



Dickens the Novelist

By F. R. Leavis, Q. D. Leavis

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In *The Great Tradition*, published in 1948, F. R. Leavis seemed to rate the work of Charles Dickens - with the exception of *Hard Times* - as lacking the seriousness and formal control of the true masters of English fiction. By 1970, when *Dickens the Novelist* was published on the first centenary of the writer's death, Leavis and his lifelong collaborator Q. D. (Queenie) Leavis, had changed their minds. 'Our purpose', they wrote, 'is to enforce as unanswerably as possible the conviction that Dickens was one of the greatest of creative writers ...' In seven typically robust and uncompromising chapters, the Leavises grapple with the evaluation of a writer who was then still open to dismissal as a mere entertainer, a caricaturist not worthy of discussion in the same breath as Henry James. Q. D. Leavis shows, for example, how deeply influential *David Copperfield* was on the work of Tolstoy, and explores the symbolic richness of the nightmare world of *Bleak House*. F. R. Leavis reprints his famous essay on *Hard Times*, with its moral critique of utilitarianism, and reveals the imaginative influence of Blake on *Little Dorrit*. Q. D. Leavis contributes a pathbreaking chapter on the importance of Dickens's illustrators to the effect of his work.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

F.R. Leavis was born in 1895 in Cambridge, where he would live and teach for most of the rest of his life. He volunteered as a stretcher-bearer in the First World War, and was badly gassed on the Western Front. Appointed Director of Studies in English at Downing College, Cambridge, in 1930, he remained there for the next thirty years, often at odds with the University establishment. In 1932 he and his wife Queenie Roth founded the hugely influential journal *Scrutiny*, which ran until 1953. He was one of the most important figures in the development of modern literary criticism, and in the elevation of English as a serious academic subject. He died in 1978.

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