

# LITERATURE, LANGUAGE, AND POLITICS

As Sue Owen observes, although Richard Hoggart is best known for his analyses of popular culture and his key role in founding the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, he 'began as a literary critic and retained a love of good literature'.<sup>1</sup> Many accounts of his work recognize this background, but it has received relatively little sustained attention, and some critics who have explored its implications have represented it primarily as a constraint on his thought which led him to reproduce established cultural hierarchies and prevented him from developing a more complex response to new media. Malcolm Pittock, for example, argues that Hoggart 'never escaped' the 'straitjacket'<sup>2</sup> of the Leavises' ideas about art and popular culture, a claim to be examined in more detail. In contrast, this chapter argues that Hoggart's focus on literature is essential to his critical practice and political thought. He insists that both literature and literary criticism offer insights not available from disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, in particular into the experienced density of everyday life. Whilst he consistently emphasizes the importance of canonical texts, his argument that techniques developed for literary analysis can be used to interpret other 'expressive phenomena'<sup>3</sup> provides a foundation for the sympathetic reading of a wide range of previously neglected cultural practices. In addition, his sensitivity to language underpins his analysis of the rhetoric of criticism itself, along with the ways in which it encodes particular ideas about the production and control of knowledge. These are, in the last instance, political issues, and Hoggart's response to them

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Michael Bailey, Ben Clarke, and John K. Walton.

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demonstrates his commitment to what he describes as a 'democratic socialism' that insists upon 'fraternity as the ground for equality and of the urge towards liberty'.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter explores the ways in which Hoggart's concern with literature defines both the objects and methods of his criticism. It is divided into main two sections. The first of these examines Hoggart's argument that the analysis of literature can increase our understanding of the 'experiential wholeness of life',<sup>5</sup> and the values which structure it. It works outwards from his writing on canonical texts to consider his approach to 'second- and third-rate work',<sup>6</sup> and thereby popular culture more generally. In order to do this, it locates his foundational work in cultural studies within its historical context. It considers parallels between his texts and post-war literature, as well as the way in which he developed the critical models he inherited from Q.D. and F.R. Leavis. It argues that Hoggart's work was not constrained by the Leavises but engages in a productive dialogue with their writing. His rejection of their elitism leads him to examine the ways in which individuals use texts and to construct reading as an active process shaped by a network of social and historical pressures. It also provides one foundation for his argument that all cultural practices reward sympathetic exploration, even though not all offer the same insights. This demands a broader conception of knowledge, a willingness to recognize ideas which do not come from expected sources or assume expected forms.

This democratic impulse informs Hoggart's analysis of critical rhetoric, on which the second half of the chapter focuses. His argument that texts encode values in their form extends to criticism itself, including his own, which is consequently positioned as the object as well as the subject of interpretation. The chapter focuses on Hoggart's comments on the language of 'theory', which form part of a broader critique of the ways in which ideas are produced and disseminated. His objection is not to theoretical investigation but to its identification with professional jargons that limit access to knowledge and consolidate the status of an intellectual minority. Hoggart argues instead for a discursive critical model in which the validity of a given claim depends on its ability to establish itself as the better argument in a process of free debate. This 'cooperative search for truth',<sup>7</sup> as Jürgen Habermas describes it, demands a form of writing that exposes its analyses to general scrutiny and recognizes itself as a contribution to open-ended discussion. Hoggart's accessible prose, which draws attention to its own rhetorical and interpretative strategies, enacts rather than simply describes

his commitment to broad involvement in the production of knowledge and the decision making this sustains.

### The Uses of Literature

Literature occupies a privileged position in Hoggart's cultural analyses partly because it explores the experienced complexities of individual lives and the way in which decisions and acts are shaped by a shifting network of material and social forces. In 'Literature and Society' he argues that 'Good literature re-creates the immediacy of life – that life was and is all these things, all these different orders of things, *all at once*. It embodies the sense of human life developing in a historical and moral context.'<sup>8</sup>

This quality is shared with other arts, but literature is particularly bound to the everyday because it is composed of words that are continuously modified by their social circulation. As Bakhtin observes, every 'word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life'.<sup>9</sup> The boundaries of literature are porous, and it is permeated by the voices of other speakers with whom it shares its material. As Hoggart insists, 'literature can never be aesthetically pure or abstractly contemplative. There can be no such thing as "abstract literature" as there is abstract painting. By its nature – because its medium, language, is used by everybody in all sorts of everyday situations; and because it tries both to say and to be – literature is an art which invites impurities.'<sup>10</sup> This 'impurity' is productive, demanding a reflection on the social function of art and the ways in which literature intersects with other forms of writing and speech. As Hoggart observes, the 'special attraction of literature is that it is compromised'.<sup>11</sup>

The concern with the particular is, for Hoggart, one of the things that separates literature from philosophy and sociology, which he argues focus on general structures and tend to use formal rhetoric and methodologies to establish a critical distance from their material. Literature, on the other hand, both enacts and explores the immediate texture of life, including its ambiguities and contradictions, insisting upon the place of the seemingly trivial as well as the obviously significant. Hoggart's distinction evokes F.R. Leavis's division between the 'abstract' and 'concrete',<sup>12</sup> and like Leavis he argues that literature is defined by its concern with the specific and experiential, that it helps us to 'know better what it must have meant to live and make decisions in that time and place, to have smelled roast beef, been troubled by falling hair and wondered what we were making of our

lives.<sup>13</sup> It not only traces the intricate network of material and social pressures that shape individual actions but also the relations between them, the ways in which each modifies the others.

This does not mean that literature is confined to the individual. Although it 'starts in absorbed attention to the detail of experience, in immersion in "the destructive element", in "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart"' it is 'driven by a desire to find the revelatory instance, the tiny gesture that opens a whole field of meaning and consequence'.<sup>14</sup> It transforms the personal into a common resource. Literature, Hoggart argues, 'can help recreate, inwardly, that shared sense of being human without which our world would truly be a wilderness, a chaos'.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of writing 'is to reach others',<sup>16</sup> to make the particular available to all. It is an inherently social practice, in which meaning is produced in the interaction between text and reader. It depends upon access to a shared system of representations, and although Hoggart, following Auden, argues that the appeal to 'common linguistic counters'<sup>17</sup> has become more difficult in 'a society so large and specialised as ours',<sup>18</sup> he insists one function of the writer is to enable communication, which is an essential part of being 'fully and sensitively implicated in the concerns of men'.<sup>19</sup> As Primo Levi argues, 'writing is a public service',<sup>20</sup> a contribution to the common good.

Although Hoggart is frequently represented as resistant or even hostile to theory, there are parallels between his interpretation of literature and the ideas Louis Althusser outlines in 'A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre'. Althusser emphasizes literature's concern with 'the "lived" experience of individuals'<sup>21</sup> and its particular insights into ideology, the 'system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of man or a social group'<sup>22</sup> and reproduce established 'conditions of production',<sup>23</sup> including their hierarchies and inequalities. This system does not operate primarily through direct injunctions but 'slides into all human activity' so that 'it is identical with the "lived" experience of human existence itself'.<sup>24</sup> Althusser's ideas of ideology abstract and name what Hoggart describes as the network of values that make 'what seems like a significant or ordered whole out of experience, a total and apparently meaningful view of life' and that are embodied in social 'systems, rituals, forms'.<sup>25</sup> Both men argue that art explores the ways in which social values are enacted in the seemingly neutral or incidental details of everyday life. There are a number of significant differences between their positions, though, and these help to delineate the claims Hoggart makes for literature.

For Althusser, writers do not give ‘us any *knowledge* of the world they describe, they only make us “see”, “perceive” or “feel” the reality of the ideology of that world’.<sup>26</sup> The basis of these perceptions emerges only in the process of Marxist analysis. Art can show how capitalism operates, for example, but cannot provide knowledge of its practices and their foundations. In contrast, Hoggart insists that although the ‘poetic, metaphor, intuitive understanding’ generated by literature is not ‘finally provable’<sup>27</sup> it is a type of knowledge, ‘not a whit less difficult to arrive at’<sup>28</sup> or less valuable than scientific data. It does not simply provide material for social analysis but is itself a form of interpretation, though the very project of cultural studies implicitly assumes that scholarship can usefully develop its insights. The distinction indicates differences in both their approach to literature, ideas about its political function, and conception of knowledge itself. Althusser focuses on the contribution which the analysis of literature might make to Marxist thought, which, he argues, provides a ‘scientific’ knowledge of social structures. In contrast, Hoggart concentrates on the ways in which literature extends the notion of ‘understanding’ itself, insisting upon the diversity of both knowledge and social experience, both of which, he argues, exceed interpretative systems. These ideas are informed by an idea of socialism as a discursive practice, founded on debate between different ideas rather than an authoritative narrative. In addition, Hoggart attributes a greater critical role, and therefore relative autonomy, to literature itself. As he argues in ‘Literature and Society’,

One is not simply talking about a mass of evidence that interestingly shows the life of an age but acts only as illustration of the judgements one then makes about a society *from outside literature*, as a historian or philosopher or social scientist. One is arguing that literature provides in its own right a form of distinctive knowledge about society.<sup>29</sup>

Althusser does not simply use literature to illustrate his ideas, and he is sensitive to its formal and imaginative complexities, but he does emphasize the role of the intellectual who transforms it into ‘scientific’ knowledge, whereas Hoggart focuses on the critical work done by literature itself.

Despite these differences, the two models overlap in productive ways, insisting on literature’s ability, as Althusser puts it, ‘to make *visible* . . . by establishing a distance from it, the reality of the existing ideology’.<sup>30</sup> Both focus on texts that fulfil this critical function and argue that the ability defines

art itself. Hoggart clarifies this in his distinction between ‘conventional literature and live literature’, arguing that whilst the former ‘reinforces existing assumptions, accepted ways of looking at the world’, the latter ‘may be disturbing, may subvert our view of life.’<sup>31</sup> As these categories emphasize function, they are not identical with ‘canonical’ and ‘non-canonical’ literature, and they provide a foundation for the continual revision of the canon and extension of the notion of art itself. They are evaluative, though, and Hoggart declares bluntly that ‘for a student of society great works of literature are more important than popular literature.’<sup>32</sup> This does not mean that ‘conventional’ writing has no value to the cultural critic. As Jonathan Rose observes, Hoggart’s ‘definition of culture combined a reverence for great books, a lesser but real admiration for not-so-great books, and a sociological interest in the uses of all levels of literature’.<sup>33</sup> His work applies techniques developed to study ‘great works of literature’ to other forms of writing, and indeed to a multitude of other ‘expressive phenomena’, such as ‘styles of dress, linguistic habits, all kinds of manners’.<sup>34</sup> Though not all works offer the same insights, all repay sustained critical attention. There are similarities between this extension of criticism and the work of contemporary intellectuals such as Roland Barthes, as Hoggart recognized when he insisted upon the urgency of the ‘case for semiology’,<sup>35</sup> as well as parallels to the work of earlier figures such as Walter Benjamin, whose writing, as Peter Demetz argues, was driven partly by a ‘hermeneutic urge to read and understand “texts” that are not texts at all ... to “read” things, cities, and social institutions’.<sup>36</sup> However, in order to understand both the radicalism and specific form of Hoggart’s ideas it is necessary to explore the most prominent model of popular culture available to him at the start of his career, that produced by the Leavises, and the historical moment that shaped his response to it.

### Hoggart in Context: Post-war Britain and the Leavises

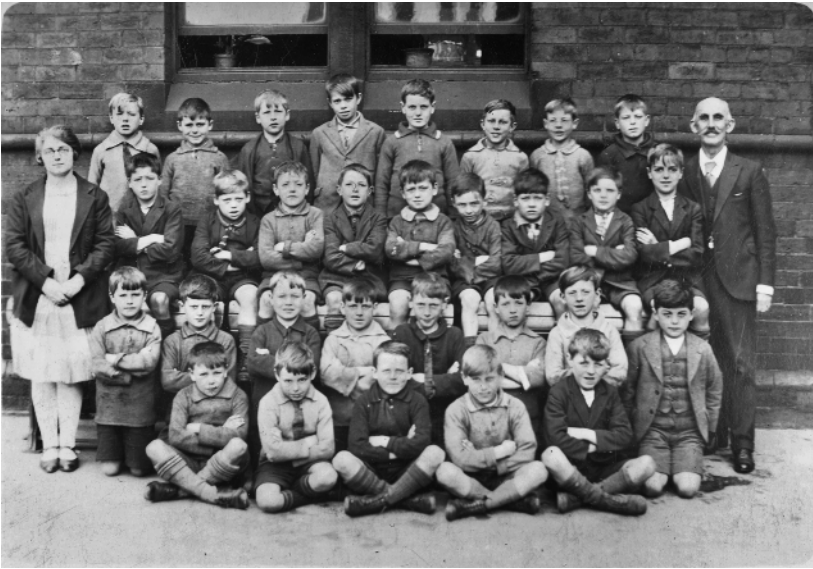
Hoggart’s work is distinguished by its sensitivity to the material and cultural conditions of its production, a quality conspicuously illustrated by *The Uses of Literacy* (1957). In post-war Britain these conditions included, crucially, a general increase in prosperity, which, although unequally distributed, had, Hoggart argued, enabled the ‘great body of urban working-class people’ to begin leaving ‘the dark, dirty back streets and the imaginative horizons which the economics of life there encouraged’.<sup>37</sup> They also included

substantial changes to the education system, which provided one foundation for what David Lodge describes as

the displacement of a literary establishment that was constituted of ageing remnants of pre-war modernism, Bloomsbury, and bohemianism, that was predominantly middle to upper-middle class, public-school and Oxbridge-educated, domiciled in central London or the country, and enamoured of Abroad – the displacement of this literary establishment by a new generation of writers who were working class or lower-middle class in social background, beneficiaries of free secondary and tertiary education under the 1944 Education Act, often the first members of their family to go to university, suspicious of inherited power and privilege, critical of all forms of snobbery, hypocrisy, affectation, rank-pulling in social life, and of pretentiousness and wilful obscurity in art and literature.<sup>38</sup>

This background shaped the texts such writers produced. Their work focused, for example, on ‘places largely neglected by the most prestigious writers of the 1940s – northern industrial towns, dull suburbs, provincial universities’,<sup>39</sup> a development illustrated by texts such as Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954), Shelagh Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey* (1958), John Braine’s *Room at the Top* (1957), Alan Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), and John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (1956). There are clear parallels between these texts and Hoggart’s study of working-class culture, not least their setting outside traditional centres of cultural and economic power. Hoggart’s account of life in pre-war Hunslet is part of a broader attempt to represent those who had been excluded from public discourse or marginalized within it. This insisted upon the value of a broader range of histories and experiences and demanded a more inclusive model of culture itself, one most famously suggested by Raymond Williams’s statement ‘Culture is ordinary.’<sup>40</sup> Though the writers listed above held a wide range of political views all considered a broader public both as subjects of literary representation and consumers of literature. Their work also insisted upon the need for a closer exploration of working-class cultural experience. For Hoggart this included, crucially, the texts they consume and the ways in which they use them.

Hoggart’s work is not simply informed by these changes in British society but also by a series of long-running debates about mass literacy, the popular media, and the function of literature that emerged with industrialism and compulsory state education. His most immediate debt was to the Leavises,



**Figure 2** Richard Hoggart, standing, with class, at Jack Lane Elementary School. ‘This may be Jack Lane Elementary School! Mr. Harrison on R. Am I 2nd from L. back row?’ Reproduction in sepia. Circa 1936. Photograph courtesy of the University of Sheffield Library.

whose ideas shaped the development of literary studies in Britain. Indeed, Terry Eagleton argues that their influence was such that ‘English students in England today are “Leavisites” whether they know it or not, irremediably altered by that historical intervention.’<sup>41</sup> Hoggart, like many of his contemporaries, certainly recognized their impact, observing that, for those in the ‘English literature world’ during the 1950s F.R. Leavis was ‘a looming and intransigent figure but one from whom many of us had learned more than from any other living critic, even if we had reservations about some of his views.’<sup>42</sup> His comment parallels Raymond Williams’s statement that the ‘teachings of Leavis’ were one of the ‘two serious influences which . . . left a deep impression on my mind’<sup>43</sup> during his time at Cambridge (the other was Marxism). For Williams, Leavis was a critic whose ideas he needed to ‘radically amend’,<sup>44</sup> but he nonetheless insisted that ‘we have all learned’ from his writing on the ‘real relations between art and experience’.<sup>45</sup>

Although Hoggart and Williams recognize the influence of F.R. Leavis, both criticize his ideas and their political implications. These objections

inform their models of cultural interpretation. As Grant Farred observes, early work in cultural studies ‘took up Leavis’ cudgels at the very place where he laid them down: at the threshold that separated the arena of politics from the environs of literary criticism.’<sup>46</sup>

In order to understand this process, it is necessary to return to the Leavises’ ideas about literature and society. F.R. Leavis was notoriously reluctant to explore the foundations of his criticism, as he demonstrated in his famous refusal to accede to René Wellek’s request that he should state his ‘assumptions more explicitly and defend them systematically’.<sup>47</sup> However, his essay ‘Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture’ does offer an interpretation of modern society and the condition of literature in the first half of the twentieth century that underpins not only his own criticism but also the broader movement with which he was identified.

Leavis argues that ‘culture is at a crisis’<sup>48</sup> because of the ‘changes in habit and the circumstances of life’ brought about by the ‘the machine’<sup>49</sup> and the commercial society it has produced. This crisis is defined by ‘mass-production and standardisation’,<sup>50</sup> including the mass-production of texts. Book clubs and the popular press, he insists, have led to a ‘levelling-down’<sup>51</sup> and increasingly formulaic writing produced according to publishers’ criteria to meet existing demands. Whilst innovative, valuable literature is still written it is increasingly the preserve of a minority ‘conscious, not merely of an uncongenial, but of a hostile environment.’<sup>52</sup> Leavis argued that this division in the reading public contrasted with earlier periods:

It was possible for Shakespeare to write plays that were at once popular drama and poetry that could be appreciated only by an educated minority. *Hamlet* appealed at a number of levels of response, from the highest downwards. The same is true of *Paradise Lost*, *Clarissa*, *Tom Jones*, *Don Juan*, *The Return of the Native*. The same is not true . . . of *The Waste Land*, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, *Ulysses* or *To the Lighthouse*.<sup>53</sup>

This fragmentation, combined with the constant exposure to ephemeral forms of writing, is disorientating, and makes the ‘task of acquiring discrimination . . . much more difficult.’<sup>54</sup> In this environment, Leavis argues, where the ‘landmarks have shifted, multiplied and crowded upon one another, the distinctions and dividing lines have blurred away, the boundaries are gone’,<sup>55</sup> the ‘prospects of culture . . . are very dark.’<sup>56</sup>

A similar pessimism structures *Fiction and the Reading Public*, and indeed the sources as well as the arguments of the two texts overlap.<sup>57</sup> Q.D. Leavis

described her book as an ‘anthropological’<sup>58</sup> investigation into popular fiction and set out to explore not only the texts themselves but the publishing industry, their authors’ motivations, and their impact upon their readers. She argued that ‘the book-borrowing public has acquired the reading habit while somehow failing to exercise any critical intelligence about its reading’, and that the consumption of fiction had become, for most, ‘a form of the drug habit’,<sup>59</sup> a way of temporarily escaping the failures of society. This was a particular problem as novels and short stories had assumed an increased importance because of the ‘decline of religious authority and of the satisfaction obtainable from first-hand living’.<sup>60</sup> ‘Lowbrow’ and even ‘middlebrow’<sup>61</sup> fiction both reflected and reinforced social fragmentation. They provided only illusory compensation, a ‘refuge from actual life’ rather than a way ‘to deal less inadequately with it’.<sup>62</sup> The best modern literature, such as the work ‘of D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, T.F. Powys, and E.M. Forster’,<sup>63</sup> still gave the reader ‘access to a finer code than his own’, but most fiction, Leavis argued, reproduced narratives that were ‘actually inferior to the traditional code of the illiterate’.<sup>64</sup> Popular literature had not only reduced the average standard of reading but actually undermined valuable working-class and peasant cultures, an idea that depends upon an idealized image of earlier rural communities as places in which ‘the ordinary worker’ experienced ‘the delight that a really interesting and varied round of duties gave’.<sup>65</sup>

As this illustrates, Q.D. Leavis, like her husband, maintained that by the twentieth century both writers and readers had separated into distinct ‘levels’, a process that began in the late eighteenth century but accelerated with mass literacy and the development of the popular press. Whilst ‘in 1760, for example . . . any one who could read would be equally likely to read any novel, or every novel, published, and the only division of the novelists of that age that can be made is between good and indifferent (effective and ineffective)’,<sup>66</sup> contemporary society was ‘decisively stratified in taste’. As a consequence, ‘the general public – Dr. Johnson’s common reader – has now not even a glimpse of the living interests of modern literature, is ignorant of its growth and so prevented from developing with it’, whilst the ‘critical minority to whose sole charge modern literature has now fallen is isolated, disowned by the general public and threatened with extinction.’<sup>67</sup> There was no longer a single reading public with a shared set of standards, but a series of distinct and unequal publics who consumed texts of distinct, unequal value. Popular education and the availability of inexpensive editions, including inexpensive editions of canonical literature,

had produced only a 'semi-literate public to interfere with the book market'<sup>68</sup> and imperil the position of that minority on whose critical abilities, F.R. Leavis declared, depended 'the implicit standards that order the finer living of an age'.<sup>69</sup>

These ideas informed the work of the generation of critics that emerged in the 1950s, and indeed Hoggart notes that 'Mrs Leavis came to say towards the end of her life that Raymond Williams and I had made reputations by climbing on her shoulders'.<sup>70</sup> Williams certainly recognized her influence on *The Uses of Literacy*, which he described as 'a natural successor and complement to say, *Fiction and the Reading Public*'.<sup>71</sup> Hoggart himself also noted continuities, but argues that whilst 'we had certainly learned a lot from her and acknowledged it . . . we stood on our own ground'.<sup>72</sup> Neither he nor Williams imitated the Leavises' work, but extended and challenged it. Their responses were informed by their political commitments, which both described as rooted in their working-class backgrounds. Hoggart insisted that 'there was no way I could have been other than a socialist'<sup>73</sup> after growing up in Chapeltown and Hunslet, poor areas of Leeds, whilst Williams grounded his socialism in the Welsh working-class community he inhabited as a child. Both objected to the Leavises' representation of the 'general public' and the ways in which they used popular culture. This not only reinforced the notion of art as the preserve of a sensitive minority but also simplified or disregarded the experience of most readers, including those amongst whom Hoggart and Williams had grown up. Both writers were explicitly invested in their response to the critical models they inherited. As Williams put it, 'when you have come yourself from their apparent public, when you recognise in yourself the ties that still bind, you cannot be satisfied with the older formula: enlightened minority, degraded mass.'<sup>74</sup>

Reflecting on his own early contribution to this debate, Hoggart observes,

I had, of course, read and admired Q.D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public*, as well as similar material in *Scrutiny* and associated publications. Admired them, but not been altogether at ease with them. Something was missing in those analyses but it took me years to discover what. By then I was in the difficult process of writing what eventually became *The Uses of Literacy*. That book pays tribute to the work of Mrs Leavis, and it is a genuine tribute. But it was, for me more importantly, an attempt to adjust something in Mrs Leavis's approach – a distancing from the material in her, too wholesale a rejection of it and all it might imply. Helped by Orwell and C.S. Lewis, I became more and more drawn to the question of what people might make of

that material, by the thought that obviously poor writing might appeal to good instincts, that the mind of a reader is not a *tabula rasa* but has been nurtured within a social setting which provides its own forms and filters for judgements and resistances, that one had to know very much more about how people used much of the stuff which to us might seem merely dismissible trash, before one could speak confidently about the effects it might have.<sup>75</sup>

The passage insists upon reading as a social process. The Leavises assumed that the way in which a novel functioned could largely be deduced from the text itself, making detailed investigation into its actual reception redundant. As John Carey argued, one striking quality of '*Fiction and the Reading Public* is its surprising neglect of any involvement with the reading public',<sup>76</sup> a statement that echoes Williams' observation that 'the reading public is really only present in the title'<sup>77</sup> of the book. In contrast, Hoggart helped to initiate research into ways in which individuals interpreted and used the texts they read within the context of specific cultural traditions. His work contributes to what Roland Barthes called the 'birth of the reader'<sup>78</sup> in post-war criticism, to the idea that meaning is not simply present in the work but is constructed in the interaction between the text and the individual who reads it.

Because meaning is produced it is neither fixed nor determined only by the work 'in itself'. This means that one cannot draw legitimate conclusions about the 'reading public' just by reading the bestsellers they consume. Indeed, one cannot even understand the social implications of the books themselves in this way. Hoggart repeatedly insists upon the need for a more sophisticated understanding of the ways in which people approach texts, which recognizes the possibility that they might make creative use of seemingly mundane or conventional material. His work encodes a democratic commitment to consider seriously the experience of all sections of society, 'to *look* at people and places; with as much sympathy as you could summon'<sup>79</sup> and to try to understand the function particular forms of reading, listening, and viewing might serve within particular social contexts. This is interwoven with a demand for a more nuanced view of popular culture which sees it as a legitimate object of study. Hoggart argued that earlier critics had assumed

that popular literature can be read in large generic groups, very quickly; and then boldly generalised about. It is, after all, merely 'symptomatic', we say.

Hence we tend to use and abuse it; we oversimplify its relation to society and so fail to see what it can tell us about the nature of a culture, what symptoms it really indicates.<sup>80</sup>

This challenges Q.D. Leavis's argument that few popular novels 'are subtle enough to merit . . . close scrutiny or are worth reading save for anthropological reasons'.<sup>81</sup> Hoggart does not see all works as of equivalent value, a view he describes as 'the "The Beatles are in their own way as good as Beethoven" nonsense', but insists that 'all forms of popular literature and art [are] worth study and might tell us surprising things about ourselves, about other people and about our and their imaginations'.<sup>82</sup> He also recognizes differences within popular culture. The Beatles may not be 'as good as Beethoven' but 'they are far ahead of the popular songwriters who came before them'.<sup>83</sup> To make such a claim is to raise broader questions of value; arguing that 'Let it Be' is a better song than 'Tell Laura I Love Her' exposes both to comparison with other pieces of music. Hoggart's emphasis on evaluation is motivated by the desire to share 'these good, these better, things',<sup>84</sup> to ensure that the most valuable works are accessible to all, but he avoids what Rose describes as 'the sharp dichotomies drawn by the Romantics, Victorians and Modernists, who tended to make a fetish of the highest art and dismiss everything else as pernicious rubbish',<sup>85</sup> recognizing a continuum of value. His argument that everybody has the 'right to the best',<sup>86</sup> though, undermines the notion that art is the preserve of a sensitive minority, as the Leavises claimed, insisting upon it as a common heritage.

The Leavises' work was not the only influence on Hoggart's thought, which also bears the trace of what Steele describes as a 'distinctly non-Leavite' tradition, characterized by 'the anti-Puritanism of the cavalier, in its best sense, style – replete with disregard for disciplinary boundaries, formal niceties, appropriate tone'.<sup>87</sup> The Leavises were a key reference point, though, and helped to establish the terms of his social analyses. He draws on many of their ideas, including Q.D. Leavis's argument about the ways in which 'Big Business'<sup>88</sup> defines mass culture, which informs his criticism of 'the popular press, the shoddier television programmes and other such barbarisms'.<sup>89</sup> However, his work is also shaped by its opposition to some of the Leavis's basic assumptions about popular fiction and those who consume it. In particular, it challenges the idea that such work can be classified in advance, that popular literature is always, by virtue of its popularity, 'conventional', and that, as such, has nothing to tell us. He insists that the

analysis of all texts should ‘start as if from scratch each time’,<sup>90</sup> recognizing value in whatever form it takes, and that cultural critics should pay closer attention to the ways in which individuals use texts. His revision of the critical models he inherited is therefore political. It challenges the basis of what Williams described as the ‘normal description of the masses, low and trivial in taste and habit’,<sup>91</sup> insists that all works merit sympathetic attention, and recognizes that readers are active, often sceptical producers of meaning, rather than passive consumers. Orwell’s criticism, which he describes as ‘firm and often puritanical, but charitable’,<sup>92</sup> provides one model for the kind of cultural analysis he advocates. Orwell was sensitive to the political failings of popular writing, to the fact that it often reproduces established narratives and could be uncritical in its representations of power. He describes James Hadley Chase’s best-selling gangster novel *No Orchid’s for Miss Blandish*, for example, as ‘a daydream appropriate to the totalitarian age’,<sup>93</sup> and notes the ways in which boys’ weeklies are ‘censored in the interests of the ruling class’.<sup>94</sup> However, he can also find value in apparently trivial works, and Hoggart quotes with approval Orwell’s conclusion, after a detailed consideration of Donald McGill’s titillating seaside postcards, that ‘when it comes to the pinch, human beings are heroic.’<sup>95</sup> None of this undermines the claims Hoggart makes for art, but it suggests that the category is broader than critics such as the Leavises had recognized, that the status of any individual work must be established through close, sympathetic reading, and that there is something to be learned from all cultural products, even if, in the case of ‘conformist’ writing, the critical work is done by the reader rather than the text itself.

The interpretation of all texts, conventional or live, depends on a sensitivity to form as well as content, to how a work says something as well as what it says. Indeed, Hoggart argues that ‘literary-cultural reading responds first to the language and the form, rather than to the message or substance’, and that the ‘tone of voice is the most obvious carrier of cultural meanings.’<sup>96</sup> Style is not incidental, a matter of decorative embellishment, but constitutive, and therefore has political implications. As Hoggart argues, a ‘way of using language toward people is a way of seeing people, of making assumptions about them. This goes further than seeing them as, say, limited in vocabulary or background; it indicates how much respect we have for them as human beings.’<sup>97</sup> Scholarly texts, though, often use what Hoggart describes as the ‘shield of an academic discipline’s formal approaches’<sup>98</sup> to evade questions about their own form and the assumptions it encodes. Hoggart’s work, in contrast, positions criticism as the object as

well as the subject of textual analysis, as one mode of writing amongst others. This is demonstrated by his exploration of the language of 'theory', and continual reflection on his own rhetorical practices and relation to his audience, both of which demonstrate a commitment to a democratic politics founded upon broad debate.

### The Language of 'Theory'

Hoggart famously makes little direct use of theoretical writing and acknowledges a 'mistrust of theory', despite a fascination with some 'abstract generalizing words'<sup>99</sup> such as 'culture' and 'class'. Indeed, his departure from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies is sometimes attributed to the 'turn to theory',<sup>100</sup> as Stuart Hall describes it. His critical method, with its debts to Arnold and the Leavises and focus on literature, was increasingly displaced by a form of social analysis that responded to the 'injunction to study the society and the culture as "lived" equally with its texts',<sup>101</sup> and the questions raised by contemporary European philosophy, sociology, and political activism. This involved the introduction of new rhetorical forms and, at its best, undermined the notion of a natural critical register, exposing the extent to which lucidity often depends on the reproduction of what 'goes without saying'. Inspired by writers from Theodor Adorno to Hélène Cixous, critics experimented with new modes of writing that enabled what Judith Butler describes as a productive 'estrangement from what is most familiar'.<sup>102</sup> The texts they produced were often self-consciously difficult, resisting simple, rapid consumption and demanding closer attention to the form as well as the content of the arguments advanced. There was a clear parallel between such writing and the literary modernism, which similarly disrupted the realist techniques it inherited. Indeed, Eagleton argues that 'writers like Barthes, Foucault, Kristeva and Derrida were really late modernist artists who had taken to philosophy rather than sculpture or the novel'.<sup>103</sup> Their styles served a critical function. The complexity of Barthes' writing, for example, does not demonstrate an inability to communicate, nor is it an unfortunate by-product of the ideas with which he engages. Instead, it is a central to his engagement with questions about the production, organization, and dissemination of knowledge, and the ways in which these both reflect and reinforce social structures. It questions ideology, what 'goes without saying', through its disruption of conventional language, its insistent playfulness and ambiguity.

Hoggart is more sensitive to these problems than has often been acknowledged, recognizing that ‘the particular languages we each inherit act themselves as controls on consciousness; they prompt required attitudes and inhibit those less acceptable to the culture; and it all then seems like “common sense” and “plain talking”; always and everywhere.’<sup>104</sup> The critical literacy he advocates involves resisting such controls, in part by recognizing the ways in which conventional wisdom is encoded in seemingly neutral or ‘obvious’ statements. As Hoggart argues,

‘Breaking down the assurance of commonsense’, refusing to ‘sink into its mire’ are admirable and absolute necessities for the intellectual, especially for budding intellectuals. Calling upon ‘commonsense’ can be justification not for sense presumed to be demonstrated abundantly by the common man, but for taking refuge when intellectually challenged and shaken in the most basic of received opinions (not thought, not ‘sense’). Its favourite motto is: ‘It stands to reason’, which means: ‘It is the universal, unchallenged and unconsidered assumption in these parts, and so must be right.’<sup>105</sup>

This is a political problem. Hoggart emphasizes the ways in which, for example, capitalism exploits ‘common sense’ to approach ‘working-class people, in particular . . . *along a line on which they are exposed*’.<sup>106</sup> Advertisers, broadcasters, and the popular press imitate the dominant idiom of working-class communities in order to represent their claims as part of the established pattern of life and prevent critical engagement with them. Effective interpretation of such texts depends on developing a language that resists such linguistic and intellectual clichés. Hoggart’s argument that the typical author of mass-produced texts ‘does not stand before his experience and try to recreate it in a form of words, with which – rather than with the writer himself directly – the reader must seek an understanding according to its complexity’<sup>107</sup> emphasizes this need for writers to engage with their material rather than its conventional image, demanding more from their readers in the process. Whilst the passage simplifies the relation between texts and the experiences they represent, it also makes a case for writing that is complex insofar as that it demands that readers look again, and differently, even at what might seem self-evident. Making ‘an effort to think about the weight of a word, or puzzle over a nuance, or follow . . . a moderately involved sentence-structure’<sup>108</sup> is integral to this process.

Hoggart’s critique of the language of theory is not, then, a rejection of complex prose. It is also not an opposition to abstract thought, although he

does acknowledge a lack of interest in theoretical work as conventionally understood. He describes this as a 'legacy of working-class attitudes', in particular a pervasive 'dislike for debate', though his resistance to 'abstract patterns'<sup>109</sup> also suggests a continuing view of life as 'dense and concrete', centred on 'the intimate, the sensory, the detailed, and the personal',<sup>110</sup> which he argues is characteristic of the working-class communities. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that 'modern literary theory can illuminate works of literature at all levels'<sup>111</sup> and insists that those working in the humanities 'ought to engage more in theoretical questioning'.<sup>112</sup> His relation to theory is consequently more complex than many critics acknowledge, and indeed than he often acknowledges himself. As Lawrence Grossberg insists, it is 'fundamentally incorrect' to claim that 'Hoggart's vision of cultural studies was not theoretically based and that he thought cultural studies could somehow function without theory'.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the idea that his work is 'anti-theoretical' is often based on its form and 'the rather patronizing assumption that "ordinary people" cannot or will not read theory, and hence that anything addressed to them must be atheoretical'.<sup>114</sup> This argument suggests that a reconsideration of Hoggart's texts involves a fresh look at the category of 'theory' itself, the political and professional contexts within which it is constructed, the extent to which it is defined by its rhetorical strategies, and the functions it serves.

The questions of Hoggart's attitude to abstract thought, the foundations of his critical practice, and the ways in which contemporary philosophy might usefully extend that practice, demand more space than is available here. His criticism of academic theoretical writing, however, is more clearly defined, and centres on two closely related concerns. In the first place, he argues that theory has become an enclosed discourse, a circumscribed object of study rather than a method of engaging with intellectual and political problems. In addition, he insists, its specialist register effectively restricts debate to a minority. His own texts, by contrast, consistently address 'the intelligent lay reader, not the academic reader',<sup>115</sup> positioning themselves as informed interventions in open, democratic debates. His objection, in other words, is not to theoretical investigation but to theory as an exclusive professional discourse, even where it represents itself as serving the interests of the majority. An analysis of his arguments on this subject provides a foundation for the interpretation of his own accessible, literary prose and its political implications.

Hoggart insists that whilst 'one does not wish to undervalue the importance of theory and need for theoretic language ... Lucien Goldmann

pointed out that some theories go beyond themselves and become “formalistic systems that tend to eliminate in a radical way all interest in history and the problem of meaning”.<sup>116</sup> The statement, pointedly centred on a quotation from a prominent theorist, draws a distinction between those for whom ‘theoretic language’ is a way to ‘clarify and increase understanding’<sup>117</sup> of objects and problems external to itself and those for whom the use of such language has become a substitute for this work. There are clear parallels between this argument and Hall’s critique of ‘theoretical fluency’.<sup>118</sup> Whilst Hall recognizes that ‘questions of power and the political have to be and are always lodged within representation, that they are always discursive questions’ he insists that certain forms of academic discourse have displaced the political practice they claim to enact. His interpretation of this as a result of ‘institutionalization’<sup>119</sup> insists that the problem is not inherent in theoretical thought but is a product of professional structures that have made ‘theory’, as Said insists, ‘a substitute . . . an academic pursuit of its own’.<sup>120</sup> Its integration in the academic system limits its connection to debates outside the university. This is a particular problem for cultural studies, for which, Grossberg insists, theorizing should be ‘a (necessary) detour’ in ‘the effort to work on and through, to transform, the material conditions and forces, the structures of social relations, the organizations of practices, of social life itself.’<sup>121</sup> Instead, ‘too often theory substitutes for the more complex work of conjunctural analysis, for the articulation of theory into historical specificity.’<sup>122</sup> Rather than serving as a way of engage more closely with social problems, it becomes an end in itself, a game with words.

In this context, the self-conscious complexity of much theoretical language is too often not a strategy for questioning the familiar but a technique professional intellectuals use to enforce the boundaries of their field, a way, as Hoggart insists, of ‘showing others and assuring themselves that they belong to an inner group’.<sup>123</sup> The ability to manipulate a specialist vocabulary provides such writers with ‘a warm indication that they have joined a club, an in-group, a mystery, a modish clique.’<sup>124</sup> As Eagleton argues, a certain ‘kind of jargon is as much a badge of tribal belonging as the stethoscope trailing ostentatiously from a physician’s pocket.’<sup>125</sup> It distinguishes its adherents not only from those outside the university system but from scholars in adjacent disciplines, as the texts it produces are frequently not only ‘incomprehensible to the toiling masses; they are incomprehensible to most of the non-toiling intelligentsia as well.’<sup>126</sup> Judith Butler makes a similar point when she observes that there is ‘a problem when writing in the

academy becomes so rarefied or so specialized that it speaks only to an in-crowd or to a group of people who are initiated into the protocols of the discourse'.<sup>127</sup> This emphasis on an 'in-group' connected by a shared interpretative structure and form of language implies that legitimate debate is the preserve of a minority whose command of disciplinary codes signifies their right to discuss certain subjects. This minority may represent themselves as 'progressive', but even in such cases their political practice involves speaking for the dispossessed rather than with them. This is, again, a particular problem for those on the Left working in cultural studies. As Eagleton argues, 'there is something particularly scandalous about *radical* cultural theory being so wilfully obscure. Not because it could reach hordes of the labouring masses if only it used shorter words. It is scandalous because the whole idea of cultural theory is at root a democratic one.'<sup>128</sup> This idea that criticism should contribute to a debate that extends beyond the academy defines Hoggart's work. It does not involve a rejection of abstract thought but a concern with the ways in which it is communicated and, crucially, to whom. It is an argument about, rather than against, theory, a rejection not of the field but of its dominant institutional forms. This forms part of a broader, essentially political interest in the social function and responsibilities of intellectual work.

### The Common Reader

Hoggart's commitment to writing for the 'intelligent lay reader' is not only founded upon a respect for the intellectual abilities of many outside the academy but the idea that effective criticism depends on debate. The validity of a claim depends upon its ability, as Habermas insists, to establish itself as the 'better argument'<sup>129</sup> in a discussion open to all. This means that writers must expose their conclusions and line of reasoning to the widest possible critical scrutiny. The use of specialist vocabulary prevents this, designating in advance not only the audience for a text but also whose critique of it will be heard. This is a particular problem for writing that addresses matters of common concern. A technical article on the design of transistors might reasonably assume an expert audience, though it should still be open to those entering and scrutinizing the field; one on the regulation of television or government provision for the arts should address a wider readership. This is not to claim that scientific or technological problems need not be subject to general debate. The argument that questions about, say, genetic

engineering, nuclear power, or the reintroduction of species are best left to specialists is a political one, and any research in the sciences raises the issue of the structures of value within which it is embedded and the functions it serves. It is rather to argue that those working in cultural studies have a particular duty to the public sphere, in which their texts explicitly intervene. The field is, in short, inherently and conspicuously political.

Hoggart outlines the foundations of his own prose in *Only Connect*, when he argues that a commitment to public debate involves

not only the assumption that one should try to talk to and listen to people outside one's specialism; for writers it implies also that – provided specialist technicalities are removed – many readers can take as much as most of us offer; it involves therefore recognizing that to write in this way (if you call it either 'popularization', or 'haute vulgarization' you are implicitly patronizing) is not a matter of writing-down, taking our complex truths, adding water and serving up with a few pally gestures. It is much more a matter of recognizing the extent to which many of our professional languages are unnecessary and defensive; recognizing that we have first to work hard so that, if we are lucky, we may write in a way which is equal to the new demands.<sup>130</sup>

The passage recognizes the importance of specialist knowledge, but values it because of the contribution it makes to collective understanding. Experts both enable and contribute to public debate, in which even their most specialist or personal work is embedded. They have a responsibility to share ideas, which, as the passage above suggests, cannot legitimately be evaded by deciding in advance that the majority of the population are incapable of dealing with complex problems. Hoggart does not argue that everybody has an 'intellectual bent',<sup>131</sup> but consistently emphasizes that intelligence is not the exclusive preserve of those who work in particular professions, have particular qualifications, or use a particular form of language. His experience of teaching adult students in extra-mural classes revealed both a widespread capacity for critical thought and the ways in which this was inhibited by technical registers that limited access to information and confined discussion to the 'initiated'. The 'lesson', Hoggart argues, 'so long as the tutor is willing to take off the armour of specialist language and talk as clearly as possible without reducing the subject (and this balancing act can be performed much more than many of us like to think), is that many of the students, even if they have had little formal education, are in some ways at least as bright as we are.'<sup>132</sup> These individuals may benefit from formal instruction, but 'specialist language' often inhibits this and suggests an

inherent division between the intellectual and ‘common reader’. In practice, Hoggart argues, such distinctions are contingent, something demonstrated by the fact that ‘few of us can hope to be better than [an intelligent layman] outside our own specialist interests’.<sup>133</sup> The use of accessible language is not a concession the gifted make to the obtuse, a process of ‘writing-down’ for mass consumption, but a condition of intellectual work, and particularly the kind of interdisciplinary work essential to cultural studies.

As Jon Nixon observes, Hoggart himself ‘rarely uses specialist language’, and indeed his ‘vocabulary is uncommonly common.’<sup>134</sup> His texts enact, rather than simply describe, a democratic commitment to a discursive model of knowledge. This demands a prose that is at once accessible and sufficient to the complexity of its subject, which makes clear, well-supported claims yet is contestable. Hoggart’s writing, which Collini characterizes as ‘colloquial, concrete, structured rather than merely adorned by metaphor and simile’,<sup>135</sup> responds to this demand. As Collini’s description suggests, it is not ‘artless’ but carefully crafted, and it aligns him within a particular tradition. He acknowledges ‘debts to Butler and Orwell’ in his ‘search for a clear, unembroidered manner’,<sup>136</sup> and he shares with the latter in particular an interest in demotic language. His texts are, as Collini observes, ‘marbled with phrases from the spoken language, old and new’,<sup>137</sup> often juxtaposed with more formal passages. In the introduction to *Everyday Language and Everyday Life* he observes that ‘I have used demotic rather than “educated” language when that seemed fitting; and used also some local as well as public forms’,<sup>138</sup> and this is demonstrated, for example, when he states, in discussing working-class stoicism, that ‘one began to weary and wish to shout: “Bite the backsides of those above you. Don’t just ‘put up’ with it”’.<sup>139</sup> His style not only establishes connections between normally discrete areas of discussion and groups of readers but insists that intellectual work is, like culture, ‘ordinary’, and that it can be carried out using ‘ordinary’ language. Hoggart makes extensive use of terms drawn from outside academic registers, and indeed often from the communities he represents. His repeated use of words such as ‘decent’ and ‘respectable’,<sup>140</sup> for example, is conspicuously indebted to working-class traditions of thought and insists that these terms have a critical, rather than simply evaluative, function.

Hoggart’s writing is not only characterized by its use of colloquial language but also by its openness to multiple, sometimes conflicting, perspectives, including those of individuals and groups excluded from what Jack Common called the ‘writing classes’.<sup>141</sup> This is demonstrated by what Bill Hughes describes as the ‘Bakhtinian multiplicity of voices’<sup>142</sup>

in *The Uses of Literacy*. The text represents the passages of working-class speech it uses as elements of distinct culture rather than simply as objects of academic scrutiny. References to “straight dealing”, “good neighbourliness”, “looking on the bright side”, “openness”, “lending a helping hand”, “not being stuck-up or a getter-on”, “loyalty”,<sup>143</sup> or phrases such as ‘Ah tek a man as ’e is’,<sup>144</sup> are not represented as empty clichés but elements of a complex tradition with its own interpretative principles and strategies. They both reflect and enable the ‘considerable sensitiveness’ that many working-class people have in ‘reaching conclusions on some things, in their own way’.<sup>145</sup> Despite the quotation marks, these comments form part of the fabric of the text and indicate a broader concern with working-class traditions of thought and interpretation. Indeed, Jean-Claude Passeron argues that *The Uses of Literacy* as a whole is organized ‘according to the structures, if not always in words, [of] working-class consciousness and speech’.<sup>146</sup> The ability to criticize and evaluate is represented as integral to working-class communities, rather than as something introduced by scholars and commentators from outside. Education can and should help to increase ‘critical literacy’, which for Hoggart means first ‘blowing the gaff on all the rampant small and large corruptions, on the humbugging, smart-alec persuaders’,<sup>147</sup> but such skills are not simply a gift those who have benefited from formal instruction give to the remainder of the population. The interweaving of voices suggests a more reciprocal process, which takes account of what Hoggart describes as the ‘self-acquired imaginative wisdom’ of individuals such as his grandmother, and their ‘self-contained, unarticulated reflection on the terms of life’,<sup>148</sup> even as it insists this could be better fostered. Hoggart’s texts are sites of debate, in which those represented not only speak, but do so in their own voices.

This emphasis on debate is strengthened by Hoggart’s continual reflection on the interpretative techniques and language he employs. Although he makes his points clearly, and often forcefully, he develops, qualifies, and comments on his analyses both within individual texts and across his work as a whole. This involves acknowledging the limitations of his own critical vocabulary. In the introduction to *Townscape with Figures*, for example, he observes that, ‘words for judgements of value are needed but not easily available, not safe. The only ones begin to look like nineteenth-century Ruritanian State Railway Bonds, uncashable. In the absence of a common currency, I fall back on words such as “decent” and “shabby”. And what do those mean, another reviewer rightly asked.’<sup>149</sup> The statement does not

claim that such terms have no value, but it acknowledges the ways in which they might be challenged, that they do not have a simple, agreed meaning, and that they are rooted in a contested critical practice. Similarly, he observes in *Only Connect* that whilst

I would have liked to use the phrase ‘the intelligent layman’ . . . it seems unusable since it apparently suggests to some people a sort of patronage: that here is a writer looking out at the common people and hoping to do good to the few intelligent ones who will listen. Which is not what is meant at all. So I give up that phrase and the other approximations; they all send some people off on the wrong track.<sup>150</sup>

This passage represents criticism as an inherently social process, rather than an enclosed activity employing words that signify only within tightly-defined limits. The term ‘intellectual layman’ is problematic because of the ways in which it functions in the community at large, rather than within a particular professional context. Hoggart’s comment recognizes language as a common resource that may be adapted for specific critical purposes but cannot finally be closed to others, even those who use it to manipulate and exploit. This presents a political challenge. As Edward Said observed,

the language I use must be the same used by the State Department or the president when they say that they are for human rights and for fighting to ‘liberate’ Iraq, and I must be able to use that very same language to recapture the subject, reclaim it, and reconnect it to the tremendously complicated realities these vastly over privileged antagonists of mine have simplified, betrayed, and either diminished or dissolved.<sup>151</sup>

This is an inherent problem of intellectual work, rather than a difficulty which can be evaded by adopting a technical vocabulary. The process of reclaiming the critical possibilities of language is always incomplete, a struggle enacted at the level of the phrase and sentence.

### Democratic Criticism

In ‘Schools of English and Contemporary Society’ Hoggart argues, ‘I do not think that any of us, whether literary critics or social scientists, can claim that we are showing “the truth”. The most we can say is that we have shown “something true about” a society, when seen from this angle or that.’<sup>152</sup> The

statement emphasizes the complexity of truth, the fact that it is always contestable and incomplete. To say “‘something true about’ a society’ admits the possibility that this may be challenged or developed, that the subject may be addressed in different ways. It does not mean that there is no such thing as the truth and that all arguments are equally legitimate; throughout his work Hoggart insists upon the importance of discriminating between both factual and evaluative claims. It does mean that, as Habermas argues, ‘*everything* whose validity is at all disputable rests on shaky foundations’. For Habermas, it ‘matters little that the ground underfoot shakes a bit less for those who debate problems of physics than for those who debate problems of morals and aesthetics’,<sup>153</sup> but in practice the contingent nature of truth is often more apparent to those writing about novels than those writing about gravity. It is certainly difficult for cultural critics to ignore. Cultural studies cannot convincingly represent itself as an authoritative discourse making final statements about the nature of things. Its concern with the subjective response to social change, with the ways in which people experience and use texts as much as the texts themselves, undermines what Grossberg calls the ‘desire for completion’.<sup>154</sup> Instead, it recognizes that its conclusions have to be continually reshaped in response to new research, developments in interpretative practices, and changes in the object of criticism itself.

Cultural studies, as Hoggart conceived it, is premised on the argument that because culture itself is neither static nor divided into discrete areas its interpretation depends upon methodological innovation and interdisciplinary research. It therefore rejects the notion that knowledge can be partitioned up between university departments, each with their own distinct concerns and methods of analysis. Hoggart’s commitment to breaking down academic boundaries is a product of his radicalism, though, rather than its end, and his work explores broader questions about the definition, production, and control of knowledge. These are political issues, and Hoggart’s response to them is founded upon a commitment to democracy conceived, not as ‘head-counting’<sup>155</sup> but as a practice of collective decision-making through open debate. Intellectual work is, by extension, democratic insofar as it encourages broad participation in the search for understanding and bases its conclusions on the better argument, whoever offers it. This argument certainly does not dismiss the value of expertise but reinterprets its foundations. Specialists are important because their training should enable them to advance the better argument in their area of study rather than because they have a privileged access to the truth as such. Historians,

for example, are historians only insofar as they increase our understanding of history, a definition that leaves space for the amateur or 'intelligent layman'. This emphasis on function is replicated in Hoggart's writing on education, which insists upon the importance of free debate in which the tutor is distinguished by their knowledge and interpretative skills rather than their prestige or authority. The aim of such discussion is to foster a critical literacy that will enable students to support, develop, and express their ideas, to increase their intellectual independence. As Hoggart argues in 'The Role of the Teacher', 'we should be glad to be judged by the degree to which our students stand on their own feet, out of our shadows. Which means we have to try to make sure they retain their freedom to be critical of us.'<sup>156</sup> The classroom should demonstrate, in miniature, the values of a democratic society, as well as providing the skills needed to sustain it.

These commitments demand a new form of writing. Hoggart's clear, contestable prose, his avoidance of professional jargons, and his emphasis on his own process of reasoning represent his work as a contribution to public discourse rather than to a discussion between members of an enclosed group or discipline. In so doing, they contribute to what Noam Chomsky describes as a 'Left libertarian'<sup>157</sup> tradition founded upon idea broad participation in politics rather than the leadership of an enlightened elite. This entails a responsibility to extend participation by sharing ideas and critical skills. Throughout his work, Hoggart criticizes the tendency of 'well-informed people' to 'write virtually for their own kind only, for their journals, and sometimes for the broadsheet newspapers'.<sup>158</sup> His texts explicitly address the 'intelligent layman', the 'common' rather than professional reader, those 'still seeking knowledge and understanding today "for the love of God and the relief of man's estate"'. He draws on a tradition of essayists, autobiographers, and novelists in order to break down the exclusive conventions of much academic writing, and his prose has more in common with Orwell's than with that of many literary scholars, sociologists, or, indeed, cultural critics.

Hoggart's focus on literature is not simply about trying to find clearer ways to communicate existing varieties of intellectual work, however, but about extending its scope. This involves reconsidering its methodologies and the evidence it uses as well as its subject matter. Throughout his work, Hoggart employs forms of knowledge excluded from much academic writing, emphasizing the value of 'poetic, metaphoric, intuitive understanding'<sup>159</sup> and drawing on personal impressions and memories as well as textual sources. Literature is important to him partly because it incorporates

such knowledge in its exploration of ‘the experiential wholeness of life – the life of the emotions, the life of the mind, the individual life and the social life, the object-laden world’,<sup>160</sup> giving a ‘sense of the way life was lived “in the bone”’<sup>161</sup> at a particular time. It does not passively reflect society, though, but explores its implicit assumptions as well as its external forms. This critical engagement depends on its rhetoric and methods of organization as well as its choice of subject matter. The work of the ‘best novelists’<sup>162</sup> is not only sensitive to the psychological as well as material structures within which individual lives develop but achieves its insights and effects through the interplay of content and form. In this, it contrasts with academic texts that constrain the process of analysis from the outset, dismissing certain forms of evidence and experience as inconsequential, as well as with those in which radical, democratic claims are undermined by a rhetorical identification with a narrow intellectual ‘elite’.

In his review of *The Uses of Literacy*, Raymond Williams argued that

we are suffering, obviously, from the decay and disrepute of the realistic novel, which for our purposes (since we are, and know ourselves to be, individuals *within* a society) ought clearly to be revived. Sound critical work can be done; sound social observation and analysis of ideas. Yet I do not see how, in the end, this particular world of fact and feeling can be adequately mediated, except in these more traditionally imaginative terms.<sup>163</sup>

The passage insists that literature can explore intersections between the material texture of life and the psychological response to it, which traditional scholarship has struggled to make sense of. It argues for a more ‘literary’ form of scholarship, not only in the sense of a criticism that draws upon literature as material for cultural analysis but also of one that uses its methods, that is more sensitive to the imaginative and subjective, and more conscious of the implications of its own form. As Williams recognized, Hoggart’s work responds to this need. It attempts to rethink the terms of intellectual work rather than simply extend the subjects it considers, raising questions about audience it addresses and the functions it serves. For Williams, *The Uses of Literacy* was not an entirely successful experiment, as at times ‘one feels Hoggart hesitating between fiction or autobiography on the one hand, and sociology on the other’, but he recognized its formal radicalism. In fact, Hoggart’s work is characterized less by fragmentation, as Williams suggests, than by an openness to multiple perspectives and a willingness to juxtapose seemingly distinct forms of analysis, undermining

the boundaries between established groups and disciplines. These characteristics are founded upon the idea that intellectual work is not simply another professional activity but a common concern, which takes from each according to their ability. Hoggart's background in literary studies and 'love of good literature' are essential to this attempt to develop a style and method of interpretation that enact his democratic socialism, to find a way 'to reach out and speak to others',<sup>164</sup> to recognize and contribute to the 'cooperative search for truth'.

### Notes

- 1 Sue Owen, 'Richard Hoggart and Literature', in Sue Owen, ed. *Re-reading Richard Hoggart: Life, Literature, Language, Education* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), p. 59.
- 2 Malcolm Pittock, 'Richard Hoggart and the Leavises,' *Essays in Criticism* (2010) 60/1: 52.
- 3 Richard Hoggart, 'Contemporary Cultural Studies: An Approach to the Study of Literature and Society' (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1969), p. 15.
- 4 Richard Hoggart, *A Local Habitation: Life and Times, Volume I: 1918–1940* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), p. 130.
- 5 Richard Hoggart, 'Literature and Society', in *Speaking to Each Other: Volume Two: About Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 20.
- 6 Richard Hoggart, 'Why I Value Literature', in *Speaking to Each Other: Volume Two: About Literature*, p. 16.
- 7 Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1983; repr. Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 89.
- 8 Hoggart, 'Literature and Society', pp. 20–1.
- 9 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' in Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981; repr. Austin: University of Texas, 1990), p. 293.
- 10 Hoggart, 'Why I Value Literature', p. 13.
- 11 Richard Hoggart, *Tyranny of Relativism: Culture and Politics in Contemporary English Society* (1995; repr. New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 1998), p. 75.
- 12 See F.R. Leavis, 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy', in *The Common Pursuit* (1952; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), pp. 211–22.
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- 36 Peter Demetz, 'Introduction' in Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing* (1978; repr. New York: Schocken, 1986), p. xxii.
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- 39 Lodge, 'Richard Hoggart: A Personal Appreciation', p. 3.
- 40 Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 4.
- 41 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; repr. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 31.

- 42 Richard Hoggart, *An Imagined Life: Life and Times, Volume II: 1959–91* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), p. 10.
- 43 Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', p. 7.
- 44 Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', p. 14.
- 45 Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', p. 9.
- 46 Grant Farred, 'Leavisite Cool: The Organic Links Between Cultural Studies and Scrutiny', *Disposition/n: American Journal of Cultural Histories and Theories* (1996) 21/48: 16.
- 47 René Wellek, 'A Letter', in Eric Bentley, ed., *The Importance of Scrutiny: Selections from Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review, 1932–1948* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 23. Leavis's response is printed immediately after this letter, as 'A Reply' (*ibid.*, 30–40).
- 48 F.R. Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture,' *For Continuity* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1933), p. 15.
- 49 Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', p. 16.
- 50 Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', p. 18.
- 51 Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', p. 18.
- 52 Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', p. 38.
- 53 Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', p. 38.
- 54 Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', p. 31.
- 55 Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', p. 31.
- 56 Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', p. 44.
- 57 For example, F.R. Leavis quotes a letter from Edgar Rice Burroughs ('Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', pp. 21–2, footnote 1) which also appears in *Fiction and the Reading Public* (pp. 49–50) where it is described as 'a bestseller's reply to the questionnaire' (p. 49). The letter derives from Q.D. Leavis's doctoral research.
- 58 Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932; repr. London: Pimlico, 2000), p. xxxv.
- 59 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 7.
- 60 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 69.
- 61 Leavis divides fiction and the periodicals that served it into 'three classes, serving three different levels of the reading public', which she designates "'highbrow", "middlebrow" and "lowbrow"' (p. 20).
- 62 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 74.
- 63 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 5.
- 64 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 74. The word 'code' here suggests cultural values, but also, more specifically, a set of principles and strategies for perceiving, interpreting, and evaluating the world.
- 65 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 48. This image of rural life was based on the work of George Sturt, whose texts include *Changes in the Village* (1912), *Memoirs of a Surrey Labourer* (1907), and *The Wheelwright's Shop* (1923).

- 66 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 33.
- 67 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 35.
- 68 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 146.
- 69 F.R. Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', p. 15.
- 70 Richard Hoggart, *A Sort of Clowning: Life and Times, Volume II: 1940–59* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990), p. 135.
- 71 Raymond Williams, 'Fiction and the Writing Public', *Essays in Criticism* (1957) 7/4: 422–3.
- 72 Hoggart, *A Sort of Clowning*, p. 135.
- 73 Richard Hoggart, *First and Last Things: The Uses of Old Age* (London: Aurum Press, 1999), p. 77.
- 74 Williams, 'Fiction and the Writing Public', pp. 424–5.
- 75 Hoggart, *A Sort of Clowning*, pp. 134–5.
- 76 John Carey, 'Queenie Leavis and the Common Pursuit', *Original Copy: Selected Reviews and Journalism 1969–1986* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 217.
- 77 Williams, 'Fiction and the Writing Public', p. 423.
- 78 Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 148.
- 79 Richard Hoggart, 'Looking Back: An Interview with Nicholas Tredell,' *Between Two Worlds*, p. 309.
- 80 Hoggart, 'Contemporary Cultural Studies', pp. 6–7.
- 81 Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 231.
- 82 Hoggart, *A Sort of Clowning*, p. 130.
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- 84 Hoggart, *Only Connect*, pp. 83–4.
- 85 Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p. 366.
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- 87 Tom Steele, 'Questions of Taste and Class', in *Re-reading Richard Hoggart*, pp. 142–52, p. 148. Steele argues that Bonamy Dobrée helped to introduce Hoggart to this tradition.
- 88 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 206.
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