to the words of a writer. Leavis captures the form of judgement in “This is so, isn’t it?” - which is an attempt on his part to ask for confirmation of his judgement by other critics/readers. He says that he is also prepared for an answer in the form of “Yes, but-”, the “but” standing for “qualifications, corrections, shifts of emphasis, additions and refinements”. Leavis says that it is not possible to have a final word on any work of art and that a sense of relative value emerges out of agreements and disagreements of judgements of various critics. The work of art thus belongs to the third realm which is neither public nor merely private. The existence of a work of art itself becomes a reality only in so far as those critics discussing

it have each recreated it. Displacing the poem from the words on the printed page Leavis says:

It is ‘there’ only when it is realized in separate minds, and it is not merely private. It’s something in which minds can meet, and our business is to establish the poem and meet in it. Merely private, on the one hand, and on the other, public in that sense that it can be produced in a laboratory, or tripped over the poem is neither: the alternatives are not exhaustive. *There is a third realm, and the poem belongs to that.*

(Leavis 1969 :48; emphasis added)

Leavis is opposed to the idea of bringing a set of norms or criteria to judge a work of art. He says that there are no “fixed standards” and that no one who understands the nature of a judgement could talk of “imposing accepted values.” (In this context, it is pertinent to remember Leavis’s well-known quarrel with Rene Wellek in his “Literary Criticism and Philosophy,” *Scrutiny*, 6, 1937, 59-70.) Viewed from these angles, Leavis’s idea of criticism seems to offer infinite possibilities of interpretation of a work of art. At the same time Leavis’s own intolerance towards other critics is well-known. How does one account for his hostility towards other critics?

A closer look at Leavis’s own practice of criticism makes one wonder whether Leavis’s professed openness and possibilities and disagreements of judgements of value operate only within a closed community of critics who share a common code of beliefs and interests. What precisely then, is this common code? Commenting on Leavis’s “great tradition” Terence Hawkes says:

In general terms these [moral] positions advocated an openness in the face of life, with intimate personal

experience as the guarantee of truth and worth, a commitment to the value of traditional folk ways and a mistrust of post-industrial society and of modern or metropolitan culture, approval of a rooted, provincial, ‘organic’ way of life, a faith in the ethical capacities of language, and a moral imperative to ‘discrimination’ in all things.

(Hawkes 1990: 926-937)

Hawkes’s statement, ironic though it is, helps us connect Leavis’s ideas of “openness” and “personal experience” with his emphasis on organic ways of life and a distrust of industrial society. Durant and Fabb too, in their *Literary Studies in Action* outline the profile (or is it a caricature?) of a Leavisite who must have the following qualities: a sensitive response to language in the experience of reading literature, a belief in the decline in values from a cultural unity experienced in the seventeenth century, the role of minority in finding alternatives to it, and a recognition of “traditions” in literature and other arts which stand in opposition to this decline, and the need for a study of literature to rehumanize people through close reading of texts. It seems as if the literary critic Leavis envisages as emerging from his idea of criticism is within the “civilized community” of his imagination. It is this “civilized community” which would ultimately decide on “standards” of taste and define “values”. Viewed in the light of this statement Leavis’s idea of criticism, his sketch for an English School and the university and the whole enterprise of *Scrutiny* can be regarded as an attempt to translate his ideas of the “civilized community” into reality. It is in place here to quote Baldick on the nature of criticism in the modern context which springs directly from his discussion of Arnold, Eliot and Leavis:

The enormous importance of literary criticism for modern civilization was that it presupposed and

developed a ‘consensus’ which had been lost in all other social spheres and relationships. *Criticism characteristically defines its own audience in an act of corroboration between minds already ;in substantial agreement.*

(Baldic 1983:227; emphasis added)

Similarly, remarking on the “collaborative” nature of Leavis’s criticism, Eagleton says that “[f]or Leavis, certain forms of language are ‘intuitively’ right, vital and creative, and however much he conceived of criticism as a collaborative argument there was in the end no gainsaying this” (Eagleton 1983:57). Also we often get confused in the Leavision critical terminology. Is it “collaboration” or “corroboration” that Leavis expects the critics to engage in, in their critical endeavour? Or is it the third realm?

We can trace the term third realm back to Plato despite Leavis’s emphatic assertion through most of his career that he is an anti-philosopher. In his *The Republic*, Plato talks about two realms - of reality, the realm of his Ideas and Forms, and that of its representation in the physical world. The realm of reality is the realm of knowledge, while the second realm is that of opinions. We gather that the world of knowledge is unchanging while the world of opinions keeps on changing. We can infer that the unchanging knowledge is objective while the changing world of opinions is subjective. Plato seems to believe that the world of Forms and Ideas is accessible only to the philosophers. This dualism of the objective and the subjective, along with the dualism of mind and matter becomes the central concern in Leavis’s last books. By making explicit use of Marjorie Grene and Michael Polanyi Leavis attempts to break this dichotomy, as also the claim that knowledge is objective. Leavis’s invention of the third realm seeks to explore the possibility of acquiring knowledge subjectively. The third

realm is a curious combination of a simultaneous negation of the objective - subjective categories, and an assertion of the possibility of their coming, together in literature. Leavis locates his third realm in the following lines.

It is in the study of literature, the literature of one's own language in the first place, that one comes to recognize the nature and the priority of the third realm (as, unphilosophically, no doubt, I call it, talking with my pupils), the realm of that which is neither merely private and personal nor public in the sense that it can be brought into the laboratory or pointed to.

(Leavis 1972:62)

The task of criticism as we have already seen is concerned with establishing the poem as an object of common access. How does the poem in the first instance attain this position? Leavis would readily answer - through language, which represents continuity. But common language itself has been corrupted by contemporary use and hence Leavis's recourse to literature which continues to retain traces of its finest use. More importantly, literature represents for Leavis the tradition of values which have been lost. From this position of language representing culture Leavis moves to the idea of world encompassing language when he comes to the end of his career. Leavis certainly strengthens his claim because it is clear from his understanding of Grene and Polanyi that knowledge of the world, not just literature, is impossible without the availability of language. His construction of the third realm therefore, while offering an exciting possibility of understanding the world, simultaneously ensures the possibility of a plurality of response to literary works through several participating readers / critics. (For an interesting reading of Leavis's ability to transcend his self and engage in a genuine dialogue with his adversary, see Merle E

Brown, “The Idea of Communal Creativity in F.R. Leavis’s Recent Criticism, “*Double Lyric: Divisiveness and Communal Creativity in Recent English Poetry*, 201-221) However, his own eagerness to build a minority culture arrests this possibility and fosters the formation of a coterie of the like minded. Holbrook is quite right in expressing his displeasure at this development in Leavis in the following words:

But there is another task, and that is of promoting understanding - the understanding of meaning. And this is not a task which involves the training of an elite: it is a struggle in the realm of ideas, ‘out there’ in the public world. While the world resents an elite, it would welcome the pushing forward of the boundaries of ideas.

(Holbrook 1984:168)

Leavis’s concept of the third realm thus reveals a potential to go beyond the genuine personal response he expects from each individual to encompass the whole society, but fails to cross the boundaries of the circle of a cultivated minority. If his criticism represents neither a real collaborative exchange in the sense of an “yes, but” nor a corroboration in the sense of an acceptance of a set of universal norms on the part of the participating critics, does it belong then only to a closed third realm of a cultivated consensus?

Culture or Cultures? F.R. Leavis Against C.P. Snow

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When C.P. Snow gave the Rede lecture in Cambridge in 1959 on “The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution”, it stirred up a debate with a dormant half-life of its own. The issues raised have a relevance beyond the West which is the purview of both Snow and his antagonist, F.R. Leavis.

Snow’s lecture is cast in a loose conversational and anecdotal form. His arguments are simplified and his assumptions generalised to suit a middle-brow audience and readership. Snow says,

I believe the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups... at one pole we have the literary intellectuals, at the other the scientists.

Snow also speaks of “Traditional culture” in opposition to “Scientific culture” without defining the keyword ‘culture’. He implies that traditional culture, the province of literary intellectuals, covers all intellectuals not engaged in scientific pursuits. Snow’s main thesis is that there is a gap, and a widening gap, between traditional culture and scientific culture. This is both the cause and result of a mutual failure of communication between scientists and non-scientists in the intellectual strata. Such incomprehension is dangerous. Therefore he pleads for educational and other correctives to bridge the gap.

Snow cites instances from his own experience to demonstrate how little the non-scientists know or care about modern science. He also laments the average scientist’s ignorance of and indifference to literature, art and music. But he blames the non-scientists (especially

the literary set) more than the scientists for this failure to be all-rounders.

Snow says that on occasions, when he was in a gathering of intellectuals of the traditional culture, he was provoked to ask the company how many of them could describe the Second Law of Thermodynamics. “The response was cold: it was also negative. Yet I was asking something which is about the scientific equivalent of : Have you read a work of Shakespeare’s?”

The Second Law of Thermodynamics became Snow’s quiz-masterly touchstone to test the science background of the literati, and they cried “Foul!” Of course, every educated person ought to know that the three laws of thermodynamics relate to the flow of heat or energy and that the second law states that heat will not flow from a cold to a hot body without the application of external energy. But is it enough for anyone to acquire and possess this piece of knowledge as a gem from the storehouse? Surely it has to be comprehended, and that requires prior training in the elements of physics. Snow’s litmus test is by no means the equivalent of reading a work of Shakespeare’s. Scientific knowledge cannot be equated to artistic or literary appreciation, a point which Leavis in his riposte drives home with vigour.

But if science and the arts are different orders of cognitive experience, should we not concede a measure of justification for Snow’s dichotomy between the “two cultures”? Can we deny his thesis, crudely simplistic though it may be, and yet maintain that there is an essential difference between scientific and literary or artistic experience? Let us put aside this dilemma or contradiction for the moment and see how Snow develops his thesis and how Leavis demolishes him and it.

Snow’s agenda is to urge that the era which followed “the scientific revolution” calls for an increasing human concern for the

betterment of people in the poorer countries. This desiderates a radical educational reform which will enable Britain and the West to provide more scientists with a social conscience, apart from a nodding acquaintance with traditional culture. For him the literati and the arts people are back numbers, with a few exceptions like himself: presumably those who will not blanch or fret if asked to explain the equation, $E=mc^2$. Thus the politics of higher education comes into the debate. Snow's lecture came in as a handy instrument for those who were already predisposed to devalue the arts and humanities in the age of technology —particularly “Eng. Lit.” — and to ennable the sciences in the universities. All they could accept was that the science curriculum be slightly broadened to accommodate a smattering of the arts.

Snow's lecture had a more clamorous impact than even he could imagine. Four years later, he published a rejoinder to his critics, *A Second Look* (1963). In essentials it reconfirmed his first look. Snow however modified his cultural dichotomy to allow an intermediate culture of sociology, demography, political science, economics, psychology, architecture, etc — humanities which constantly (if vainly) aspire to the condition of mathematics, (as all art, in Pater's phrase, constantly aspires to the condition of music). Snow accepted that he should not have used the test-question about the Second Law. It is curious that in his review of the debate, Snow avoids confrontation with F.R. Leavis, but relegates the latter's diatribe to a couple of passing footnotes. In one of them he reveals that *The Spectator* consulted him before printing Leavis's rebuttal in its issue of March 9, 1962 and that he, Snow, indemnified the journal in advance against any libel action by him! Perhaps he thereby hoped to enlist respect for his dignified forbearance.

We may now review F.R. Leavis's Richmond lecture given at

Downing college, Cambridge, in 1962, and printed later that year under the title, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P.P. Snow* (Chatto & Windus). This book of only 45 pages includes an essay on Snow's lecture by Michael Yudkin, a biochemist. Yudkin's judicious critique, from a different point of view, predated Leavis's lecture and was printed in *Cambridge Review*, but Leavis saw it only after his own lecture. Leavis added it on to his tract as a useful buttress, which it is.

The very first sentence of Leavis's lecture is a stunning attack on Snow:

“If confidence in oneself as a master-mind, qualified by capacity, insight and knowledge to pronounce authoritatively on the frightening problems of our civilisation, is genius, then there can be no doubt about Sir Charles Snow’s. He has no hesitations.”

At this salvo, a rustle was heard in the hall, according to Ian Mackillop in his new biography, *F.R.Leavis: A Life in Criticism* which is reviewed in TLS by Dan Jacobson. (The Hindu, September 3, 1995). Jacobson comments :

“The first sentence, with its elaborately conditional syntax and its long-delayed conclusion, is itself a system of hesitations, a series of cautions, a warning of the difficulty of what is to be discussed. Then, unhesitatingly, comes the four-word hammer-blow of the second sentence. Why is it delivered? Because the man deserves it. He has the impudence to have no hesitations.”

Leavis's lecture will not go down as an exemplar of his own hesitations. Nor is it a piece of writing in accord with his critical norm of a capacity for discriminations. On the contrary, it is marred by a personal animus which is perhaps a reaction to Snow's

probing him on a raw nerve. A sampler of Leavisite animadversions is given in the appendix for the reader to judge; (the text is not easily available in India). Here a couple of instances will do.

“Snow is in fact portentously ignorant.”

“Snow thinks of himself as a novelist.”

“He is a British Council classic.”

The main points of Leavis's Philippic can be summarised. (1) Snow represents a type of mind which is unhistorical, incapable of literary discrimination, cliche-ridden in ideas and expression; his pretension to spanning the two cultures is hollow. (2) Snow's emphasis on improving the 'social condition' and bringing material progress through science to the world's poor is in contrast with his devaluation of literature's concern with the tragic predicament of the individual. This is a crass disregard of the need of our times, which is intelligence, a supremely human power of creative response, something religious or spiritual. The best literature makes one sensitive to it. (3) Higher education should, of course, improve communications between the arts and the sciences, but "the culture of the Sunday papers" should not be taken to represent true culture. The English department should foster "a collaborative-creative process", "in the creative response of individuals, who collaboratively renew and perpetuate what they participate in — a cultural community or consciousness." (4) A university is "something more than a collocation of specialist departments", it is "a centre of human consciousness: perception, knowledge, judgment and responsibility."

What is the culture we are talking about? Both Snow and Leavis avoid attempting to define 'culture'. But the undercurrent of Leavis's impassioned discourse is that culture is a concept to be thought of in the singular. Raymond Williams in his *Keywords* (1976) says, "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated

words in the English language.” His entry for the word traces the origins and the senses in which ‘culture’ was used in botany, anthropology, etc, and the sense in which we speak of the cultures of different nations, groups and periods. The overlap of ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’ is hard to demarcate. The modern usage of ‘culture’ as pertaining to music, literature, painting, theatre and film has in many countries the back-up of the state through a Ministry of Culture. The late 20th century idiom in phrases like ‘management culture’ and ‘political culture’ broadens the scope but impoverishes the connotation of aesthetic refinement. The titles of these four influential books give an idea of the semantic shift: Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture* (1934). T.S.Eliot’s *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1950) and Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). From this list, we leave aside the Marxian concept of the superstructure, which includes the prevailing culture of a society as determined by its economic base. Likewise, the special case of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ in China under Mao must be left out.

Said picks out that sense in which the concept of culture “includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought.” The last phrase is lifted from Arnold, for whom culture is an antidote to the brashly material urban life in an industrial country. Note that Arnold ascribed this function of refinement and education of taste to criticism, a point of view which Eliot and Leavis shared. Since Arnold’s time, the exclusive enjoyment of “the best that has been thought and said in the world” - “and thus with the history of the human spirit” - came to be regarded as elitist, snobbish, highbrow; the coinage ‘culture-vulture’ encapsulates the public hostility to the aesthete. Said gives political focus to the concept by pointing out that “culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with

the nation and the state; this differentiates “us” from “them”, almost always with some degree of xenophobia.” Even within a single country, we now place value on cultural diversity, as signalled by the vogue words ‘multiculturalism’ ‘subculture’ and ‘hybridity’. We in India are conscious of a latent or patent tug of antagonism between those who stress an exclusiveness of cultural identity and those who advocate cultural pluralism — fundamentalism versus tolerance. These themes however do not engage either Snow or Leavis.

Leavis defiantly maintained his position in a later lecture in the U.S., “Luddites? or There is Only One Culture” (*Lectures in America*, 1969). Apart from defending Dickens against the charge of being a Luddite, he is here concerned to reinforce his scorn for the literary intellectuals of the Sunday papers and to reiterate his call for a living sense of culture, a single culture, which will “maintain the full life in the present, of our transmitted culture”. He says, “Of course, the collaborative creation of the world of significance and values has to be seen as a matter of response to material conditions and economic necessities.” Again, “the sustained collaborative devotion of directed energy and directing intelligence that is science needs to be accompanied by another, and quite different, devotion of purpose and energies, another sustained collaborative effort of creative intelligence.” He denies that literary criticism is confined to the exegesis of texts — for him “the judgments the literary critic is concerned with are about life.”

It is impossible to escape the conclusion that Snow and Leavis are talking of different things, and at different levels of sophistication. Snow uses the word ‘culture’ in a sense akin to that of a group of academic disciplines, the arts or humanities versus the sciences. This distinction corresponds to commonsense perceptions and cannot be disregarded. But Leavis takes ‘culture’ in a rarefied

Arnoldian sense, giving it a spiritual resonance. These two intellectuals need not have argued long about D.H.Lawrence as a novelist or about the relevance of Pascals thought, “*on mourra seul*”, which Snow cited and Leavis misunderstood. Leavis could have brushed aside Snow’s jibe about literary intellectuals being “natural Luddites”. But it provoked his ire and scorn to such an extent that he indulged in his polemic *ad hominem* against Snow’s literary standing.

Both Snow and Leavis confine their debate to the West, ignoring the civilisations of the East. The deprivation is theirs. They assume that, whether in the sciences or the humanities, it is the West which must be the pioneer and custodian of human civilisation and advancement. Whereas Arnold, as the citation given earlier shows, looked upon culture as encompassing the world and the history of the human spirit.

For us in India, the clash between Snow and Leavis has a special relevance. We are being drawn into a global culture and a world history while still unready for the tasks of education and refinement which must fit us to come before the world as proud inheritors of a unique civilising influence: in the phrase of Ananda Coomaraswamy, “the heart and essence of the Indian experience is to be found in a constant intuition of the unity of all life, and the instinctive and ineradicable conviction that the recognition of his unity is the highest good and the uttermost freedom.” In this, we are nearer to Leavis than to Snow, but the Indian way must be to reconcile the truth of both.

Leavis does not spell out how his apotheosis of Culture in the singular, with Literature as the high priestess, is relevant to the modern world. Should we go to a classic novel or a tragic drama to gain insights into the human condition? Leavis was too drastic in his demolition job on Snow. Why does he deprecate Snow’s

advocacy of an increased social awareness or material prosperity? Why the vituperation?

One explanation is that Snow's university reform ran counter to Leavis's educational ideas. Leavis was chagrined by the influence which Snow began to command with the two cultures thesis. Leavis's Richmond lecture was in the old pamphleteering tradition which entertained the literate public with shrill controversy and invective. He took Snow as a type of establishment insider, a familiar in the corridors of power from which he himself was excluded. Leavis was wary of theoretical formulations, concentrating instead on the particulars under textual scrutiny. So the debate shows a poverty of conceptualization, indeed, a spurning of it. The greater his vehemence, the weaker his effect.

But there is one perception of Leavis, profoundly internalised, which Indians can temperamentally recognise and acclaim, whether we are bookish or not. It is in his questing spirit as a literary critic:

“In coming to terms with great literature we discover what at bottom we really believe. What for — what ultimately for — the questions work and tell at what I can only call a religious depth of thought and feeling.”

How clearly it accords with Coomaraswamy's words, “The Hindus grasped more firmly than others the fundamental meaning and purpose of life, and more deliberately than others organised society with a view to the attainment of the fruit of life.”

The controversy over culture or cultures must continue. Snow's main point is a banality, and even defective insofar as among scientists from different specialised fields, there is mutual ignorance — a botanist, for instance, may not be familiar with thermodynamics or the theory of relativity. As knowledge keeps increasing, so does general ignorance thereof. Encyclopaedists are

extinct. We cannot boast with Browning's grammarian, "Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text". Francis Bacon's boast that he took all knowledge for his province would seem a sign of hubris today. We have to devise other strategies to gain access and to use relevant information and knowledge. We must learn to learn. The advances in information technology will not increase one's wisdom, but they can aid creative intellectual work. Of course, we must broaden the educational base. How many of us use the phone — now the cordless — and drive a car and switch TV channels without any guilt or shame about our total incomprehension of the way these things work. Such ignorance perhaps guards us against the Faustian madness for mastering all knowledge.

In conclusion, we could consider the comment of a scientist of Indian origin living in Britain:

"I think it is important for scientists to appreciate music, art and literature (otherwise they could hardly be called educated or human!). I am appalled, however, at the crass ignorance of politicians, civil servants and 'establishment' about the most fundamental concepts of mathematics, physical and biological sciences.. Yet it is such people who ultimately decide whether the public shall or shall not fund particular projects in science. A liberal education should mean a 'quadrivium': arts, literature, mathematics and the basics of natural philosophy. History and economics could be the super structure."

The Provincialism of F.R. Leavis

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I belong to a generation of English teachers who were trained to read English verse and Shakespeare's plays by F.R.Leavis (1895-1978) and the quarterly he edited i.e. *Scrutiny* from 1932 to 1953. Not that English poetry or Shakespeare's dramas were unintelligible to us. We had access to well annotated editions, but sensitiveness to the rhythm of verse, and its approximation to the idiom of spoken English were qualities we learned to value after we were trained by Leavis and the Scrutineers. Leavis made these the basis of his evaluation of poetry.

The presiding deity at our universities was T.S. Eliot. I.A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929) also exercised a good deal of influence. It was through the medium of Leavis, however, that this influence was transmitted to the younger teachers of the fifties and the sixties.

New Bearings in English (1932) initiated us into what then was called modern poetry i.e. the verse of Eliot, Pound and Hopkins. *Revaluation* (1936) enforced Eliot's strictures against Milton and the Romantic poets. The title of *The Common Pursuit* (1952) was borrowed from Eliot. The search for the strain of metaphysical wit in English poetry from Carew to Byron was an extended application of Eliot's approach to 17th Century poetry. Eliot had included Dryden in the canon, Leavis extended his hospitality to Pope.

Since the criticism of fiction was not taken seriously by our universities we got acquainted with *The Great Tradition* (1948) somewhat later. We did at that time realize that it would make a more lasting impression than his criticism of poetry. Among the

torch bearers of Leavis's gospel Denys Thompson, Henry Coombes and above all Boris Ford through *The Pelican Guide to English Literature* disseminated his approach and evaluation of the English writers. Arnold Kettle and Raymond Williams who professed Marxism nevertheless used Leavis's method of close reading in *An Introduction to the English Novel* (1951 & 1953) and *Reading and Criticism* (1950) respectively.

Having learnt so much from Leavis's critical books on poetry I must confess that I have always felt uncomfortable with the streak of persecution mania in him. This often led to the distortion of his judgment. Beginning with "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture" (1933) and up until the rejoinder to C.P.Snow's famous lecture on the *Two Cultures* (1962) Leavis adopted a gratuitously aggressive posture. Very often his essays were occasioned by the desire to debunk some well established critic or scholar like A.C.Bradley. His disparagement of the entire generation of poets which came after Eliot i.e. W.H. Auden, Dylan Thomas and Louis Mac Neice was uncalled for. He persistently undervalued Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The severity with which he condemned the later prose and dramas of Eliot was matched only by his unqualified admiration in the earlier period. Part of the intention of building up Lawrence towards the end of his career was to use Lawrence as a stick to beat Eliot with.

The title of this paper was suggested by one of the topics recommended by Prof.C.D.Narasimhaiah in the note circulated to the participants in this Seminar viz. Leavis's relationship to the past. The critics mentioned for comparison are Johnson, Coleridge, and Arnold. So far as Coleridge is concerned the present writer is not equipped to discuss him at a gathering of seasoned scholars such as this. In any case his metaphysical interests were not shared by Leavis who is essentially British in his empirical temper. Instead

I shall include Henry James and T.S. Eliot in the tradition. Johnson, Arnold and Leavis have one important feature in common - they are all moral critics.

Thus Leavis falls outside the aesthetic tradition to which the early James belonged or to the Symbolist tradition which influenced Eliot. He is often classified as one of the New Critics along with Richards and Empson but New Criticism also includes the work of American writers like Ransom, Brooks and others who disowned any link between literature and society. W.K.Wimsatt in *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957) excluded Leavis from his survey because he had no contribution to make to literary theory.

James and Eliot are far more professional in their discussion of technical matters such as the point of view and versification respectively than Johnson, Arnold or Leavis. Leavis has acknowledged his debt to Arnold but about Johnson he has reservations. Although like Eliot he respects Johnson's judgment as a critic he disapproves of Johnson's didactic approach. Furthermore he considers Johnson to be deaf to the rhythm of Shakespeare's verse. Leavis considers that the experience of reading must involve an exercise of all the reader's faculties including intelligence. It does not, in his view, involve the suspension of our critical faculty.

For purposes of history it should be pointed out that Arnold's judgment on Dryden and Pope implies a division of the psyche into two compartments, the intellectual and the spiritual or emotional.

Their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits,
genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul.
The difference between the two kinds of poetry is
immense.

Eliot demolished this false assumption about the creative act in his essays on the Metaphysical Poets and Marvell. Instead of placing

wit out of bounds he accorded to wit the pride of place, insisting on “tough reasonableness” as a virtue in poetry. In his early phase Leavis accorded a place of honour to wit and the intellectual quality in poets. When, however, he turned into a devotee of Lawrence he abandoned these principles and followed Lawrence into the dark labyrinths of what he chose to call the spiritual world.

It will be recalled that Ursula in *Women in Love* (1921) resents the intellectual superiority of Hermione and calls herself “a sacred and inviolate priestess of desecrated mysteries.” (Chapter 22) Leavis’s insistence on “the transcendent intelligence” of Lawrence carries no conviction in view of Lawrence’s own disparagement of the Enlightenment, liberalism, humanism and university education itself through the consciousness of Ursula in *The Rainbow* (1915).

The chief difference between Arnold and Eliot on the one hand and Leavis on the other is that Arnold and Eliot regard themselves as heirs to the European tradition while Leavis excludes the continental writers from the scope of his criticism, while extending hospitality to some select American writers.

To some extent it makes sense to exclude poetry written in foreign languages because even if the critic is familiar with the language his readers may not be, thus the experience of reading criticism will be merely passive. Besides Leavis prides himself in possessing the inward sense in responding to English poetry, a sense he denied to B.Rajan. He does not claim to have that sense in discussing French or Italian poetry.

Fiction, however, is a different matter. A novel consists of more than words on the page in spite of assertion to the contrary by C.H.Rickword. The story, the characters and even more the social content and the moral outlook can be translated without much loss into another language. English critics have always been more confident in expressing critical opinions about Tolstoy and

Dostoevsky than about Racine or even Goethe. Poetry in a foreign language is not wholly translatable. Some turn of phrase, some metaphor, some undertone will be sacrificed - the most obvious sacrifice will be that of the rhythm. A word as familiar as the second person pronoun sounds obsolete if accurately translated from French or German.

In *The Great Tradition* Leavis devotes one chapter each to George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad. The only novel by Dickens which makes the grade is *Hard Times*. In the introductory chapter Jane Austen is honoured as the inaugurator of the great tradition. D.H.Lawrence's name is added as an after thought. In his later years of course Lawrence became an obsession with Leavis.

This list is notable for excluding Defoe, Fielding, Sterne, Emily Bronte and Thackeray among the major English novelists. Richardson and Hardy are given a grudging nod. Even in subsequent articles in which he discussed some novels as dramatic poems he did not mention *Wuthering Heights* or *The Return of the Native*. Dickens, who is praised only for satirizing Gradgrindery in *Hard Times*, was later characterized as Shakespearean in *Little Dorrit*. Among the 20th century novelists Virginia Woolf and James Joyce are excluded from the honours' list.

The exclusiveness of Leavis's criticism borders on narrowness, if not intolerance. If we compare *The Great Tradition* with E.M.Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) or comparable works by Percy Lubbock or Edwin Muir we shall be impressed by the catholicity of their criticism. There are different kinds of excellence in fiction as in other branches of literature. Just as epic poetry, tragic poetry and pastoral poetry cannot be compared indiscriminately with one another similarly the novels of Fielding, Bronte and Joyce belong to categories other than those of George Eliot.

This point has been made by numerous historians and critics of the novel but the point I wish to focus on is that there is in fact no tradition of the English novel from which French and Russian fiction can be excluded. Leavis partly conceded this by choosing to write an essay on *Anna Karenina* in later life, like his master Matthew Arnold.

Leavis's attempt to isolate the English novel from its European connexions places him in a class apart from Arnold, Eliot and Henry James who did not share the insularity of Leavis. Clearly it is Samuel Johnson who resembles Leavis most in respect of his Englishness, with more than a shade of anti-Gallicism. The scope of Johnson's criticism, however, was restricted by his publishers. The editing of Shakespeare and the lives of the English poets were assigned to him by publishers. It would have been gratuitous on Johnson's part to extend the range of his work to French or continental writers. He refers to the 17th century French dramatists and Voltaire's criticism more or less as Leavis refers to Flaubert and Proust, chiefly to expose their limitations.

But in this paper the focus will be on Leavis as a critic of fiction, hence the comparison with Johnson will not be fruitful. The only critic who offers himself for comparison then is Henry James. No less a writer than George Steiner claims that:

Like James, but with a more deliberate intent of order and completeness, Leavis has brought to bear on the novel that closeness of reading and expectation of form reserved previously for the study of poetry or poetic drama.

Leavis's close reading of fiction was certainly an innovation but comparison with James is misleading. After all Henry James performed for novel criticism the task that Aristotle performed for tragedy. It is impossible to discuss the form of the novel without

using James as a starting point. Nobody writing about the novel can afford to ignore “the point of view”, the relative importance of dialogue and narration, the hazards of the autobiographical novel, or the omniscient narrator, the authorial comment, “the figure in the carpet” and “the lucid reflector”. Even “the baggy monsters” has become a standard description of the more ambitious 19th century novel which is sometimes called the epic novel.

As against such criteria of analysis, Leavis's criteria are terms like concreteness, realization, maturity, sincerity, “life affirming”, and so on. Now “sincerity” is not a quality whose presence can be judged objectively while James's criteria are relatively more impersonal.

To return to the performance of Leavis as a critic of fiction it would be worthwhile to consider his observations on Henry James's novel, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881):

(James) sees England through literature. We know that he turned an attentive professional eye on the French masters. He has (in his early mature work) an easy and well-bred technical sophistication, *a freedom from any marks of provinciality*, and a quiet air of knowing his way about the world that distinguish him from among his contemporaries in the language. (italics mine)

The same freedom from provinciality marks James's criticism. Leavis himself is deficient in the very qualities he so admirably sums up in James. He is neither easy nor well-bred. Far from possessing a quiet air of knowing his way he is assertive, aggressive and often dogmatic.

In defence of his anti-gallicism. Leavis quotes two passages from James. In one of his letters to William

James (1876) Henry James complained of weariness and satiety with the French mind:

Easy and smooth-flowing as life is in Paris, I would throw it over tomorrow for an even very small chance to plant myself for a while in England. I have got nothing important out of Paris nor am likely to . . . I know the Theatre Francais by heart!

In another footnote Leavis quotes Percy Lubbock's summary of James's letters written in 1875. James had made the acquaintance of Turgenev and through him of the group which surrounded Gustave Flaubert i.e. de Goncourt, Daudet, Maupassant, Zola and others.

If we see the context of these remarks we find that they arise from James's personal frustration. "He found the circle of literature tightly closed to outside influences; it seemed to exclude all culture but its own." James could not get any recognition from the French literary establishment. This was in striking contrast to the friendly reception he got from the English literary establishment. He consequently felt more at home in England. This was perfectly natural, considering that he was an English, not a French novelist.

There is a wilful distortion in Leavis's account of James's attitude to French letters, art and culture. James's connexion with France and especially Paris was both deep and extensive. There is a volume of articles collected under the title of *Parisian Sketches* which comments on every facet of life in Paris from the elections to the palace of Versailles. Art, literature and the theatre are all considered worthy of description and criticism. A more considerable volume called *The Scenic Art* devotes most of its space to the Parisian stage, including a discussion of the actors and actresses. An even more important work is entitled *French Poets and*

Novelists which consists of book reviews of French writers including the critics. Turgenev is the only writer in this volume who was not originally French. Another collection called *Literary Reviews and Essays* can be divided evenly between French and Anglo-American writers.

The influence of French language and culture is all pervasive in James's works of fiction. *Madame de Mauves* (1875), *The American* (1877) and *The Ambassadors* (1903) are among the notable ones in which the protagonist attempts to come to terms with French culture as revealed in its art, theatre, social life and man-woman relationship. It is undeniable that the portrayal is often as critical of the French as of the American expatriates but Leavis's failure to respond to James's masterly novel *The Ambassadors* arises from Leavis's failure to appreciate what James's protagonist Strether and (by implication) James himself saw in Paris. While the values of Mrs Newsome in New England are centred in worldly success as revealed in money making, the values of Madame de Vionnet are rooted in an appreciation of the finer things of life like art and sensitiveness to human sentiment. To quote James himself:

The bustling business at home (i.e. in Wollett), the mercantile mandate, the counter, the ledger, the bank, the ‘advertising interest,’ embody mainly the special phase of civilization to which he (i.e. Strether) must recall his charge (i.e. Chad) - and a totally other cluster of forces weave the adverse tangle. Singularly, admirably Mme de Vionnet comes after a little to stand, with Strether, for most of the things that make the *charm* of civilization as he now revises and imaginatively reconstructs, morally reconsidering, so to speak, civilization.

A novelist who sets out and largely succeeds in presenting such a striking contrast between two ways of life, would not expect a perceptive reader to miss his meaning. In other words Paris especially and France generally stands for the freedom of the imagination, a refined moral sense and a superior civilization. And yet Leavis, who claims to understand and admire James, writes "What, we ask, is this, symbolized by Paris, that Strether feels himself to have missed in his own life?" It may be remarked parenthetically that E.M. Forster had already answered this question twenty three years before Leavis asked it.

It is at the party in the garden of the sculptor Gloriani that Strether advises Bilham, the painter, to "Live all you can; its a mistake not to." So far as Strether himself is concerned it is too late for him to follow his own advice. His own life he says is "at the best a tin mould, either fluted or embossed, with ornamental excrescences, or else smooth and dreadfully plain, into which, a helpless jelly, one's own consciousness is poured." Real freedom to exercise his imagination is denied to him because of his Woollett background.

Another serious lapse in Leavis's introductory chapter of *The Great Tradition* pertains to his assertion about the kinship between Jane Austen and Henry James. He asserts, "Henry James also was a great admirer of Jane Austen." (p.10). In the footnote he ventures the guess that, "He (James) can't have failed to note with interest that *Emma* fulfills, by anticipation, a prescription of his own: everything is presented through Emma's dramatized consciousness, and the essential effects depend on that."

As against this James's own view is stated in a famous lecture entitled "The Lesson of Balzac." Tracing the history of Jane Austen's reputation he says that while she had been underrated in her own time, in the later period she had, in his opinion, been

overrated. The tide, he claims, has turned by the stiff breeze of the commercial. The forces responsible for this change are, according to him, "the body of publishers, editors, illustrators, producers of the pleasant twaddle of magazines."

This admittedly does not refute Leavis's valid observation. Jane Austen refrains from overtly interfering with the reader's response to her novels. The reader sees the events through the consciousness of Emma, strictly as required by James's critical theory. This example shows that James's estimate of individual writers and works does not always conform to the canons of his criticism. What is true of Austen is equally true of Flaubert. However much he may have complained about the limitations of Flaubert's moral vision he undoubtedly learnt impersonality and dramatization in novel writing from Flaubert rather than George Eliot whom he professed to admire or even Balzac whom he held up as an example for all novelists to follow . . . So far as he is concerned James states:

I speak of him (i.e. Balzac) . . . as a man of his own craft, an emulous fellow-worker, who has learned from him more of the lessons of the engaging mystery of fiction than from any one else . . .

If, as Leavis holds, James is in the great tradition of the English novel, then there is no such thing as an exclusively English tradition of novel writing. The passage quoted above is from a lecture delivered in 1905. Quite early on in 1884 he delivered another famous lecture called "The Art of Fiction." He regretted in that lecture that the English novelists were morally timid, that art in the Protestant countries was viewed with suspicion, and that it was the French who had brought "the theory of fiction to remarkable completeness."

A Report on the proceedings of a two-day Seminar on F.R. Leavis held in Dhvanyaloka, Mysore, Nov.9-10, 1995.

The annual C.N. Sanjay Memorial Workshop in Commonwealth Literature had a dual purpose to serve this year. A three-day Seminar on “Commonwealth Autobiography” originally planned for 8-10 Nov. 1995 had to be abridged so as to pay, in Prof.CDN’s words “our debt to F.R. Leavis: Teacher and Critic” in the year of his birth centenary. The transition from one to the other however did not happily create any jarring effect. On the contrary the fusion of the two events representing the creative and the critical functions (*bhavayitri and karayitri pratibha*) seemed amply to bring home the ancient Indian concept of the poet and the critic as the “two eyes” of the Muse of Poetry.

Prof. CDN’s “Reminiscences” of his illustrious mentor was on the one hand intensely personal, warm and moving and on the other dispassionately critical and objective accounting for his admission that he was an admirer of Leavis but not a Leavisite!

He not merely sought attention to Leavis’s concerted efforts at *educating* the readers throughout his critical career but his concern for integrity and feeling for words which quickened into experiences at his hands. He was happy too that Leavis could send an Indian back to his own roots, to all those marvellous critical concepts lying like museum pieces which he did not know how to use. Interestingly Prof.CDN could find an Indian parallel for every Leavisian concept that made him such a pervasive influence. To cite just one or two examples; if Leavis’s “ideal reader”, “corroboration” and “common pursuit of judgment” found an echo in the ancient Indian concept of *sahridayatva*, his plea for a close reading of the texts was reminiscent of *hrdaya samvada, akhanda carvana or tatastha tallinatha*.

But in his conviction that Leavis could afford the luxury of the voice of dissent, Prof.CDN permitted himself to question some of Leavis's "significant omissions" like, beginning the "great tradition" with Jane Austen; ignoring Melville; placing Yeats below Byron and Marvell; softening towards Hardy whom he had rejected earlier, etc, etc.,

An awareness of these gaps in the great critic's armour only seemed to increase one's responsibility, for it became apparent before long that the centenary celebration itself was an opportunity for a "revaluation" of the master. Prof.T.R.S. Sharma didn't feel inhibited to point out for instance that despite his humaneness, Leavis was a "quarrelsome man," perpetually quarreling either with Snow or somebody else; that he was "totally ignored" in America even when he was alive; that there was a great divide between Leavisionists and others and we could not read him the way the older generation read. His accent on the best that is written in *England*, his championing of English studies and his views on education had, according to Dr.Sudha Pandya, exposed him to the attack of critics who dubbed him "parochial." Mr.M.Sridhar lent support to it when he remarked that some of Leavis's personal judgements were today "questioned". Dr.C.P.Ravichandra admitted that at times he felt "uncomfortable with Leavision criticism." There were also disagreements concerning Leavis's concept of a "third realm", for in Prof.C.N.Ramachandran's view it was a "logical contradiction", a "logical impossibility" since a scrutiny of it was possible only for those who could have a "dialogue" with him. Mr.Sridhar retorted that it was "logically possible" but Leavis "closed" it. So in the face of a vigorous clash of opinion like this, it became imperative to examine how the teacher was going to present him in the classroom. However, the final view that emerged from this spirited debate was that since Leavis was not just culture-conscious but language -conscious too which was

“world-encompassing”, it was possible to “tackle” him in the classroom!

If the entire afternoon session on the opening day was notably devoted to a discussion of “Two Cultures” by three speakers, Dr.P.K. Mohanty, Dr.Sachidananda Mohanty and Sri.A. Madhavan, eloquently testifying that the controversy over this subject was not yet over, the following morning witnessed a lively debate on Leavis’s notion of “Organic Society” at the end of Mr.Hajela’s paper. Recalling Yeats, Pound and Eliot who were also concerned with this problem and earlier still the writers in the Golden Age, Prof.Mohan Ramanan couldn’t brook the idea of an “organic society” breaking up “several times” which made him surmise that it was perhaps not an “objective fact”. In Prof.Ramachandran’s view, whether there was an organic society actually in 17 th cent or not was irrelevant, for unless we had an idea of an ideal we could not realize where we had gone wrong. Prof.Sharma backed him up with the observation that history was not a unilinear thing; there was always a rise and fall and organic societies had always existed . . . but as small, marginal societies. Prof.CDN intervened to explain that Leavis’s pining for an organic society was a subjective, personalized response in one sense and in another his judgement was the product of a collective wisdom as well.

Prof.R.K. Kaul’s paper which focussed on Leavis’s “provincialism” and “short sightedness” in *The Great Tradition* elicited the comment from Dr. Ramachandran that if the work was not an exhaustive account, it was because Leavis was not a historian in the first place and he was not writing the *history* of English Fiction but was only tracing a particular tradition *he* thought was distinguished through a few novelists. Prof.Kaul’s title which alluded to Leavis’s provincialism made Prof.CDN wonder how “liberal” Henry James was what with his last wish to have his ashes buried in Boston!

Continuing in the same vein Mr.Sridhar observed that Leavis's "provincialism" didn't prevent him from talking about Henry James and Joseph Conrad and Prof.C.N.Srinath added, nor Eliot and Pound in poetry.

Taking exception to Prof.Kaul's view that New Criticism separated Literature from other considerations, Dr.Ramachandran pointed out that it was not true, for even when the New Critics analysed a text they went *beyond* it. Beginning from Cleanth Brooks and Ransom, they were concerned with Agrarian society and Literature for them was one way of combating the menace of Industrialization.

Making his presentation, Dr.T.R.S. Sharma said his intention was not to establish Leavis as a literary critic but to see how he relates to recent theories in the context of our changing notions about Author, Text and Reader and the erosion of boundaries between disciplines. If, Leavis, who bridges the chasm or at least attempts to with his concern for values, significances and affirmations, *was* going to be remembered it was, as a "moral critic" stimulating responsible thinking. "Liasion Centre" was the one dream of Leavis which has been fulfilled, the speaker noted.

Presenting his paper Dr.Mohan Ramanan made very generous references to Prof.CDN before acknowledging the "formidable force" of "Leavis-CDN Line" in Indian universities. His strong reservations on prescribing regional language works in English translations (which was different from Indian Writing in English) in an attempt to Indianize English departments however met with stiff resistance from certain quarters.

Dr.R.Ramachandra's "very uncontroversial paper" (as Prof.Kaul put it) was followed by three more presentations -all three however read out by substitute speakers in the absence of the authors

themselves. The first was by Robin Leavis (F.R.Leavis's son: the name and the connection itself sufficed to cause quite a bit of excitement) read out by Prof.Srinath wherein the author attempted to designate Leavis as a “creative literary critic” who had to struggle against not only past conditions but what was to come. However, he was optimistic that a substantial body of his criticism would survive thanks to his conscious endeavour to preserve *purity* .. *his* living principle.

Prof. Ashok Kelkar’s predominantly linguistic oriented paper was read out by Dr.Ragini Ramachandra and that of Prof.G.B.S.Singh, Professor of Italian at Belfast and Leavis’s literary executor by Dr.K.C. Belliappa which noted among other things that if Leavis was a *whole* critic; more influential than Eliot, it was because of his language.

Leavis’s importance as a cultural as well as a literary critic; his relationship with T.S. Eliot; his interest in words which was an offshoot of his interest in life; his criterion of excellence; his concern for craftsmanship; his focus on “concrete particularities”, “critical intelligence”, “correction of taste” and “challenging discriminations” not to speak of his approach to philosophy were some of the issues that received particular attention. Judging by the deliberations over two packed days it was evident Leavis’s criticism was both *timely and timeless*.

With “Leavis for lunch and Leavis for tea” as Prof. Sharma lightheartedly put it, the curtain finally came down with Prof.Kaul admitting to a feeling of being “overwhelmed” by the experience of “the last few days” before adding that he often thought of Prof.CDN as another “Sir Arthur presiding over the Round Table... in quest of the Holy Grail”!

Ragini Ramachandra

