

The Responsibilities of Dissent: F.R. Leavis after *Scrutiny*

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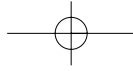
F.R. Leavis, *Lady Chatterley and the Intellectuals*

To make sure, in commenting briefly on the court proceedings over *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, that the note one hits on won't lead to one's being misunderstood isn't altogether easy. If one says that the Prosecution failed because it was as inept as the Defence was ludicrous, one might be supposed to be wishing it had been less inept. And who could have hailed the success of the Prosecution as a good thing – a proof and promise of health and creative vitality in our civilization?

Leavis, 'The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment', p. 335.¹

Although a famous champion of Lawrence's work, F.R. Leavis refuses to testify as an expert witness for the Defence in the Chatterley Trial of 1960. In a review of the Penguin book-of-the-trial, he explains that he considers the Defence depressingly misconceived and sadly representative of shortcomings amongst intellectuals; the epigraph here is taken from that review.² The *Spectator* publishes, in the weeks following Leavis's article, a number of responses, and Leavis makes a further contribution revealing that he has also written about the matter to the *Guardian* but that his letters have not been printed. The correspondents are largely bemused and disappointed by Leavis's stance, accusing him of being too harsh on the Defence, harmful to the anti-censorship cause and inconsistent, even mischievous, in motivation. The article thus reproduces many elements familiar from Leavis's later career, and typifies the mode of 'polemical sociology' he adopts at this time: subject (Lawrence); manner (fierce); location (wide circulation general





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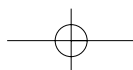
magazine); and subsequent public controversy are all quite typical. This episode as a whole is indicative of concerns which predominate in literary and cultural debate at the time; it is the expression of recurrent and fundamental issues. In addition, the case illustrates difficulties inherent in the articulation of dissent from liberal or left orthodoxy, which offer further evidence of the nature of the discursive community in the period.

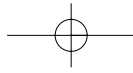
The Chatterley Trial is one of those events that commentators and historians cherish for its dramatic value, for the thrilling conjunction it offers of powerful characters in a decisive moment of action. It is an occasion charged with symbolic force. Celebrated for its immediate liberating effects, it has become emblematic of the real opening of the sixties, the beginning of a new era. In Larkin's memorable phrase, it inaugurates an epoch:

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
Which was a little late for me
Between the ending of the Chatterley ban
And The Beatles' first LP.³

It is also important, though, to view the event as a culmination and coalescence of processes and changes typifying the later 1950s. Leavis proclaims the Chatterley affair 'a definitive registration of . . . change in society' (234). Rolph wonders what 'dynamic reason' there could be that this novel should have such a resounding presence.⁴ Certainly D. H. Lawrence becomes a central, determinant feature of critical discussion in the period but many more general preoccupations bear on that discursive moment. For this purpose, Leavis's work offers an especially revealing instance.

The review of *The Trial of Lady Chatterley* is an aspect of the more prominent public role which Leavis shapes after the closure of *Scrutiny*, in 1953. His contribution to *Scrutiny* as editor and primary contributor is immense but, despite the protestations in his 'Valedictory' article, its impact seems inevitably limited by the journal's small circulation and quite specialized readership.⁵ The problem of influence, of how to reach, engage or generate a wider critical public beyond the university, remains his primary preoccupation. After 1953, beyond his teaching work in Cambridge, Leavis becomes a contributor and frequent correspondent to diverse newspapers, journals and magazines, thus addressing a larger audience. He writes frequently for *Commentary* and *The Spectator*, but also for *Sewanee Review*, *Universities Quarterly*, the *Times*, the *Guardian*, *Literary Criterion*, *Essays in Criticism* and *Times Literary Supplement*. His letters appeared in these publications, and also in the *Listener*, *New Statesman*, *Observer*, *London Magazine*, *Encounter* and *Essays in Criticism*.⁶ Before 1953, only eight of his letters are published outside *Scrutiny*; in the subsequent decade over forty are printed, along with two dozen essays, articles and reviews. Between 1933 and 1953,





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he is involved in ten public exchanges of correspondence, six of which are in the pages of *Scrutiny*; from 1953 to 1963 there are seventeen such controversies in eleven different locations.

This pattern of publication implies the shaping and amplification of a public persona, the chiding and corrective controversialist intervening promptly and polemically over cultural issues. The persona derives from a crucially and explicitly dialogic conception and ideal of critical practice. Often other critics are directly engaged in the titles of Leavis's pieces (for instance, 'The Americanness of American Literature: A British Demurrer to Van Wyck Brooks' or, 'The State of Criticism: Representations to Fr. Martin Jarrett-Kerr'), invariably other critics are addressed in the text, chastised and corrected, congratulated and thanked.⁷ The numerous attendant controversies and correspondences also point to the existence of lively, responsive readerships, a critical public or community represented by and in these publications. Shortly after the Chatterley episode, indeed, Leavis delivers his Richmond Lecture at Downing College, "'The Two Cultures': The Significance of C. P. Snow", which is also published in the *Spectator*, then extensively reported in the daily press, and generates the most substantial furore of his career, provoking a large correspondence across most of the print media.⁸

In publishing away from the network of smaller magazines and professional journals in this way, Leavis refuses the secluded or marginal position of the sheltered scholarly specialist in the university. This refusal is underscored in typical rhetorical flourishes; he writes often of the experience of 'exposing oneself' in criticism. Discussing George Eliot in *The Great Tradition*, his censure is couched in the form of an ironic admission of guilt:

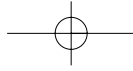
I had better confess that I differ (apparently) from Lord David Cecil in sharing these beliefs, admirations, and disapprovals, so that the reader knows my bias at once. And they seem to me favourable to the production of great literature. I will add (exposing myself completely) that the enlightenment or aestheticism or sophistication that feels an amused superiority to them leads, in my view, to triviality and boredom, and out of triviality comes evil.⁹

In a later essay on the relations between literature and philosophy, his prefatory comments are frankly apologetic:

I found the problem very difficult, and I realized that the difficulties were of a kind that made a faultless performance impossible. I knew that it was incumbent on me to take risks and incur certain adverse criticism. I knew, for instance, that I should expose myself to the charge of ignorance (I *am* ignorant) and be accused of outrecuidance.¹⁰

In a discussion of the role of the English Association, Leavis similarly uses the term to emphasize that publication is a properly public declaration:





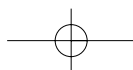
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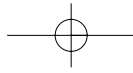
All those who have ever been concerned in any attempt to make university literary studies minister to life would find a file of *English* worth glancing through – for the evidence so abundantly exposed bears even more significantly upon universities than upon schools.¹¹

For Leavis, the articulation of a position is, morally and materially, necessarily and inevitably an act of conversation, involving the confidence and vulnerability of critical dialogue. It is important, therefore, to read ‘The Orthodoxy of the Enlightenment’ not only in the context of a literary debate over the merits of a Lawrence novel, but also as a performance in tension with the conventions and conditions of this wider environment of publication, within the discursive atmosphere of other articles and public controversies.

In this case, publication is within the capacious ‘Books’ section of the *Spectator*, the largest circulation general intellectual review of the period.¹² Ahead of the conventional short review notices of between five hundred and a thousand words, Leavis’s text is published in the ‘lead article’ space given to more substantial essays such as Antony Crosland’s assessment of Denis Potter’s *The Glittering Coffin* (disappointing, but representative of the ‘young Left’ of *Universities and Left Review* circles), Noel Annan’s reflections on the introduction of sociology lectures in Cambridge (indictment of Oxbridge and Establishment institutional inertia), or Richard Wollheim’s attack on *The Long Revolution* (Williams’s style and intelligence compared unfavourably with Crosland’s in *The Future of Socialism*).¹³ These pieces, and the correspondence they provoke, and similar articles and exchanges appearing in *Encounter*, *Twentieth Century*, *New Statesman*, *Listener*, and *Universities and Left Review/New Left Review*, figure habits and spaces of public intellectual debate which Leavis exploits, but of which he is also extremely sceptical and censorious. In ‘Orthodoxy of Enlightenment’, for example, he releases a passing broadside at the deficiencies of ‘our great Liberal daily’ (241). As with much of Leavis’s work, more fully to understand such strictures, which often appear at best preemptory and at worst vicious, it is useful to refer to original and more substantial articulations of underlying principles made earlier in the pages of *Scrutiny*.

Attention to the function of the general intellectual reviews is a dominant feature in the work of the *Scrutiny* project and Leavis’s articles habitually emphasize the issue: it is the journal field above all which provides material for *Scrutiny*’s polemical sociology. For example, in *Scrutiny* 14.2 (September 1946), Leavis contributes several pages of ‘Comments and Reviews’ in response to the current numbers of contemporary journals. These range over twelve separate publications in under seven pages, making extensive use of quotation and reference. Apart from evincing an intense investment in and familiarity with the field, the comments express a conviction of the specific necessary attributes of such journals, which are also the essential objectives aspired to (if not, Leavis admits, wholly achieved), in *Scrutiny*:





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Its contributors do, for all the variety represented by their positions, share a common conception of the kind of discipline of intelligence literary criticism should be, a measure of agreement about the kind of relation literary criticism should bear to 'non-literary' matters, and, further, a common conception of the function of a non-specialist intellectual review in contemporary England . . . If *Scrutiny* had behind it nothing more positive than the idea of running a high-brow review (and our criticism of the *Kenyon*, as of the old *Southern* and the *Sewanee*, is that we have been able to discern nothing more positive behind them), then there would have been neither influence nor survival.¹⁴

This concern for the functioning of the 'non-specialist intellectual review' is the *sine qua non* of Leavis's critical practice. In the 'Responsible Critic' exchange with F.W. Bateson, which coincides with his sombre announcement that *Scrutiny* is to cease, the conclusion of Leavis's rejoinder turns not on *Essays in Criticism's* challenge to his (and *Scrutiny's*) scholarly credentials (although the substance of the discussion defends them closely), nor on Bateson's Oxonian reticence with regard to 'valuing'. The priority, for Leavis, is an issue Bateson appears not even to address:

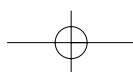
It is significant of prevailing conditions that a manifesto on the 'Function of Criticism at the Present Time' printed in one of the few British journals devoted to literary criticism should ignore the most important aspect of the function.

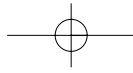
This function must involve, above all, public analysis of the literary world that accounts for the place and representative practices of the major intellectual organs:

The 'atmosphere', the 'order of ideas', may be fairly represented by those British Council 'Surveys', the valuations of which are propagated and enforced by the virtual unanimity of the British Council (financed by the tax-payer), the B.B.C (an enormously wealthy, influential and powerful public corporation), the weeklies and the Sunday papers – and into this system the universities are being more and more drawn . . . To make a show of energizing on behalf of criticism while ignoring this situation is worse than futile.¹⁵

Subsequently, *Essays in Criticism* does publish a series of articles under the rubric 'The Organs of Critical Opinion' assessing the journal field, and the issue becomes a standard theme in the 'Editorial Commentary' section, although Leavis's 'obsessions' continue to be deprecated.¹⁶

The importance which Leavis attributes to the state of the periodical press is consistent with an emphasis evident throughout the work of the *Scrutiny* group. A glance at Maurice Hussey's idiosyncratic and often bizarre index to





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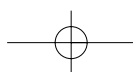
the reissue reveals 'Literary Journalism' as one of the largest subject categories, with proliferating 'see also's and frequent recurrence as a sub-topic to other entries.¹⁷ The common purpose of articles on the topic was, as H. A. Mason writes in 'The *New Republic* and the Ideal Weekly', 'to suggest an approach towards the formulation of a standard for a weekly journal of opinion'.¹⁸ R. G. Cox contributes three essays on the subject, 'The Great Reviews' I and II, and 'The Critical Review Today: Prolegomena to a Historical Inquiry'.¹⁹ In the latter piece, an insightful, synoptic history of the periodical field since the 1914–18 War, Cox charts the drastic reductions in scale, number and quality of publications over the previous two decades, but also discusses how the upheaval of the 1939–45 War and its aftermath rendered comparisons strictly invalid, since social and cultural conditions had so changed. Leavis, in 'A Retrospect', chooses Cox's articles to exemplify 'the living contemporary interest that supplies the life and meaning of his scholarship' (R. 15–6), they represent the ideal working of the *Scrutiny* group's 'charged conception'. Such articles confirm only superficially the charges of cultural pessimism and nostalgia which are levelled at the *Scrutiny* group; positive assessments of earlier conjunctures are in tension with analyses of current practice which lay a stress on the unprecedented nature of the contemporary scene. Leavis's work continually draws attention to the challenge of such unparalleled change, urging continuity but acknowledging a need for new responses:

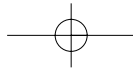
The accelerating processes of civilization have worked so immense a change so rapidly that those who began to take note of the literary world in the 1930's and later are unaware of any other state of affairs than that with which they are familiar; for any other observer the changes must be frightening.²⁰

In the later 1950s, after the closure of *Scrutiny*, these processes are amplified and accelerated. Writers consistently refer to the unique cultural conditions, the unprecedented changes in experience: foremost amongst which are changes in the area of publication, and in the status of literary critics.

Given the frequency of expressions of disapproval and disappointment concerning the journal field in Leavis's work, writing for the *Spectator* involves a level of compromise which leaves him vulnerable to charges of inconsistency. Jeremy Treglown, former editor of the *TLS*, for instance, draws attention to this apparent double standard, the 'biting the hand that feeds him':

F. R. Leavis was one of the critics who, through his own little magazine *Scrutiny* and his derisive attacks on the London literary establishment, had helped to sustain the cliché of oppositionalism which Ezra Pound had contributed to the *Lit. Supp.*'s inferiority complex. (Both Pound and Leavis none the less took its shilling.)²¹





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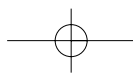
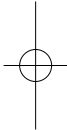
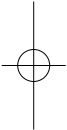
Certainly Leavis is damning of the *TLS* on occasion, an attitude which hardens after a confrontation with editor Pryce-Jones in the early 1950s.²² Comments made in 1946, however, reveal that during the previous editor's tenure Leavis welcomes and encourages the paper's efforts:

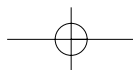
Perhaps not everyone who gave up the brightened and modernized *Times Literary Supplement* some years ago has become aware of the recent improvement. It is a marked one, and the *TLS* is now, on the whole, a credit to English critical journalism . . . Not all the reviews, of course, are good, but enough of them are to make it plain that there is an intelligent and disinterested controlling purpose.²³

Although Leavis and the *Scrutiny* group are conventionally represented as destructive forces of negative criticism – an *Encounter* article on the journal's closure is entitled 'A Massacre of Authors'— such positive assessments are in fact common in the journal, even given Leavis's acknowledgement, cited earlier, that 'there can be no real – no truly creative – performance that doesn't entail much offending "negative" criticism' (R. 16).²⁴ The simultaneous engagement in debates and judgement of their grounds and terms, suggests criticism must always be maintained at two levels, the practical (involving the texts in question), and the theoretical (involving principles and method).

For Leavis and the *Scrutiny* group the responsibilities of the general critical review are substantially coterminous with those of the critic: the one is redundant without the other. The expression of such a symbiosis is not, however, simply tautological. Attention to the material conditions of publication, and the implications of this in terms of readership, involves a concern for the critic's role as public intellectual which is central to *Scrutiny* writing, and the major preoccupation of Leavis's work at this time. The critical style and method of 'polemical sociology' develops specifically to address these issues.

'The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment' therefore enacts a particular conception of the role of the critic which figures a commitment to an ideal of public discourse. It is as elements in such an on-going project that many statements dismissed as paranoiac or obsessive need to be considered. As Leavis argues in 'A Note on the Critical Function' (1961), 'It will always be necessary to insist . . . that criticism is a collaborative and creative interplay. It creates a community and is inseparable from the process that creates and keeps alive a living culture.'²⁵ The location and manner of the intervention are intrinsic to the critical practice, and they are thus involved in other large, interlocking questions about the forms of literary criticism, the professionalisation of letters, the authority of the critic and the nature of the reading public. These issues come into better focus in the closer analysis of the content of Leavis's review which follows.

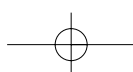


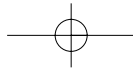


The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment

'The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment' is the expression of a difficult, dissenting position with regard to a significant contemporary cultural event. As such, it addresses explicitly questions about Lawrence's status and importance which crucially challenge Leavis's critical values. The position articulated is delicately discriminating. Given the adversarial context of the trial, criticism of the Defence inevitably exposes him to accusations of sympathy with the Prosecution, despite the rhetorical gesture of that opening challenge, 'And who could have hailed the success of the Prosecution as a good thing?' Leavis recounts that the essence of the Defence case had been that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* 'should be current as an unquestioned literary classic' (236). However, he argues that the novel actually fails on several counts, and in Lawrence's own terms, to satisfy the criteria for that classic status. He explains how the writing is overly didactic, the representation of Clifford and Mellors uneven and inconsistent, the use of the four-letter words inappropriate and the representations of sexual experience misjudged: such deficiencies are in clear contrast to the achievement of, for example, *The Rainbow* or *Women in Love*. A more appropriate defence, Leavis contends, would have been to acknowledge openly these inadequacies whilst maintaining that the book is important, more simply, 'as a foil to his [Lawrence's] successful and great art, and in that way may be used as an aid in his critical appreciation' (236).²⁶ As it is, Leavis predicts, 'Lawrence is henceforward the author of *Lady Chatterley*. This is what the new orthodoxy of the enlightenment reduces him to' (240). The article exposes the case as a missed opportunity, and the failure of the expert witnesses to use the public occasion to make important discriminations betrayed both their status, and that of Lawrence.

The position articulated in the review is typical of Leavis, dissenting from the conventional or expected response, offering a challenging perspective on a familiar situation. Whereas he might have been expected to see the coalition working in defence of Lawrence as a vindication of his own long critical struggle to understand and celebrate the writer, his reaction to the testimony is rather one of culpability: 'I couldn't help feeling that I had a heavy responsibility. It gave me a sense of guilt.' (241) The refusal to support Defence or Prosecution is consistent with numerous other opportunistic, fastidious expressions of moral principle: the exacting scepticism of 'Under Which King, Bezonian' ('What is immediately in place is to insist that one does not necessarily take one's social and political responsibilities the less seriously because one is not quick to see salvation in a formula or in any simple creed'); the steady attention to German culture during the 1939-45 war ('We printed during the war D. J. Enright's sustained examination of Goethe - to give to whom, at that time, so much space was in a sense our "politics"'); the fierce corrective to Bateson, editor and founder of *Essays in Criticism* ('I can only, with a whole and very regretful sincerity, report that





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we have not as a matter of fact felt ourselves challenged or rivalled by *Essays in Criticism*'.²⁷

One of the peculiarities of this episode, however, is that the view of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* contained in 'The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment' is not even especially idiosyncratic in criteria, instances or critical conclusions. A few weeks earlier in the *Spectator*, as Leavis acknowledges, D. W. Harding expresses similar reservations.²⁸ Stuart Hall's *New Left Review* piece on the novel makes many of the same points:

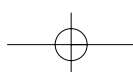
Lawrence tends to *prejudge* Clifford, and to awaken a certain response of sympathy for him which throws the novel off balance . . . it often declines into repetition and plodding and persuasion which is more characteristic of *Kangaroo*. It is a prophetic novel, in the bad sense as well as the good . . . There is no point overpraising the novel, for it will not bear it.²⁹

The files of Penguin's solicitors also reveal widespread reservations on the part of potential witnesses which resemble those of Leavis. J. B. Priestley notes of the novel, 'It represents an experiment by a novelist of genius, and though I do not think the experiment succeeds, it would be the height of absurdity to regard it as a pornographic work'; Graham Greene writes, 'I am myself dubious how far Lawrence was successful in his intention. I find some parts of the book rather absurd and for that reason I would prefer not to be called as a witness in case I was forced into any admission harmful to the Penguin case.'³⁰ In an *Encounter* symposium appearing shortly after Leavis's article, to which several of those called at the Trial contribute, Rebecca West argues that 'this Act leans heavily on the evidence of expert witnesses in circumstances which would make any expert witness chary indeed of giving evidence'.³¹ Richard Hoggart, in reflections on the Trial which echo Leavis almost point for point, confesses:

I, for instance, would have been prepared to say that I think Clifford's physical maiming a weakness (in spite of Lawrence's explanation of it); that Lawrence's general presentation of Clifford is lop-sided (as is that of Morel in *Sons and Lovers*); that the theme of 'mechanical civilization' is not successfully grafted on to that of sex-relationships; and that in parts Lawrence hectors the reader. I imagine many defence witnesses would agree with all or some of these criticisms.³²

The distinctive or provocative aspect of Leavis's piece, therefore, seems not to be especially related to the detail of his critical opinion (though waiting to speak out until after the trial nevertheless constitutes a position of sorts), but rather to the manner of his expression and his reiteration of wider theoretical or moral concerns.

Although critical discussion of the novel takes up the bulk of Leavis's article, an equally essential theme is the question of the responsibilities of the

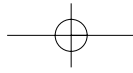


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'expert witnesses', the 'enlightened', whom the Defence calls to give evidence. The ironic attribution of these words even operates as a motif, reminding the reader that an argument is being conducted with real people, and that the significance of the Trial is caught up with this wider question. Witnesses for the Defence represent, for Leavis, 'a new and confident orthodoxy of enlightenment' (234), gathered around a neophytic conviction of the value of Lawrence's work, as exemplified in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In testimony, they justify their beliefs through general references to Lawrence's acknowledged position of eminence amongst twentieth century writers and more specifically, concerning this novel, through celebration of his struggle against sexual repression and censorship, and his original portrayal of working-class experience (237, 239). In context, therefore, Leavis's strictures about the weaknesses of the novel refute precisely the grounds put forward during the Defence. In each instance this point is reinforced with a reference to the 'experts', 'witnesses' or 'enlightened opinion', stressing again that the articulation of critical opinion is also expressive of a discursive community. Taking three early paragraphs at random, the emphasis is clear: 'For the experts did not mean . . . one of the witnesses, testifying . . . a point unwittingly made by one of the experts . . . the body of testifying experts . . .' (236–7). Later, considering the class issues, the formulation remains consistent: 'Why does Lawrence make the lover working-class? The answer (not given by any of the experts) is that Lawrence doesn't.' (238)

The responsibility of the witnesses for their testimony is accentuated through a comparison with the force of earlier critical and legal consensus, which had neither defended nor celebrated Lawrence. According to the previous orthodoxy, Lawrence's work demonstrates an unhealthy (indeed criminal) preoccupation with sex, an excess of class feeling (even snobbery), and a careless attitude to form (235, 240). Here the reasons underlying the attention to the critical reading public become more fully evident: Leavis argues that Lawrence's 'history had left somewhere in him a dormant exasperation, contemptuous and resentful' (240). The problems in the later work are related not simply to Lawrence's pathology, but to failures of critical reception and environment. The relation between artist and public is a consistent theme across Leavis's work, the expression of his conviction of literature and criticism as interconnected aspects of social activity, articulating and representing key aspects of (national, linguistic) community. The Lawrence case is thus also an illustration of Leavis's sense of the consequences for the artist of deficiencies in the corrective critical class and the wider educated public.

This indictment of the experts is reinforced by the text's exemplification of Leavis's notion of what does constitute responsible practice. Leavis's resistance to philosophical and theoretical articulation is on the grounds that the practice of criticism is effectively an ostensive discourse, creating and enacting discursive conditions and agreements about what is important and valuable (and why). Simple statements of principle inevitably court

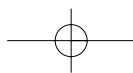


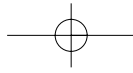
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banality, whereas intelligence working at any level of complexity, as necessarily when involved with literary texts, eschews excessive simplification or generalization. The witnesses are censured above all for their failure to judge and articulate proper distinctions of value, whereas ‘The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment’ bristles with judgements and evaluations. Critics of Leavis’s work have long objected to this insistence on the necessity of making value judgements in criticism. They contend that such judgements aspire to an objective status but depend on appeals to abstract, idealist scales of value, resulting in stridently defended prejudices grounded in the mystified and coercive ‘recognition’ of predetermined qualities. This is a large issue; the problem of valuation is a dominant one in critical discussions at this time, and a major area of concern. ‘The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment’ is not directly addressed to the topic in the manner of near-contemporaneous essays such as ‘T. S. Eliot’s Stature as Critic’ (1958), ‘A Note on the Critical Function’ (1961) or ‘A Retrospect’ (1962), each of which articulates his principles more explicitly, or theoretically.³³ However, the article does engage the question at the levels of performance and practice.

Two types of value judgement are articulated in the review: general statements of evaluative priority and specific criticisms of local instances. The text opens with comments which establish an overall framework for judgement. At stake is whether the Trial episode is a ‘proof and promise of health and creative vitality in our civilization’ (235). The argument extends from this unexceptionable if normative ‘point of view’: the essential critical standard is the possibility of ‘a real advance’ in these ordinary terms. This uncontroversial ideal functions rhetorically to rally the reader to the cause but offers little purchase on practical criteria or technique, though the normative limits of ‘health’, particularly in its relation to ‘life’, are frequently the grounds of later critical censure. Nevertheless, in their generality these phrases do reproduce something of the essential, and open, criteria of the terms of the Act and of Mr. Gardner’s summation at the Trial (‘the defendants have shown, on a balance of probabilities, that it would be for the public good that this book ought to be generally available’), and therefore articulate a preliminary area of consensus within which debate might take place.³⁴ Within that area, it is precisely the difficult agreement over what is, in this context, for the ‘public good’ which is to be defined through trial and discussion.

On *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and the Trial, Leavis is both absolute and specific: ‘it is important that this obvious enough truth should be recognized – [it] is a bad novel’ (235/6). Recognition of the ‘truth’, though, is not a matter of easy individual assent but requires intellectual effort, a struggle with evidence, conscience and the Other’s argument, to attain a judgement. Critical competence necessitates energy and effort of resistance to conventions, preconceived ideas and personal relations that might disrupt or distort the response to a text; such disinterestedness is a precondition of critical discussion. Leavis’s grounds for judging the novel a failure were noted above,





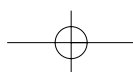
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relating to the didactic 'hygienic aim' which, for Leavis, distorts the wholeness and balance of Lawrence's vision. As the review details these 'evidences of disrupted integration in the artist', it is, as we saw earlier, in direct response to explicit prior evaluations put forward by the Defence. Each instance takes the form of a rebuttal, the value an assertion in tension with that earlier, opposing case: 'That might seem a difficult retort to answer', Leavis remarks and, later, 'We shall hardly get further here by argument: we are faced by a conflict of reports'. It is the conviction that 'we' *shall* get further by argument, rather than by acceding either to convention, orthodoxy or absolute truth, which determines Leavis's procedure. Throughout his work, value judgements are expressed in these interrogative or consensual forms, contingent on a discursive currency for their force. He maintains that all critical statements are of the form, 'This is so, isn't it?' and presuppose a response, 'Yes, but'.³⁵ This leads back to the importance of a vital critical environment, that other major theme in Leavis's writing, as the guarantee of the articulation of genuinely representative values.

The implications of Leavis's attention to the responsibility of the critic and the functioning of the reading public in the Chatterley Trial extend to a further issue, which also recurs in negative responses to Leavis's work: the distinctive force of Leavis's style, his critical voice. Opposition derives partly from reactions to his fierce insistence on the value judgements, an insistence which appears all the more aggressive once removed from the immediate polemical context. Hermione Lee makes a similar point in her examination of Virginia Woolf's (equally distinctive and combative) authorial voice:

Those famous formulations about modern fiction have now dropped completely out of their journalistic context: we read them as self-ignited, free-standing meditations on what she felt the novel should be and do. But they were, in their inception, angry reactions to reviews of her own work.³⁶

Nevertheless, concern about Leavis's voice is also, perhaps even more commonly, a response to the severity of his corrections and condemnations of other critics, which are often censured as unacceptable *ad hominem* attacks on opponents. The epitome of Leavis's stylistic excess is the 'Two Cultures' affair: Lionel Trilling's magisterial condemnation ('It was a bad tone, an impermissible tone'), is at the gentle end of the spectrum on an occasion of extraordinarily fierce denunciations.³⁷ In comparison, the tone of 'The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment' seems almost subdued, although the witnesses are subject to the repeated ironic play on their expertise and enlightenment, and the episode is described in such bitter terms such as 'alarming', 'fantastically and perversely false', and 'terribly depressing' (236; 241). In his later letter to the *Spectator*, Leavis even defends himself against the accusation that his article is harsh towards the Defence. Noting that the substance of his criticisms has not been disputed, though, he does add that he held back from



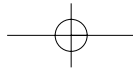
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reproducing too many of the 'absurd, conscienceless, evasive or irrelevant pieces of expert evidence'.³⁸

The appearance of 'The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment' in a publication such as the *Spectator* also entails a large and contentious issue which is at stake both during the Trial and in Leavis's review: the authority of the literary critic to make public interventions of this type. The articulation of such a combative voice in this environment instantly evokes a persona antagonistic both to the genteel consensus of belles-lettres and the tranquil objectivity of scholarly pursuits. As we have seen, Leavis indicts the expert witnesses on grounds of ineptitude and irresponsibility within his explicitly normative framework and he expresses and enacts an 'opposing conviction' of the proper function of the critical intellectual.³⁹ Writing for the wide-circulation general review is an aspect of that function to which, as was noted earlier, Leavis is necessarily increasingly committed in this period, due to the demise of *Scrutiny* but also as an essential action within the critical role as insistently defined there. A further implication of the 'Orthodoxy of the Enlightenment' episode, therefore, is in its intersection with changing conventions and assumptions regarding the status of the public intellectual. Specifically, contemporary debates regularly address the increasing specialization of intellectual work, the rapid increase in academic posts, and the concomitant diminution of the non-university intellectual or critical class brought on by the decades of expansion of public education. These developments are familiar and need only be briefly mentioned, though their presence within and behind the issues of this piece are constantly apparent.⁴⁰

The *Scrutiny* group closely register the pressure of these variations, responding with a range of analysis, counter-suggestion and resistance.⁴¹ Although *Scrutiny* writers document the historical evidence of changes in the status and authority of the literary critic, as for the intellectual weeklies, their writings are also clearly driven by the realization that contemporary circumstances are so changing as substantially to undermine and disqualify many of the earlier conditions of intellectual authority. Although 'continuity' and 'tradition' are watchwords, therefore, there is a balancing insistence that it would be impossible (and undesirable) to legislate a return to previous social or cultural conditions.⁴² The combative conception of intellectual responsibility embodied by the *Scrutiny* project is specifically concerned with the literary sphere, but the extensive range of topics considered in the journal, and the recurrence of the critical mode of polemical sociology, points to continuing aspirations to a broader intellectual role, the deliberate attention to what Leavis terms 'non-literary matters'.⁴³

The distinctive (and unfortunate) importance of literary criticism within English culture has been frequently noted. Perry Anderson has provided a convincing account of this peculiarity in his 'absent centre' thesis.⁴⁴ The Chatterley affair exemplifies both the manner in which literary concerns provide the catalyst for broad cultural and political debates, and also the tensions



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which attend such a function. The lines separating the concerns of scholarship from the ideals of general humane liberal education and the dangers of appreciative aestheticism have never been clear in English Studies.⁴⁵ Leavis's arguments for the English School as a 'liaison space' in the modern university are just one indication of the widespread, continuing pressure to define and justify the discipline in the period.⁴⁶ Graham Hough notes in an account of the state of university English Studies, in J. H. Plumb's symposium *Crisis in the Humanities* (1964):

At one time it was imagined that English Literature could provide the core for a modern education in the humanities. Many people thought of it as filling the place of the old classical discipline – that it would be the unifying, central study for everyone who did not want a scientific or a purely professional training. But it has not become so. It has turned out to be just a 'subject' like any other . . . So far from becoming a core and a centre the study of English becomes a set of special tricks . . . The thing becomes as far as possible a game played by professionals according to professional rules . . . how remote they are from the interest of the unprofessional reader of poetry, how specialized, how much knowledge they assume of narrowly technical argument.⁴⁷

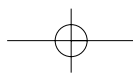
Such reflections on the place of English Studies suggest that the importance of the literary critical field is already waning even by the mid-1960s. The status of the literary intellectual is necessarily caught up in this decline, and thus features strongly in Leavis's work, most acutely during the 'Two Cultures' debate, but equally forcefully in these reflections on the Chatterley Trial.

Issues around the authority of the literary expert are consistently focused in critical discussions of Lawrence, and are at the heart of the Chatterley Trial. The Act states 'It is hereby declared that the opinion of experts as to the literary, artistic, scientific or other merits of an article may be admitted'. Mr. Gardner, in his summing up, emphasizes this fact, but also steadily insists on the ordinariness of the witnesses:

It is very easy to adopt the line, 'You and I are ordinary chaps, and don't you bother about these experts, because they are teachers who live in their books and they don't really see what goes on in the world: you have seen them in the witness box, they don't do shopping and washing up and get married and have children, they don't really know what goes on at all'; but, you know, any suggestion of that kind [by the Prosecution] will not be founded on evidence.⁴⁸

In an exchange in the *Spectator*, between Bernard Levin and John Sparrow, addressing precisely this issue, Sparrow contends:

I did not in fact challenge the qualifications of all or even most of the witnesses: I said, 'It is not clear, *in several cases* (my italics – JS), in what their



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qualifications as experts consisted' and it was as literary experts and nothing else that the two whose qualifications I challenged were put forward . . . So far from never describing the witnesses as experts, counsel did so repeatedly, Mr. Gardner going so far as to suggest that 'No higher class of experts could have been called in any similar case'.⁴⁹

Levin responds that 'Mr. Sparrow does not take up my point that the Act does not lay down any definition of an expert, nor demand any qualifications for one'.⁵⁰ 'The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment' keeps this issue powerfully to the fore, Leavis depending for his authority to appraise the witnesses on the force of performance and demonstration rather than abstract or institutional accreditation.

Leavis asserts at the beginning of the essay that 'a real advance' in social and cultural life, 'depends upon the existence of a body of genuinely enlightened opinion, ensuring the nature of Lawrence's genius and achievement shall be widely understood' (234). Such statements are commonplaces within the British critical tradition at least since Arnold, and form a characteristic motif in Leavis's writing. However, the insistent emphasis on the issue, underscoring each comment on both novel and Trial, each turn of the argument, its implications ramifying into every aspect of Leavis's style and voice, indicates a preoccupation more urgent and specific than the specious reiteration of a conventional slogan. The collaborative ground of the critical function is the controlling theme of Leavis's work, in the substance of his argument, its form of polemical sociology, and the public site of its expression.

Notes

1 Leavis, 'The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment', *Spectator*, 17 February 1961, 229. Reprinted in *'Anna Karenina' and Other Essays* (London, 1967), pp. 235–41. Subsequent quotations in the text are from this latter edition.

2 C.H. Rolph, *The Trial of Lady Chatterley* (Harmondsworth, 1961); Leavis 'The Trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', *Spectator*, 3 March 1961, 291. Reprinted in *Letters in Criticism*, edited by John Trasker (London, 1974), pp. 84–5. Correspondence also, *Spectator*, 24 February 1961, p. 255. Ian MacKillop discusses Leavis's response to the Chatterley Trial, in *F.R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (London, 1995), pp. 304–9.

3 Philip Larkin, 'Annus Mirabilis', *High Windows* (London, 1964), p. 25.

4 Rolph, *Trial*, p. 205.

5 Leavis, 'Valedictory', *Scrutiny* 19.4 (October 1953), 254–7.

6 Leavis's correspondence, in M. B. Kinch, et al, *F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York, 1989) pp. 102–117; also Appendix I 'Chronology of Exchanges', pp. 431–443. Beyond this, Leavis clearly kept up a considerable private correspondence. Stefan Collini also argues to reassess the public nature of Leavis's critical persona, from similar quantitative premises, in his 'The Critic as [Anti-] Journalist: Leavis After *Scrutiny*', in Jeremy Treglown and Bridget Bennett (eds), *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower: Literary Journalism and Literary Scholarship from Fielding to the Internet* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 151–176

7 Leavis, 'The Americanness of American Literature: A British Demurrer to Van Wyck Brooks', *Commentary* (November 1952), 466–474, reprinted 'Anna Karenina',

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pp. 13–151; ‘The State of Criticism: Representations to Fr. Martin Jarrett-Kerr’, *Essays in Criticism*, 3.1 (April 1953), 215–233.

8 Leavis, ‘The Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow’, *Spectator*, 9 March 1962, 297–303. Extensive correspondence in subsequent numbers. The first reports of Leavis’s lecture appeared in *The Times*, 1 March 1962. MacKillop provides a steady narrative, *Leavis*, pp. 314–325. See also Collini’s Introduction to C. P. Snow, *Two Cultures* (Cambridge: Canto, 1993).

9 Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto, 1948), p. 23.

10 Leavis, ‘Mutually Necessary’, in *The Critic as Anti-Philosopher*, edited by G. Singh (London, 1982), pp. 186–208 (p. 195). The use of the archaic term ‘outre-ridance’, excessive self-esteem or arrogance, is a nice, sardonic touch.

11 ‘Comments and Reviews: Henry James and the English Association’, *Scrutiny*, 14.2 (December 1946), 133.

12 As Mulhern comments in 1979, ‘Few precedents exist for the study of a journal as such’, *The Moment of ‘Scrutiny’* (London, 1979), p. ix. More recent work, approaching journals from a variety of perspectives, similarly express regret about the lack of models: see Michael Sheldon, *Friends of Promise: Cyril Connolly and the World of ‘Horizon’* (London, 1989); David Peters Corbett and Andrew Thacker, ‘Raymond Williams and Cultural Formations: Movements and Magazines’, *Prose Studies*, 16.2 (August 1993), 84–106. The *Spectator* competes with the *New Statesman* as senior serious British intellectual weekly of the time. R. G. Cox, 15 years earlier, characterizes the position as follows: ‘Today, *The New Statesman* and *The Spectator* divide the weekly field between them’, ‘Critical Review Today’, p. 259.

13 Antony Crosland, ‘Smashing Things’, *Spectator*, 12 February 1960, 223; Noel Annan, ‘The Sociology of Slowness’, 2 December 1960, 904–5; Richard Wollheim, ‘The English Dream’, 10 March 1961, 334–5.

14 Leavis ‘Comments and Reviews: The *Kenyon Review* and *Scrutiny*’, *Scrutiny* 14.2 (December 1946), 135–6.

15 Leavis, ‘Responsible Critic’, p. 328.

16 See Bateson, ‘Editorial Commentary’, 6.1 (January 1956), pp. 126–9 (p. 126); ‘Organs of Critical Opinion I: The Review of English Studies’, 6.2 (April 1956), 190–200; Ronald Hayman, ‘Organs of Critical Opinion II: Reviewing in *The New Statesman* and *The Spectator*’, 6.4 (October 1956), 434–444; Mark Roberts, ‘Organs of Critical Opinion III: Reviewing in the *London Magazine* and Some Other Monthlies’, 7.2 (April 1957), 144–162; Bateson ‘Organs of Critical Opinion IV: *Times Literary Supplement*’, 7.4 (October 1957), 349–261; *Scrutiny* symposium, 13.1 (January 1963).

17 Maurice Hussey, ‘Index A: Subjects’, *Scrutiny*, 20 (1963), 44–6.

18 Mason, ‘The *New Republic* and the Ideal Weekly’, *Scrutiny* 7.3 (December 1938), 250–261. The article is also a fascinating auto-critique of the effects of *Scrutiny*’s resistance to Marxist influence: ‘Unfortunately the discussion of the relation of politics to literature has been left too exclusively to Marxists. It seems a fair criticism of *Scrutiny* that it has been too content to maintain a negative attitude, and that exposure of the weakness of the Marxist position does not constitute the whole duty of a quarterly’.

19 R. G. Cox, ‘The Great Reviews: I’, *Scrutiny*, 6.1 (June 1937), 2–20; ‘The Great Reviews: II’, 6.2 (September 1937), 155–75; ‘The Critical Review Today: Prolegomena to a Historical Inquiry’.

20 Leavis, ‘Responsible Critic’, p. 327.

21 Treglown, ‘The *TLS* in the Second World War and How to Fill Some Gaps in Modern British Cultural History’ in Treglown, *Grub Street*, pp. 135–150 (p. 136). Treglown makes a strong case for a reassessment of the role of the *TLS* in the period, noting how many cultural historians, for instance Hewison and Fussell, simply ignore it.

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22 Leavis rehearses much of the Pryce-Jones episode as evidence of the coterie spirit of the literary world, 'Retrospect', pp. 19–21.

23 Leavis, 'The *Times Literary Supplement*', *Scrutiny*, 14.2 (December 1946), 134–5.

24 A. J. Cronin, 'A Massacre of Authors' *Encounter*, 6.4 (April 1956), 25–32.

25 Leavis, 'A Note on the Critical Function', *Literary Criterion*, 5.1 (Winter 1961), 1–9 (8).

26 Leavis avoids legal detail, but clearly if the 'literary excellence' defence is not used, then under the terms of the law the Defence would have to be along the lines that, 'A person shall not be convicted of an offence against Section 2 if it is proved that publication of the article in question is justified as being for the public good on the ground that it is in the interests of science, literature, art, or learning, or of other objects of general concern.' (Rolph, *Trial*, 11). Given the way Mr. Justice Byrne conducts the case, on the whole resisting the Defence's appeals for greater latitude and concentrating, as did the Prosecution, on the specific question of the novel's 'tendency to deprave or corrupt', the likelihood of this having been a practical or successful defence is small. Bernard Levin, in a discussion appearing in the *Spectator* after the trial, discusses this issue, 'The Lady's Not For Burning', *Spectator*, 4 November 1960, pp. 677–8: 'Mr Justice Byrne, concentrating on the foreground, insists to the jury that they had to be satisfied that the literary or other merits of the book were so *high* (his words and his emphasis) that they outweighed the obscenity and allowed the book to be published in the public good.'

27 Leavis, 'Under Which King, Bezonian?' *Scrutiny*, 1.3 (December 1932), 205–214 (p. 20); 'Retrospect', pp. 20, 8; 'The Responsible Critic', p. 162.

28 D. W. Harding, 'Lawrence's Evils', *Spectator*, 11 November 1960, 733–4. Leavis, 'Orthodoxy', p. 240.

29 Stuart Hall, 'Lady Chatterley's Lover: The Novel in its Relationship to Lawrence's Work', *New Left Review*, 6 (November–December 1960), 32–5.

30 Steve Hare, (ed.), *Penguin Portrait: Allen Lane and the Penguin Editors 1935–70* (Harmondsworth, 1995), pp. 242, 247.

31 Rebecca West, "'Chatterley'", 'The Witnesses and the Law', *Encounter*, 16.3 (March 1961), 53. William Emrys Williams (a director at Penguin), wrote to the symposium along similar lines, 'I am sick to death of the kind of Chatterley discussion we have all had to put up with in the last few weeks, and although I am obviously glad that we at Penguin's won the verdict, I take no pleasure in the actual form of the contest', 54.

32 Hoggart, "'Chatterley'", 'The Witnesses and the Law', *Encounter*, 16.3 (March 1961), 54–5.

33 Leavis, 'T. S. Eliot's Stature as Critic: A Revaluation', *Commentary*, November 1958, 399–410. Reprinted as 'T. S. Eliot as Critic', *Anna Karenina*, pp. 177–196; 'A Note on the Critical Function'; 'A Retrospect'. The 1966 essay, 'Valuation in Criticism' is only the most explicit address to the topic, *Orbis Litterarum*, 21 (1966), 61–70, reprinted posthumously in *Valuation in Criticism and Other Essays*, edited by G. Singh (Cambridge, 1986).

34 Rolph, *Trial*, p. 199. 'The public good' is the exculpatory phrase within the Act.

35 The 'This is so, is it not?/Yes, but...' motif recurs throughout Leavis's work. See, for instance, in the 1953 debate with Bateson: 'The challenge, with the force given it by the context, seems to me wholly justified. It has, of course, the implicit form: "This is so, is it not?"; 'Correspondence: The Responsible Critic', p. 326. It has also been one of the major grounds of subsequent antipathy to Leavis.

36 Lee, 'Crimes of Criticism', p. 123.

37 Lionel Trilling, 'The Leavis-Snow Controversy', *Commentary*, June 1962. Reprinted in *Beyond Culture* (1963; Harmondsworth, 1967), pp. 133–158 (p. 137).

38 Leavis, *Letters*, p. 85.

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39 For further discussion of this 'opposing' frame of mind, see my earlier article, "'An Opposing Conviction": Leavis on Wittgenstein' in *Studies in English Language and Literature* (ELLS, Kyushu University), 48 (February, 1998), 75–86.

40 The broad lines of these changes are described in a number of places. Three differing, provocative accounts can be found in John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (1969; Harmondsworth, 1973); more succinctly, Bradbury, 'Afterword', in *Eating People is Wrong* (1959; London, 1984); and Alan Sinfield, (ed.), *Society and Literature 1945–70: The Context of English Literature* (New York, 1983).

41 Mulhern considers the 'objective function' of the journal to be the negotiation of the emergence of a specific intellectual caste and its articulation of a professional idiom, in *Moment*, p. 318.

42 The accusation of historical ignorance or naivete on the part of the *Scrutiny* writers is a recurrent criticism: Bateson, for instance, rehearses it in his 1953 exchange.

43 See for instance, 'The Responsible Critic', pp. 177–183, or the 'Kenyon Review and *Scrutiny*' article cited earlier.

44 Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', *New Left Review*, 50 (Jul–Aug 1968), 3–58. Reprinted in *English Questions* (London, 1992), pp. 48–104.

45 They remain indeterminate today: see Stephen Heath, 'Education-Academia: The Value of Literature', *Critical Quarterly*, 41.1 (Spring 1999), 132–138.

46 Leavis, *Education and the University: A Sketch for an English School* (London, 1943), reprinted from *Scrutiny* 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 11.2; *English Literature in Our Time and the University: The Clark Lectures 1967* (London, 1969). There is a strong echo of Leavis's position in recent defences of Cultural Studies as an interdisciplinary space within the academy: See, for instance, Johnson, 'What is Cultural Studies Anyway?'; Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (1990; London, 1992).

47 Graham Hough, 'Crisis in Literary Education', in J. H. Plumb, (ed.), *Crisis in the Humanities* (Harmondsworth, 1964), pp. 96–109 (pp. 98–9; p. 102).

48 Rolph, *Trial*, p. 198.

49 John Sparrow, 'Letters: Lady Chatterley's Lover', *Spectator*, 16 March 1962, 335. Sparrow writes numerous letters and articles about the Trial, also drawing attention to the deficiencies of the Defence case. The danger for Leavis in criticizing the Defence is thus to be associated with such overtly reactionary positions.

50 Bernard Levin, response to Sparrow, *Spectator*, 16 March 1962, 336.

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