UNIT 15: F. R. LEAVIS: “LINE OF WIT”

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- read Leavis as one of the leading English literary critics of the 20th century
- gain a clear idea of his views on literature especially poetry and fiction
- locate the significant issues in Leavisite criticism
- grasp the significance of the essay “Line of Wit” as a seminal text of English criticism

15.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the course. In this unit, we shall discuss the essay “Line of Wit” in by F. R. Leavis. Leavis was an English literary critic of early-to-mid-20th century. He taught for much of his career at Downing College, Cambridge and later at the University of York. The students of literature often read Leavis as one of the most influential figures in 20th century English literary criticism, as he introduced a new “seriousness” into the field of English studies. Throughout his entire career as a critic, Leavis took ‘evaluation’ as the principal concern of criticism, which had the power to shape contemporary sensibility. He further insisted that the

preoccupation with form on the part of the great English novelists was a matter of responsibility towards a rich moral interest, and that works of art with a limited formal concern would always be of lesser quality. In that respect, it is believed, Leavis differed substantially from his contemporaries, the New Critics, with which we often tend to identify him. In this unit, you will get an opportunity to discuss F. R. Leavis and judge for yourself his relative significance in the English critical scenario of the 20th century through a discussion of his essay “Line of Wit.”

15.3 F. R. LEAVIS: THE CRITIC

Frank Raymond Leavis was born in Cambridge, England, on July 14th 1895. His father Harry Leavis sold pianos and other musical instruments near Cambridge. Leavis was educated at a local private school whose headmaster Dr. W. H. D. Rouse was a classicist and was highly praised for his ‘direct method’, a practice done by teachers to carry on classroom conversations with their pupils in Latin and classical Greek. He was just 19 years old when the war between Britain and Germany broke out in 1914 during World War I. He took part in the war as a stretcher-bearer, working with the Friends’ Ambulance unit. However, the experience of the war had a lasting effect on Leavis as he later suffered from insomnia and intermittent nightmares. It took time for Leavis to recover from the experience of the War.

He had then won a scholarship from the Perse School, and in 1919, he began to study history. In his second year, he changed to English and became a pupil at the newly founded English School at Cambridge. But, despite a first-class Honours in History, Leavis was never considered a strong candidate for a research fellowship. In 1924, Leavis presented a thesis on ‘The Relationship of Journalism to Literature on the Rise and Development of the Press in England’. This work became the stepping-stone for his future development as a thinker and critic. In 1927, Leavis was appointed a probationary lecturer for the university, and his substantial publications left clear marks of influence from the demands of his own teaching. In 1929, he married one of his students, Queenie Roth. Their

union resulted in a productive very collaboration. When Leavis published *New Bearings in English Poetry*, his wife published *Fiction and the Reading Public*, and both became instrumental in publication of the quarterly journal *Scrutiny.* In 1930, F. R. Leavis was appointed director of studies in English at Downing College where he taught for the next thirty years.

Being students of literature, you must try to know about the journal *Scrutiny.* F. R. Leavis founded scrutiny, a Quarterly Review and a literature journal, in 1932. The first issue of May 1932 was limited to only 100 copies. Gradually, the circulation grew leading to 750 copies in the later part of 1930s and 1000 copies in the later part of 1940s. During 1950s only 1500 copies, were made but most of them were held by colleges and academic libraries for circulation. Leavis remained its principal editor of the journal until the final issue in 1953. During that time, he used it as a vehicle for the new Cambridge criticism, upholding rigorous intellectual standards and attacking the dilettante elitism, which he believed, characterised the Bloomsbury Group. *Scrutiny* provided a forum for identifying important contemporary works and for reviewing the traditional canon. This criticism was informed by a teacher's concern to present the essentials to students.

New Bearings in English Poetry was his first major breakthrough in the field of criticism. He was also associated with the American New Critics, who emphasised 'close reading' and detailed textual analysis of poetry over an interest in the mind and personality of the poet, sources, the history of ideas and political and social implications. Although there are similarities between Leavis' approach to criticism and that of the New Critics, Leavis differs from them in not considering the theory of the work of art as a self-contained and self-sufficient aesthetic, and as a formal artifact isolated from the society, culture and tradition from which it emerged. *New Bearings*, devoted principally to Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot and Pound, was an attempt to identify certain new achievements brought by these poets into the field of modern poetry.

In 1933, Leavis published a collection called *For Continuity*, based on some of his *Scrutiny* essays. His other book *Culture and the Environment*



Cavalier Poets

It refers to the group of English poets during the reign of Charles I (1625-49). This group includes Richard Lovelace, Sir John Suckling, Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew and Edmuns Waller. These poets virtually abandoned the sonnet form which had been the most chosen and favoured contemporary medium for love poems. Their lyrical poems are usually light, witty, elegant, and for most part, concerned with love.

stressed the importance of the presence of informed and highly trained intellectual elite whose existence within university English departments could preserve the cultural continuity of English life and literature. In *Education and the University* (1943), Leavis argued that “there is a prior cultural achievement of language; language is not a detachable instrument of thought and communication. It is the historical embodiment of its community’s assumptions and aspirations at levels which are so subliminal much of the time that language is their only index.”

In around 1948, Leavis focused mostly on fiction, and made his general statement on fiction in *The Great Tradition* by stressing an English tradition through Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad. Leavis purposely excluded major authors such as Sterne and Hardy, but eventually changed his position on Dickens, and later published *Dickens the Novelist* in 1970. In 1950, in the introduction to *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, Leavis set out the historical importance of utilitarian thought. In 1952, was published another collection of essays from *Scrutiny* under the title *The Common Pursuit*. This is one of Leavis’ best-known and most influential works. A decade later, Leavis became controversial when he delivered his Richmond lecture, “Two cultures? The significance of C. P. Snow” at Downing College vigorously attacking Snow’s suggestion that practitioners of the scientific and humanistic disciplines should have some significant understanding of each other, and that a lack of knowledge of 20th century physics was comparable to an ignorance of Shakespeare. Leavis’ attacks on Snow were widely decried in the British press by public figures such as Lord Boothby and Lionel Trilling. Leavis introduced the idea of the ‘third realm’ as a name for the method of existence of literature.

In 1962, his readership and fellowship at Downing were terminated; however, he took up Visiting Professorships at the University of Bristol, the University of Wales and the University of York. His final volumes of criticism include *Nor Shall My Sword* (1972), *The Living Principle* (1975) and *Thought, Words and Creativity* (1976).



LET US KNOW

In his *Living Principle,* F. R. Leavis said that collaboration is essential as any work of art can exist only in what he calls the "third realm"—the realm of that which is neither public in the ordinary sense or merely private. This collaborative nature of criticism is continually underlined in Leavis' own practice. Examples can be cited of his collaboration with his wife, Queenie Dorothy Leavis, in *Lectures in America* and *Dickens the Novelist.* Another example of collaboration was with his students at Downing who introduced his methods and principles in schools and universities where they subsequently taught. Moreover, the subsequent emergence of the journal "Scrutiny" provided as well as accommodated wide range of critical comments on diverse topics. (Irena R. Makaryk, p. 401).

Leavis' preferred method of analysis–displayed to best advantage in his studies of poetry—is a 'close reading' of short passages and he was happiest when working in a classroom with an open text before him. Like the theorists of practical criticism, he held that literary analysis should contain nothing that cannot be produced from, or related back to, the text itself. In a discussion of philosophy and criticism, he argued that the critic must guard against extrapolating from the text under analysis, and refrain from all premature or irrelevant generalizations. His refusal to theorise or philosophise about what he is doing is based on the conviction that the authority of the mature and experienced critic or reader is based on an immediate sense of values instilled by training in the labour of reading.

Leavis' importance in the development of literary criticism in England in the mid 20th-century lay in his unceasing insistence on the priority of practice over theory and the centrality of evaluation within the critical process. Ramaswami S. & V. S. Sethuraman have stated: "Leavis' *Revaluations* is an attempt at rewriting the history of English poetry in the light of Eliot's observation that 'Donne, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herbert and Lord Herbert, Marvell, King, and Cowley at best are in the direct current of English poetry,

and that their faults should be reprimanded by this standard rather than coddled by antiquarian affection' ('The Metaphysical Poets'). Like its counterpart, Leavis' *The Great Tradition*, which attempts to rewrite the history of fiction, *Revaluation* reflects, as much in its inclusions as in its omissions, the critical preferences and prejudices of F.R. Leavis. Leavis is nothing if not normative in his approach and he is not ashamed of his literary judgments which are always based on a deep commitment to life." (Ramaswami S. & V.S. Sethuraman, p. 693). In *Revaluations,* he argued that the critic should 'say nothing that cannot be related immediately to judgments about producible texts.' On the other hand, he also argued that mature literary discussion could manifest itself only within an informed human community.

Although it is difficult to classify Leavis' criticism, an attempt can be made to group it into four chronological stages. The first is that of his early publications and essays which include *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) and *Revaluation* (1936). Here he was concerned primarily with reexamining poetry from the 17th to the 20th centuries, and this was accomplished under the strong influence of T.S. Eliot. In addition, during this early period Leavis sketched out his views about university education. Then he turned to fiction and the novel, producing *The Great Tradition* (1948) and *D.H. Lawrence, Novelist* (1955). Following this period, Leavis pursued an increasingly complex treatment of myriad literary, educational and social issues.

In two of his last publications were embodied the critical sentiments of his final years including *The Living Principle: 'English' as a Discipline of Thought* (1975), and *Thought, Words and Creativity: Art and Thought in Lawrence* (1976). One noticeable point in him is that unlike in his early phase of carrier, his criticism in later part became progressively philosophical in nature.

F.R. Leavis died at the age of eighty-two on the 14th April 1978 having been made a Companion of Honour in the New Year. His wife Q.D. Leavis died in 1981.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How will you understand Leavis' 'third realm'? Is this a legitimate critical concept?

Q 2: Explain the significance of the journal 'Scrutiny'.

Q 3: What were Leavis' suggestions for the critics?

15.4 READING THE TEXT "LINE OF WIT"

In the preface to his seminal book on English Poetry, *Revaluations* (1936) F.R. Leavis defines the task and duty of the critic to be the perceiver of himself so that he/she can make the finest and sharpest discriminations possible and state his/her findings as responsibly, clearly and forcibly as he/she can. In 1932, Q. D. Leavis criticises Charlotte Brontë for her indulgence in undisciplined emotion that makes her a 'schoolgirl of genius' and very unfavourably compares her genius with the 'well-regulated minds' of Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth, while F. R. Leavis (1936) complains that Milton's habit of writing Latin verse forces him to exhibit in *Samson Agonistes* a loss of 'all feelings for his native English'.

Seen in the context of such discussions, we can comprehend the significance of this essay "Line of Wit", which is also the opening chapter in his book *Revaluations* (1936), is an attempt to define the main line of the English poetic tradition. This essay is also a celebration of T. S. Eliot's work on the Metaphysical poets, as Leavis says: "Mr. Eliot's achievement is a matter for academic evaluation, his poetry is accepted, and his early observations on the Metaphysicals and on Marvell provide currency for university lectures and undergraduate exercise."

Moreover, the appearance of the *Oxford Book of Seventeenth-Century Verse* also offered scope for surveying and reconsidering the poetry of the great Metaphysicals like Donne whose 'extraordinary force of originality' made him 'so potent an influence in the seventeenth century'. Leavis then states that a poem like "The Good Morrow" with its most appealing beginning: *"I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I/Did, till we lov'd?"* enables Donne to show his originality by deviating from the old

‘musical’ tradition of poetry and by using “in complete dissociation from music a stanza-form that proclaims the union of poetry and music”. This dissociation is positive; and the utterance, movement and intonation are those of the controlling and ‘talking’ voice. Moreover, Donne’s verse which had turned acutely dramatic presents a technique, a spirit in which the sinew and living nerve of English are used—”suggests an appropriate development of impressions that his ear might have recorded in the theatre”. This also refers to Donne’s characteristics like presentation of situations, the liveliness of enactments, which are aptly justified by the inclusion of his poem “Satyre (iii)” in the *Oxford Book.*

Leavis discusses how the characteristics of Donne’s poetry such as presentations of situations, liveliness of enactment could be called dramatic. For example, one of Donne’s poems in the *Oxford Book* namely “Satyre (iii)” reminds the readers of dramatic blank verses. The elements of play with sense movements across rimes, the control in tone and stresses found in this poem, provide affinities with Shakespeare. Yet Donne was writing something very original and quite different from blank verse. According to Leavis, “Enough illustration (out of an embarrassment of choice) has been given to bring home how dramatic Donne’s use of his medium can be, how subtly; in a consummately managed verse he can exploit the strength of spoken English.” Leavis was perhaps trying to hint at the ‘colloquial’ elements in Donne’s verse which made his poetry so memorable.

Referring to the influence of Donne on the Cavalier poets like Thomas Carew, Leavis states that Carew: “exemplifies Donne’s part in a mode or tradition (or whatever other term may fitly describe that which makes the Court poets a community)…To say this is not to stress any remarkable originality in his talent; his strength is representative, and he has individual force enough to be representative with unusual vitality.” This can be best seen in his poem “Know, Celia” where he represents a court culture—an element of the tradition of chivalry, which meaningfully showed the contemporary life and manners. Leavis then makes a reference to Prof. Grierson’s *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* where he is seen to have shown Carew’s indebtedness to Donne.

However, Carew's achievements also lead us back to influences other than that of Donne's. For example, Ben Jonson, whose 'classical' endeavours remind us that there are 'ways of being classical'. But, the idiomatic quality of the Caroline poetry, its relation to the spoken language makes another significant point about Jonson's influence on his successors. Jonson's effort was to cultivate an English mode that could express a sense of contemporaneity with the classical masters like Horace and Juvenal. This mode, as seen through a large number of his poems, can be described as 'consciously urbane, mature and civilized.' The assertive force of Jonson's genius, his native robustness, his interest in man and manners and his views on literature and poetic art, could clearly be seen in his poems included in the *Oxford Book.* Leavis argues: "Ben Jonson's powerful genius to initiate the tradition, the common heritage, into which a line of later poets could enter and by which a very great Augustan poet was to profit long after civilization and literary fashions had been transformed." One may use the term 'wit' to emphasise the remoteness of Johnson's art from the 19th century notion of the 'lyrical'.

LET US KNOW



Wit

In the Middle Ages, then term wit used to mean 'sense' or 'the five senses': thus 'common sense'. During the Renaissance, however, it came to mean 'intelligence' or 'wisdom'; thus intellectual capacity. During the neo-classical age, Dryden, Cowley and Pope held wit as primarily a matter of propriety. As Pope started in his famous *Essay on Criticism*: "True wit is Nature to advantage dressed." William Hazlitt later distinguished between wit and imagination: wit being artificial and imagination being valid for him. During the 19th century when the term imagination was used to designate the ability to invent, wit was associated with levity. Matthew Arnold dismissed Chaucer and Pope from his list of great poets because of their wittiness, and 'lack of high seriousness'. Eliot, however, hailed metaphysical poets like Donne and Marvell for their peculiar ability to combine wit with seriousness.

The "Line of Wit" begins with Ben Jonson and Donne, through Carew and Marvell to Pope. Leavis argues that Pope has certain qualities that relate him to Marvell: "The affinity with the mode of Marvell's *Dialogue* should be fairly obvious. The weight behind that concluding passage of the *Dunciad* is greater than Marvell could supply and the urbanity has a different inflection, but the relation between wit and solemnity is essentially that of the *Dialogue*." But, according to Leavis, such a line should also include Cowley who seems to be another significant figure and more representative than Marvell. Because, in a poem like "Of Wit", Cowley "discusses and expounds wit in a manner and spirit quite out of resonance with the Metaphysical mode—quite alien and uncongenial to it; with a reasonableness that has little to do with the 'tough reasonableness' underlying Marvell's lyric grace…It is a spirit of good sense, of common sense; appealing to criteria that the coming age will refine into 'Reason, Truth and Nature'."

Then, he goes on to analyse the relative significance of the neo-classical poets like Dryden and Pope. Leavis states that Dryden's genius and his strength of native English led Hopkins in the 20th century to praise him as 'the most masculine of our poets, in his style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of our own literature…'But when compared to Pope, Dryden becomes inferior. Pope's greater strictness of versification means greater autonomy manifesting greater fineness and profundity of organization suggesting a much greater intensity of art. However, such a comparison is erroneous. Because, Dryden's effects are all for the public ear and his pamphleteering verse as well as the blank verse in a poem like "All for Love" could be appreciated on a first hearing. Therefore, Dryden's verses were effective for satiric purposes and could be read in the appropriate spirit. This is what is perhaps missing in Pope. So, the greatness of Dryden can be compared to that of Ben Jonson. The community to which Jonson belonged as a poet was predominantly ideal but the community to which Dryden belonged was one in which he actually lived and moved. His complete involvement with the Augustan life could make one call him a great representative poet rather than a great poet. However, Leavis says that he may be a greater poet than Marvell, but he did not write any poetry as indubitably

great as Marvell's best. Instead, Pope was a complete Augustan and explored through his poetry the strength of his own civilization and achieved a kind of strength so closely related to Marvell's.

In this context, Leavis' reference to Eliot's idea of 'dissociation of sensibility' becomes significant as he puts the phrase into currency, and ascribes the kind of dissociation largely to the influence of Dryden and Pope. This directly brings us back to the discussion of the changes that took place over English cilvilisation in the 17th century leading to the appearance of modern English prose during the early part of the Restoration. Other influential factors leading to the 'changes' included—economic and socio-political history, the emergence of the Royal Society and various intellectual and cultural developments. But, the decay of the Courtly culture due to 'disruptions', 'exile' and 'travels', can be best identified in the lyrical tradition of the Restoration. As for the tradition of wit and grace in lyric is concerned, it died into modes, into conventions of sentiments and expressions of a new age. However, the impression of the period was incomparably rich with the contributions of Donne, Ben Jonson, Herbert, Milton, Marvell and Dryden. Each poet was practising an art having important social functions.

The essay "Line of Wit" finally comes to an end with references to Carew, Cowley and Herrick. Leavis once again says that 'the line of wit', then, runs from Ben Jonson (and Donne) through Carew and Marvell to Pope'. Carew's "The Inscription on the Tombe of the Lady Mary Wentworth" neatly justifies this line. His wit is in the pure Augustan mode. On the other hand, the wit in Cowley's "Of Wit" exhibits a curious instability. While Herrick's poem "The Funeral Rites of the Rose" when compared to Marvell's "And Sleeps so too" can be discussed by the underlying urbane wit.

From your reading of this unit on Leavis' essay "Line of Wit" you must have understood that 'Moral Seriousness', according to Leavis, is the hallmark of criticism. Besides, like Matthew Arnold, he viewed 'Reading' as a defence against the mass-culture born out of heavy industrialisation. As David Macey observes—although such criticism is quite open about its attachment to a high culture, it also made the study of popular culture an institutionalized practice which had a direct impact on the early developments

in cultural studies. As one of the most influential figures in 20th century English literary criticism, Leavis introduced a kind of 'seriousness' into English studies, and the modern university subject on criticism has been shaped very much by Leavis' examples.

Leavis held the view that an 'organic' or 'common culture' had been lost because of industrialization. Therefore, his preservation of tradition goes hand in hand with his celebration of the life-force that once sustained the sturdy communities of 16th century, and which survives in the capacity of experience, the reverent openness towards life and the moral seriousness that typify the great novelists. However, you will note that Leavis' idea of tradition depends on his views of literature. He further opined that the educated public must maintain a kind of cultural continuity. Because, a living culture draws upon the best from the past, adapting it to new situations and needs, and the educated public can uphold standards that have been established in the past.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How does Leavis define the task and duty of a critic in the Preface to his *Revaluations*?

Q 5: How has the term 'Wit' been viewed throughout the ages?

Q 6: On what grounds, Leavis compared Dryden with Pope in his essay "Line of Wit"?

Q 7: What does Leavis have to state about 'moral seriousness'?

15.5 LEAVIS AS A NEW CRITIC

The influence of the Leavises on the development of English as an academic discipline has been so strong that anyone studying English literature in Britain during their time could be called an unwitting Leavisite. David Macey writes "Together with the 'Practical Criticism' of I. A. Richards and William Empson's practice of 'Close Reading', the Leavises' recommendation of attention to the 'text', played an immensely important role in turning English into a serious and disciplined mode of study rather

than a 'gentlemanly' conversation about books. The network of connections cantered on the journal *Scrutiny* extended their influence through schools and colleges and shaped the literary education of more than one generation of students, whilst the insistence from the 1930s to the 1970s on the distinctive discipline of university English is the major single factor that has made English literature the hegemonic discipline within the English education system. In major studies like *Of Both Poetry* (1936) and *General Studies of Prose* (1948, 1952), as well as of individual novelists such as *Lawrence* (1955) and *Dickens* (1970), the Leavises helped to shape the modern canon of English Literature." (Macey, 225).

F. R. Leavis possessed a very clear idea of literary criticism and he was well-known for his decisive and often provocative judgements. Leavis insisted that evaluation was the principal concern of criticism, and that it must ensure that English literature should be a living reality operating as an informing spirit in society, and that criticism should involve the shaping of contemporary sensibility. The attention paid by other critics to Leavis was never free from controversies. Although his ideas superficially resembled those of the New Critics of the United States, he was never an anti-historicist. Leavis firmly believed that literature and life are closely connected and that a work of art cannot be separated from the culture that produced it.

It can be argued that Leavis' achievements as a critic of poetry have always been so impressive. But, Leavis is widely accepted to have been a better critic of fiction and the novel than of poetry. Much of this is due to the fact that a large portion of what he had to say about poetry had already been said by his contemporaries. For example, in *New Bearings in English Poetry,* Leavis attacked the Victorian poetical ideal, suggesting that 19th century poetry rejected the 'poetical' and instead showed a separation of thought and feeling and a divorce from the real world. The influence of T. S. Eliot is easily identifiable in his criticism of Victorian poetry, as he acknowledged in *The Common Pursuit* that, 'It was Mr. Eliot who made us fully conscious of the weakness of that tradition'. In his later publication

Revaluations, the dependence on Eliot was still very much present, but Leavis also demonstrated an individual critical sense operating in such a way as to place him among the distinguished modern critics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: In what ways, does David Macey see Leavis as a New Critic?



15.6 LET US SUM UP

You have, from this unit, learnt that Leavis' criticism falls into two phases. In the first place, influenced by T.S. Eliot, he devoted his attention to English verse. In *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), he attacked Victorian poetry and proclaimed the importance of the work of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, emphasizing wit and the play of intellect rather than late-Romantic sensuousness. In *Revaluations: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936), on the other hand, he extended his survey of English poetry back to the 17th century. In *Revaluations*, Leavis was able to provide a fuller analysis of the poets like Eliot and others. Leavis opens the first chapter "Line of Wit" of Revaluations by remarking that Eliot's achievement is a matter of academic evaluation, his poetry is accepted and his early observations on the metaphysical and on Marvell provide currency for University lectures. Although Leavis follows Eliot in describing the line of wit, he also has some disagreements about the lack of the quality of wit in Colwley and in Milton's *Comus* as can be found from the essay "Line of Wit".



15.7 FURTHER READING

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Web Resources:

http://www.artandpopularculture.com/F._R._Leavis

http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/334127/F-R-Leavis

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrutiny_(journal)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F._R._Leavis

15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Leavis took collaboration as very essential as any work of art can exist only in what he calls the "third realm"—the realm of that which is neither public in the ordinary sense or merely private… …This collaborative nature of criticism is continually underlined in Leavis' own practice such as his collaboration with wife Queenie Dorothy Leavis, in *Lectures in America* and *Dickens the Novelist… …*Another example is the journal "Scrutiny".

Ans to Q No 2: Leavis remained the principal editor of the journal "Scrutiny" until the final issue in 1953… …he used the journal as a vehicle for the new Cambridge criticism, upholding rigorous intellectual standards and attacking the dilettante elitism which he believed, characterised the Bloomsbury Group… … "scrutiny"

provided a forum for identifying important contemporary works and for reviewing the traditional canon.

Ans to Q No 3: Leavis argued that the critic must guard against extrapolating from the text under analysis, and refrain from all premature or irrelevant generalizations… …his conviction was that the authority of the mature and experienced critic or reader is based on an immediate sense of values instilled by training in the labour of reading.

Ans to Q No 4: A critic should be the perceiver of himself so that he/she can make the finest and sharpest discriminations possible and state his/her findings as responsibly, clearly and forcibly as he/she can.

Ans to Q No 5: In the Middle Ages, the term wit meant 'sense' or 'the five senses'… …during the Renaissance, it came to mean 'intelligence' or 'wisdom'… …in the neo-classical age, Dryden, Cowley and Pope held wit as primarily a matter of propriety… …in his famous *Essay on Criticism* Pope stated: "True wit is Nature to advantage dressed."… …in the 19th century wit was associated with levity… …When Matthew Arnold dismissed Chaucer and Pope from his list of great poets because of their wittiness and lack of 'high seriousness', T. S. Eliot, hailed the metaphysical poets for their ability to combine wit with seriousness.

Ans to Q No 6: Leavis states that Dryden's genius and his strength of native English led Hopkins in the 20th century to praise him as 'the most masculine of our poets, in his style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of our own literature…'… …But when compared to Pope, Dryden becomes inferior. Pope's greater strictness of versification means greater autonomy manifesting greater fineness and profundity of organization suggesting a much greater intensity of art. However, such a comparison is erroneous.

Ans to Q No 7: Leavis viewed 'Moral Seriousness', as the hallmark of criticism… …Like Matthew Arnold, he too viewed 'Reading' as a defence against the onslaught of Industrialism born mass culture… …Leavis introduced a kind of 'seriousness' into English studies in the

early part of the 20th century, and the modern university subject of criticism has been shaped very much by Leavis' examples.

Ans to Q No 8: David Macey states that like other New Critics such as I. A. Richards and William Empson, both F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis focussed on the 'text'… …this method played an immensely important role in turning English into a serious and disciplined mode of study… …the journal *Scrutiny* extended influence through schools and colleges and shaped the literary education of more than one generation of students.



15.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Provide an appraisal of F. R. Leavis' achievement as a literary critic. What is the nature of Leavis' critical method?

Q 2: Do you think that F. R. Leavis' critical practice was influenced by T. S. Eliot's discussion of the Metaphysical poets? Discuss with reference to the essay "Line of Wit."

Q 3: Discuss Leavis' stand on the English poetic traditions in connection with the poets he mentions in the essay "Line of Wit".

Q 4: Discuss how Leavis accords Donne a special poetic significance in the text "Line of Wit."

Q 5: Explain how or why Leavis sees the 'line of wit' running through specific poets whom he mentions.

Q 6: What are the important premises of Leavis' New Criticism? Assess the significance of Leavis as a New Critic.

* * *

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