RECONSIDERATION II

The Achievement of F. R. Leavis

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THERE IS NO GREAT POETRY, there are only great poets, said John Sparrow, the late Warden of All Souls, in his British Academy lecture on "The Idea of Great Poetry" (1958). Looking back on Dr. F.R. Leavis's life, achievement, and character, one can say that "there is no great criticism; there are only great critics." Leavis was such a critic, just as Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, and Arnold were—a great critic who was, like great writers, according to Leavis himself, also a great man. His commitment to literature and literary criticism went far beyond what is merely professional or academic; it was both moral and spiritual, a way of living as well as of thinking. He could have said with Henry James: "I *am* damned critical—for it's the only thing to be, and all else is damned humbug." This explains the fervor, the intensity, and the depth and sincerity behind everything Leavis wrote or argued about. It was a commitment the nature of which both Leavis and his wife identified in their dedication of their Dickens book: "We dedicate this book to each other as proof...of forty years and more of daily collaboration in living, university teaching, discussion of literature and the social and cultural context from which literature is born." Such dedication is rare in any critic. In Leavis it was his second nature, something compulsive and overriding, so that criticism for him was, to use T.S. Eliot's words, "as inevitable as breathing."

Controversy dogged Leavis all his life, as it continues even after his death, but it did not distract him from his proper job as a critic. And even though he sometimes responded to it—"I am used to being misrepresented, but I am not resigned to it"—it neither diminished his stature nor impaired his vision or authority as a critic.

As the century draws to its close, in any objective and dispassionate stocktaking Leavis's figure will be seen to emerge over and above any other twentieth-century critic—leaving aside the criticism of the three creative writers—Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence, and T.S. Eliot. Already in his lifetime, Leavis's critical revaluations, placings, and determinations—once regarded as heretical and revolutionary—had come to acquire orthodox currency. Establishing what constituted the majorness of the major writers of this century—Hardy and Yeats (but only on the basis of not more than half a dozen poems of theirs), Pound (but solely as the author of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*), the Joyce of *Ulysses*, D.H.

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Lawrence, Henry James, Conrad; and at the same time—an inevitable corollary—debunking such, according to him, bloated reputations as the Joyce of *Work in Progress*, the Pound of the *Cantos*, Auden, C. Day Lewis, E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, and, of course, C.P. Snow—these were the tasks Leavis set himself as a critic. In so doing he was solely motivated by his belief in the value and importance of literary criticism no less than in the value of creative writing itself—the two being essentially linked. From the outset—his own Ph.D. thesis at Cambridge being on the relation of journalism to literature—Leavis was conscious of the difference not only between the two, but also between the journalism of the Sunday papers and literary criticism properly so called. One aspect of the modern technologico-Benthamite civilization he lost no opportunity of castigating was the inordinate influence the mass media exercised; and "the journalistic addiction of our intellectuals—and journalism (in one form or another)," he noted, "is now the menacing disease of university 'English.'" It is such intellectuals—or "intellectuals without intellect," as he would call them—who, in reviewing Leavis's books, attacked not so much what he wrote, as what he was, what he believed, and what he stood for.

This brought about what one might call the general anti-Leavis stance of the reviewers in newspapers and weekly periodicals, who chose to ignore or misrepresent the critical revolution Leavis brought about through *Scrutiny*, as well as through his epoch-making books—*New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), *Revaluation* (1936), *The Great Tradition* (1948), *The Common Pursuit* (1952), *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (1955), *Dickens the Novelist* (1970, together with Q. D. Leavis), and *The Living Principle* (1975).

Leavis's writings gave a new force, a new significance and a new relevance to literary criticism as a discipline of thought and sensibility; developed the technique of reading a novel as a dramatic poem, and took the interpretation and evaluation of a poem, as well as the analysis of what is creative about its style and language, beyond scholastic exegesis on the one hand, and philosophy, philology, and linguistics on the other. Terms such as "close criticism," "practical criticism," "new criticism," meant nothing more and nothing less to Leavis than criticism in practice—criticism achieved through analytical sublety, delicacy and perceptiveness while reading a poem or a novel.

Leavis neither followed nor founded any theory or school of criticism. He was, in principle, against any theory or methodology, and would have fully agreed with T.S. Eliot, that in criticism the only method is to be very intelligent—and, Leavis might have added, very mature. However, in some of his essays, Leavis comes very close, if not to defining or formulating his theory or method of criticism, at least to characterizing the way he read and analyzed poetry. In his celebrated reply to criticisms of his book *Revaluation* by René Wellek, Leavis tells him that by the critic of poetry he understands "the complete reader," the ideal critic being the ideal reader; that the "reading demanded by poetry is of a different kind from that demanded by a philosopher," that "philosophy is abstract and poetry concrete," and that "words in poetry invite us, not to 'think about' and judge but to 'feel into' or 'become'—to realize a complex experience that is given in words. They demand, not merely a fuller-bodied response, but a completer responsiveness"—a responsiveness that is incompatible with the judicial one-eye-on-the-standard-approach suggested by Dr. Wellek's phrase: "your 'norm' with which you measure every poet."

Practical examples of this kind of reading, analyzing and evaluating poetry are Leavis's comments on Act I, Scene VI, of

Macbeth, Macbeth's speech which opens scene VII of Act I; Donne's "The Sun Rising"; the passage with which Milton's description of the Garden of Eden closes (*Paradise Lost*, Bk IV, 1.268); passages from *Dunciad*, *Prelude*, and *Excursion* as well as *The Ruined Cottage*; Matthew Arnold's sonnet "Shakespeare"; Hopkins's *The Wreck of the Deutschland*; Hardy's "After a Journey"; Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," "Byzantium," and "Among School Children"; Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*; Eliot's *The Waste Land*, *Ash Wednesday*, and *Four Quartets;* and—in Italian—Montale's *Xenia*.

In the field of the novel, too, Leavis's celebrated critiques are based on the "close reading" of Dickens's *Dombey and Son, Hard Times,* and *Little Dorrit*; George Eliot's *Romola, Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*; Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady, The Europeans*, and *What Maisie Knew*; Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo, Victory*, and *The Secret Agent*; D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love, The Rainbow*, and *The Captain's Doll*; Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*; and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. In such critiques, Leavis invariably displays that masterly grip on the complexity of the issues raised by a particular novel, or dramatically enacted by a particular character—in other words, on the "criticism of life," society, and the *Zeitgeist* implicit in the novel—as a result of which his reading of the novels achieves a better criticism and a better history of the social and cultural milieu in which the novel was written than any historian of that period. And this, among other things, is because of his disciplined literary and critical sensitivity to the novelists' creative use of the language, which corroborates the truth of his own proposition that in the Victorian age "the poetic strength of the language goes into the novel," and that "the great novelists are the successors of Shakespeare."

If Dickens and George Eliot were the nineteenth-century successors of Shakespeare, D.H. Lawrence was the twentieth-century successor—Lawrence each of whose great novels is "a comprehensive and intensely 'engaged' study of modern civilization." In tackling such novels Leavis's own style and language attain that psychological and creative sublety and perceptivity in the use of language that he attributes to Lawrence. Lawrence, Leavis tells us, "compares the individual life to a mountain tarn that is fed from below, no inlet being perceptible. The promptings of true spontaneity–those, for instance, in which the creativity of an artist is manifested—come from the hidden source, which 'it is the hardest thing in the world' to learn how to draw from." However, analysis of style, language, and imagery was never undertaken by Leavis for its own sake; it always subserved a larger and more important scope—that of placing and evaluating the poem or the novel in question.

Close analytical and evaluative criticism that determines the tone and the substance of Leavis's essays on the poets, novelists, and prose writers (from Milton to T.S. Eliot, and from Dickens to D.H. Lawrence), also informs his essays on the classical English critics—Johnson, Coleridge, Matthew Arnold—or on modern critics such as Henry James, D.H. Lawrence, and T.S. Eliot. In criticizing other critics, Leavis sifted what was historically important in their work from what is intrinsically and permanently so, and evaluated it in terms of the criteria habitually embodied in his own criticism.

Johnson's criticism, for instance, in contrast with Dryden's, is considered to belong to "'the living classics'.... It can be read afresh every year with unaffected pleasure and new stimulus. It is alive and life-giving." Leavis analyzes the secret of the vigor and the weight of Johnson's critical writings as residing in "a powerful mind and a profoundly serious nature," and resulting from "bringing to bear at every point the ordered experi-

ence of a lifetime." Equally penetrating are Leavis's comments on Johnson's limitations, even though such limitations have their "positive correlatives." However, "they are not the less limitations, and seriously disabling ones." One limitation is Johnson's "censure of Shakespeare's indifference to poetic justice and Shakespeare's general carelessness about the duty to instruct." In discussing Johnson's virtues and limitations, Leavis arrives at an admirably balanced view of Johnson's achievement as a critic: "The subtlety of analysis that Coleridge, with his psychological inwardness, is to bring into criticism is not at Johnson's command. But it can be said that Johnson, with the rational vigour and the directness of its appeal to experience, represents the best that criticism can do before Coleridge."

In Coleridge's own case, Leavis emphasizes the discrepancy between "a rarely gifted mind," which Coleridge undoubtedly possessed, and what, with his gifts, he actually achieved in the field of literary criticism, as distinguished from his "philosophy of art," his theoretical criticism, his "metaphysics, poetry and facts of the mind," Coleridge's "darling studies," which, according to Leavis, fall outside the range of the literary critic. Nevertheless Coleridge had the capacity, as some of the passages Leavis quotes to illustrate, for "a kind of sensitive analytic penetration such as will hardly be found in any earlier critic." Why he could not bring this capacity to fruition is analyzed by Leavis in a way that demonstrates his own capacity for "sensitive analytic penetration" as well as for critical evaluation. It is, Leavis tells us, "what starts out as in the synopsis of *Biographia Literaria*–the disorderliness, the lack of all organization or sustained development: locally too, even in the best places, he fails to bring his thoughts to a sharp edge and seems too content with easy expression." In chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge is seen to be at his best in his analytic evaluation and interpretation of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, so that, as Leavis points out, "there is nowhere in Coleridge anything more impressive to be found than this." And though he was "much more brilliantly gifted than Arnold... nothing of his deserves the classical status of Arnold's best work"—a judgement at odds with T.S. Eliot's claiming Coleridge as "perhaps the greatest of English critics, and in a sense the best."

In dealing with Matthew Arnold—in many respects the critic most akin to him—Leavis observes that when we read Arnold's classical essay "'The Study of Poetry,' it is impossible not to recognize that we have to do with an extraordinarily distinguished mind in complete possession of its purpose and pursuing it with easy mastery—that, in fact, we are reading a great critic," even though the essay "dates" in various ways; as, for instance, when, in the "famous" opening, Arnold suggests that religion is going to be replaced by poetry. As to Arnold's "best-known tag" from this essay—"criticism of life"—Leavis, instead of saying with Eliot that Pater's doctrine of "Art for Art's sake" is the offspring of Arnold's "criticism of life," argues how the latter expresses "an intention directly counter to the tendency that finds its consummation in 'Art for Art's sake.'" For, as Leavis as a literary critic-*cum*-literary historian points out, "Aestheticism was not a modern development: the nature of the trend from Keats through Tennyson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti was, even in Arnold's mid-career, not unapparent to the critic who passed judgement on the Great Romantics." Leavis interprets Arnold's "criticism of life" in a way that throws light on his own critical principles and criteria. "We make (Arnold insists) our major judgements about poetry by bringing to bear the completest and profoundest sense of relative value that,

aided by the work judged, we can focus from our total experience of life (which includes literature), and our judgement has intimate bearings on the most serious choices we have to make thereafter in our living." Hence the Leavisian exposition of what Arnold meant by the famous phrase "criticism of life" sums up his own critical philosophy and valuation as well as the grounds for his belief that "the judgements the literary critic is concerned with are judgements about life" and that the study of literature is the best means of improving one's capacity for living—a belief that is central to Leavis's writings and to *Scrutiny*. Thus, for all the defects and limitations Leavis found in Arnold's *The Study of Poetry*—for instance the lack of the "gift for consistency and definition"—Leavis was closer in spirit to Arnold than to Coleridge or Johnson, and possessed and practiced with notable success the more positive values he attributed to Arnold: "a belief in keeping in sensitive touch with the concrete and an accompanying gift for implicit definition—virtues that prove adequate to the sure and easy management of matured argument and are, as we see them in Arnold, essentially those of a literary critic." This, in part, accounts for Leavis's considering Arnold not only "compellingly alive," but also "decidedly more of a critic than the Sainte-Beuve to whom he so deferred."

Coming to Henry James—"a great Victorian Anglo-Saxon"—Leavis justifies his place among the classical critics by virtue of his essential value-judgements, especially those concerning the theme of "morality" in art *vis-à-vis* Maupassant, Flaubert, and Balzac. A disciple of Flaubert, Maupassant also considered art to be an absolute or ultimate, and James, "irretrievably an Anglo-Saxon," could not but ask questions about the value and significance of the perfectly done, and could not but bring home to his readers that "there is no eliminating and no escaping the appeal of life, however much one may suppose oneself to believe in the ultimateness or self-sufficiency of art." Hence James could not help pointing out that Maupassant "never, in the score of values, presents a gentleman"; that the default of intelligence in the artist as artist (*viz*, the author of *Madame Bovary*) *is* a default of intelligence about life; that for all its populousness Balzac's world struck him "as dauntingly empty."

Among other things which distinguish Leavis's critiques of Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, Arnold, and James from his critiques of Eliot (in "T.S. Eliot as a Critic") is his sense of contemporaneity with Eliot and the particular kind of indebtedness on Leavis's part that that entailed. Yet, neither the sense of contemporaneity nor that of indebtedness prevented him from making searching criticisms of Eliot as critic. Leavis had nothing but praise for Eliot's early essays, including the "Introductory Essay" on Dr. Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* and *London*, which he considered to be one of Eliot's finest—"in fact a model of critical writing." Nevertheless he found certain ideas, attitudes, and valuations in those essays "put into currency by Eliot to be arbitrary." For instance, Eliot's doctrine of impersonality and of the separation in an artist between "the man who suffers and the mind which creates"; his reducing the tragedy of *Hamlet* "to a matter of an inexpressible emotional state, one of disgust, occasioned in Hamlet by his mother"; his bracketing *Measure for Measure* with *Hamlet* as an "'artistic failure' dealing with 'intractable material.'" For Leavis, *Measure for Measure* is "a wonderfully sure, direct, profound and delicate treatment of sex," which constitutes its "intractability" for Eliot just as the "disgust" of Hamlet does. Hence, according to Leavis, Eliot's fundamental defect as a critic is this negative attitude towards life, "attitudes of disgust and fear and

rejection, that play a part of which he is not properly conscious....They portend a radical failure of wholeness and coherence in him, and consequently a defeat of intelligence."

As a judge of modern poetry, too, Eliot's performance is judged to be "consistently disastrous"; as, for instance, his backing Joyce and Wyndham Lewis, his dismissing Lawrence, his over-estimate of Virginia Woolf, his considering David Garnett as a "significant writer, a master of English prose," his stating that "he is not interested in what, in the *Cantos*, Pound says, but only in the way that he says it." All this, according to Leavis, exemplifies Eliot's weakness in value judgement. And for Leavis the rightness and perceptiveness of one's own value-judgements is the hallmark of a literary critic. "Any reading of a poem," Leavis tells us,—and, for that matter, of a novel as well—"involves an element of implicit valuation. The process, the kind of activity of inner response and discipline by which we take possession of the created work, is essentially the kind of activity that completes itself in full explicit value judgements. There is no such thing as neutral possession."

Leavis's belief in the importance of critical value judgements was the inevitable consequence of his belief in significant art and how "it challenges us in the most disturbing and inescapable way to a radical pondering, a new profound realization, of the grounds of our most important determinations and choices. Which is what Arnold meant by saying...that literature is to be judged as 'criticism of life.'" It is such a belief, held with a passionate conviction and disinterested zeal, that gave life and authority to Leavis's key pronouncements on various poets, novelists and writers, and their works—pronouncements which enable us to see them in a new light, from a new angle, and in a new perspective. Here are some examples:

In Shakespeare's mature plays, and especially in the later plays...it is the burden to be delivered, the precise and urgent command from within, that determines expression—tyrannically. That is Shakespeare's greatness: the complete subjection–subjugation–of the medium to the uncompromising complex and delicate need that uses it.

Milton invented a medium the distinction of which is to have denied itself the life of the living language.

Bunyan's religion, like his art, comes from the whole man. And the man, we can't help telling ourselves as we reflect on the nature of the power of his masterpiece, belonged to a community and to a culture, a culture that certainly could not be divined from his theology.

Pope is as much the last poet of the seventeenth century as the first of the eighteenth...his wit is metaphysical as well as Augustan, and he can be at once polite and profound.

He [Wordsworth] had, if not a philosophy, a wisdom to communicate....His heart was far from "unoccupied by sorrow of its own," and his sense of responsibility for human distress and his generously active sympathies had involved him in emotional disasters that threatened his hold on life. A disciplined limiting of contemplation to the endurable, and, consequently, a withdrawal to a reassuring environment, became terrible necessities for him.

The pain with which his [Keats's] heart aches (in "Ode to a Nightingale") is not that of a moral maturity, of a disenchanted wisdom born of a steady contemplation of things as they are; it is itself a luxury.

The Victorian-romantic addicts of beauty and transience cherish the pang as a kind of religiose–poetic sanction for defeatism in the face of an alien actual world–a defeatism offering itself as a spiritual superiority. Hopkins embraces transience as a necessary condition of any grasp of the real.

How much of the fully achieved thing *is* there in Yeats's *oeuvre*–what proportion

of the wholly created poem that stands there unequivocally in its own right, self-sufficient? I have in mind the period of his work in which he challenges us to think of him as a major poet. And it seems to me that the proportion is not large.

Any real claim he [Thomas Hardy] may have to major status rests upon half a dozen poems alone: "Neutral Tones," "A Broken Appointment," "The Self-Unseeing," "The Voice," "After a Journey," "During Wind and Rain."

The rhythms [in Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*], in their apparent looseness and carelessness, are marvels of subtlety: "out of key with his times" is being said everywhere by strict rhythmic means....Mr. Pound's regeneration of poetic idiom is more than a matter of using modern colloquial speech....The whole [*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*] is great poetry, at once traditional and original. Mr. Pound's standing as a poet rests upon it, and it rests securely.

The poet [T.S. Eliot] is as close to the contemporary world as any novelist could be....By means of such references and quotations Mr. Eliot [in *The Waste Land*] attains a compression, otherwise unattainable, that is essential to his aim; a compression approaching simultaneity—the co-presence in the mind of a number of different orientations, fundamental attitudes, orders of experience....[*Four Quartets* is a] tour-de-force of disciplined thinking.

It is a tribute to Leavis's powers of style as well as of critical thought and perception in their concreteness and concentratedness that such pithy comments can sum up with such dramatic aptness the merits and qualities of a particular poet or poem. But behind the efficacy of Leavis's style and idiom, behind what he manages to convey so succinctly, lay the force of his critical convictions rooted in firsthand experience and insight. Academic, philosophical, and linguistic methods and approaches had little use for one who firmly believed in the "personal" nature of a judgement. A judgement, he would say, "is either personal or it is nothing; you cannot take over someone else's." No wonder this gave his critical reasoning and conclusions the air of dogmatic categoricalness, but the Johnsonian phrase "not dogmatically but deliberately" served him, too, in explaining the whole drift and ethos of his critical scope and procedure. Courage and integrity were the hallmarks of Leavis both as a critic and as a man who would have wholeheartedly endorsed both what D.H. Lawrence says: "A critic must be emotionally alive in every fibre, intellectually capable and skilful in essential logic, and then morally very honest"–and what Pound says: "If a man is not ready to take any risk for his ideas, either his ideas are worth nothing or he is worth nothing."

As the numerous hurdles in his academic career at Cambridge, where he never achieved a full professorship and was made a Reader only in the last two years, prove, Leavis did take many such risks. "The only way to escape misrepresentation," he would say, "is never to commit oneself to any critical judgement that makes an impact–that is, never to *say* anything." Both in his books and in his *Scrutiny* reviews and articles, Leavis had much to say and he said it with characteristic force and frankness. For instance, concerning the charge of cruelty and the destructive "attack" against Sir C.P. Snow, Leavis said: "The unanswerableness is the 'cruelty' and is what has wounded Snow. It would have been less 'cruel' if it had been accompanied, as it is not, by the animus that impels the intention to hurt." Leavis's criticism, even at its most drastic and severe, was never tainted by such an animus.

But if Leavis had no such animus accompanying his criticism, it did not follow that his critics, too, would be free from it—critics who did not so much

attack him, what he had written, and what he stood for, as misrepresent it. For instance, even though he had written with critical acumen and insight on Mark Twain and T.S. Eliot, the Ezra Pound of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, as well as about "The Americanness of American Literature," where he referred to the "American central tradition" (Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and James) "carrying with it the promise of a robust continuing life" and suggested that "in Jane Austen, Dickens, Hawthorne, Melville, George Eliot, Henry James, Conrad, and D.H. Lawrence we have the successors of Shakespeare," he was accused of being anti-American. And this because, among other things, he contemplated, as he calls it, "the nightmare of the intensification of what Matthew Arnold feared," namely, the danger of England becoming a greater Holland or a little America; interpreted the general acceptance, in England, of Hemingway as a great writer, as a sign of the collapse of standards; and showed his astonishment at American academics writing on novels from Jane Austen to D.H. Lawrence with "utter insensitiveness to those refinements of perception, distinction, valuation and interest which imply the collaboratively created human reality they depend on, and, voided of which the novelist's theme becomes a mere opportunity for such gratuitousness of 'interpretation' as the critic's need to be original may prompt him (or her) to contrive."

Another misrepresentation concerned Leavis's views on university education. He was accused of being both elitist and anti-democratic, when he protested against "the transition from quality to quantity in education," against the universities "turning out hordes of 'substandard' would-be researchers," thereby debasing "research," and against the accelerating drift of Americanization leading us headlong towards the Comprehensive University; and when he suggested that "neither democratic zeal nor egalitarian jealousies should be permitted to dismiss or discredit the fact that only a limited portion of any young adults is capable of profiting by, or enjoying, university education. The proper standard 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." The more you extend higher education, Leavis prophetically foresaw, "and especially in an age of technological aids and open universities ...the more insidious becomes the menace to standards and the more potent and unashamed the animus against them." Looking around as he saw the upsurge of the democratic mass university in the seventies he realized that already there was no redeeming it—there was no redeeming it because, as he wrote just four years before his death, "the civilization it represents has, almost overnight, ceased to believe in its own assumptions and recoils nihilistically from itself."

Still another misrepresentation Leavis suffered from all his life concerned his English style. He was frequently accused of "clumsiness of expression," "nervous mannerisms of style," "ramshackle use of language." One critic compared his English to "a third former's translation of Cicero"; another described it as "coke-like in its roughness and chill"; and still another blamed him for his "imprecise prose and bad temper." A reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* quoted a long sentence from Leavis's comment on Milton's influence in the nineteenth century, and simplistically paraphrased it—a paraphrase where the subtlety and cogency of Leavis's reasoning disappears and what remains is an inert, skeletal account of what Leavis was conveying. So closely tied up Leavis's thought process is with his style that it is impossible

to improve upon or modify his English without blunting the edge and losing the characteristic nuance of irony and the sophisticated subtlety of intellectual statement. When Leavis's book on Lawrence was being published in America by Knopf, the publisher's "stylist" wrote to Leavis suggesting that he clarify a particular sentence in the book. Leavis's reaction was: "I am *not* going to attempt that kind of paraphrase for the American or any other 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."

Those who accused Leavis of the obscurity and incomprehensibility of his English should have asked themselves some very simple questions—and they, of course, did not. How could Leavis's criticism, couched in a "ramshackle," "convoluted," and "incomprehensible" English, have had the vast impact it had? How could he have been such an effective teacher and such a lively and arresting public lecturer? How could he have given to the English language, more than any other twentieth-century critic (T.S. Eliot included), except Ezra Pound, so many pithy, pregnant, and memorable critical maxims and formulations, if his English had been so bad? And lastly how can one account for the success and numerous reprints on both sides of the Atlantic of his books, if those who bought them could not easily make out what he was saying?

Clarity of expression, A.E. Housman said, is not a virtue but a duty. But so is fidelity to one's own thought in all its subtlety and complexity. If there is any critic in this century of whom it may be said that his was "an individual mind," it is no doubt F.R. Leavis—a mind that inevitably creates its own individual style. There is no important critic who did not have such a style—the personal quality and peculiarity of style reflecting the individuality and independence of his mind and thought. It was so with Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, and Matthew Arnold, and it is so with Leavis whose place is surely with *them*—and not with the cultivators or lovers of elegant English. It is ironic that with all his "sensitizing familiarity with the subtleties of language, and the insight into the relations between abstract or generalising thought and the concrete of human experience" acquired through a long and assiduous frequentation of such masters of prose as Dickens, George Eliot, and D.H. Lawrence, Leavis should be considered incapable of writing "good English," as Dame Edith Sitwell, while dismissing his *Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow* (1962), clearly implied: "Dr. Leavis only attacked Snow because he is famous and writes good English."

A critic of life as well as of literature, of society, and of what he called "certain menacing characteristics of our civilization," as well as of university education, Leavis may be said to have worn in this century the mantle of Matthew Arnold, so that one can say of him what A.E. Housman said of Arnold after the latter's death: "He leaves men behind him to whom we cannot refuse the name of critic; but then we need to find some other name for him and to call him more than a critic, as John the Baptist was called more than a prophet."