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F. R. Leavis
The Creative University

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The Creative University

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About the Author

Steven Cranfield is Senior Lecturer in Pedagogic Research in Higher Education at the University of Westminster. He is the author of papers, articles, chapters and books on health, management and leadership, education and the creative arts. At Westminster he is course leader of the MA in Higher Education and he jointly coordinates the Higher Education And Theory (HEAT) network and the Translaborate research group, a transdisciplinary forum exploring the confluence of ideas of translation and collaboration. His books include Training matters (HealthEducation Authority, 1994), Developing change management skills (with ValerieIles, 2004) for the UK's National Health Service, and Of purest blue (with ClaudioTedesco, Get A Grip, 2010), an edited co-translation into English of the eminentSpanish poet Francisco Brines. He is a contributing author to Enhancing teachingpractice in higher education (edited by Helen Pokorny and Digby Warren, Sage,2016). Having studied English as an undergraduate with F. R. Leavis, he workedfor many years as a healthcare professional, going on to teach, consult andresearch with a number of universities and national and intergovernmental-bodies. During the 1990s he returned to Leavis as the subject of his doctoralre-search. He is Vice-Chair of the Leavis Society.

Chapter 1
Introduction: The Heretic Who Survived?

F. R. Leavis was a major literary presence of the twentieth century, by any account a key figure on the English-speaking cultural landscape. He died almost four decades ago after a long, prolific and embattled career as teacher, critic, educationalist and social commentator. He was a co-founder and guiding light of the Cambridge-based *Scrutiny* (1932–1953) which has good claims to be considered the most influential literary-critical journal of the last one hundred years. The influence of this journal and of Leavis on generations of teachers and educationalists in secondary and tertiary education must be judged immense and far-reaching. The counter-reaction to Leavis was correspondingly deep and widespread. Indeed, so deep is Leavis's influence that it often passes as unnoticed, even by those who are the main beneficiaries of it.

In the history of thought about the university Leavis is one of the few English thinkers worthy to be placed alongside other Europeans such as Jaspers, Horkheimer and Ortega y Gasset. Since Leavis's heyday, however, higher education has had to take account of needs and groups largely by-passed by the old academic culture. Leavis, where he is talked about at all, might seem to have little productive to say to these new constituencies.

We are thus faced with a paradox of a once immensely influential critic and educator who has, to all intents and purposes, vanished from contemporary debate about higher education, except as a historical point of reference. Did Leavis speak too soon when he claimed he was the heretic who survived? Two factors are at work here. The first is the way in which Leavis's socio-educational thought is closely embedded in critiques of specific literary texts—take away the reader's familiarity with these texts and Leavis's arguments may seem perplexing, even wilful. The second is Leavis's apparently resolutely negative verdict on the 'democratic mass university'. The prevalent image of Leavis as an erstwhile Young Turk who later lapsed into a rearguard, even knee-jerk, reactionary has impeded any real curiosity about the nuanced, and in some cases still heretical, ideas he has about the university.

What purpose then might our reading or re-reading of Leavis have in these changed and still-changing circumstances? How can the work of Leavis serve today as an intellectual tool for understanding, and possibly changing, higher education?

The way in which I seek to answer these questions in a positive way is by pursuing three main premises as follows.

Leavis is a rich source of ideas and experience to do with higher education and society. Leavis's life and thought can help us to understand better not only their subject but issues of wider social and educational import. The lessons of Leavis's career in higher education, and how he himself articulated these lessons, still speak powerfully to contemporary policy and practice. I have devoted substantial space to Leavis's thinking about pedagogic practice as a major source of authenticity and wisdom: Leavis's views on educational policy and practice were forged and tested in the discipline of daily teaching over more than 50 years, an activity that was gladly embraced and which came without benefit of sabbatical and for much of his career without financial security. While Leavis's wholesale dismissal of mass culture has not worn well, the depth and seriousness with which Leavis poses key questions about culture, society and education, and his positive conception of language and speech communities, retain considerable force.

Leavis has a lot to say about the contested, elusive subject of creativity. We can learn much critically from Leavis on this subject to help clarify, deepen or extend our ways of understanding and talking about creativity in higher educational contexts, including pedagogic practice. Here I have sought to extract Leavis's thinking about creativity from its primary literary sources, offering a minimum of example to indicate how Leavis extrapolates from texts. This tactic is not without risks, including that of reducing Leavis to a series of unanchored propositions but it is, I believe, a necessary one to help us appreciate that when Leavis talks about creativity, and he talks about it on nearly every page, he sees no distinction between its instances in imaginative literature and in other, educational and social contexts.

The future prospects of higher education are increasingly seen as linked to the future prospects of creativity. I leave this premise relatively open for the time being, given that it lends itself to diverse interpretations. It is here that Leavis exerts a potentially powerful leverage on current thinking about the future of higher education. It may be that we arrive at different conclusions from those of Leavis, even after giving him a fair hearing; but that the issues at stake are critical I take as given. Those who argue that what we think about creativity in higher education does not matter very much, or that it is an elitist concern that can look after itself, are not in my view advancing coherent arguments, least of all educational ones. A changed understanding of Leavis has, I believe, the power to alter the way we think about higher education, to inform discussion about what might constitute 'the creative university'—which is not to be equated solely with major innovations, measurable outputs or matching skills supply to the workforce.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of Leavis's life and work, its intellectual lineage and his contemporary standing. Chapter 3 offers a schematic outline of Leavis's educational world-view, derived from his critical and discursive texts, in order to bring out the holistic nature of Leavis's social and educational thought and practice. The following Chaps. 4 and 5 take an in-depth look at Leavis's idea of the critical exchange which in my view represents his most enduring contribution to thinking about practice in teaching and learning in higher education. Chapter 6 explores

Leavis's heuristic thought about the future of higher education and 'the creative university'. Here I have largely side-stepped Leavis's battles in the culture wars during the 1960s and 1970s to focus on issues of wider and more contemporary interest. While Leavis rested his case largely on the strength of 'English' as he contended for it, it is not solely for those teaching and studying within 'English', whatever their ideological stance, that his abiding interest may lie. Chapter 7 offers a personal reflection on what it meant to me to be 'taught by' Leavis as a student of English in the 1970s. I should explain that after university I put English and Leavis to one side for many years to pursue a career as a professional in mental health. One day, as I was struggling to make sense of why many service users in severe distress felt oppressed, even betrayed by language, I was reminded, perhaps in desperation, of Leavis's description of language as 'our incomparable living ally'. 'If only', was my first thought. But I stopped in my tracks and this proved to be the start of a long journey towards appreciating what made him say that and why.

Chapter 2
Leavis: Life, Work and Heritage

2.1 Student, Nurse, Researcher (1914–1924)

Frank Raymond Leavis was born on 14 July 1895, the son of a relatively prosperous, respected and free-thinking (agnostic rationalist) Cambridge shopkeeper (the shop sold pianos and other musical instruments). Leavis attended the Perse School and had a happy and outwardly uneventful childhood. An accomplished athlete as a boy, he was nonetheless barred from competitive sports by his father on ethical grounds. When the First World War arrived Leavis was a first-year undergraduate of History at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Refusing active combat on grounds of conscience, he suspended studies and volunteered for the Friends Ambulance Unit where he was a nursing orderly on the ambulance trains in northern France (not a stretcher bearer as once popularly believed). Leavis's exposure to the conditions of technologised warfare proved decisive. It left him psychologically and physically traumatised, with what would be now be recognised as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including insomnia, digestive problems and a stammer. Leavis took up long distance running on his doctor's advice and acquired a reputation for physical prowess and a love of outdoor activities. On his return in 1919 at the age of 24 he had transferred to the recently created English Tripos—'fashioned in wartime and partly because of the war' (MacKillop 1995: 51). Tragedy struck a further blow when Leavis's beloved father was killed in a road traffic accident during his final examinations. He was awarded a first only after a behind-the-scenes acknowledgement of mitigating circumstances by his supervisor Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (known as 'Q'). Leavis registered for the then 'new' Ph.D. in English, receiving his doctorate in 1924 for a thesis on 'The relationship of journalism to literature: studied in the rise and earlier development of the press in England'. A further breakdown had been narrowly averted during his studies when his supervisor, evidently acting *in loco parentis*, had intervened to narrow the scope of what was an over-ambitious initial topic.

The remarkable rise of Cambridge English during this post-war period (Collini 1998), under the aegis of figures such as I. A. Richards, author of *Principles of literary*

criticism (1924), which marked the creation of a new school of practical criticism applying empirical psychology to investigate the states of mind induced by literature, was to some extent the effect of circumstance and serendipity, as Leavis later acknowledged: 'it was a favour of the gods that gave such a start to Cambridge English' (Leavis 1969: 15). In a very short time those involved at the start of Cambridge English had to discover the limits and potential of their role and develop ways of working with others. Lecturers and students had an opportunity to learn collaboratively, rather than be told, what to do. This became a standard for Leavis of how teaching, learning and academic practice at their best could be. It was also an omen when the experiment proved not to be scalable. As Leavis later reflected, 'the promise of the start was accidental; the hostility that killed the promise (in 1926, with the establishment of the Faculty) gives us the academic ethos we must count on, and the spirit that, miracles aside, will be strong in the use of the institutional machinery, of the influence and the power. …Here we have the attitude that… I assume to be the right one: a non-acceptance of defeat' (Leavis 1969: 21).

2.2   Teacher, Critic, Editor-Publisher (1925–1962)

Leavis launched himself into teaching at Cambridge in a spirit of energetic optimism. Following a period of freelancing, he was appointed to a probationary lectureship in 1927, largely owing to the personal intervention once more of 'Q'. Two years later he married Queenie Dorothy Roth, one of his former students, and they went on to have three children. She would also become his closest literary collaborator in a partnership that was personally and professionally mutually supportive and protective to a remarkable degree. From the start Leavis's championing of the modern met with hostility from institutional colleagues who regarded him as a rule-breaker, even corrupting. In 1925 word went round about his being a 'pornographer' after he applied unsuccessfully to the Home Office to import the then banned Joyce's *Ulysses* for study purposes (Leavis 1974: 97–99). The intervention of the British Home Secretary to persuade Cambridge to pull Leavis into line could easily have stopped the young academic's career dead in its tracks.

In 1932 Leavis was appointed director of studies at Downing College, although he was not to have a full-time, pensionable university post until his fifties. (Q. D. Leavis was never to receive official recognition from Cambridge for the teaching and supervision she conducted over many decades.) Blocked prospects, institutional discouragement, ostracism and the financial hardships arising from these were to become a cause of continuing bitterness for Leavis, leading to the later claim that he and his colleagues were Cambridge in spite of Cambridge (Leavis 1986: 222).

Also in 1932 Leavis joined the editorial board of the literary critical journal *Scrutiny* and became its guiding presence and voice. The quarterly was the brainchild of a group of postgraduate researchers centring on the Leavises' household, largely building on the 'literary sociology' of Q. D. Leavis's *Fiction and the reading public* (1932), a *succès d'estime* written up from her Ph.D. thesis. *Scrutiny*

ran for over 20 years, closing only when the Leavises reluctantly concluded that its nucleus of unpaid collaborators had been dispersed irrevocably as a result of the Second World War. During the 1930s *Scrutiny* was outspoken in its criticism of Marxism and Marxist fellow-travellers and of the class-insulated dilettantism of the Bloomsbury Group and this fierce independence from orthodoxy and unorthodoxy alike won it no friends in the educational and literary establishments, a number of whom nonetheless borrowed surreptitiously from it (see Watson 1977). The journal's readership extended well beyond numbers sold and it was particularly influential in the compulsory and adult education sectors and overseas (Mulhern 1979; Hilliard 2012). *Scrutiny* significantly provided Leavis with a route to publication and his contributions formed the basis of a number of influential literary critical books by him, among which were *New bearings in English poetry* (1932), *Revaluation* (1936), *The great tradition* (1948), *The common pursuit* (1952) and *D. H. Lawrence: novelist* (1955). Taken together these represented Leavis and *Scrutiny* at their apogee of influence and provided a radically revised chart of the literary canon based initially on isolating the innovative achievements of modern poetry. Later on Leavis, influenced by his wife's research interests, had placed greater emphasis on developments in prose fiction, relying less on traditional ideas of genre as on a hybrid, genre-spanning concept of 'the novel as dramatic poem'.

During the latter part of the Second World War, when debates about future social reconstruction were at their most intense, Leavis was keen to seize the moment and *Education and the university* (1943), first published as a series of articles in *Scrutiny*, was optimistic, bold and forward-looking. In this compact volume Leavis spent less time on arguing over philosophical fundamentals and more on outlining a raft of suggested practical changes to methods of teaching, learning and examination at undergraduate level. In its central chapter Leavis sketched out a surprisingly eclectic, wide-ranging interdisciplinary syllabus for English studies in which History and foreign literatures played a major part. He severely criticised the use of unseen end-of-course examinations, as a form of game-playing: 'That this is the way of working… the examiner and the supervisor know as well as the candidate. For the examiner the knowledge is depressing' (Leavis 1943: 50). At this time it was revolutionary (it perhaps still is) to argue that unseen examinations are not tests of intelligence but serve only a limited number of practical purposes such as the testing of memory, problem-solving skills and command of propositional knowledge (Entwistle & Entwistle 2003). Many of Leavis's alternative ideas for teaching and assessment (small group study, project work, book reviews) were novel at the time but are now much more widely accepted (Jarvis 1995). Leavis, however, was seldom satisfied at the way in which others subsequently put into practice these and similar ideas for student-centred and more autonomous methods of learning. As Bell (1988) comments, 'he spent the early part of his career wishing to "modernise" the study of literature and the latter part of it opposing the form of that modernisation when it occurred' (9).

The closure of *Scrutiny* in 1953 effectively removed the main vehicle for initial publication for Leavis although he continued to write for several other outlets. With the exception of the book on Lawrence in 1955, composed mostly of *Scrutiny*

essays, Leavis's major publications ceased for a period of a decade. Meanwhile, his academic responsibilities ranged over student recruitment and admissions, teaching and examining, research supervision and serving on Faculty committees.

2.3   Teacher, Prophet (1963–1978)

At about the time Leavis was due to retire from his Cambridge post in 1962 he had delivered a private lecture attacking cultural Philistinism in the shape of the 'sage and mastermind' C. P. Snow. Three years previously Snow's (1959) *The two cultures*, delivered as a Rede Lecture at Cambridge, propounded the thesis of two mutually uncomprehending cultures, the arts or humanities on the one hand and the sciences on the other (Snow clearly regarded the latter as the more socially and politically beneficent). Leavis was concerned about Snow's growing reputation outside as well as inside the academy, notably on sixth-form school students quoting Snow in their entrance exams, and he felt that some drastic revisionary criticism was called for. The lecture once published quickly polarised opinion and the ensuing controversy in Britain and the USA (Ortolano 2005), notably the accusation of unpardonable academic manners over the lampooning of Snow as novelist, was to dog Leavis for the rest of his career. The lecture did, however, give Leavis an entrée to a much wider audience and he proceeded to direct its attention in a series of addresses, lectures and publications to what he saw as 'lethal developments' in higher education; these included university expansion for its own sake, the prioritisation of social sciences over English in humanities funding, the teaching-research divide (dismissed as a cliché), and the potential for collusive alliances between academics and student politicians advocating for 'participation'.

The student unrest of the 1960s distressed Leavis who was unable to see past what struck him as wanton vandalism: for him the 'student-intellectuals' were buying all too confidently into the assumptions of the hierarchies they opposed (Leavis 1972: 163–198). New generations of students often failed to appreciate just how radical an educator Leavis had been. He was once taken to task by a student in a lecture theatre at this time for, by his own account, 'my declining to take up the subject of the suffering Mexican peasant when my explicit subject for the short hour was the university in industrial England' (Leavis 1972: 166). The irony is that Leavis was no stranger to what are now called multi-culturalism and post-colonialism or to Mexican peasants. In the 1930s, in *Culture and environment* (Leavis & Thompson 1933) he had recommended Stuart Chase's *Mexico* (1931), about changing social conditions among the Mexican peasantry, for close study in sixth forms.

Downing English had proved very popular and successful with students down the years, much to the annoyance of Faculty colleagues who accused Leavis of creating a fifth column. The failure to secure the future of his fiercely defended approach to teaching at Downing following his retirement created a rift between him and members of the remaining team and led him eventually to resign his fellowship with the College. The offer of a chair at the University of York in 1966 provided Leavis with an opportunity to pursue his teaching, research and writing

interests in what proved to be a congenial and lasting partnership at a new (in both senses) university.

Increasingly isolated as 'the heretic who … survived' (Leavis 1974: 87), Leavis distanced himself from potential allies on the Left and in the burgeoning field of Cultural Studies (Inglis 1993), preferring the intellectual corroboration he found in the margins of philosophy (R.G. Collingwood, Michael Polanyi, Marjorie Grene), and taking up the cudgels with 'Wittgensteinians', 'linguisticians' and a number of cultural targets which included the BBC, the Arts Council and metropolitan literary journalism, all of the latter regarded as having succumbed to the levelling-down effects of mass culture.

A certain narrowing of interest was reflected in a prose style of increasing self-reference or, alternatively, self-reflexivity (see Chap. 7). At the same time, a corresponding depth of concentration allowed Leavis to revisit authors such as Dickens (Leavis & Leavis 1970), Eliot (in Leavis 1975) and Lawrence (Leavis 1976) in books which carried an urgent, more prophetic tone. Important statements of his position on higher education and other socio-cultural issues appeared in *English literature in our time and the university* (1969) and *Nor shall my sword* (1972). If Leavis was sometimes ploughing old furrows in this period he sowed the seeds of some novel philosophical investigations into the nature of language and human creativity. He continued to resist assimilation of his views to philosophy, however, and regarded his stance as 'anti-philosophical', even as he resorted to philosophical *bricolage* to express them, coining terms such as *Ahnung* and 'nisus' derived from Collingwood and other sources to describe the dynamics of creativity. Throughout this period Leavis was still teaching, corresponding prolifically, and issuing a steady stream of new and recycled literary and social criticism. Characteristically Leavis stopped teaching in 1977 not because he had run out of things to say but only because he lacked the physical means as a result of a debilitating aphasia (see Layram 2011: 10 March 1977) to say them.

Leavis collected a number of honorary doctorates and was made a Companion of Honour in early 1978. A few months later he died in Cambridge. Q. D. Leavis died in 1981.

2.4 Intellectual Affinities

Where does Leavis sit in the history of thought about higher education in Britain? Leavis located himself as a social and educational thinker in an English tradition running from Coleridge through Newman, Arnold and Ruskin to what was then the present in Lawrence and Eliot. In this genealogy Arnold has a central role (Leavis 1982: 53–64). Arnold's *Culture and anarchy* (1869) was the classic mid-Victorian statement putting the case for 'high' culture in an age of commerce and waning religious faith. Leavis's *Mass civilization and minority culture* (1930) and *Culture and environment* (Leavis & Thompson 1933) had offered to update and extend Arnold's critique of cultural Philistinism by stressing a number of unprecedented developments of the machine age: levelling-down, substitute living and the

debasement of culture—all of which were linked to the encroachment of instrumental reason on all aspects of life through the complex of assumptions, beliefs and behaviours Leavis would call 'technologico-Benthamism' (Leavis 1972: 111). This mind-set does not 'admit any other kind of consideration, any more adequate recognition of human nature and human need into the incitement and direction of our thinking and effort [than] technological and material advance' (Leavis 1972: 78).

This critique underpinned his ferocious attack on Snow and his opposition to the Robbins Report on Higher Education (1963) on the grounds that both prioritised the sciences as an engine of economic growth while side-lining the humanities. Leavis derided the Report's espoused aim of higher education as 'the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship' (Robbins 1963: 7) as window-dressing and he regarded his later social discourse, from the 1960s on, as a kind of 'higher pamphleteering' against this and related developments, in the tradition of Arnold and Ruskin (MacKillop 1995: 375). This intellectual lineage is the one in which the majority of his critics in Britain—for example, Bell (1988), Robinson (2001) and Storer (2009)—situate Leavis as educator and cultural critic, in which he may be viewed with equal justification as an exponent of 'anxious conservatism' (Scruton 1985: 118), 'radical earnestness' (Inglis 1982) or a hybrid of the two in 'English prophecy' (Robinson 2001).

2.5   Ortega y Gasset: Leavis's Distant Cousin

What of other, more distant connections? The European educator and cultural critic who is, in my mind, closest to Leavis is the practically contemporaneous Spaniard Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955). Ortega is perhaps best known in Anglophone countries for texts such as *The revolt of the masses* (La rebelión de las masas) and *Mission of the university* (Misión de la universidad), both published in Spain in 1930 (Ortega y Gasset 1930a, b) and widely translated, the latter of which states the case for an elitist modern version of education at perhaps its most radical, intelligent and humane. The commonality with Ortega did not escape Leavis's attention. Whereas other critics of cultural crisis and decline, such as Spengler, vanish from Leavis's writing after the 1930s, Ortega is being cited by Leavis in an epigraph in his final book *Thought, words and creativity* (1975: 7). Ortega was a reformist who opposed revolutionary action and both right- and left-wing authoritarianism, as did Leavis during the 1930s. Both, ironically, would attract the label 'reactionary'. Ortega's disdain for 'mass man' caused him to loathe collectivism and to espouse the individual above all as change agent. Leavis, who had established his political credentials by engaging with Marxian theories of bourgeois rationality (Horkheimer 1993), also firmly resisted any hint of assimilation to 'collectivist ideologies' (Leavis 1972: 41), holding to the view that 'Psychology is individual psychology and is still that in its dealings with individuals in mutual relation' (Leavis 1972: 17).

Ortega's was a strong conception of university reform which, like Leavis's, focused significantly on mission and purpose: 'the root of university reform is a complete formulation of its purpose. Any alteration, or touching up, or adjustment

about this house of ours, unless it starts by reviewing the problem of its mission—clearly, decisively, truthfully—will be love's labours lost' (Ortega 1930b: 27–28). Leavis was equally concerned with what he called '"the essential university-function"—a phrase and a purposive conception that, with the new, the unprecedented, human crisis in view, I suppose myself to have originated' (Leavis 1982: 179) (See Chap. 6).

In pursuit of their respective conceptions of the university Leavis and Ortega were propelled in different ways to collaborative projects. Yet both found compromise with other people difficult because of the sheer strength of their personalities and convictions (Harding 1984)—for Leavis, creative strength depended on a certain level of 'intransigence' (Leavis 1982: 40). Perhaps on account of this both struggled in compensatory ways with an ideal of creative collaboration, the paradox being that for Leavis the further this ideal receded from reality the more articulately expressed its groundings became. Ortega insisted that we perceive reality only from the perspective of our own lives, 'perspectivism' (Ilundáin-Agurruza 2013), although this does not result in solipsism: non-egotistic, non-relativistic truth is attained by the sum of perspectives of all lives. Leavis too dwelled on the agon of personality and impersonality (Bell 2007) although his deliberations and convictions were seldom as dark as those of Ortega: 'We recognise "egoism" and "egotism" at once as pejorative terms but the phrase "*le moi haïssable*" [Pascal's 'detestable self'] intimates that the state of having an individual identity is a state of balance between pejorative possibilities' (Leavis 1986: 296).

2.6 Leavis Studies

By the 1970s Leavis's influence if not reputation had begun to wane, as the arrival of 'theory' challenged 'criticism' in English and Cultural Studies and as university expansion brought more and more diverse critical voices into the arena. In this changed environment Leavis's concern with value judgment and a carefully restricted canon, together with an avowed anti-Marxist stance, looked *passé*, prompting the Marxist critic Terry Eagleton (1996: 27) to remind students of English that they were 'card-carrying' Leavisites whether they knew it or not. Francis Mulhern's *The moment of 'Scrutiny'* (1979), appearing the year after Leavis's death, had already provided what remains a definitive account of the journal, written from a Marxist perspective. An important milestone in the revaluation of Leavis came not from politics, however, but from the confluence of philosophy and literature. Michael Bell's *F. R. Leavis* (1988) made a compelling case for a parallel between Leavis's conception of language and that of Heidegger. The next year a comprehensive bibliography by Baker et al. (1989) of both the Leavises' writings appeared. Gary Day's *Re-reading Leavis* (1996) interrogated Leavis through the lens of post-structuralism and vice versa to uncover some unlikely similarities and differences, not all to Leavis's disadvantage. Books by Samson (1992) and McCallum (1983) stressed contradictory elements of Leavis's thinking. A staunch defence of Leavis's critical values against 'theory' came from

an unlikely quarter in Film Studies, in Robin Woods' *Hitchcock's films revisited* (1989). The centenary of Leavis's birth in 1995 saw several publications of a historical or biographical nature (see Chap. 7). Latterly there has been a revival of interest in Leavis's literary criticism, notably in its historical, modernist underpinnings, for example in Richard Storer's *F. R. Leavis* (2009).

As a thinker on social and educational issues, Leavis suffered a more immediate posthumous decline in interest and recovery has been more gradual, for example with Guy Ortolano's *The two cultures controversy* (2009), Christopher Hilliard's *English as a vocation* (2012) and the critical re-issue of Leavis's (2013) *Two Cultures?*. While theorists and critics of higher education continue to use Leavis as a historical reference point, few have dwelt at length on his educational ideas; works by Maskell & Robinson (2001) and Storer (2009) are notable exceptions. Meanwhile, Leavis's work continues to attract the interest of philosophers (Scruton 2000; Moyal-Sharrock 2013; Harrison 2014).

Much Leavis archival material is dispersed among universities in the UK and the USA. Despite growing availability of primary documents, however, there is a considerable amount about Leavis that we do not know. Leavis was a prolific letter writer, and only a fraction of his correspondence has been collected and published (Leavis 1974). Some of this is in university archives such as at Reading and York but much remains in private hands. Ian MacKillop's (1995) unauthorised biography *F. R. Leavis: a life in criticism* provides the first extensive, scholarly account, superseding Ronald Hayman's *Leavis* (1976), but it omits some episodes in the life and seems in part to have been written, however understandably, to spare the sensitivities of the living; what must have been the full complexity of the man somehow eludes the biographer. Leavis awaits his Ray Monk whose *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the duty of genius* (Monk 1991)—a distinctly Leavisian sub-title— provides a model of scholarship and vitality *vis-à-vis* a multifaceted and challenging personality that one would wish to see being brought to bear on Leavis. Memoirs and recollections of Leavis meanwhile continue to appear in posthumous papers, journalism, essays and social media (see Chap. 7).

For a number of decades the University of York has administered the Leavis Fund for undergraduates, postgraduates and academic staff to support their research and in 2013 the University's Langwith College inaugurated its Leavis Room for students. Downing College, Cambridge, followed with its own Leavis Room in 2015. Since 2013 there has been a UK-based Leavis Society (*leavissociety.com*), independent of the Leavis Estate, with representatives in the USA, Canada, India and China. The Society organises international conferences and gatherings of scholars and provides online information and resources about F. R. and Q. D. Leavis. In China in recent years there has been much interest in Leavis and the Cambridge English School among doctoral and post-doctoral researchers; remarkably, Leavis's early cultural criticism was translated into Chinese as far back as the early 1930s (Cao 2013).

Several key critical texts by Leavis have since been re-issued under the imprint of Faber and Faber, an irony that would have amused Leavis and his long-standing 'opposition in person' T.S. Eliot who as editor-director at Faber declined to print

the one publication he had commissioned from Leavis. The entirety of *Scrutiny* is now freely available online at *unz.org/Pub/Scrutiny* and a bibliography of Leavis's primary publications and selected secondary literature can be found at *leavissociety. com/bibliography*.

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Chapter 3
Leavis's Educational World-View

3.1 A Systemic Perspective on Leavis

This chapter summarises Leavis's educational world-view or *Weltanschauung* using a framework based on the following, to a degree overlapping, categories:

- the living principle
- the living individual
- the living purpose—the university as creative centre of civilisation.

Leavis's thought is remarkably consistent over the years; there were no major conceptual 'turns'. While its expression and content change somewhat as Leavis adapts to new situations and new intellectual bearings, and there are shifting emphases, these tend to enlarge on rather than alter his basic premises and represent his attempt to get a firmer grip on fundamentals. While I have tried where possible to paraphrase Leavis this is not how he ever presents the totality of his ideas; as discussed in Chap. 6, there are disadvantages to recontextualising Leavis's thought by detaching it from its nutrient sources in the imaginative texts that largely give rise to it (another later source is Leavis's engagement with the post-critical philosophy of Polanyi (1959) and the logic of scientific discovery). That said, many will be unfamiliar with these originals and even for some who are a framework such as proposed here (see Box 3.1) may offer initial bearings; I have therefore also excluded some arcane terminology that Leavis introduces into his later writing. The framework adopted here embodies an overall constructivist and systemic approach to learning and development, drawing on creativity research (Csikszentmihalyi 2001), which I believe sits well with, or at least does less violence to, Leavis's thought.

'Creativity' and its cognates appear with what may seem like a disconcerting frequency. Leavis connects this word to several critical and educational concerns: the conditions favouring individual human development, growth and fulfilment; human relationships and sexuality; the nature of language; notions of intelligence

and rationality; the critique of instrumental reason; the function and purpose of the university; educational methods and standards; and the idea of the educated public. For Leavis, 'creativity' was one of his selected 'focal' words, like 'life', and 'responsibility'. A focal word, for Leavis, is not a pre-applied definition but a form of criterion implicit in and generated by one's engagement with the object which acquires a more precise meaning in each new context. Hence Leavis's use of 'creativity' was as much about his attempt to discover and articulate afresh what he really meant by this word. In his defence, Leavis himself acknowledged the dilemma when he stated that 'I felt that I had overworked ('creative')… But… to avoid a frequent use of the word was impossible' (Leavis 1969: 52).

Dates in brackets throughout refer unless otherwise indicated to publications by Leavis.

Box 3.1 Leavis's educational world-view

The living principle

- Reality is a collaborative creation.
- A major instance of this collaborative creation is language.
- The more creative use of language develops our thought about life.
- 'Life' *is* a necessary word.
- Nothing is important but life.

The living person

- Life and creativity are 'there' only in individual, living beings.
- Creativity derives from and strengthens our attachment to life.
- All individuals seek creative fulfilment.
- Creativity exists along a continuum from the 'ordinary' and 'everyday' to that of the creative artist.
- Creativity involves important responsibilities to self, others and 'life'.
- Creativity can be thwarted and disordered.

The living purpose—the university as creative centre of civilisation

- Creativity finds itself under increasing threat on a number of fronts.
- The university—and university 'English'—have a key part to play in resisting these threats.
- The university should aim to be a concentrated centre of creative collaboration.

3.2   The Living Principle

Reality is a collaborative creation. Reality, as we humanly experience it, is an organic whole, not a mechanical assembly of parts. Objective reality is a construct that is incurably anthropocentric: 'Pure reality *an sich*—reality not humanly created —is beyond our experience' (1986: 296). This silent nod to Kantian metaphysics, the tradition of *Verstehen* (sympathetic understanding) (see Chap. 6), and possibly also Weberian sociology, is intentional. Reality is humanly created and science offers but one perspective on reality. The achievements of science, moreover, depend on a basic and comprehensive type of collaboration which arises from this humanly created reality: 'there is a prior human achievement of collaborative creation, a more basic work of the mind of man (and more than the mind), one without which the triumphant erection of the scientific edifice would not have been possible: that is, the creation of the human world, including language' (1972: 61). Claims by positivist science to adjudicate on which disciplines provide the best, indeed only, knowledge of reality are hubristic: 'the human "common world" has always been, very humanly, more inclusive than the objective world of science…. objectivity in the scientific sense is a late and sophisticated derivative of the creativity that has built up the human world by creating language' (1986: 296). Humanly created reality is a sign of 'the living principle', 'the creative and unifying principle of life' which 'will affect every patch of the total field of work' (1972: 119).

A major instance of this collaborative creation is language. Language is heuristic and always in a process of development and change. It is much more than a means of expression or communication: 'A product of collaborative creativity, it makes continued and advancing collaborative thought possible—and it will hardly be forgotten that such collaboration entails, vitally and essentially, disagreements. Finality is unattainable' (1975: 49).

The creative use of language develops our thought about life. 'There could be no developed thought of the most important kind without language' (1976: 20). Creative use of language is a reflection and outcome of 'life' and is authentic and valuable insofar as it describes the world of social relationships and/or communicates to the reader or listener the inner experience of individuals in their quest for meaning, identity and fulfilment. The greatest creative writers possess a 'marked moral intensity' and promote 'awareness of the possibilities of life' (1948: 10).

'Life' is a necessary word. 'Life' is a term that gestures towards the holistic nature of reality: 'Life, it may be commented, is a large term—too large to be of much use… Actually, of course, it is a term we cannot do without' (1986: 116); 'to try and define it would be futile' (1986: 281).

Nothing is important but life. This phrase, which Leavis takes over from Lawrence, is what he calls a 'complex or telescoping proposition' (1976: 27–28) that acquires precision and particular shades of meaning according to context. We may speculate about the origins and ultimate meaning of life, but whatever processes, entities or final causes we arrive at through empirical research or metaphysical thought, 'life' is a *ne plus ultra* beyond which we cannot push,

conceptually or experientially (1975: 19–69). Efforts to conceive of a transcendent reality other than in terms of life and living present us with a non-conception (1975: 155–264).

3.3 The Living Person

Life and creativity are 'there' only in individual, living beings. 'Life is not a force like electricity: it is in the concrete actuality always an individual, and if treated as if it could be made general, ceases to be there' (1976: 26). This does not invalidate the use of the generic category of 'the individual' (1975: 40–41). But life is only 'there', available to knowledge and experience, in its individual instantiations. The use of the spatial analogy 'there' points to the ontological status of 'life' as simultaneously independent of the knower yet arising from a process of continuing collaboration, including with the past and the future. Our understanding of life exists in what Leavis calls 'the Third Realm' (1972: 41 et seq.), a mode of existence that transcends the categories of 'either/or', such as the merely private or the public (1975: 19–69). Language can gesture towards but never wholly encapsulate the Third Realm because language is itself a prime exemplar of this realm. We can meditate, at least linguistically, on the Third Realm only from within language itself; this fact requires us to overcome reductive 'common sense' or any epistemology that would seek to escape from this paradox (1986: 294).

Creativity involves important responsibilities to self, others and 'life'. The individual is a focus of creative responsibility: any exaltation of creative life or genius is 'inseparable from an acceptance of responsibility' (1975: 18–19). The responsibilities falling us as creative individuals engaged in critical thinking, reflection and discussion are three-fold:

- *cognitive*, to report in a coherent way on what we really think and feel, even when we are seeking to be articulate about our confusions and uncertainties. We cannot take over someone else's thought and claim this as our own. Whenever this happens, we cease to derive any real satisfaction *as thinkers* (1975: 19–69);
- *emotional*, to be sincere and honest with ourselves and others about what we really feel, and to be on the look-out for false and easy sentiment, emotional self-indulgence and self-deception (1975: 125–134); and
- *ethical*, to explore imaginatively and rigorously what we *ought* to think, feel and do. Works of imaginative literature function as pre-eminently educative and moral (not moralistic) instruments. This is the reverse of any claim that they present us with a code of conduct or force acceptance on us of pre-determined answers to moral dilemmas (1967: 14–15). Imaginative art at its most powerful and challenging may 'work a revolutionary change in [our] sensibility' (1952: 228).

A key challenge for criticism is not to seek philosophically demonstrable probity in terms of the precision to be reached but how to progress beyond the individual

response so that partners to a discussion can 'meet in a meaning' that can be profitably shared with others (1986: 285–297). In furthering our understanding of and participation in this type of 'meeting'—another instance of the Third Realm— the emphasis falls on the general principle rather than the universal rule. Pedagogy develops various structured situations that facilitate our meeting in a meaning (1943: 33–65).

Commitment to ongoing dialogue and refinement of judgment is represented schematically by a form of critical exchange that consists of 'This is so, isn't it?', a question which expects to elicit at most the response 'Yes, but—' (1969: 47). This formula is the opening gambit in a pedagogic strategy designed to foster co-participants' developing sense of personal discovery and conviction *vis-à-vis* the object of attention, as distinct from an approach that requires the other person merely to find something (intelligible, intuitive, theoretical) to say about it (see Chaps. 4 and 5).

Creativity derives from and strengthens our attachment to life. Creativity is at once a major manifestation of, and approach to, 'life'. Every individual is born into an already-created 'world'. From birth we actively learn to make sense of this world, and of our developing selves within it, through the interaction and inter-dependence of self, other(s) and environment: 'Mother and child already form a society' (Buytendijk, cited in 1975: 34). No one individual can create life, the human world or language. Each contributor to creativity builds on prior human achievements, discovering problems, challenges, clues and potential solutions through the steady accumulation and testing of a common inheritance: 'living is both re-creative and creative' (1975: 34, 36) (see Chap. 5). Thought which offers to marginalise or deny human creativity is self-contradictory and disordered, 'a defeat of intelligence' (1976: 18).

All individuals seek creative fulfilment. Humans intuitively aim for a 'spontaneous-creative fullness of being'. Creativity is an impulse latent in all that seeks various outlets: physical, interpersonal, social, cultural and spiritual. The main creative vehicle for social and cultural reproduction is language. Individuals may be helped or hindered towards developing their creative potential by the interplay of several factors: genetic inheritance, individual psychology, upbringing and education, culture and environment (1930, 1972, 1975).

In their search for creative self-actualisation, individuals have a certain auton-omy of the spirit that transcends material or political considerations. The goals that motivate us cannot be reduced to materialist philosophies; these provide a reductive account of human creativity and human need. While the claims of Marxism need to be examined with respect, the search for truth lies above the adherence to orthodoxy and ideology (1968: 317). Insofar as any political programme promotes the goal of increased industrialisation it accelerates the socially destructive processes initiated by capitalism. Marxist utopianism, and the utilitarian 'progress' upon which it is predicated, are the flip side of capitalism's coin: they present us with an unsatis-fying future that 'looks vacuous, Wellesian and bourgeois' (1986: 52).

Creativity exists along a continuum from the 'ordinary' and 'everyday' to that of genius. 'There is a continuity from the inevitable everyday creativeness of the

ordinary individual life to the creativeness of the artist' (in Coveney 1967: 16). The creativity of the major artist and scientist alike are not anomalous but representative: 'Not only is creativity concentrated in them, so that they represent supremely the distinguishing characteristic of life, but in the exercise of their genius they are dependent on collaborative creative human continuity' (1975: 213). The moral of the creatively exceptional is that it is at the same time representative (1975: 49).

Creativity can become blocked and disordered. The existence of creativity can provoke a number of negative responses, including hubristic pride, self-abnegation and sentimentality (in Coveney 1967: 18). The most destructive response is envy. Envy is the angry feeling aroused when someone else has and enjoys something desirable; the envious response is to take it away or spoil it. (Leavis draws here on the work of the post-Freudian Ian Suttie whose book *The origins of love and hate* (1935) Leavis recommended (1943) as student reading). Envy is one of the main motives behind the egalitarian drive of mass higher education that strips away 'privilege': what everyone cannot have, no one shall have. Envy ultimately arises in the psyche from the egotistical 'selfhood' as incarnated for Leavis in Blake's mythic (male) persona of Urizen, emblem of oppressive rationality and law and suppressor of spontaneous energy—although, as Leavis argues in a discussion of Dickens' novels, Urizen's progeny and recruits are not male-only (in Leavis & Leavis 1970: 282 et seq.).

3.4 The Living Purpose—the University as Creative Centre of Civilisation

Creativity finds itself under increasing threat on a number of fronts:

- *epistemologically*, through the encroachment of instrumental reason on all aspects of life by the complex of assumptions, beliefs and behaviours dubbed technologico-Benthamism (1969: 111) (see Chap. 2);
- *ontologically*, through a set of political and economic arrangements predicated on dehumanising labour and a mass culture characterised by standardisation, levelling down and promotion of substitute living (in Leavis & Thompson, 1933: 29–103), all of which diminish our capacities for 'spontaneous-creative fullness of being' (see Chap. 2); and
- *sociologically*, through the systematic erosion of the main bulwark we have against the above developments, namely an influential and educated public (1972: 201–228) (see Chap. 6).

The critique of instrumental reason commits us to the idea of higher education as a locus of critical and spiritual self-awareness on behalf of the wider society. The task of defending, maintaining and renewing cultural tradition now devolves to a non-partisan minority willing and able to resist civilisation's trends and pressures.

Culture is the accumulated expression of wisdom and emotional truth, as contained for example in the record of its literature, visual arts, music, folk arts and so on. Literature, however, has a unique capacity to interpret technologico-Benthamite civilisation back to itself. Our civilisation urgently needs such interpreting because it is increasingly beset by a state of amnesia brought on by an obsession with scientific progress and the perpetual present, commercial profit and the positivist erasure of human subjectivity. (Minority) culture and (mass) civilisation enshrine opposing sets of values. Culture is the potential remedy to civilisation's malaise because it has the power to keep us, or put us back, in touch with the 'lost intelligence, memory and moral purpose' (1943: 23). It affirms life as active creation rather than reactive representation or repetitive reproduction of the past. But it is a potentiality, no more. 'High' culture is (or was) a tenable solution only insofar as it commands respect beyond its borders.

Social institutions (including universities) are chronically beset by 'blankness' (1982: 175). 'Blankness' is characterised by distancing, blaming and reality avoidance. This avoidance is effected, not through direct coercion or censorship, at least not in the 'tight little island' of Britain, but through the operation of 'a comprehensive system of personal relations, the members of which… know they "belong", and observe a corresponding code' (1972: 70).

The university—and university 'English'—have a key part to play in resisting these threats. Contemporary civilisation has lost its bearings, being unable to distinguish ends from means (1943: 23). The liberal education as defined by Arnold, Newman and others, however, is inadequate to present-day circumstances, given the increasing specialisation of the disciplines. A corresponding new conception of the function of the university, as predicated on provisionality in the present, openness to the future and a continuity and connectedness with the past, needs to be asserted. This new conception is not based on a mythic ideal of the university or of the hope of attaining a predetermined future goal but is the answer to humanity's desperately felt need—'the need that is the product of advanced industrial civilization. There is no other answer; only in the university can the needed new function [for the educated public] develop its organ' (1969: 30–31).

'English' has a crucial part to play in this new idea of the university, not least because the anti-creative assumptions and beliefs of technologico-Benthamism are laid bare by and diagnosable in its language (see Chap. 6). The kind of specific training in intelligence and sensibility that the study of university English involves enables it to carry out this diagnostic task. The study of creative literature in institutions of higher education should therefore involve close analysis of contemporary use of language (including in political discourse and mass media) and be directed by a strongly creative purpose. Students should not be left to flounder or be given 'monstrously unrealistic' reading lists and syllabuses that betray a lack of a coherent idea of what a purposeful study of literature is (1969: 168–9).

Elites are an ineradicable aspect of life (1972: 201–228). But it is a tenet of modern, progressive education that elites must be sedulously abolished, as standing in the way of the goal of equality of opportunity. The educated public is not to be equated with the dominant class or any kind of ruling elite (1943). To all intents and

purposes this kind of public is now eradicated. The absence of its critical influence
—whether as driver or restrainer—is everywhere apparent in contemporary society.
If reconstituted, however, it might yet exercise an influence and power incom-
mensurate with its size, including acting as a force to be reckoned with by society's
actual 'elites'.

The university should aim to be a concentrated centre of collaborative creation.
The university demands an innovative, more student-centred approach to teaching,
learning and research (1943). The educated elite it has the potential to produce can
help form the vital nucleus of the now disintegrated educated public and help to
resist the 'blind drive onward of material and mechanical development' (1943: 16).
Higher education cannot afford to ignore wider economic realities, especially as
governments face the problem of conflicting economic objectives. If English is to
fulfil its role as constitutive of the educated public theses about its value, based on
nationalistic assumptions and beliefs and on narrowly interpreted economic
imperatives alike, need to be revisited. The 'real' university is a possibility only. To
be realised, certain conditions are required, including: a creative vision and con-
ception, intelligence, political will, energy, and the ability to exploit luck and
happenstance (1982: 175). The posited new 'essential university-function' is likely
to be the creation of a minority able to exploit the above conditions, working both
inside the system and often in spite of it. The envisaged new function is likely to be
greeted by much 'hostility or blankness from the institutional university' (1982:
171-185).

3.5 A Strong Present Sense

It is important to recognise that in the foregoing synopsis of mine Leavis is not to be
regarded as proposing a vitalist philosophy, or indeed any philosophy, although
there are clearly philosophical bearings in it and philosophical directions in which
Leavis's ideas might be taken. Leavis's notions of the Human World and the Third
Realm, for example, bear a close relation to Husserl's *Lebenswelt* or lifeworld, the
world as created, lived and experienced by human beings and which subsumes the
world as registered and manipulated by positivist science (O'Hear 1988). As an
educator Leavis is not so naïve as to disavow having an epistemology but he draws
clear limits to how far an educator need go in calling on one to elucidate the
pragmatics of his or her stance. As Leavis tried to explain to a co-participant in a
discussion about Newman's *Idea of a university* who had gathered on the basis of
his contribution that Leavis was 'a vitalist' (1969: 54, emphasis added):

> No thought of any philosophy or intellectual system, of course, had been in my mind; I
> merely meant to evoke in my hearers *a strong present sense* of what they of course knew,
> and to insist on its crucial relevance. But did they know it? Do people know it? They do and
> they don't.

A modest disclaimer perhaps, but for Leavis part of his mission as cultural critic and educator was to bring forth the recognition of what people already know: this is itself a re-creative process. I was about to say '*in his view* this is' but this is 'of course' another case of what we do and don't know: perception and recognition *are* creative and re-creative and we may very easily overlook this (see the discussion of Archer and Leavis in Chap. 5). Hence the centrality for Leavis (discussed in later chapters) of a method of ostensive practice, showing us not what we ought to have seen and known, had we the critic's privileged knowledge and techniques at our disposal, but what is 'there', not by wilful assertion but by 'evok[ing] a strong present sense'. Another aspect of this mission was drawing attention to those habits of mind and expectations which are simply ways of avoiding or pre-empting what we already know, in this case by 'placing' what Leavis is saying by attaching a philosophical label to it and assuming its meaning has been securely grasped. In either case, the critic and educator's task becomes one of seeking to vindicate the recognitions at stake in attending to the creative object or experience.

Having expounded what I think are the guiding principles and premises in Leavis's thought, in the chapters following I look at some of implications and criticisms of Leavis's ideas in relation to pedagogy and higher education. Chapters 4 and 5 look at the argument that Leavis's thinking betrays an empty metaphysic, avoiding declaring its epistemological assumptions. These two chapters also take a sustained look at the implications for pedagogy of the claims centring on 'the living person'. The latter part of the framework 'the living purpose' is addressed mostly in Chap. 6 which also examines the issue of disciplinarity and the claims made by Leavis on behalf of 'English'.

One further word on 'creative'. In applying the word 'creative' to contemporary discourse we need to exercise caution against gliding automatically from one sense of 'creative' to another (Williams 1976). The student fashion designer in the creative industries may be engaged in a different kind of creative project to that of the experimental physicist, the information technologist or the nursing student. More importantly, universities have ceased to have the monopoly on knowledge creation and there are nowadays any number of alternative and competing sites for pursuing diverse forms of knowledge production (Gibbons et al. 1994).

I return to a critical exploration of Leavis's premises about 'the creative university' in Chap. 6. In the following two chapters 1 look not at the at times anxious overall thesis about the fate of creativity but at the more poised and positive core of Leavis's educational thought and practice, his notion of the critical exchange. This represents Leavis at perhaps his most engaging as an educator. Here Leavis has something uniquely valuable to say to the fashion designer, physicist, information technologist and nursing student, among others.

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Chapter 4
Leavis and Pedagogy: Critical 'Theory'

4.1 Leavis's Paradigm of Critical Exchange

> A critical judgment has the form, 'This is so, isn't it?' […] though my judgment asks to be confirmed and appeals for agreement that the thing is so; the response I expect at best will be of the form, 'Yes, but—'.

Ever since its definitive formulation excerpted above (Leavis 1969: 47), Leavis's paradigm of the critical judgment (or exchange) has signally gained the attention of many of his expositors. Robinson (1973) sees it as underlining a general truth about the nature of language and 'its relation to the individual's critical activity by which we live' (235). Strickland (1981: 157) regards it as an example of the critic responsibly pursuing truth claims about the real world, a project which he sees structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers as having misguidedly abandoned. As a contribution to ideas about higher education, Barnett (1990) sees the formula 'This is so, isn't it?' as 'an essentially open conception of truth, in which truth claims are invested with personal meaning, commitment and judgment' (58-9). Matthews (2004) argues that Leavis's procedure in the paradigm is determined by 'the conviction that "we" *shall* get further by argument, rather than by acceding either to convention, orthodoxy or absolute truth' (60, emphasis in original).

During and after his lifetime the paradigm became a byword for Leavis's approach to teaching. Bradbrook (1984) half-mockingly characterised it as 'the language of *Scrutiny*' (40) and the 'Yes, but—' formula was frequently used as a strap-line in contemporaneous reviews of Leavis (see Watson 1977). Latterly, philosophical dimensions of the paradigm have been pursued by critics (Joyce 2009; Gorodeisky 2014). Kramer (2011) also draws attention to the paradigm's emphasis on literary value judgments attained through dialogue: 'the interpretation is an individual one and a trans-individual one; the individual interpretation is preserved and superseded in the collective one' (104).

Because the paradigm is often lifted out of context, it is worth looking at this to see what Leavis is saying, and as importantly not saying. Leavis expressed the paradigm

in varying degrees of detail throughout his career; the fullest exposition of it occurs in one of the Clark Lectures given at Cambridge in 1967 and is printed in *English literature in our time and the university* (1969). In the lecture Leavis sets out to characterise the nature of standards in English studies; he is keen to avoid any misconception that these are susceptible to metrics as conventionally understood: where English is concerned, 'No one, then, who knows what standards are and what is the nature of critical authority could talk of "fixed standards" or of "providing them with a legal backing"' (Leavis 1969: 47). The paradigm is then introduced (Leavis 1969: 47) to exemplify the critical or pedagogic process by which individual value judgments are developed and form the basis of standards rather than being derived from them.

> Essentially, as I've said before (I suppose) in a good many places but the point has to be made and much hangs on it, a critical judgment has the form, 'This is so, isn't it?'. And the concurrence appealed to must be real, or it serves no critical purpose, and, if he suspects insincerity or mere politeness, can bring no satisfaction to the critic as critic. What, of its very nature, the critical activity aims at, in fact, is an exchange, a collaborative exchange, a corrective and creative interplay of judgments. For though my judgment asks to be confirmed and appeals for agreement that the thing is so; the response I expect at best will be of the form, 'Yes, but—', the 'but' standing for qualifications, corrections, shifts of emphasis, additions, refinements. The process of personal judgment from its very outset, of course, is in subtle ways essentially collaborative, as my thinking is—as any use of the language in which one thinks and expresses one's thoughts must be. But the functioning of criticism demands a fully overt kind of collaboration.

The paradigm may be seen to have three main components: personal judgment; critical activity; and the functioning of criticism. These form successive stages of widening reference, from personal to inter- or trans-personal to public and institutional. For Leavis, the function of criticism is of necessity an inclusive concept, encompassing more than the critical act. Critical pedagogy is a matter of increasing intellectual and social initiation into a collaborative community, the emphasis falling on the continuity in transitions between individual (student), collaborative interplay and community this creates and sustains. Elaborating on the synthesis of these last three constituents, Leavis explained (1972: 207) a few years after the lecture in question was delivered that:

> A university that is really one […] will make it possible for the student (who won't be just a 'student') to feel he belongs to a complex collaborative community in which there are his own special human contexts to be found, and will make him, in his work and the informal human intercourse that supplements it and gives it life, more and more potently aware of the nature of high intellectual standards.

One of the widely accepted functions of higher education is to stretch its participants, in terms of their pursuit of academic rigour, standards of performance and intellectual integrity and development of autonomous critical capacities. Indeed, it is argued that a distinguishing feature of higher education is its potential for developing awareness of these capacities as a pervasive characteristic of everyday life (Barnett 1990). Leavis seeks to consolidate this argument by stressing the nature of the student's belonging to, or living into, a 'complex collaborative community' in which awareness of 'high standards' owes as much to informal as

formal contact—the 'hidden curriculum' (Jackson 1990). This community will not be limited by the student's discipline, although it will make space for it; the phrase 'special human contexts to be found' also suggests a process of discovery and sense making not restricted to the acquisition of specialist knowledge and skills.

Readers unfamiliar with Leavis may question the use of inverted commas placed round 'student' in the above quotation. Leavis continually struggled to find terms that would adequately characterise the contribution and status of each of the participants in a pedagogic relationship (see Chap. 7). The word 'student' troubled him as much as the word 'teacher' because both were at best approximations to the kind of finely balanced pedagogic relationship he cherished. An early formulation represents perhaps one of his best if circumlocutory shots at defining this relationship, in the introduction to *Revaluation* (1936) where he acknowledges his indebtedness to 'those with whom I have … discussed literature as a "teacher", adding, 'if I have learnt anything about the methods of profitable discussion I have learnt it in collaboration with them' (Leavis 1936: 14). Leavis saw no reason why the discussant should not also be the co-teacher or co-researcher, and this helps to explain why he disliked drawing a dividing line between 'undergraduate' and 'postgraduate' (he spoke of 'more or less senior') and did not wish his lectures and seminars to be advertised as exclusive to either group (in Layram 2011: 25 Sept 1967).

4.2 Form and Function of the Critical Exchange

Leavis holds that a critical judgment has the form of 'This is so, isn't it?'; however, this does not mean that it necessarily consists of a literal question or request expressed in precisely these words, as Leavis makes plain when he says 'the "but" standing for…'. The appeal to corroboration via 'a fully overt kind of collaboration' is, in Leavis's view, a defining feature of university life in general, although this is not to suggest that every interaction between a teacher and a student will be framed as one of joint working. The collaborative exchange is essentially open-ended and persuasive; when it operates heuristically, that is as a mode of discovery, it consists of what Polanyi (1959: 229) calls 'statements in the fiduciary mode', statements of personal commitment that should have the words 'I believe' attached to them. The goal of such statements is to move beyond the merely personal assertion of a belief or conviction without resorting to criteria dependent on an idea of objective knowledge, that is, impersonal knowledge, independent of individual persons doing the knowing. For Leavis the literary critic and Polanyi the scientist-philosopher all knowledge is embodied, personally committed knowledge. There is moreover no method or template for achieving this goal (Leavis 1982: 190):

> I have had a habit of telling pupils that you can't prove a value-judgment but I go on to say that you can always (no doubt I ought to say generally) get beyond the mere assertion of personal conviction. The process of 'getting beyond' is tactical, and its nature is most clearly brought out in the 'practical criticism' of short poems. But what is brought out in this way is the essential critical process.

Davies (1992) suggests that the paradigm of the critical exchange, far from being coercive, is intended to subvert inflexible modes of instruction: 'The oppressive statement gives way to the tactful, sympathetic inquiry … the authoritative monologue to the open-ended conversation' (37). Its aim, according to Leavis, is to allow critical judgments to '[find] their bearing with regard to one another, and not a theoretical system or a system determined by abstract considerations' (Leavis 1982: 213).

To an extent the paradigm shares features of the Socratic method of teaching (Overholser 1992), including the asking and answering of questions to stimulate critical thinking, and a dialectical method in which participants work collaboratively to construct a meaning rather than win an argument. Where it departs from this method is the absence of any ironic dissimulation of ignorance which might act as a disruptive force to undermine student and text alike. The paradigm's 'isn't it?' is not ironic understatement. The critical exchange is reality-oriented and provisional, though never arbitrary. Its main purpose is not intellectual display for its own sake but the getting of wisdom, which represents 'a more securely poised resultant, one more fully comprehensive and humanly better centred […] than any ordinarily brilliant person could offer us' (Leavis 1975: 69).

4.3 Leavis's Paradigm: An Empty Metaphysic?

Criticisms have been advanced against Leavis's idea of the critical exchange on theoretical grounds: indeed this has proved to be one the major sources of antipathy towards Leavis from as far back as the days of *Scrutiny* (Matthews 2004: 65). One of the most cited criticisms at the level of theory is that made during Leavis's lifetime by Perry Anderson (1968) in the course of his 'Components of the national culture'. (For a discussion of objections to Leavis's paradigm at the level of practice, see Chap. 5.) Although this study was written several decades ago, it conveniently states one of the main, enduring charges against Leavis, namely that he lacks an explicit epistemology underpinning his practice and critical valuations. As far as we know, Leavis did not read or respond to Anderson's critique; had he done so it might have struck him as a recapitulation of arguments made by René Wellek in 1937, to the effect that Leavis had not 'stated [his] assumptions more explicitly and defended them more systematically' (cited in Leavis 1952: 211). Leavis believed he had answered these objections conclusively at the time, arguing that while 'it should be possible to elicit principles and abstractly formulable norms … [and] be able to complete [my] work with a theoretical statement' (Leavis 1952: 214) he had kept his criticism as close as possible to the concrete. Leavis thus left the door open to 'theory', or at least did not turn the key, and it is this door that Anderson, having absorbed the earlier debate with Wellek, pushes against in his critique. As such he has been taken as a continuing point of reference on this theme by several critics of Leavis (Watson 1977; McCullum 1983; Bell 1988; Scruton 1998; Matthews 2004; Storer 2009). Anderson's criticism has the advantage,

moreover, for the present discussion, of bringing together a number of theoretical objections, and directing these squarely at Leavis's paradigm.

In his study, an analytical survey of trends in mid-twentieth century socio-cultural criticism in Britain, Anderson seeks to explain why Britain had, by that date, not produced its own national school of socialist-Marxist thought, as had many other European countries. Where this sociologically informed account should have been there was a conspicuous 'absent centre'. Literary criticism, as advocated by Leavis, was the only discipline to move to occupy this centre, a remarkable achievement given the relatively low status of criticism as a discipline of thought in Britain and other countries. Having effectively occupied the centre against much institutional resistance, however, Leavis was unwilling or unable to produce a theoretical justification of why his conception of criticism should have been there. Anderson pays high tribute to the criticism, stating that Leavis is 'a landmark that has yet to be surpassed' but concludes: 'The paradox of this great critic is that his whole *oeuvre* rested on a metaphysic which he could never expound or defend' (50). Concentrating diagnostically on Leavis's critical exchange, which he duly appreciates as being based on an interrogative rather than an assertive form, Anderson (1968: 52) all the same sees this being placed in the service of an unarticulated metaphysic which refuses to acknowledge the central assumption of its epistemology, namely that of 'a shared, stable system of values':

> If the basic formation and outlook of readers diverges, their experience will be incommensurable. Leavis's whole method presupposes, in fact, a morally and culturally unified audience. In its absence, his epistemology disintegrates.

The extent to which higher education is necessarily based on a consensus of broad societal values or engenders a clash between them is, of course, one of the key questions for theorists of culture and pedagogy (Clark 1986; Barnett 2014). Previous critics on the Left, notably Raymond Williams in his *Culture and society* (1959), had taken Leavis to task over his presupposition of a culturally unified audience in the shape of the 'organic community' (Leavis & Thompson 1933: 87–92). This was the chief metaphor in Leavis's early and middle career used as a regulatory ideal—also for Leavis, somewhat contentiously, a historical reality—of a pre-industrial, pre-capitalist society in which work and life were a harmonious whole and where people lived 'unawares… as integral parts of the rural community' (Leavis & Thompson 1933: 86). Anderson refers to Leavis's 'organic community' as coming from an 'enormous nostalgia … of the past which pervades his work' (52), which is designed to disguise from its creator the absence of any equivalent present-day cultural unity. Leavis, however, in a lecture given in 1967 (Leavis 1972: 85, emphasis in original) that predates Anderson's critique, disavowed any recourse to such nostalgia when he stated:

> We [he and co-author Denys Thompson of the 1933 work] didn't recall this organic relation of work to life in any nostalgic spirit, as something to be restored, or to take melancholy pleasure in lamenting; but by way of emphasizing that it was *gone*, with the organic community it belonged to, not to be restored in any foreseeable future.

That said, Anderson contends that, having formulated an *idea* of a unified audience in previous cultural phases it is incumbent on Leavis to posit the theoretical ground on which such an audience might be reconstituted. As it stands, then, Leavisian critical method and pedagogy, as putative tools designed to bring this audience into existence, are deeply incoherent on an epistemological plane.

4.4   A Shared System of Values?

Anderson's emphasis on the *incommensurability* of reports on experience, whereby readers in a post-Enlightenment, late modern culture have no necessarily common measure or shared ground, introduces a new twist to previous criticism of Leavis's studied avoidance of stating his methodological assumptions. The use of this term parallels Kuhn's (1962) innovatory use of it in *The structure of scientific revolutions*; there it refers to the lack of measure between scientific paradigms, the particular sets of theories and beliefs or epistemologies which both enable and constrain research. While Anderson and Kuhn have different ideological inclinations (Wolfart 2000: 385) each draws attention to the inability of those located on different sides of a paradigm to communicate across the dividing boundary. According to this view, Leavis's belief in the value of dialogic exchange leading to ever-increasing concurrence is exposed as groundless, since in the absence of any set of values commanding widespread assent (such as those which Leavis had detected historically in the 'organic community'), which would frame and give direction to the dialogue, there can be at best only a mass of arbitrary and incompatible viewpoints with no other goal than to generate further viewpoints. At worst, according to Anderson, this underpins Leavis's recourse to 'an insistent metaphysical vocabulary ['life', 'actual', 'vital'] combined with a positivist methodology' (Anderson 1968: 51). (With this idea of insistence Anderson usefully gives us a tip worth pursuing: see Chap. 6.)

This argument of incommensurability, which finds perhaps its strongest expression in the fragmentary postmodernist 'language games' of Lyotard (1984) and his followers (see Readings 1991), in my view misses a large part of what Leavis is offering by focusing on the dialogic process of critical exchange in the abstract (see also Bell 1988: 133–134) rather than in its paradigmatic, embodied instances. This is not to suggest that the challenge represented by 'theory' is disposed of by an appeal to British empiricism. Scruton (1985), for example, seeks to counter Anderson's dismissal of Leavis by claiming that 'it is one of the strengths of British culture that it has traditionally produced, not sociological theories of itself, but social and cultural *criticism*' (133, emphasis in original). Leavis, however, goes some way to meeting theory on its own ground, and his reasons for eschewing any probative intent about its relevance to critical pedagogy are not due to an inability to abstract but rather to a concern about the opportunity cost: 'I do not see what would be gained by the kind of explicitness [Wellek] demands (though

I see what is lost by it)' (Leavis 1952: 215). (This opportunity cost is discussed further in Chap. 5.)

In a literal sense, the 'basic formation and outlook of readers' (Anderson 1968: 52) is dependent on presupposing certain universals or common grounds—hence the word 'university' itself—although, needless to say, how and in what these universals and commonalities might be embodied is a matter of debate: the idea of 'the university' is simultaneously a presupposition and work-in-progress (Leavis 1982: 171–285; Barnett 1990, 2014). But that there might be certain universals, to be (re-)discovered, such as what is meant by 'the pursuit of knowledge', is one of Leavis's necessary faiths in his continuing to 'believe in' the university (Leavis 1982: 171–185) (see Chap. 6).

While the idea of incommensurability might seem to be able to adduce much evidence, for instance, in siloed thinking among the disciplines, in practice much inter-, cross- and transdisciplinary communication continues to take place (Gibbs 2015). Higher education is not short of instances that may seem to increase the likelihood of educator and student speaking at cross purposes: asking different stakeholders in higher education what they comprehend by 'the value of a degree', for instance, might well provoke the kind of pluralist response that would illustrate Anderson's broader thesis of divergence (see Woodall et al. 2014). Indeed, being tossed into a welter of contradictory, irreconcilable voices is often what it *feels* like for students, especially as they manage the transition to university study (Booth 1997). This adaptive process is both cognitive—a certain degree of cognitive dissonance is required if learning and adaptation are to occur—and ethical—'both students and lecturers in higher education have moral role obligations … derived from the functions of the roles being voluntarily undertaken by each party' (Regan 2012: 14).

In a fundamental sense, therefore, educators need to be points of stability and consistency, even at times ones of fixed reference; it is hard to imagine how otherwise they could facilitate the creative potential of students (Craft 1997), let alone maintain the business of teaching, assessment and research (one likes to think that the creative potential and the business should go hand in hand, difficult as this alliance may be to maintain in practice). That said, any espoused sense of stability need not rule out multiple voices, diversity, flexibility, negotiation and compromise, as Leavis's metaphors of dialogue and play and the sense of kinesis in 'shifting' in his critical exchange suggest. Nor need this stability entail the unreflective unanimity in the disciplines that Leavis castigated with regard to C. P. Snow's vision of the scientific culture: in Snow's words, 'Without thinking about it [scientists] respond alike' (cited in Leavis 1972: 50). Perhaps this phrase of Snow's is shorthand for agreed conventions or 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi 1959). If so, Snow's expression of unanimity among the scientific community over methodological norms and practices is insufficiently distinguishable from group-think and unconscious bias. That kind of stability, or inertia, is derided by Leavis in his critique of Snow (Leavis 2013) as being deeply at odds with the risk taking and experimental freedom that he valued in teaching and research in the sciences and humanities alike (Leavis 1982: 182).

Returning to Anderson's 'shared, stable system of values' that must in his view underpin the epistemology of the cultural critic, reader and teacher alike—at least a teacher like Leavis committed to a model of pedagogy in its interrogative rather than assertive forms—Leavis is certainly committed to holding certain presuppositions but the *Scrutiny* project was based on the premise that in modern civilisation any such shared system of values could no longer command wide assent. Had Leavis assumed the contrary, or that such a system of values could be reinstated programmatically, then this would indeed be a damaging criticism. Anderson acknowledges, with a view to the socio-political upheavals of the twentieth century, that 'nothing was less obvious or to be taken for granted in Leavis's day than a stable, shared system of beliefs' (Anderson 1968: 52); but he writes here as if Leavis were an unwitting victim and propagator of this assumption rather than one of its deepest explorers. Indeed, the wider realisation that this state of affairs could no longer be taken for granted in the cultural and pedagogic realms was in no small part due to Leavis's socio-cultural analysis and educational methods, whether people subscribed to these or not.

Leavis as a lifelong teacher evidently 'believed in' values in the sense that these obtain in the kind of educational arrangement which Weick (1976) calls a 'loosely coupled' system, one in which people are often bound together by shared values, norms and expertise (Regan 2012) rather than simply by the obligations of shared tasks, such as teaching and marking exams (Becher 2001). It is from his allegiance to this kind of systemic thinking about culture and organisational values that Leavis's conception of the university as 'more than a collocation of specialist departments' (Leavis 1972: 63) derives. However, at this level these shared values and norms cannot necessarily be taken for granted either, as the pioneering sociological analyses of higher education conducted in the pages of *Scrutiny* set out to demonstrate. Q.D. Leavis in her 'Discipline of letters: a sociological note' (Leavis 1943), for example, had provided a case study of how unquestioned academic norms based on 'conventional literary and cultural values' (14), underpinned by 'scholarship and social snobbishness' (12), could be profoundly corrosive of academic life and anti-educational in their effect. Moreover, it is by virtue of engaging in dialogue based on critical, reflexive practice—exemplified in the close reading of major literary texts—that, according to both Leavises, we (if we count ourselves 'literary critical readers' and even if we do not) largely discover and clarify what these values and norms might be (Leavis 1967: 14–15). Anderson, to my mind, underplays the heuristics of Leavis's paradigm as well as the element of the oppositional which, as Matthews (2004: 60) points out, is intent on questioning convention and challenging orthodoxy.

Anderson's charge that Leavis's paradigm must be accounted as resting on a failed metaphysic appears to leave many of these scruples at the level of theory and practice out of the account. Perhaps the most important is Leavis's 'necessary faith' in the university's commitment to a 'sustained effort of collaborative human creativity… [that] creates, and recreates, its sense of possible solutions, further problems, and remoter goals as it goes on' (Leavis 1972: 186–187). This mode of systemic thinking about pedagogy and higher education (see Knight & York 2003),

favouring incremental learning rather than upheaval, aligns Leavis with thinkers like Polanyi and in opposition to those who espouse variations of utopian millenarianism; while Anderson might well agree in principle with Leavis's notion of 'necessary incompleteness' in programmatic action, in practice Leavis's commitment to a liberal meliorist approach probably further limits his validity as a cultural thinker for Anderson as it did for Williams (see Watson 1977: 154–165). Certainly, if anyone thinks that Leavis has any remotely immediate solution to what he calls the 'appalling problems' facing humanity he leaves the reader in no doubt when he states on the same page as the preceding quotation from him, with an implied nod to the 'solutions' of Marxism and scientism alike: 'I haven't suggested what solution for the appalling problems will be found …—I don't know. In the nature of the case, nobody knows, so nobody can tell us' (Leavis 1972: 186). While this might sound on the face of it like an abnegation of responsibility, the eschewal of ultimate totalising solutions is for Leavis the presupposition of any major creative and experimental thinking in response to global and local problems in which pedagogic practice in the university might be seen as having a hand.

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Chapter 5
Leavis and Pedagogy: Critical Practice

5.1 Practicability and Leavis's Paradigm

> A critical judgment has the form, 'This is so, isn't it?' […] though my judgment asks to be confirmed and appeals for agreement that the thing is so; the response I expect at best will be of the form, 'Yes, but—'.

The previous chapter examined the form and function of Leavis's paradigm of critical exchange (Leavis 1969: 47), repeated above in its condensed version, and the criticism of its epistemology. Questions about the paradigm have also been raised at the level of practice; these aver that in today's higher education any critical exchange at the level assumed by Leavis is simply not a going concern. Much as tutors would like their students to be active if not equal partners (Healey et al. 2014) in a critical exchange, how realistic is this? And where English studies is concerned, how is consensus to be achieved when radical disagreements remain over what should constitute the curriculum (Bloom 1994)? Scruton (1998: 20), for example, argues that it is pointless for educators in English to recommend Leavis's 'weighty arguments' for George Eliot's centrality to the canon if students (or indeed tutors) are unlikely to share a belief in the validity of a canon or the presupposition that the close reading and moral self-exploration counted on by Eliot (and Leavis) matter.

Objections to Leavis's paradigm may be summarised as follows. The goal of the exchange may be a worthy one but the burden Leavis places on the participants to achieve it is unreasonable given the structural and power differentials of those involved. Judgments arrived at via Leavis's paradigm are more likely to be arbitrarily imposed than authentically agreed, and at their most coercive may serve the interests of a strategy for indoctrination rather than empowerment (a case of 'my George Eliot right or wrong'). These unwelcome outcomes may be a pervasive risk in higher education generally due to wider trends in teaching and learning and society, including notably the delegitimation of authority and knowledge claims (Barnett 2000); if so, they can only be accentuated by the structure and values of

Leavis's pedagogy. How else, it has been argued, could Leavis have acquired a reputation during his lifetime, whether justified or not, for gathering 'disciples' (Watson 1977) and of as often alienating many of them (Evans 1993)?

5.2 Wyatt's Criticism of Leavis

John Wyatt (1990: 73–90) in an otherwise sympathetic account of Leavis's contribution to the history of higher education singles out Leavis's 'This is so, isn't it?' as highly problematic and symptomatic of a 'self-generated dilemma' at the heart of Leavis's thought. Seeking to foster a genuine encounter between tutor and student with no pulling of rank, Leavis assumes a level of student autonomy and readiness which is not there except for the few under special circumstances, as Wyatt (1990: 83) explains:

> … this is the master addressing the novice … It is not easy for many students of literature, never mind for people working in unrelated academic disciplines, to accept the leadership implied in 'This is so, isn't it?', no matter how much this question becomes more genuine because a collaborative response is needed.

As with Anderson's (1968) criticisms in Chap. 4, I am calling on Wyatt in a representative sense, to focus attention on two of the more commonly levelled charges made against Leavisian practice, those of indoctrination and elitism, both considered as deriving their energy and motivation from an aggressive and alienating self-belief on Leavis's part. When Leavis goes on, later in the same lecture in which he describes the paradigm, to say that 'a genuine teacher doesn't find himself holding back his subtlest insight and his most adventurous thought because they are not suitable for communication to first- or second-year men' (Leavis 1969: 66), there might seem to be some support here for Wyatt's reservation about the teacher's intent and the student's equally strong resistance. Leavis's remark may indeed appear to indicate unduly high expectations of students and an insensitivity to their individual needs and interests, the teacher by this account intervening too eagerly with the new and challenging insight. By seeming to privilege the teacher's voice, what space is allowed for the student's? Wyatt highlights a potential disjuncture between illocution (intention) and perlocution (reception)—to use Searle's (1969) terms about speech acts—if students are not ready to rise to the occasion of the teacher's 'subtlest insight' or perhaps wish to exercise the right to silence. Quite so, Leavis might retort, if that is the case then the students concerned probably ought not to be there, or at least not yet. This is an instance where Leavis's determination not to talk down to students by exposing them, come what way, to the teacher's more adventurous thinking, may acquire uncomfortable elitist or dogmatic undertones.

Yet, Wyatt possibly misreads Leavis's intention, as when he states that Leavis is 'quick to add' that his 'question … expects a response' (83). Leavis is not quick to add anything: indeed, there are 87 words intervening between posited question and posited response (for the full quotation see Chap. 4). What is communicated in this intervening passage strikes me as a sufficiently scrupulous account of what might be expected to happen, including time allowed for reflection, for a genuine proposition from a tutor to elicit a genuine and unforced reply from a student. The tutor's expectations, 'what I expect at best will be', are also couched in appropriately modest, pragmatic terms which counterbalance any tendency towards arrogance on the tutor's part. It is clear from the particular language Leavis is using here that this dialogic process is not to be reduced to a matter of transaction only although this is not to say that the turn-taking that underpins it may not be played out differently in other cultural and lingual contexts (see Martin-Jones and Saxena 1996).

5.3   Pedagogisation

A wider issue at stake here, a fundamental one for pedagogy at large, that applies to both practice and theory of the critical exchange, might be stated as the distance between discourse and practical activity (Engeström et al. 1999), that is, how we talk about teaching and learning and how we do it in practice. This process is further complicated by what has been called the 'pedagogisation' (Singh 2002) of knowledge, namely the removal of the discourse of knowledge from its original site of production (say, the classroom, tutorial, laboratory, workplace or clinical setting), its encoding in symbolic forms and subsequent decoding by non-specialists back in the practice setting (see Bernstein 1990). It is during this process that issues of power relations enter over 'the distribution, recontextualisation and evaluation of complex knowledge' (Singh 2002: 577). While Leavis is highly aware, even hyper aware, of the systems of power that operate within and outside educational institutions, he is notable—perhaps for some, including Anderson (1968), notorious— for his concern to minimise, as far as is practicable, any unduly disruptive distance between discourse and practical activity: it is this which in part accounts for his concern about the opportunity cost of theorising at the expense of (further) principled practice discussed in Chap. 4. What he offers, accordingly, is not an explicit theory of pedagogy or a simple rejection of the value of theorising but a set of articulated principles which seek to remain in close contact with the conditions of practice and consciously seek not to stray very far from these. These 'living principles' (see Chap. 3) are embedded in a carefully composed discourse where attention to words, syntax, rhythm and even punctuation counts: for example, the use of the em dash in 'Yes, but—' signals not the interlocutor being cut off mid-sentence or being dumbstruck but the speech and/or non-verbal communication that is expected to supervene.

5.4   Master and Novice

This last point is not to suggest that Wyatt, any more than Anderson, has not read Leavis attentively but that there are elements of Leavis's embodied thought that he like Anderson may simply not have registered. Take, for example, the words 'master' and 'novice' which Wyatt introduces categorically to explain his concern about the hegemonic tendency of Leavis's paradigm. These may usefully be compared to the same terms used by Donald Schön (1987) to characterise the epistemology involved in developing the reflective practitioner; indeed, Wyatt may have had Schön's seminal work in mind at this point. Schön links the acquisition of professional effectiveness and competence to the notion of democracy in practice (Argyris & Schön 1974) and his concept of instructional leadership (Schön 1988) emphasises the collegial classroom: 'master' has no dictatorial or patronising connotations for him and like 'novice' it is construed in entirely positive ways. A hierarchy is involved in the relationship but it is one that is predicated on the novice progressing duly from a position of temporary dependence. This is the democratic (or perhaps meritocratic) spirit which I think Wyatt is invoking when he introduces 'master' and 'novice'; he falls short of setting Leavis up as a would-be guru although he evidently sees this as a potential danger. Applied in this latter context, however, Wyatt's terms do not do justice to the tone and meaning of Leavis's original and to my mind exclude or even disregard something vital to it. Wyatt, together with Barnett (2000) and others, has put his finger on a very real problem in education, namely the delegitimation of authority and the crisis of confidence this has precipitated in the teaching profession in many settings, but he brings to bear on this problem an erroneous set of binary terms that might enable us to think about it in a clearer and more nuanced way. Leavis's eschewal of such conventional binaries, even as we have seen with his dissatisfaction with 'student' and 'teacher', places him on firmer ground, I believe, than Wyatt appreciates. Leavis's critical judgment, we note, 'asks … and appeals': this is not the voice of the leader but of the petitioner. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development—the area of learning that comes into play when the teacher has a higher skill set than that of the student—offers perhaps a more fitting analogy to the kind of finely tuned coaching, mentoring or leading Leavis has in mind, by which the teacher sets just the right level of difficulty or challenge to effectively draw the student on.

5.5   The Paradigm's Reception and Its Contemporary Relevance

Leavis's historical contributions to pedagogy have been well served by his critics (see Chap. 7). Significantly, his paradigm of critical exchange probably had greater impact outside higher education, notably in the compulsory, further and adult education sectors in Britain and overseas. One such example of influence exerted was on David Holbrook's pioneering work teaching disadvantaged school children

in *English for the rejected* (1964). Hilliard (2012: 142–170) has provided a detailed account of the widespread impact of what he calls 'Left-Leavisism' on adult education from the 1940s to the 1960s, including the early teaching of Richard Hoggart, furnishing evidence that a Leavisian-inflected pedagogy was entirely compatible with classroom approaches building on the knowledge and experience of the student from whichever point the student might start. Hilliard also makes the point that Leavis's sights, as well as his *Scrutiny* colleagues', were consistently set more on the student or prospective university student and less on faculty colleagues which may help to account for the greater impact of their ideas on those whose interest lay primarily in methods of 'critical training' for school pupils and adult learners.

In the event, Leavis's academic peers in English proved to be a far less receptive audience for his pedagogic methods and proposals. When on one occasion he was prompted to respond in the columns of the Press to what he considered were widely held misconceptions about his approach to teaching his concern was met by the following from one professor of English: 'We are favoured with another careful account of Dr Leavis's teaching methods' (Kermode 1962; cited in Watson 1977: 103)—as if talking in print about one's teaching in a spirit of self-criticality were a kind of academic *faux pas*. We are thus faced with the historical paradox of a particular approach to pedagogy—hardly unique to Leavis although Leavis's way of talking about it was perhaps unique—that reflected the conditions of an elite educational setting of the tutorial or supervision session (MacKillop 1995: 94–95), making greater initial sense to those outside the academy.

However, this paradox may offer us a key to appreciating the potential wider contemporary application of Leavis's critical exchange. Its past record of contributing significantly to inspirational and innovative teaching in contexts which would nowadays be described as fitting the description of 'non-traditional learners' may stand it in good stead in a contemporary higher education system seeking to meet the needs of such learners within a 'widening participation' agenda (National Audit Office 2008). This is not, of course, to suggest that higher education should be concerned solely or predominantly with the needs of non-traditional learners but that the anti-elitist record of Leavisian pedagogy in practice is an important factor to consider in the pragmatics of teaching. While Leavis's later despondency about the creative potential of the 'democratic mass university' (Leavis 1975: 7) impeded to some extent his curiosity about innovations in pedagogic practice beyond his immediate ken—he was, however, particularly impressed by the diversity of teaching and assessment methods he encountered at York in the 1960s and 70s (Leavis 1972)—the critical exchange is not incompatible with modes of teaching and learning in mass or universal education. Far from it. It connects strongly, for example, to contemporary research in higher education about the value of critical thinking as a necessary life skill for inculcating the habit of reflection and questioning in all aspects of life (Scriven & Paul 2007). The relevance of the Socratic among other methods of teaching might also be adduced here, of course, and this is not to stake a claim for Leavis that can be legitimately shared by alternative

paradigms. That said, I would contend that in a context where an unskilled application of educational technologies (see Chap. 6) may inadvertently reduce or impoverish the element of direct encounter between teacher and student, Leavis's paradigm maintains a particularly steady focus on the value of the teacher as mentor, supporter and critical friend. It is this kind of relationship which is arguably more likely to facilitate those 'leaps of learning' (Kiley 2011) which policy discourse in higher education holds out as among the chief desired outcomes of teaching and research.

Where Leavis the teacher seems to acquire a more telling significance—alongside other educationalists such as Buber (1923), Dewey (2007) and Mezirow (2000)—is in relation to the growing interest in student voice, particularly in Western neo-liberal market economies with their 'students as consumers' (see Singleton-Jackson et al. 2010), and in the 'student as co-researcher' (Seale et al. 2015) and 'co-disseminator of knowledge' (Hill et al. 2013). Leavis in particular highlights the value of creative collaboration at a higher level than that of mere transaction and transactional leadership. His reflections on creativity also draw attention to the possibility of 'perverse' collaboration and in so doing he fruitfully problematizes the teacher-student nexus at the heart of the critical exchange or encounter, pointing to tensions, barriers and opportunities in relation to joint effort in the pedagogic relationship that have the power to illuminate current thinking in these and related areas.

5.6   Archer and Leavis on Creativity

How might a Leavisian perspective on creativity, language and collaborative community shed light on current notions which bear on student learning? Take, for example, the sociologist and critical realist Margaret Archer's (2012) notion of 'the reflexive imperative' as enacted by today's students in their experiences of teaching and learning (see Case 2013). Archer has been associated with 'an "ontological turn" in student learning research, with a focus on students "being" and "becoming" rather than just on knowledge and skills' (Case 2015: 3). This 'ontological turn' resonates strongly with key aspects of Leavis's ideas of the critical exchange and the student's 'living into' a collaborative community discussed in this and the preceding chapters. The idea of the reflexive imperative is based on the premise than in late modernity traditional guidelines are no longer adequate to new situations; awareness of this state of affairs creates a more pressing need for reflexivity. We are thus witnessing the rise of what Archer calls a 'morphogenetic society' in which various types of reflexivity, including 'meta-reflexivity'—'the reflexive critique that subjects direct at their own internal conversations, which intensifies personal stress and social disorientation' (Caetano 2015: 61)—begin to rise to prominence among the educated young.

For both Archer and Leavis reflexivity is an integral, imperative aspect of the modern student's experience of learning and personal development or *Bildung* (Case

2013); it is not a take-it-or-leave-it affair and it operates essentially in a framework of an orientation towards collaborative meaning-making, including when this is focused internally on the student's self-reflexive conversations. Leavis makes an equivalent point about the critical exchange when he states that 'my thinking is—as any use of the language in which one thinks and expresses one's thoughts must be … in subtle ways essentially collaborative' (Leavis 1969: 47). However, differences between Archer and Leavis begin to emerge when we look at their respective conceptions of language and collaborative creativity that underpin reflexivity. Archer (1995: 72) refers to the creative potential of human beings as follows:

> This is the human condition, to be born into a social context (of language, beliefs, organization) which was not of our making: agential power is always restricted to re-making, whether this be reproducing or transforming our social inheritance.

Leavis might have agreed with the substance of the first part of Archer's sentence, even if he might have quibbled with the portentousness of 'the human condition'. Indeed, he makes similar-sounding statements throughout his *oeuvre*, for example, about how the child's discovery and construction of the world 'is possible because the reality he was born into was already the Human World, the world created and renewed in day-to-day human collaboration through the ages' (Leavis 1975: 34). However, he might have contended that the second part of Archer's sentence does not go nearly far enough. Here is Leavis (1986: 250) expressing a similar idea to Archer's at this point:

> The creative, and re-creative maintaining of the full human heritage, the vital and unimpoverished human heritage, can't be left to the old, traditional approaches. The 'educated class' most certainly—whatever it is—isn't adequate to performing the function in the old ways.

Contrast Archer's 're-making' with Leavis's 're-creative'. Perhaps only someone exposed to the Leavisian educational world-view (Chap. 2), or its equivalent, would notice the difference between these two words, an example perhaps of 'what people know and don't know' (see Chap. 2). While Archer goes on to qualify 're-making' as potentially 'transforming our social inheritance', to describe this as *always a restriction* of the power of the agent would be, for Leavis, a fundamental misapprehension of the nature of 'creative thought' which, as far as he is concerned, 'must take place, not on any confines, but on frontiers—the frontiers of language, which major creativity advances' (Leavis 1976: 30). What is at stake here, it seems to me, is a conception of creativity and attendant student reflexivity as more than rhetorically transformatory.

5.7   Criticality, Care and Generosity

Changes in the conditions of learning and teaching, accelerated by trends towards increasing participation rates (Kaiser et al. 2014), globalisation (Stromquist & Monkman 2014), edu-business (Au & Ferrare 2015), network governance (Ness

et al. 2015) and the like, can work both for and against more creative approaches to pedagogy (Barnett 1997; Barnett & Coates 2005). In recent years attention has centred on, for example, methods of teaching creatively with small and large groups as alternatives to the ubiquitous lecture (Denick 2007), blended learning (Bonk & Graham 2012), and the use of digital technology including social media (Henderson et al. 2015). None of these innovations, I would suggest, renders Leavis's paradigm of critical exchange obsolescent. Indeed, it can be argued that Leavis's concentration on essentials helps ensure an appropriate dual focus on ends as well as means in these and future educational developments. The paradigm of the critical exchange is an expansive as well as inclusive concept (see Chap. 4), encompassing more than the pedagogic act; like the notion of the community of practice (Wenger 1998) it leads outside itself in ways that lend it particularly well to goals of intellectual and professional development as well as those of increasing social and civic responsibility (Ehrlich 2000).

Any number of challenges face educators and students alike in today's higher education. One of the major ones, it has been suggested (Barnett 1990: 58), is nothing less than the realisation of the creative potential of higher education itself:

> If higher education is to realise its potential, the personal response of the students needs to be drawn out. This is no easy matter. Undergraduates of all kinds are often reluctant to express a point of view, to declare themselves and to take a stand. They have to be encouraged, patiently and continually, to do so.

The tone here is unlike anything in Leavis but the ambition and the approach to pedagogy are based on similar premises. The argument allows space for Leavis's particular concern for criticality and collaboration while acknowledging, in a spirit of care and generosity, the authentic difficulties faced by the student in achieving these goals, and possibly not just undergraduates: mature and postgraduate students may equally need to be drawn out individually and collectively to foster a personal response —although Leavis tactfully reminds us that more is involved even here than treating the student as just 'a student'. We know that Leavis, as an undergraduate and doctoral researcher, experienced equivalent difficulties and was in much need of encouragement 'patiently and continually' from tutors and supervisors to enable him to find his voice and express his point of view (see Chap. 2). As a teacher he pre-eminently recognised and acted on the intrinsic value of this spirit of care and generosity.

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Chapter 6
Leavis and the Creative University

6.1 The Concentrated Centre

Leavis, resonating with Ortega's (1930) thesis of 'mass man' (see Chap. 2), believed that the 'democratic mass university' (Leavis 1975: 7) was largely getting it wrong; nevertheless he also believed, like Ortega, that the 'university' was uniquely the site where we might conceivably get it right. For Leavis there is no serious alternative organisational contender for the role of enacter of self-reflexive critique in society (Leavis 1972). By virtue of its being a 'concentrated centre of creativity' (Leavis 1969: 3), the university, according to Leavis, consciously assumes important responsibilities as guardian and carer of creativity and critique. At the same time, social trends already evident in Leavis's time and since gathering pace highlight the risks the university runs in undermining its own creative potential.

Some might contend that the university's track record on fostering creativity has never been exactly encouraging: the function of the Western university in the pre-modern era saw creativity relegated to a minor role, even banished from the curriculum (Barnett 1990). Moreover, the contemporary university certainly does not have the monopoly on developing creative ideas; indeed it may have an unwitting part to play in suppressing the creatively new. Concerns have been raised, for example, about the stifling of innovation and creativity through over-regulation, such as through over-zealous application of metrics in the assessment of research (Taylor 2011). A challenge facing Leavis was to maintain the role of cultural vigilante with the role of advocate on behalf of a conception of the creative university that was frequently at variance with the ideal. What is remarkable is not that he occasionally got this balance wrong, as he probably did in his critique of C. P. Snow (reprinted in Leavis 2013), as his frequent ability to keep the two roles in tensed equilibrium.

6.2 Radical Disorder

One of the valuable insights for higher education generally that Leavis brings from his reading of creative writers is the extent to which the capacity for enabling and thwarting creativity may co-exist in the creative artist (and by extension in the reader and social systems). Far from being immune to these contradictory impulses, major writers offer cardinal instances of how these drives are played out: their supremely creative achievements are frequently both hard- and narrowly-won. Leavis's critique (1948) of George Eliot, for example, is a detailed demonstration of how Eliot's creative intelligence as a novelist co-exists with a self-undermining tendency towards over-identification with some of her characters; by tracing what Leavis calls this 'radical disorder' (91) inscribed in the words on the page, rather than through psychological speculation about their author, Leavis is able to pin-point the artistic intelligence that effectively 'places' the counter-creative lapses. Leavis connects two general propositions to this type of analysis. The first, derived from and strengthened by modernist critical method such as that he had absorbed from Richards (see Chap. 2), is that attitudes towards creativity can be inferred from language in ways that may qualify or even contradict its ostensible meaning, and hence a trained eye and ear will be able to probe and detect in its language any pseudo-creative assumptions that characterise the prevailing technologico-Benthamite discourse of higher education: this view of language as a form of social practice anticipates the work of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003). The second, in which Leavis departs from modernism and Richards, is that creative thought largely furnishes the criteria by which its achievement can be judged; these criteria emerge *through* the thought rather than being imposed *on* it, including by author or subsequent reader-critic—hence Leavis's fondness for Lawrence's dictum 'Never trust the teller, trust the tale'. (This incidentally distinguishes Leavis from post-structuralism's diagnoses of radical disorder where the presumption of criteria, particularly those generated by the texts themselves, is deeply questionable.)

   In his readings of George Eliot, Blake, Conrad and others Leavis attunes our ears to the complexity of the notion of creativity as something over which humanity, creative geniuses not excepted, cannot exert *complete* transmuting control (post-structuralism at its most extreme denies it has any). Something always and necessarily eludes the controlling will. Creativity for Leavis is like Blake's 'Tyger' from the poem of that name: 'it doesn't suggest the reassuring … and it is a recognition that entails the troubled sense of energy—which life cannot do without' (Leavis 1982: 13–14). These are critical messages about creativity and innovation that an increasingly risk averse, profit-driven higher education would do well to ponder amid competing discourses on creativity in the market place (Christensen & Eyring 2011).

6.3 The University as Work-in-Progress

Leavis fundamentally disagreed with the increasingly utilitarian drive of higher education, and with what he foresaw as its manufactured turbulence designed to emulate the change-drive culture of private industry (Birnbaum 2001). One of his late essays, '"Believing in" the university' (1974) (in Leavis 1982: 171–185) addresses the question of his 'belief' or 'faith' in the university as a going concern: as Leavis admits, the 'total change' that had occurred since he wrote Education and the university (1943) 'has been so great that we may fairly speak of ourselves as living in a different civilisation' (Leavis 1982: 175).

This essay is not one of Leavis's most cogently argued but it provides a valuable indicator of his later attitudes, including why he continued to teach, write and agitate for an alternative approach to change from within the university when he saw little chance of this being adopted. Leavis placed great emphasis on 'opportunism', that is, on creating or exploiting serendipitous opportunities for change— serendipity here being the twin ingredients of 'accident and sagacity' which are frequently overlooked as sources of learning and development in a higher education predicated on planned curriculum design and planned management of change (see Kelly 2015). Challenged to say how he thinks the contemporary university could be 'saved', Leavis retorts that if anything needs saving it is not the university, it is humanity and life, from the 'accelerating developments [of civilisation] as it completes its conquest of our lives' (Leavis 1982: 177). The sudden dramatic raising of the stakes here should not obscure the logic of the underlying argument, which is that the university is a means rather than an end, although not a means in a restrictive instrumental sense. This accounts for Leavis's insistence that he does not posit the continued existence and well-being of the university as an *ultimate* goal. To do this would be to regard him as putting forward a teleological argument when the conviction he espouses is teleonomic, a concept of apparent goal-directedness which Leavis derived from his serendipitous reading in the philosophy of biology (Grene 1966: 226–252). Leavis explains this special sense of teleonomy when he states that his conception of the university is certainly 'purposive' and 'telic' but 'the *telos* … is an implicit denial of finality' (Leavis 1982: 180–181). It is open ended towards change and development while supporting 'the continuous collaborative creativity that ensures significance, ends and values, and manifests itself as consciousness and profoundly human purpose' (Leavis 1972: 156).

Leavis in this late essay is concerned with the basis on which he can construct a plausible, responsible argument on behalf of the university as 'neither a foreseen static goal nor a dream-evasion' (Leavis 1982: 179). Had he been a systems theorist (von Bertalanffy 1950) he might have stated that we live in systems that are so complex that we cannot fully understand them even as we act upon them. The choices and actions we make, based as often as not on our intuition, can have system-wide implications that are neither always intended nor predictable. Leavis from within his own discipline of thought in the humanities is saying nothing more nor less than that systems should work with and not against human nature.

Of course, if large complex organisations like universities are to work in accountable ways and make wise decisions in the interests of those whose needs they serve then people must have in front of them the information they need, when they need it. However, the utilitarian hope that the acquisition and analysis of ever more sophisticated 'big data' (Chen et al. 2014) will give us a complete or near-complete picture of reality that enables us to reduce to practically zero the element of error in our calculations is an example of our willingness to be led astray by misplaced teleological thinking. The spirit in which the university, like any comparable social organisation, is constructed or realised is necessarily one of incompleteness. In *Education and the university* we find Leavis stating that (1943: 59, emphasis in original):

> The education proposed is necessarily full of incompletenesses and imperfections. It is a training in carrying on and going forward in spite of, and in recognition of, incompletenesses and imperfections – the only way in which the required kind of thinking (without which the specialist is frustrate) *can* be carried on.

Leavis to an extent anticipated postmodernism's concern with provisionality although he clearly sees this as no substitute for discerning a sense of purposeful direction. The kind of provisionality Leavis refers to can be seen as a core strength of a more flexible, responsive type of 'living' curriculum, engaging with 'real world' challenges (Kelly 2015), even if the price to be paid is that it engenders a feeling of fragility and uncertainty in student and educator alike (Barnett & Coates 2005).

6.4   Interdisciplinarity

The main thrust of Leavis's practice, despite his combative stance in favour of English, was interdisciplinary (Moran 2002). The journal *Scrutiny* at its best during the 1930s and early 1940s was a notably interdisciplinary forum. Leavis's later account of English as a potential 'liaison centre' (Leavis 1972) in the academy was also a genuine gesture towards valuing the interdisciplinary, at least at postgraduate or senior level. Leavis's conception of the creative university (discussed below) is on a par with the kind of collaborative meaning-making between disciplines that accords with much theory and practice in organisational learning (Dierkes et al. 2001) as well as research into student learning (Savin-Baden 2008). At the same time Leavis's faith in interdisciplinary work as it materialised before his eyes was badly dented—he strongly disapproved of mixed disciplinary courses at undergraduate level, for instance—and he developed a strong aversion to stepping outside disciplinary boundaries or even seeing these as semi-permeable. His faith in the 'liaison centre' as necessarily situated in English was shared by fewer and fewer people even in his own discipline. Had he re-conceptualised his early experiences as a student and novice lecturer during the 1920s as prefiguring the value of the transdisciplinary (Nicolescu 2008; Gibbs 2015) he might have reconfigured the

problem in a way that found him a different set of academic and other intellectual allies. Innovations theorists have argued that 'most innovation happens at the boundaries between disciplines or specializations' (Carlile 2004: 555); whether we accept this assertion or not, it is a tenet that the Leavis of the early 1920s, at the cusp of innovation in teaching and learning in his own field, might have eagerly embraced.

6.5   Reclaiming the Idea of the University

Can the contemporary university be understood as anything more than a collection of multiple, competing and shifting goals (Scott 1995)? Can a new understanding of goals and goal-directedness emerge from the fragmented, polyvocal situation that constitutes the contemporary university (Barnett 2000)? With their eyes on the confluence of past and present ways of thinking on these issues, Barnett & Standish (2003) pose the synoptic question, 'Is there any way of writing, any way of espousing a thesis [of the idea of the university], that might be felt to stand in the line of Newman, Arnold, Jaspers, Ortega, Leavis, and Moberly?' (224).

Leavis's kind of 'belief in' the university and his characteristic mode of address (the public lecture), it may be argued, were feasible when the role of the public intellectual was more widely accepted (Posner & Posner 2009) and the scale of higher education much smaller, but it is now relatively inconceivable in a world of pundits, incommensurable language games (see Chap. 4) and local stories rather than grand narratives (Lyotard 1984), one in which truth-claims are expected to be minutely evidenced or risk incredulity as 'anecdotal'.

In the absence of a consensus over feasible ways of speaking about the university in any univocal and prospective sense for a wider audience, possibly the most authentic response to Barnett & Standish's (2003) challenge—it is one I see threaded through their own several contributions to debate (see Barnett 2013; Standish 2012)—is to ask repeatedly in comprehensible language, variations of the question 'What for?' (which is not to be equated with the postmodernist's ironising 'So what?'). 'What for?' is a question that pulses through Leavis's literary and social criticism alike: indeed, there is no shift of register when he reflects on the 'What ultimately for?' he sees being pursued by imaginative artists, pre-eminently the major English novelists and Tolstoy (Leavis 1967: 13), and the same question he pursues in relation to the university. Leavis saw nothing incongruous about including a study of T. S. Eliot's later poetry, with its distinctive take on the exploratory-creative nature of language and the probing questions to which this gives rise, in a major book-length statement on the idea of the university (Leavis 1943). This was not, however, as Leavis repeatedly pointed out, a claim that poetry would save us.

Barnett (2000) argues that 'the suggestion that there could be a single idea of set of ideas to carry us forward in placing and in developing our universities in the twenty-first century is clearly going to be problematic' (4). If this argument is

granted, then the corollary is perhaps no less problematic. No straightforward anti-essentialist argument in favour of unbounded plurality—viewed by Leavis (1972: 32) as fence-sitting—will suffice either. The major challenge, as Leavis conceives it, and it is one that contemporary debate has yet to provide an adequate answer to, is not to hold out for a single dominant purpose of the university but, more practically, how to make the university in all its diversity 'more than a collocation of specialist departments—to make it a centre of human consciousness: knowledge, judgment and responsibility' (Leavis 1972: 63).

Questions of teleonomy, of 'purposive conception', when applied to a loosely coupled system (Weick 1976) such as the university, are inevitably of a complex order. Issues of purposiveness need to be carefully thought through and lessons learned fed back into the system on a continual basis, as a means of intellectual capital and knowledge management (Reinhardt et al. 2001). Leavis insists that no single account or 'answer' offered can suffice. According to Leavis, the most one can say in general, in terms of 'answers' and goal-setting where large, complex systems are involved, is that we are engaged in an enterprise about which we feel more-or-less purposive and that our 'perception of problems and goals changes' (Leavis 1972: 187). The focus then shifts to one of the stories or *Weltanschauungen* that people weave around goals and the continuities that can be discerned between stories (McDrury & Alterio 2002). Hence, the importance of our registering the kind of story which Leavis weaves from his notion of human creativity and how this infuses his pedagogic practice.

6.6 The Economy of Creativity

For Leavis the university has a special place in the economy of creativity, not merely by virtue of its functions of knowledge creation and critique, cultural reproduction and training for the professions. Of all society's institutions it is the one where creativity can, given the right circumstances, level of will and intelligence, reflect on its own processes and purposes in ways that benefit not just the university but society as a whole. This makes the university, indeed any university, a potentially unique type of organisation in this respect, one that much educational discourse tacitly presupposes and tends to take for granted, even when the discourse is hard-nosed about the university's duty in 'setting realistic targets and eliminating weaknesses' (Shattock 2010: x). For Leavis, only within and from the university can insights into the creative process have the maximum intellectual, social or spiritual purchase, via an educated public made conscious of, and energised by, an authority that is incommensurate with its (usually) numerically small size.

Such was the thesis that had received a full-scale treatment in *Education and the university* (Leavis 1943) and which was developed, in schematic outline, in Leavis's subsequent essays, public lectures and letters to the Press. The key message throughout is that only through a continual effort to re-conceive creativity, individually and collaboratively, can higher education come near to grasping its

(and hence society's) more urgent purposes (Cranfield 2006). It is this message which in my view constitutes Leavis's continuing challenge to higher education, his idea for 'a creative university', rather than any programmatic guidance or 'vision'. That the core of his pedagogic practice and his wider deliberations on the function of the university equally form part of this continual effort to re-conceive creativity is itself a constructive example, one that transcends what might otherwise appear like a distinct lack of scalability in his ideas (see Moran 2002). In any creative university how we think about teaching or conducting inquiry and how we think about the future of the institution are likely to go hand in hand. Consider, as a counter illustration of this thesis, the Dearing Report (1997) on higher education in the UK which unlike previous such reports committed itself to the development and funding of teaching as a profession for university academics. Yet the substantial compendium of sub-reports it contains mentions 'creativity' and its cognates only eleven times, each time linked to a performative notion of creativity as serving economic imperatives such as high-level technical skills and developing relationships between global corporations and their suppliers (4.14), skills of entrepreneurship (4.25), and so on. (The UK government's subsequent independent Browne Report (2010), *Securing a sustainable future for higher education*, mentions 'inspiring creativity' (1.1) once.) Whatever the Report's intentions, a Leavisian reading would point to a radical disconnect between the espoused commitment to developing academics as teachers and the *humanly* impoverished anticipated consequences.

Leavis argues that in articulating their purposes the individuals concerned in higher education will be no less committed to their sense of individual responsibility as they act within more 'holistic' systemic perspectives (cf. Ortega's perspectivism discussed in Chap. 2). Where this level of commitment is unforthcoming we act not as free agents but instead enact a perverse form of collaborative creativity which conceals its own inauthentic premises from itself. In this, Leavis anticipates subsequent inquiry into how individuals can avoid disciplinary reductionism and reduce the influence of pernicious ideologies (Delanty 2001; Barnett 2003).

Leavis is anti-systematising to the extent that he deliberately offers no political or detailed educational programme. For him, as for Ortega (see Chap. 2), the issue at stake is about the fundamental basis of judgment, not 'the fact of judging rightly or wrongly—truth is not within our reach—but the lack of scruple which makes them omit the elementary requirements for right judgment' (Ortega y Gasset 1930; cited in Leavis 1976: 7). It is not true, however, that Leavis does not think systematically or systemically; quite the reverse. Criticism's confusion on this score (see Mulhern 2000: 15) is an indication of aspects of Leavis that continue to evade recognition.

The hegemonic hubrism which Leavis associates with the Blakean figure of Urizen (Leavis 1972), the embodiment of overweening conventional reason and law, takes many forms in higher education. As critical as he was of the academic system, Leavis did not want to undermine or destroy it but to rebuild it for more creative purposes. His project was 'to defeat the academic ethos from within in the most positive and creative way' (Leavis 1986: 222).

'Critics have found me narrow' (Leavis 1948: 9), Leavis stated, anticipating the objection that whatever he might say in his defence about the virtue of concentrating on essentials, he would be accused, unfairly in his view, of exclusivity of the wrong kind. Bell (1988) draws on Isaiah Berlin's analogy of the fox and hedgehog, claiming that 'Leavis is a classic instance of the hedgehog. He knew not a lot of different things, but one big thing, and that he knew really well' (131); for Bell, the one big thing is Leavis's 'concern for language as the collective creation of its speech community' (133). I have argued for a similar one big thing in the shape of Leavis's idea of the critical exchange which, in my view, represents the core of his continuing and wider significance for contemporary higher education: hence the amount of space I have devoted to exploring this conception.

6.7 Leavis and Home Truths

Leavis suffers more than most major thinkers from the process of 'translation', that is, from the encoding of his thought in abstract terms and its recontextualisation in other settings (see Chaps 2 and 5). Admittedly Leavis did his utmost to discourage such abstracting, intent as he was on directing attention to the concrete and to practice: hence his giving methodological precedence, where sociological analysis of higher education is concerned, to what we would call the retrospective insider-participant case study (Leavis 1967: 1–35). Dismissive references in later texts to social sciences (Leavis 1972, 1975) do him little credit for not having engaged seriously with developments in this discipline since the 1930s. But this does not mean that his particular approach is not underpinned by a body of knowledge about social order and social change, even if following the demise of *Scrutiny* in 1953 this is seldom articulated in sociological terms as such. It is criticism's demurral with Leavis on this matter that enables what I take to be a fairly representative schematic outline of Leavis's critical ideas to conclude with the verdict that 'Given the recent developments in the fields of cultural and literary theory, it is almost enough to present a narrative of the Leavisite approach to condemn it to ridicule' (Storey 1995: 256–7). Taken out of context, and sometimes in, it is possible to misread Leavis in this reductive way—to hit the target and miss the point (see Chap. 5).

A concluding illustration of another kind of misreading of Leavis occurs in a book *Life.after.theory* (Payne & Schad 2004). The point of ending with this example is to highlight the value of our attending to what Leavis actually says, as opposed to what we think he says. The book's co-editor John Schad includes the following as an epigraph to his Epilogue: '"*life is a necessary word*" F. R. Leavis' (184). What Leavis wrote is: '"Life" *is* a necessary word' (Leavis 1972: 11, emphasis in original) (see also Chap. 3). The transposition omits two important features of Leavis's original, the emphatic 'is' and the inverted commas round 'life'; its recontextualisation obscures the fact that this statement is not just an assertion, it is much stronger than this, it is a form of insistence about the word 'life'

(made contestable by its being placed in quotation marks). That is to say, the reader is less likely to register its constative force in the absence of its rhetorical form or failing this some indication of its original context or *Weltanschauung*. The unconditioned reader approaching Leavis's original is likely to think, 'What makes the author so emphatic? Why would it occur to someone to say that this *isn't* a necessary word?' It is a reflective prompt, in the implied interrogative cast of 'This is so, isn't it?' Of course, it may prompt a 'Yes, but—'… However, that is the point about what is known as intentional understanding for which Dilthey coined the (German) word *Verstehen*: 'Intentional understanding engages directly with the world as we perceive it; it aims not so much to explain things, as to make us at home with them' (Scruton 1994: 243). To that extent, all literature and all criticism is a form of *Verstehen* or humane or sympathetic understanding (O'Hear 1996). It is a form of insisting on what might be called for want of a better word home truths. In the formulation of certain challenging and doubtless challengeable home truths about principles, values and practices of higher education Leavis has few equals.

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Chapter 7
Being Taught by Leavis

7.1 Recollections of Leavis

Leavis in his heyday was one of most talked-about figures in higher education, an academic whose ideas about teaching were the subject of debate and controversy not only in schools, colleges and faculty meetings but in journals and newspaper columns in Britain and overseas. A fictionalised and somewhat contested account of his tutorial teaching, featuring the actor Sir Ian Holm as Leavis, made it to the small screen in *The last romantics* (Williams 1991). No recording of Leavis's teaching is known to exist although there are two audio recordings of public lectures. By contrast, a considerable number of personal accounts of his teaching has amassed over the years. These range from students' verbatim notes of tutorials and seminars (Holland 2011) to individual reflections (Robinson 2011) to book-length memoirs (Ellis 2013). Three publications (Thompson 1984; MacKillop & Storer 1995; Cambridge Quarterly 1996) bring together a substantial diversity of perspectives and testimonies by former students, colleagues and independent witnesses. The majority are written by those who knew Leavis at Cambridge from the 1920s on; fewer exist from those who knew him in the later York years (see Wilson 2012). Most bear witness to the considerable influence, in many but not all cases welcome, that Leavis exerted as a teacher. The main purpose of the following selective personal account of aspects of Leavis's teaching at York is not to add to the stock of reminiscence but to raise reflections about what counts as 'being taught' when the teacher is as potent a thinker and practitioner as Leavis and which his particular example serves to accentuate.

7.2   Leavis at York

I applied to study English and Related Literature at York, to be 'taught by' F.R. Leavis, largely on the strength of an essay by Leavis on Keats which my English teacher had put my way and on my headmaster's advice. 'They threw him out of Cambridge. He was the only thing worth going there for.' While neither statement was factually correct, my headmaster, a History graduate and Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, was apt to express truths rather than facts. I was interviewed by Philip Brockbank, then Head of Department at York. During the conversation, when I explained that my father's profession written on the application form —'heavy lifting technician'—was a euphemism for 'dock worker', he commented drily that Professor Leavis had written something similar about Milton. I was offered a place.

As an undergraduate at York between 1972 and 1975, I saw a good deal of Leavis in the course of his teaching and the daily life of Langwith College of which he and I happened to be co-residents (Leavis travelled to York from Cambridge mid-week during term time). Immediately striking were his informal, almost Bohemian dress and demeanour; a lifetime apparently spent grabbing every available hour in the sun had also taken its toll on Leavis's complexion. Leavis wore his learning, like his white Shelleyan shirts, very lightly and while he could be acerbic at the lectern he was never less than courteous to students. His relations with English colleagues were, it seems, less uniformly positive and while he had cordial connections with several staff we heard stories of friendly overtures from young lecturers in the senior common room being pre-empted with a strategically raised newspaper. Only much later did it occur to me that there might be an explanation, if not an excuse, for this behaviour: Leavis needed a particular kind of contact with students which he didn't need with other staff. He wrote privately to Philip Brockbank that he was anxious above all to have the time and conditions that would allow him to keep up his reading and thinking and writing (in Layram 2011: 30 December 1967). Regular teaching, including those new to university, was a pre-requisite for Leavis's 'other' creative work (teaching was no less creative for him). At the time I hadn't fully appreciated the declaration of dependence in the dedication of Leavis's recently published (1972) *Nor shall my sword*: 'To my York students, who gave me a new Blake with clean margins to write in' (v).

Leavis was no stranger to margins. A lifetime having been spent on a number of them as student-researcher, non-combatant nursing orderly 'behind the lines', teacher and critic ensured that Leavis, contrary to popular stereotype, was never fully incorporated in any dominant system of values. The irony, not lost on Leavis, was that a figure so consistently marginal to the nodes of power and career advancement should have been found so frequently in the limelight being cast in a leading Machiavellian role. An overt concern with marginality was particularly evident in those of Leavis's public lectures at York which I attended, including those which formed the basis of parts of *The living principle* (Leavis 1975) and the later book on Lawrence (Leavis 1976). A characteristic feature of them as delivered was the asides

and those more focal comments that made it into the published versions in which Leavis reflected on his marginality and challenge to the mainstream as defined by the perspective of those with the power to define the centre. Leavis thus anticipated, experientially as well as theoretically, the kind of reflexive discourse on marginality that began to appear in the 1980s (Salutin 1984) but which in Leavis at the time was largely dismissed as self-importance or persecution mania (see Harding 1984). In terms of the critical judgments expressed in these lectures, Leavis found himself caught on another set of margins, between the outer stretches of modernism and the confines of what he referred to forensically as 'the orthodoxy of enlightenment'. The lectures on Lawrence, in which he inveighed against sexual equality, or rather what would now be called political correctness, for example the routine alternation of female and male announcers on the BBC, found him out of sync with a generation of students in the vanguard of women's and gay liberation movements.

Leavis occasionally referred to his 'students' or 'pupils' but he rarely referred to himself as a teacher and was not even fond of the word 'teaching'. We knew he had put it on record that 'I don't like it ["teaching"] because of the suggestion it carries of telling—authoritative telling' (Leavis 1969: 65, 66). That didn't stop him expressing forthright views, especially on the amount of reading students could reasonably be expected to get through. Leavis's emphasis on the relatively few great writers in the canon was a salutary corrective to fashionable or wilful academic tastes, although this did not always have a noticeable influence on the syllabus. When an announcement went up on the department noticeboard that Richardson's *Clarissa* (nigh on one million words) was the compulsory set text for the Augustans course many of us baulked. Some called for support on Leavis's argument in *The great tradition* that 'the demand [Richardson] makes on the reader's time is in proportion—and absolutely—so immense as to be found, in general, prohibitive' (Leavis 1948: 13). It was pointed out in return that much as Leavis had admitted to having no great desire to repeat the experience he had at least done Richardson the favour of reading the book.

Leavis's 'appreciation and analysis' classes (see Page 1995), question-and-answer sessions for first-year English undergraduates based on dating unseen passages of prose and verse, a well-honed method that Leavis had brought with him from Cambridge, I found a mixed blessing. An awkward exchange in which I failed to attribute a piece of seventeenth-century prose (by Halifax) effectively silenced me in class for most of the term. My fault, not Leavis's, and silence isn't necessarily a barrier to learning and having your intellectual horizons broadened (Ollin 2008). Nevertheless, I thought Leavis could have provided more 'scaffolding' (Rosenshinem & Meister 1992) without compromising 'standards'. While the format of the class notionally drew the student in and allowed space for the student voice, in terms of being 'co/researcher' (Fielding 2004), I couldn't but sense a winnowing process at work.

Where Leavis counted most for me as a teacher was as a reader of poetry. Here I could connect more easily with the critic on Keats who had been a factor in my applying to York to begin with. There were several opportunities to experience this teacher-critic: readings were announced at the start of term and open to

undergraduates, research students and staff (Leavis to my knowledge never encouraged others to contribute suggestions for texts). Leavis's readings were by no means confined to English texts: he would give seminars on Mallarmé's *Toast funèbre* and Valéry's *Le cimitière marin*, the latter also to ponder vicariously the impact and aftermath of the Great War, a topic Leavis was to return to during his York years. (It was at York that he had completed his initial training as a teenager for the Friends Ambulance Unit before going to serve in France.)

7.3   Leavis's Seminar on Eliot

One seminar I attended in 1973, on Eliot's 'Little Gidding' (1942), the last of his *Four quartets*, offers a case in point of the effect of Leavis's reading on me, although my experience was probably far from unique. Ellis's (2013: 134) account of Leavis's tutorial readings of this poem in Cambridge during the 1960s demonstrates that Leavis had been rehearsing it for some years, to the extent that it had probably assumed a quasi-symbolic significance for Leavis as a *compte rendu* of his views about Eliot, life and language. Not that this was a cause for unqualified celebration: much of the significance of his account and the poem that occasioned it related to failures in communication. Leavis was apt here to refer to lines from an earlier Quartet of Eliot's, 'East Coker' (1940): 'every attempt … is a different kind of failure'.

Much of the detailed commentary about the poem made its way into *The living principle* (Leavis 1975) and a private recording of Leavis reading the poem at York made at about the same time as the seminar is kept at the British Library Sound Archive. So the characteristic analytic method and the sound of Leavis's voice (if not the accompanying physical gestures—Leavis would insist that he read 'as one who reads not only by the ear but by the body' (Leavis 1986: 268)) can be independently verified. To avoid repeating Leavis's published account I have focused on comments of his that have not to my knowledge made their way into print, drawing on my contemporaneous notes. Familiarity with Eliot's original is not, in my view, necessary to appreciate Leavis's pedagogic method, although one of the main themes of 'Little Gidding'—the recurrent question of whether one's life will have been lived well and authentically—was one that preoccupied Leavis personally no less than it had done Eliot. It is common knowledge that Leavis in his teaching was remarkably reticent on an interpersonal level—there were no false intimacies or dogged attempts on his part to learn students' names—yet there was evidently something in this poem of Eliot's that nudged Leavis towards a degree of unaccustomed self-disclosure, in this case the sharing of his personal and far from comfortable relations with Eliot. That something, it turned out, was Eliot's own self-disclosure in the poem, the unique occasion on which, according to Leavis, the poet's self-defensive mask momentarily dropped.

Initial animated anecdotes about Eliot and the visit he paid to the Leavises' Cambridge household in wartime, at about the same time that 'Little Gidding' was

being composed, in which during the course of a mutually circumspect conversation Eliot left a neat pile of cigarette ash on the living room hearth, served to work the audience—although, as it became clear, this was not the only reason for offering what struck me at the time as distracting autobiographical details. Once Leavis had started on the poem itself, however, a different level of engagement was evident in the deliberately dry mode of delivery. Leavis was fond of quoting Wittgenstein's scolding remark to him 'Don't interpret!' when he had asked Leavis to read out a poem, and Leavis put it on record that he disdained actorly interpretations of Shakespeare's verse (Leavis 1986: 260). Despite Leavis's dislike of the fore-grounding of the interpreter's personality, many recollections of him testify to the transformational, indeed dramatic power of his live readings. Perhaps maturity and experience were factors in the Eliot reading: maybe more prosaically we were simply in the presence of a more-than-usually 'informed reader' characterised as someone with a fuller possession 'of the semantic knowledge … that a mature … listener brings to [the] task of comprehension' (Fish 1980: 48), if that is not too cognitively reductive a formula for something that is easier to recognise than describe.

Leavis did not read the poem sequentially or in its entirety. Instead he began with the three rhymed stanzas in the second movement, that start 'Ash on an old man's sleeve/Is all the ash the burnt roses leave'. With the anecdote of Eliot's cigarette ash so fresh in the memory, Leavis's starting with these lines can hardly have been accidental. After reading the stanzas through he re-read the first, stopping at the seventh line 'The death of hope and despair', explaining the subtle paradox that Eliot was invoking with its implied reference to the poet's earlier *Ash-Wednesday* ('the repeated "ash" in the second line isn't accidental, do you see?'). This poem, one of Leavis's favourites, used Christian symbolism and language in a highly unorthodox way—Leavis habitually called it a 'technique for sincerity'—to explore the nature of conceptual thinking and spiritual affirmation. I do not recall hearing Leavis ever using the word 'stuckness' but he certainly used 'immersion' and 'paralysis' to describe the contrary impulses ('which way should I turn?') which he registered in Eliot's earlier poem and which he (Leavis) enacted in the way he 'in turn' struggled to make sense of Eliot's spiritual and linguistic impasse in this subsequent poem. Leavis mentioned how powerfully the succession of short lines, short-winded almost, conveyed a sense of futility and extinction that could come only with advancing age, how the poem before us couldn't have come from a young man. The implication was that the same could have been said for the reading.

Leavis's nonlinear analysis of the text allowed him to anticipate or circle back to different parts of the poem to emphasise a word, phrase, rhythm or other particular nuance. He spoke of the reader's line-by-line comments 'building up in the margins' (margins again) in the service of creating a cumulative response. This heuristic method appeared to model discreetly Eliot's development and recapitulation of 'musical themes' (the title *Four quartets* indicated this aspect of what Leavis called its *procédés* or structural devices) as well as the attendant playing fast and loose with past, present and future in the act of composition which were part of the poet's avowed attempt—'the intolerable wrestle/With words and meanings'—to transcend the logical constraints of discursive prose: too blunt a tool, Leavis

reminded us, for the precisions the poet had in mind. Leavis more than once spoke of the risk of faltering in reading, of the failure inherent in any attempt to read the poem adequately, mirroring the poet's repeated refrain of failure to articulate meaning.

This kind of reflexivity, of engaging in the moment, the better to understand the thoughts and feelings of an experience while experiencing it, requires some comment, given that it was a characteristic feature of Leavis's critical approach (see Smith 2014: 328) much in evidence here. An expressed anxiety about whether he was up to the task of *interprète* seemed to attend much of Leavis's teaching and wasn't peculiar to this seminar, Eliot or this period of Leavis's career. I don't think this was so much an affectation or an attempt to assimilate himself to Eliot, given that some of Leavis's fear of faltering was due to an uncomfortable interrogation of the poet's ostensible meaning that amounted at times to resistance, as something more integral to the experience of reading generally. By way of justifying this belief I would refer to the way in which Leavis consistently offset his frequently expressed inability to deal fully with a specific text against the ability to point again and again to the local successes of the text in which the potential risks of failure to attend to it were inscribed. It was this latter governing idea that was, I think, fundamental for Leavis in terms of critical and pedagogic practice and which brought the demonstrable reflexivity into play. It wasn't so much other readers who could point out most forcefully any critical shortcomings we might have as the text under consideration itself, intelligently read. This meant coming at the text with an awareness, however sketchy, of the preconceptions we bring to it and with an openness to having those preconceptions tested, clarified and perhaps modified. That Leavis had long been explicit about this principle comes across in his critical exchanges with F. W. Bateson in the closing issues of *Scrutiny*—see Leavis & Bateson (1953)—which form an extended debate on the relative authority of text and context in determining critical response.

7.4   Leavis and the Supplement

Many recollections and critical studies of Leavis single out the creative power of his readings whether live or in print although few have explored affinities between what Leavis was doing pedagogically and approaches to the transformational nature of reading advanced theoretically in reader-oriented criticism (Tompkins 1980) or post-structuralism (Day 1996). If there was a further pedagogic moral for me from Leavis's reading in person it was about attending to the borderline between the object itself and that which we bring to supplement it. Derrida (1976) coined the term 'supplementarity' to designate the process whereby something, supposedly secondary, comes to serve as an aid to something 'original'. Logically speaking, what is original and complete in itself cannot be added to. 'Supplementary reading' usually implies just that, subsidiary, secondary or non-requisite material. In that sense most critical reading is customarily regarded as dependent on and

supplementary to the primary text. A critical reading, no matter how accomplished and inward with the original, doesn't alter that original. But what 'is' the original? Leavis asked this question in relation to the ontological status of the text and its 're-creation' in the minds of people 'meeting in a meaning' and, as we saw in Chaps. 3, 4 and 5, came up with some unusual answers and implications for pedagogy. Derrida's answer, equally unusually, claims that the supplement is both accretion *and* substitution: anything that can justly accommodate a supplement, in this case a critical response, must have needed it in some way, in what way exactly its being the task of critical method to determine in the given context. (A selection of early essays by *Scrutiny* contributors edited by Leavis (1934) is called, appropriately enough, *Determinations*.) Derrida frames this process negatively, as a gap or absence, but this is not incompatible with the positive and Leavisian notion of need (see Watson 1977). Seen in this light, critical reading assumes a potentially more active, creative role insofar as it rises or is drawn forth appropriately to meet this need. Viewing texts from this perspective ultimately opens the way, it's claimed, for more creative reading and response (see Tompkins 1980). We are not very far here from Leavis's notion of the essential creativity of criticism and its attendant responsibilities to seek the real, discussed in Chap. 3.

Leavis's seminar reading of the poem, far from aiming to 'add to' his and our understanding of it, much less supplant this, acted as a 'supplement' to Eliot in this sense. His struggle to apprehend Eliot's struggle seemed a shadow of the original, was frankly acknowledged as such, and yet it also appeared to go some way towards continuing it in the present moment.

How to know when to step in and when to get out of the way; how to avoid standing inappropriately, obtrusively or at all between the student and the object or experience being gestured towards: these are delicate but crucial arts for an educator in whatever field which Leavis taught me to appreciate through ostensive practice. What I took from Leavis the teacher was a sense of the depth at which literature—as an irreplaceable mode of knowledge (see Bell 1988)—operates rather than any specific critical valuations or interests; he sent one back to the text with deepened response and (re-)awakened curiosity. To this extent the seminar leader or reader and the literary critical writer were of a piece. I couldn't as an eighteen-year-old have put these things in this way and even now I am not sure I come near to understanding fully let alone conclusively what Leavis has to offer. Fresh perspectives open up on each re-reading. Nevertheless, I recognise in retrospect that the Leavis I was fortunate to experience at first hand in more intimate and concentrated settings embodied this pedagogic artistry to a high degree. When circumstances worked in its favour it operated at an exemplary level despite or perhaps because of the frequent foregrounding of the risks of failure.

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