

The Leavisites and T.S. Eliot combat mass urban culture

2

Introduction

We now come to the second chapter of part one on 'High Culture Gladiators' to introduce another early influential model of cultural analysis. In this chapter I will outline the importance of the Leavis circle to the rise of cultural criticism in Britain and explore the importance of its contribution to the 'Culture and Civilization Tradition'. I will also discuss the political importance of the Leavises' account of cultural history and the Leavis circle will be related to trends already established in Arnold's work. Cultural theory will be discussed with relation to important ideas (and implicit methodologies) that have left an enduring mark on cultural criticism. This chapter will demonstrate another possibility for creative criticism and will also look at a number of suggestive ideas about culture in the work of T.S. Eliot. The chapter will be concluded with detailed advice on practice. You will see that the high culture gladiators introduced in this, and the following, chapter were countering what they understood as barbaric forces associated with popular mass culture - contributing to what has become known as the 'mass culture debate' (Strinati, 1995: 10f.).

MAIN LEARNING GOALS

- To recognize the historical context of the Leavises work and the role of English Studies to the rise of cultural criticism.
- To understand how the Leavis circle contributed to debates about contemporary mass culture and helped to establish forms of cultural criticism focused on popular culture.
- To appreciate the importance of key concepts like discrimination, informed judgements, standardization, levelling down and the devaluation of language and the quality of life.
- To perceive how the training of critical awareness provided a technique for cultural analysis and how the Leavises' work relates to resistance, the raising of consciousness and the moral character of analysis.
- To be aware of how definitions of culture may be considered political, or even instruments of power.
- To understand T.S. Eliot's approach to culture with relation to cultural disintegration and cultured minorities, and to recognize how his understanding of culture resembles an anthropological approach and anticipated later cultural criticism.
- To be able to explore these ideas in (creative) critical ways.

The historical context and the importance of the Leavis circle to the rise cultural criticism

The question of when British cultural studies began, in the context of humanities courses, often takes the cultural historian back to the importance of the rise of English as a discipline at Cambridge University – that is, in the years following the First World War (Inglis, 1993; Strinati, 1995; Storey, 2001). The new breed of critic at Cambridge, like F.R. Leavis and Queenie Leavis, helped to extend the debates about **contemporary mass culture**. These debates (mediated via literary criticism) were conducted in the lecture hall, in books and, importantly, in the articles published in the journal F.R. Leavis edited, called *Scrutiny*. Indeed, *Scrutiny* became so important that literary and cultural historians talk of the days of the journal as an important 'moment' in the development of British critical/cultural life (Inglis, 1993: 32f.).

From the point of view of cultural studies, the importance of the Leavises and *Scrutiny* can be seen in the way they extended the 'Culture and Civilization Tradition' associated with Matthew Arnold. As we saw in the last chapter, the important debates that grew out of this tradition were concerned with, on the

SOME INFLUENTIAL EARLY MODELS OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS

one hand, high literary-intellectual culture and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge and, on the other, anarchy, utilitarianism, materialism and the dehumanizing effects of industrialism. These debates provided the *Scrutiny* writers with an important source of social critique. As we shall see, in this criticism notions of 'high' culture could be usefully deployed in the interests of both analysing what was seen as the damaging effects and tendencies of industrial capitalism and providing cultural antidotes to them.

Oversimplification

W A R N I N G

Although there was considerable common ground between the academics who contributed to *Scrutiny*, its pages were by no means dominated by acolytes echoing all the ideas and values expressed by F.R. Leavis. This can be seen from one of the most controversial debates that took place between F.R. Leavis and the North American critic, René Wellek. The debate was over the question of whether or not literary critics should be explicit about their use of theory. Wellek (1937) argued that critics, whether aware of it or not, always expressed a theory and therefore should clarify their theoretical position whereas Leavis preferred a 'feeling one's way forward' approach seeing theory as proper to philosophy thus 'queering one discipline with the habits of another' (Leavis, 1952: 213).

In terms of cultural studies, the influence of the Leavises and *Scrutiny* is fundamental to the development of what exploring culture meant in English departments in the British university context. Terry Eagleton has described the importance of the changes brought about by the Leavises to students of English Literature at Cambridge of the 1930s. Eagleton makes the point that in the early 1920s it was by no means clear why English was worth studying but, by the 1930s, 'it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else' (Eagleton, 1983: 31):

English was an arena in which the most fundamental questions of human existence – what it meant to be a person to engage in significant relationships with others, to live from the vital centre of the most essential values – were thrown into vivid relief and made the object of the most intensive scrutiny. (Eagleton, 1983: 31)

Such was the influence of *Scrutiny* on English Studies that 'English students in England today [Eagleton was writing in 1983] are "Leavisites" whether they

know it or not' (1983: 31). Although it is possible to question the extent of the ubiquity of Leavisism on the academy (it tends to disguise other tendencies like the American New Criticism and the persistence of the philological tradition), this is still an important point, because many early critics who become associated with cultural studies started out studying and teaching English and often developed their ideas with relation to the debates associated with the Leavises and their circle. Although, quite understandably, the Leavisites are often represented as reactionary elitists (Eagleton, 1983: 30f.), it is important to recognize that, in their day, they were the young rebels – the academic revolutionaries who were destined to leave a significant mark on English Studies. If the term 'the Leavisites' sounds like they were the inhabitants from another planet, in some ways they were! The planet, however, could be said to have been founded by Matthew Arnold, for the Leavis circle were, as we shall see, disseminating an Arnoldian view of class and culture. By the 1930s the Leavisites had definitely landed.

In order to explore some of the most important ideas that have been relevant to the way the Leavisites thought about culture let us imagine a young, intelligent working-class man or woman, living during the late 1930s, who goes to a public lecture where F.R. and Queenie Leavis speak. After the lecture our listener writes to a friend. Using this creative-critical method we can imagine how someone, from a working-class community, might have reacted to the ideas and values being put forward. As I'm referring to some later editions of works written in the 1930s, I'll have to ask you to suspend your disbelief when you see dates of editions from the 1970s.

Letter to Cecily

Dear Cecily,

You asked me in your last letter if I'd give you an outline of the lecture given by the Leavises that I attended in Cambridge. As I took extensive notes, I'll be able to go into some detail - I've added titles to each part, which I hope you'll find useful. Let's start with the first part.

High, organic and mass culture

In broad terms the Leavises established a view of culture which was divided into two main categories: on the one hand there were the intellectual and creative works, or what we might call 'high' literary culture, and on the other, the pursuits and habits of what they referred to as the ordinary or 'common' people (meaning people like us!). You remember we talked about

SOME INFLUENTIAL EARLY MODELS OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Matthew Arnold? Well, the first definition was related to Arnold's idea that intellectual, creative culture was something that had to be protected and propagated by an **enlightened minority** and this would function as a panacea for the ills of contemporary society. I copied down a few of F.R. Leavis's ideas. If you read them you'll get an idea of his rather magisterial tone (by the way he was quoting from a book he wrote with Denys Thompson):

Upon the minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition. Upon them depend the implicit standards that order the finer living of an age, the sense that this is worth more than that, this rather than that is the direction in which to go, that the centre is here rather than there. (Leavis and Thompson, [1933] 1977: 5)

I took this to mean that people like you and me must either try to become part of this select group or accept that we are not worthy to have an opinion. It sounded convincing at the time but reading it over again now it all sounds rather 'woolly'. What do you think?

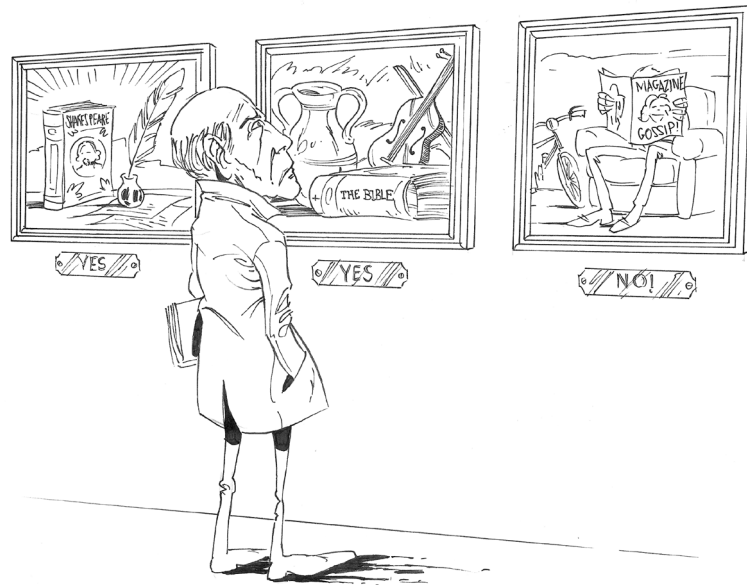
However, to get back to the lecture, the second category had a further important distinction that I think you might find of interest. The pursuits and habits of those like us, the 'common' people, were judged according to whether they were the products of **organic folk communities** or the unfortunate consequences of urban, **mass industrial society**. The latter forms were seen as utterly corrupt. This was partly because the processes of industrialization, which forced people to work in factories, were dehumanizing and partly because the kinds of habits and pursuits developed within the communities of industrial workers were considered utterly banal and demeaning. I had mixed feelings about this.

On the one hand, I thought about my own family - how my own mother and father (and other family members) have worked in what I would call sub-human conditions. I remember your own poor grandfather who died in a mining accident. And look how much our families have suffered trying to fight for better conditions and higher wages! If it hadn't been for my scholarship to study at university, I'd probably be in a factory by now! This made me feel that at least the Leavises helped to draw attention to some of the degrading conditions of industrialization. On the other hand the Leavises were hardly sympathetic to the working classes with regard to their general way of life or their struggles. Not once did they express any solidarity with our efforts to improve our wages or conditions! But, again, I digress. This brings me on to the second part of my letter.

The Leavises and cultural history

To be honest, I consider the distinction between the organic and forms of debased industrial culture was made possible by what I thought was a

THE LEAVISITES AND T.S. ELIOT COMBAT MASS URBAN CULTURE



laughable and, to some extent, idealized view of British history. The Leavisites argued that everything was different prior to the Industrial Revolution. For example, the world of Shakespeare's contemporaries was one that boasted an organic, vital, common culture; the Industrial Revolution was seen as shattering the unity of a healthy organic, common culture. Mass civilization was characterized by increasing commercialism and declining standards, but minority culture was there to preserve vital cultural standards and values.

I'll never forget Queenie Leavis as she read from one of her works. She reckoned that generations of 'country folk' had lived 'to some purpose' without any other books except their Bible! She said they had enjoyed 'a real social life' and that they had a way of living that 'obeyed the natural rhythm and furnished them with genuine interests'. These turned out to be country arts, traditional crafts, games and singing! What a wonderful vision of our ancestors all dancing and singing to the rhythms of nature, reading the Bible, and spending their spare moments practising traditional arts! What a very neat and convenient view of our forbears - everyone conforming to their role and everybody very much in their place.

I've copied some of her words down for you from her *Fiction and the Reading Public*. It appears that the 'commoners' of today are dominated by:

substitute or kill-time interests like listening to radio and gramophone, looking through newspapers and magazines, watching films and commercial football, and the activities connected with

SOME INFLUENTIAL EARLY MODELS OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS

motor cars and bicycles, the only way of using leisure known to the modern city-dweller. (Q.D. Leavis, [1932] 1974: 209)

*So, we urban dwellers only dedicate ourselves to trivialities. We don't actually read newspapers and magazines but look through them - I suppose at the pictures! You can see from this that the Leavises associate the **consumption of mass culture** with **passive diversion**. I wondered, while the Leavises were speaking, how they could know what it was that we (the 'commoners') got from newspapers and films etc. and how they could be so confident that we didn't respond in active or critical ways. Here's a little table I drew during the lecture, which I hope will help to sum up what was being said.*

<i>The Leavisite approach to culture</i>		
<i>1. Literary 'high' or minority culture</i>	<i>2. The pursuits and habits of the 'ordinary' or 'common' people</i>	
	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
	<i>Organic, vital, common folk culture</i>	<i>Products of urban, mass, industrial society</i>

The voice of contemporary criticism

If you keep Queenie Leavis's list of 'kill-time interests' in mind while reading later chapters, you'll get a good idea of how attitudes towards the consumers of popular culture have changed. You might note that in order to criticize the Leavises' point of view, the writer of 'Letter to Cecily' questions the validity of these universalizing claims, thus anticipating the later chapters on Hoggart, Thompson, Williams and Hall.

The next section of the lecture was dominated by the themes included in the following title.

Discrimination and informed judgements: Standardization, levelling down, the lowest common denominator and Americanization

There were, according to F.R. Leavis, important consequences for the definition of culture here. To counter the worst effects of industrial culture there was a need for society to learn forms of discrimination. He insisted that cultural objects of lasting value had to be chosen by those with the education and training to be able to make informed judgements; hence his insistence on the importance of developing canons of great works.

helpFILE: F.R. Leavis and canons of great works

Leavis's books, *The Great Tradition* (1948) and *Revaluation* (1936), were both concerned with establishing the basis of the literary canons of the novel and poetry. Typical of the criteria that would characterize a great novel were: displaying an open reverence before life, the existence of fine distinctions, high seriousness, a sense of tradition, and the sense that a novel contributed to the evolution of the form.

*In this way the great achievements of culture contribute to the preservation and development of civilized intellectual/ creative society. Here, once again, I recognized Arnold's fear that civilization is threatened by the forces of barbarism: in this case the continued spread of mass culture characterized by **standardization** and what F.R. Leavis called **levelling down** - referring as he did to his book, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930).*

*The problem here for the Leavises is that mass culture appeals to **the lowest common denominator** and thereby impoverishes life. At this point I wondered how a factory worker or manual labourer could be expected to take full advantage of great literary works - and whether or not life might be improved more for the majority by attending to their immediate material needs. But I digress, he went on to argue that this cultural impoverishment is made worse by the increasing **Americanization** of British cultural life. He was very critical of the importation of American popular culture like Hollywood films, comics and Westerns. And to think, I went to see the gangster film *Scarface* only last week! This Americanization is made still worse, apparently, by the gradual weakening of the influence, importance and authority of the self-elected cultural minority who attempt to preserve great cultural traditions. By the way, I'm paraphrasing from F.R. Leavis' *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930).*

The training of critical awareness, the devaluation of language and the quality of life

*Once the Leavises had finished their talk, a member of the audience asked if they could give some practical advice on how we might counter the problems of standardization, levelling down and gradual Americanization. The practical answer was the **training of critical awareness**. F.R. Leavis suggested we read his *Culture and Environment* (a book he wrote with Denys Thompson in 1933) he said it gave readers practical advice on how to read what they saw as the debased language of the popular press and advertisements, but in a critical way. He emphasized that **debasement of language** was not just a question of words but a devaluation of emotions and the quality of life.*

Well, Cecily, considering our humble origins, it seems that our emotions and quality of life may already be severely debased! Whatever, as I fear I may have bored you with such a long letter, I shall say goodbye hoping that you will at least find it informative.

Your very good friend ...

The voice of contemporary criticism

This kind of criticism suggested that close (detailed) reading could be transferred from the literary to the cultural text. It is significant that the subtitle of Leavis' and Thompson's *Culture and Environment* was *The Training of Critical Awareness*. This transition is important for cultural analysis not only in terms of method but because it assumed that it was important to be able to read and understand the cultures of everyday life (even if, in this case, it was to point out their demeaning effects and vast inferiority). As forms of cultural studies developed these popular cultural forms would not be rejected by such simple value judgements. Eagleton makes the point that *Scrutiny* 'actually founded such "cultural studies" in England, as one of its most enduring achievements' (Eagleton, 1983:34). For how Leavis and Thompson suggested criticism should be carried out see the practice section below and for literary into cultural studies see Easthope (1991).

practice EXERCISE: variations on the 'Letter to Cecily'

Take the 'Letter to Cecily' and write your own responses (or the imagined responses of others) to the ideas put forward. Here are some possibilities:

- A concerned contemporary who sees the Leavises' ideas in a very positive way
- A 1930s union official
- A minor or factory worker
- Matthew Arnold's ghost (who looks for continuities with and differences from his own work).

Resistance, the raising of consciousness and the moral character of cultural analysis

The idea of defending the ideals of 'high' culture from the barbarous forces of industrialism leads to another important strand in cultural studies: **the idea of resistance**. As we saw above, the Leavises (and *Scrutiny* writers) were involved in a consciousness-raising project to warn against, and provide adequate training to counter, the worst effects of mass (industrial) culture. The following table sums up the basic ideas.

The Leavises' work can be called 'moral' because of the way it moves from texts to standards and critiques of mass industrial society, and to the extent that forms of resistance and consciousness raising are key ingredients in cultural criticism. In this sense much of cultural studies can be called 'moral' because resistance and the raising of consciousness have become fundamental to reading culture. This is not to say that all cultural critics deliberately set out with this intention, but putting cultural products into a political or ideological context tends to reinforce the 'moral' character of much that is published within cultural studies.

The Leavises and the 'close reading' of advertisements

For this last section on the Leavises I want to show how some of their ideas are related to practice. In *Culture and Environment* F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson (1933: 11f.) gave readers practical advice on how to read what they saw as the debased language of the popular press and advertisements in a critical way. In terms of advertising, they start off by recognizing (through a series of quotations) that it has become a highly specialized branch of knowledge based on market research. In fact, they see it as branch of applied psychology intended to provoke automaton-like responses from the public.

What they suggest is that people might be trained from an early age to recognize how advertisements attempt to appeal to consumers; for example, through simple and obvious appeals to fear. From here they go on to illustrate a whole series of rhetorical strategies that are employed by advertisers. They recommend their readers to ask questions about the aims and functions of advertisements, how much information they actually give about a product and how different strategies affect them.

SOME INFLUENTIAL EARLY MODELS OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Cultured minorities	The masses
They cultivate minds through 'high' arts and provide ways of discriminating between great and inferior forms of culture	Enjoy mass culture in a passive or uncritical way with no sense of taste
They are involved in consciousness-raising projects	They engage in unthinking consumption
They provide training to counterbalance the worst effects of industrial machine culture and set up resistance against the devaluation of emotions and the quality of life	They are lost in the cheap sentimental appeals of popular novels, press, TV and films etc. and are subjected to the dehumanizing forces of industry and commerce

Leavis and Thompson also suggest that readers consult publications devoted to consumer research, where they can discover the kinds of frauds that are practiced on unsuspecting customers. This is a kind of do-it-yourself cultural analysis which not only offers insights into the mechanisms of advertising but is of great practical use in so far that it provides knowledge that can help to expose shady business practices and encourage citizens to protect themselves in an active and critical way. This is a kind of cultural studies which is still relevant and, incidentally, today easier than ever given that the World Wide Web provides more information than ever.

From the point of view of method, Leavis and Thompson were pinpointing an important phenomenon of mass culture; they were seeing it as a form of manipulation which requires interpretation (or '**close reading**'); and they were, through analysis, suggesting ways in which the public may learn to see through advertising and thus resist its power. One consequence of this procedure is that cultural analysis is not simply an exercise in interpretation – it is interpretation with *specific ends* in mind. That is, to make people more aware of questionable practices and to bring about what is seen as positive change. You might be reminded here of Eagleton's (provocative) assertion that the *Scrutiny* group 'actually founded' a certain kind of 'cultural studies' in England.

Although (given the enormous political gulf that separates them), it might seem ludicrous to quote Marx in a discussion of Leavite criticism, what unites the Leavises and much cultural criticism is Marx's famous statement that: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (Marx, [1845] 1976: 65). Much cultural studies has this in common

THE LEAVISITES AND T.S. ELIOT COMBAT MASS URBAN CULTURE

with Leavisite criticism: consciousness raising is considered an important activity in itself because it may be the first step towards change.

In terms of practice, rather than set up an exercise focused on reading advertisements here, I shall refer you to chapter eleven where there is considerable further discussion on the analysis of advertisements, complete with practice exercises. To begin the practice exercises on the Leavises' work we shall start with a short one to help you explore the question of raising consciousness.

practice EXERCISE: cultural studies as consciousness raising

Look through the abstracts of any cultural studies journal and take note of:

- how far the article might be said to be a form of consciousness raising
- how far it could be said to criticize, defend, or make more complex, our understanding of cultural products and practices.

notes ON PRACTICE: some useful sources

If all the journals which claim to be of interest to cultural studies are taken into account the choice for this exercise is absolutely enormous. To start you might choose one or more of the following:

Australian Journal of Cultural Studies
Cultural Studies
European Journal of Cultural Studies
Gender, Place and Culture
International Journal of Cultural Studies
Media, Culture and Society
Theory, Culture and Society

An alternative is to explore cultural studies websites which often have on-line publications and a host of resources and information. You might try the following which were up and running at the time of writing (each one has many links to other pages but beware, addresses sometimes change):

Cultural Studies-L Page : <http://comm.umn.edu/~grodman/cultstud/>
Cultural Studies Central: <http://www.culturalstudies.net/>
Voice of the Shuttle's Cultural Studies Page: <http://vos.ucsb.edu/browse.asp?id=2709>

SOME INFLUENTIAL EARLY MODELS OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS**practice** EXERCISE: getting at passivity

To finish these practice sections dedicated to the Leavisite position, you might think about the question of passivity with relation to entertainment. Here are some questions which may help you:

1. What does it mean to be passive?
2. Even if we question the idea of total passivity, do some leisure activities demand more than others? What's the difference between reading a Disney comic and Dostoevsky. In what ways might one demand more intellectual passivity than another? Is your experience of watching reality TV fundamentally different from watching a piece of drama considered as Literature? If so, in what ways? Look at the help file above on 'F.R. Leavis and canons of great works', do any of Leavis' criteria help you? You might come back to this question when you've read the next chapter on the Frankfurt School, where further criteria are offered to distinguish between different kinds of culture.
3. Why might you choose something which does not demand too much from you?

If you don't find answering these questions easy, here's some help.

notes ON PRACTICE: exploring passivity

1. Some of the following definitions of passivity might help you with question one: to be inert, to offer no opposition, to be submissive, to take no active part.
2. Many popular films like *Scary Movie*, or cartoons, like *The Simpsons*, *South Park* or *Family Guy* often structure their plots round all kinds of other narratives, how might this challenge the idea of passive reception? You might think about how far our experience of different cultural forms depends on *how* we look or read.
3. As far as considering why you might choose something which does not demand too much from you, you might consider how work and lifestyles influence what people choose to do in their spare time.

T.S. Eliot: cultural disintegration and cultured minorities

Going back to the first part of the twentieth century, the poet and essayist T.S. Eliot also had an important influence over how 'culture' was understood both within and outside departments of English. Eliot, the third of our 'high culture gladiators', is mentioned in introductions to cultural studies (Turner, 1996 and especially Jenks, 1993) but his work is not often given much emphasis.

THE LEAVISITES AND T.S. ELIOT COMBAT MASS URBAN CULTURE

However, I shall use his *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* ([1948] 1975) as a useful connection between Arnold and the Leavisites and the 'progenitors' of cultural studies explored in chapters four to six (Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams). Eliot's importance to the 'pre-history' of cultural studies can be understood in the following ways:

- **He continued the debate concerning cultured elites** and their role in upholding civilization (for Eliot, Christian civilization). In this his thinking can be seen as an extension of the Arnoldian tradition but also a challenge to it in terms of the way he does not allow religion to become subsumed into culture.
- **He registered his preoccupation about division and cultural disintegration.** Although this aligns him to some extent with the Arnoldian/Leavisite tradition, Eliot emphasized forms of disintegration at the 'upper group level' ([1948] 1975: 293). According to Eliot, by the seventeenth-century, religious thought and practice, philosophy and art in Britain became increasingly more complex and specialized. This meant that they fell into the hands of specialists and thus became separated from one another. These disconnections resulted in cultural fragmentation which, for Eliot, impoverished culture.

The voice of contemporary criticism

Fragmentation through specialization has also become an important theme within Sociology (Weber, 1946) and Marxism (Marcuse ([1964] 1986) and Habermas (1981)). It is also relevant to what is known as the 'postmodern condition' (Lyotard, 1984).

- **He put emphasis on the importance of culture as a whole way of life.** One of the things that makes Eliot's ideas relevant is that he defined culture anthropologically. He saw it as 'the way of life of a particular people living together in one place', and this culture is visible in the arts, the social system, habits, customs and religion. However, for Eliot, culture could not be reduced to these categories: these are merely the parts into which it can be anatomized. Each part has to be understood with relation to all the others (Eliot, [1948] 1975: 302). Despite what has been seen as Eliot's elitist emphasis on minority culture (Jenks, 1993: 103f.) and 'extreme right-wing authoritarianism' (Eagleton, 1983: 39), he does, given this anthropological view, offer a wider view of culture which includes everything from religions and literature to Derby day and Stilton cheese. This all-inclusiveness resembles contemporary cultural studies.

SOME INFLUENTIAL EARLY MODELS OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS

A dialogue with the social sciences

By defining culture in this way Eliot helped to reinforce an anthropological approach to definitions of culture. In many introductions to cultural studies it is not customary to introduce students to the work of Edward Burnett Tylor, but Tylor provided anthropologists with what can be seen as the first persuasive definition of culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor, [1871] 1958: 1). Most dictionary definitions of culture reflect Tylor's and this definition would re-emerge in the work of Raymond Williams (see chapter six) and establish itself as a key approach to understanding culture in cultural studies. For a brief overview of anthropological and sociological definitions of culture see Jenks (1993: 25f.).

- Finally, Eliot asserted that 'the cultures of different peoples do affect each other: in the world of the future it looks as if every part of the world would affect every other part' (Eliot, [1948] 1975: 303). Here Eliot (in the context of 'European culture') saw that cultures are not hermetically sealed from one another: they interact and draw on one another. Methodologically, this notion of '**transnational culture**' is a useful starting point for discussions of **multiculturalism** which complicates cultural identity further by showing how a monolithic cultural identity can be challenged by the circulation of 'other' ethnic cultural identities available within what can be called a 'host' culture. This can also be a starting point for an exploration of any cultural theory that challenges dominant notions of identity. See later chapters, especially chapter thirteen.

practice EXERCISE: working with Eliot's 'transnational culture'

Eliot's prediction that in the world of the future it looks as if 'every part of the world would affect every other part' seems to have been confirmed. There are many ways this might be explored from looking into processes of globalization (how dominant cultures, and especially international capitalism, establishes or enforces its values, beliefs and practices across the world) to how cultures interact with one another. Let's ask a simple question and explore how it might be answered: How might Eliot's idea of 'transnational culture' help us to think about ways in which different cultural forms influence one another?

notes ON PRACTICE: exploring transnational culture with Akira Kurosawa

The Japanese film director, Akira Kurosawa was a great admirer of Western culture, and especially North American films. His love of American film genres and styles led to criticisms in Japan that he was too Western. However, the relation between Kurosawa and Western cinema was not one way: many of his films have inspired directors all over the world. If his films *Stray Dog* (1949), *Yojimbo* (1961) and *High and Low* (1963) drew on detective novels and thrillers and translated them into Japanese idioms, a number of his films have influenced directors in the West. For example, his *Yojimbo* influenced Sergio Leone's spaghetti western, *A Fist Full of Dollars* (1964) and George Lucas acknowledged Kurosawa's *Hidden Fortress* (1958) as an influence on *Star Wars* (1977). Perhaps the most curious case was Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai* (1954), a film which Kurosawa admitted was very much influenced by the Hollywood western, yet it went on to provide the basic plot structure for one of the most famous westerns of all time, *The Magnificent Seven* (1960).

Kurosawa also drew on writers as diverse as Gorky, Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Ed McBain and Georges Simeon, and many film directors around the world have openly recognized Kurosawa as an influence (Richie, 1996). From these references alone we can see how it is unrealistic to see cultures as wholly isolated or self-enclosed. You might also think about other ways Japanese culture has influenced the West (and vice versa) and in what ways the culture you live in interacts (or has interacted) with 'other' cultures.

Here's a final question designed to get you to think in general terms about some of the ideas we have explored with relation to Arnold, the Leavises and Eliot.

practice EXERCISE: culture and power

In order to get a clear idea of how culture may relate to power, you might try to answer the following question. Comparing the ideas of Arnold, the Leavises and Eliot, can you explain very briefly how their definition of culture may be considered political, or even an instrument of power? Try to answer the question for yourself. If you have difficulty, a possible answer is included in the following notes on practice.

SOME INFLUENTIAL EARLY MODELS OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS**notes ON PRACTICE: culture and power**

All these writers privileged what *they* regarded as high culture over other cultural forms. Their definitions of culture depended on a privileged elite which put itself above other classes (especially the working classes). The idea of Arnold as a reactionary is reinforced by his opposition to any kind of political change which might result in more rights for the politically dispossessed. Arnold's linking of class war to cultural disintegration and his belief in the necessity of a social elite of enlightened individuals to 'police' culture set the general tone for the work of the Leavis circle and T.S. Eliot. In this way the definition of culture within the Culture and Civilization Tradition can be seen as an instrument of class oppression, and it is in this sense that it can be seen as an instrument of power ...

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

This chapter has reviewed the historical context and the importance of the Leavis circle to the rise of cultural criticism, including that focussed on popular culture. The Leavisite model of cultural history has been assessed, as have key ideas like the training of critical awareness, the importance of informed judgements, standardization, levelling down, and Americanization. This chapter also outlined Eliot's approach to culture through cultural disintegration and cultured minorities and demonstrated how some of his strategies resemble an anthropological approach to cultural criticism. The last part of the chapter suggested ways that these ideas might be explored in practice.

The Leavis/*Scrutiny* circle's importance in methodological terms can be summed up in the following way:

- Like Arnold, the Leavises linked cultural forms to historical change and mass industrial culture.
- The Leavis circle extended the Culture and Civilization Tradition by developing canons of works and critical practices that would teach discrimination and the training of critical awareness. These provided techniques for cultural analysis linked to the task of raising consciousness. At the same time, their understanding of culture may be considered elitist and an instrument of power. The emphasis on resistance and consciousness raising are strategies which are common to much work in cultural studies.
- Popular cultures like the press and advertising were analysed, valued and understood through 'close reading' (albeit negatively).
- In this way, according to Eagleton, the *Scrutiny* group 'invented' a form of cultural studies.

Methodologically, Eliot is interesting because:

- His discussion of fragmentation through specialization reflects this kind of thinking in sociological and Marxist cultural criticism.
- He helped to reinforce an anthropological approach to definitions of culture.
- He offered a wider view of culture which included everything from beliefs and literature to holidays and eating habits.
- He saw that cultures are not hermetically sealed from one another: they are *transnational*, interacting with and drawing on one another.

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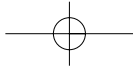
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Further reading

- For detailed accounts of the development of the new degree in English at Cambridge see Inglis cited above (1993:32f.) and for a brief discussion of Eliot's politics see Eagleton cited above (1983:39f.).
- Baldick, Chris (1983) *The Social Mission of English Criticism*. Oxford: Blackwell. Baldick describes the rise of English, the importance of the Leavises and the *Scrutiny* group linking their work to the values that lay behind it.
- Doyle, Brian (1989) *English and Englishness*. London: Routledge. A book which explores how English Studies relates to national identity.
- Foucault, Michel (1980) *Michel Foucault: Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972–1977*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf. In one of the practice exercises I asked you to think about Arnold, the Leavises and Eliot and how their ideas may be related to culture and power. Michel Foucault is a key writer for critics interested in these relationships. Although Foucault's work can be very complex for the beginner, these interviews present Foucault's ideas in a more accessible, conversational style and demonstrate how different forms of culture relate to power.
- Mulhern, Francis (1979) *The Moment of Scrutiny*. London: New Left Books. Like Eagleton and the other writers mentioned here, Mulhern is interested in the historical moment of scrutiny with relation to its ideological affiliations.
- MacDonald, Dwight ([1957] 1998) 'A Theory of Mass Culture', in John Storey (1998, see references above). This is another approach often mentioned in introductions to cultural studies that offers positive readings of folk art and 'High' culture and a negative view of mass commercial culture.



THE LEAVISITES AND T.S. ELIOT COMBAT MASS URBAN CULTURE

Steger, Manfred B. (2003) *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. In the section on Eliot I mentioned globalization in a very generalized way. Although this reference is a very basic introduction to the topic, it offers a useful overview of some of the main issues that have been raised with relation to this concept stressing, as it does, not only the economic aspects but the political, religious, cultural, environmental and ideological. It also contains a useful annotated bibliography.

Storey, John (2001, see references above). Storey's second chapter offers a particularly effective critique of the Leavisites' ideas and the politically objectionable values that stood behind them, while appreciating their historical importance – and without doing too much of a hatchet job on them.

