

Q. D. LEAVIS, ARCHIVES AND THE 'ART OF LIVING'

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Even in a post-Derridean era sensitized to the hazards of a desire for origins, much work with archives unfolds from the assumption that there is much to be gained from awareness of traces provided through the archive of the materials and environment from which something emerges and takes form, its originary matrix. This essay maintains that the work of Q. D. Leavis (QDL) – well-known Cantabrigian figure, spouse of F. R. Leavis (FRL), co-founder of *Scrutiny* and author of *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932) – itself represents such a formative matrix. Q. D. Leavis's research comprises a still generally unrecognized body of conceptual material importantly shaping the cultural contributions of the group associated with the periodical *Scrutiny* and its legacy. Moreover, through its impact on the *Scrutiny* circle, I would argue, in still little acknowledged ways, Q. D. Leavis's work significantly influenced what Terry Eagleton famously calls 'the rise of English' – the field this group did so much to build.¹ Finally, this line of thought informs preliminary notes on how we might, today, approach a trove of newly available archival material on 'QDL' herself and, more generally, how the case of Q. D. Leavis might offer ways to think beyond what Derrida calls (in an enigmatic footnote of *Archive Fever*) the 'patriarchive' – patriarchal understandings of the archive and the patriarchal logic of the archive as generally understood.²

That archives witness and keep cultural memory through their artefacts provides good reason to read them at times through the concept of a 'matrix' (*OED*): 'a place or medium in which something is originated, produced, or developed; the environment in which a particular activity or process begins; a point of origin and growth'. A matrix points to the past of an organism; archival material can register a text's past and genesis. From this flows the customary cultural gendering of the archive. Relevant here is the Aristotelian distinction as articulated by Judith Butler between 'matrix' and 'form' – in the received cultural binary, respectively gendered feminine and masculine. Butler comments on

the classical association of femininity with materiality [which] can be traced to a set of etymologies which link matter with *mater* and *matrix* (or the womb)

In Greek, *hyle* is the wood or timber out which various cultural constructions are made, but also a principle of origin, development and teleology The matrix is an originating and formative principle which inaugurates and informs a development of some organism or object. Hence, for Aristotle, 'matter is potentiality, form actuality'. In reproduction, women are said to contribute the matter; men, the form.³

An 'archive' construed as making legible through its documents a matrix of 'some organism or object' thus may easily be read as merely 'feminine' and 'maternal', subordinated in that classical way – yet as latter-day archival scholars, we are equipped to deconstruct and challenge that familiar cultural hierarchy and to address how and why archives matter. Indeed as Derrida's 'patriarchive' suggests, the archive and the archival are generally read as womblike, but this analogy need not be read through feverish psychoanalytic and patriarchal suspicions about the desire for the womb.⁴

These reflections emerge from work pursued over the last decade on the genesis of this discipline we still call 'English'. In a course I've designed on early-twentieth-century criticism, we seek to thicken and complicate received narratives on the 'rise of English' (articulated by such sources as Eagleton's *Literary Theory* and Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature*) with dusty documents from the cultural archives. Pace Derrida, I'll admit to the wish for the story of origins of how we 'do' English as a field of study now, since this is behind the curtain for so many. Students read I. A. Richards on his protocols, follow Empson into the wilds of ambiguity, and consider the Leavises on 'real culture'; then we cross the water to later critics taking a page from these figures, American New Critics such as Cleanth Brooks and John Crowe Ransom, then Canadian successors such as Northrop Frye and Marshall McLuhan. We also read Q. D. Leavis, by whose pioneering 'anthropological' method my students are often caught. We follow her commentary on the habits of the British reading public, or publics, of her time, her diagnosis of their typical reading matter, levels of taste and the cultural factors conditioning these.⁵

My thinking on Q. D. Leavis also relates to ongoing work on what I shorthand now as the 'making of the female public intellectual' in the early twentieth century, initially spurred by Toril Moi's study of Simone de Beauvoir.⁶ In this context, the idea of 'making', which I often link to 'poiesis' in the context of verse, points to the concepts of matrix, formation and resources, conditions of possibility shaping development. In this spirit, this essay considers the 'making' of English as a discipline and addresses what QDL herself read as vital resources for the 'making' of intellectual practice.⁷

Again, Q. D. Leavis's early research, especially for *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), based on her dissertation, often now feels somewhat like a hidden archive sourcing and shaping early vanguard work in the field of 'English'. What spurred this line of thought was discovering that, surprisingly, Canadian media guru Marshall McLuhan had credited Q. D. Leavis's work in the 1970s with a

foundational impact on his thought. To capture the significance of QDL's *Fiction and the Reading Public* on his work, McLuhan used a pair of tropes derived from Gestalt psychology and communications, 'figure and ground'. Stepping off from this dichotomy, and from the concept of 'ground' in particular, this essay divides into three parts: first, it explores the implications of McLuhan's use of 'ground' with regard to Q. D. Leavis's work and the development of the field of English; second, it considers the place of such a concept of 'ground' in Q. D. Leavis's own thought, and then, finally, it frames a cluster of methodological questions about how in future, on the one hand, we might handle and read archival materials associated with Q. D. Leavis herself and, more generally, explore an avenue for re-theorization of the archive.

In recent commentary on what Mark Krupnick calls the 'intellectual provenance' of McLuhan's work,⁸ there has been emphasis on its wellsprings at Cambridge, where after pursuing both a second BA and MA,⁹ McLuhan earned a doctorate in 1943.¹⁰ There he encountered I. A. Richards, in whose experimental protocols he participated, William Empson and F. R. Leavis. Although he is often linked to the 'New Criticism' in the United States, and though he cultivated relationships with the American New Critics in the late 1930s and 1940s,¹¹ it was Cambridge that most significantly shaped McLuhan's sense of intellectual practice and critical vision. He later styled himself 'the only man in the USA who had a thorough grounding in the techniques of Richards Empson and Leavis at Cambridge'.¹² McLuhan would read the Cambridge group as surpassing the New Critics in their awareness of the larger post-Arnoldian cultural missions informing the work of early twentieth-century criticism. At one point McLuhan even critiqued F. R. Leavis in a letter for being so concerned with such 'important' cultural work that he neglected what McLuhan called the 'sun in the egg-tarnished spoons on the daily table':¹³ more on this idea later.

It would be Cambridge-inspired methods that McLuhan would deploy in *The Mechanical Bride*, his first book, in 1951, which directs techniques of close reading to the phenomena of popular culture – advertising, journalism, comics, radio, film. When first teaching in the United States, McLuhan noted that he was keen on 'getting Leavis across to my classes'.¹⁴ McLuhan would later observe of his influences, crediting modernists as well as the Cantabrigian critics by way of a Blakean phrase: 'Richards, Leavis, Eliot, Pound and Joyce in a few weeks opened the doors of perception on the poetic process, and its role in adjusting the reader to the contemporary world. My study of media began and remains rooted in the work of these men.'¹⁵ Yet one of these 'men' turns out to be a woman.¹⁶

McLuhan first met both Q. D. Leavis and F. R. Leavis in 1935, shortly after arriving at Cambridge: 'This afternoon, ... I called for tea with Dr. and Mrs (also Dr.) Leavis. He is the editor of *Scrutiny*, a highbrow English journal.'¹⁷ McLuhan encountered the Leavises three years after the *annus mirabilis* for their circle, in 1932, when they had founded *Scrutiny*. Although QDL never appeared as official editor of *Scrutiny*,¹⁸ she was constantly involved with its

preparation and contributed a wealth of its articles.¹⁹ In 1932, QDL would also publish *Fiction and the Reading Public*, begun as a dissertation under the supervision of I. A. Richards. She would earn her doctorate in 1931, at the age of twenty-five.

In 1933, a Leavisite book called *Culture and Environment* appeared.²⁰ Co-authored by F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, this 'experimental' book, as Leavis and Thompson put it, directed the 'training of critical awareness' that the Cambridge critics were pursuing in the literary classroom to the 'immediate cultural environment – and the ways in which it tends to affect taste, habit, preconception, attitude to life and quality of living' (4–5), so as to help readers to 'discriminate and resist' (5). This book would essentially 'close read' advertising and journalism, much as McLuhan later would in his first book, *The Mechanical Bride* (1951). Acknowledging his theoretical debt, McLuhan even titled a 1944 course he designed 'Culture and Environment' (Letters 157).²¹ While not publicly recognized, QDL's work was central to *Culture and Environment*. As Chris Baldick notes, 'Years later, F. R. Leavis was to insist that the enormous influence of *Culture and Environment* derived from its debt to Q. D. Leavis's work in *Fiction and the Reading Public*. Using her research as a basis, F. R. Leavis had been able to write *Culture and Environment* in a week.'²² In *Culture and Environment*, QDL's *Fiction and the Reading Public* is quoted (see 'Substitute Living', 100–1), and several other examples are clearly drawn from QDL's research, although without explicit acknowledgement.²³ As F. R. Leavis's biographer Ian MacKillop observes, F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson 'had so much help from QDL that it is surprising that her name did not appear on the title page' (208).²⁴

It would be *Fiction and the Reading Public* that McLuhan would credit years later with major theoretical influence on his work. In a 1973 letter, McLuhan registered respect for the way that, rather than consider the novel in isolation, QDL had studied the cultural environment out of which novels were written and the 'publics' (21) who read them. Here McLuhan invokes the metaphor of figure and ground: 'Communication theory for any *figure* requires the including of the *ground* for that figure and the study of the interplay between the *figure* and its *ground* QDL's *Fiction and the Reading Public*', he noted, was 'the only study ever made, in English, of a reading public. That is, the study of *ground* for the *figure* of the novel. The ordinary study concentrates on *figure* minus ground, i.e. the content of the novel is studied and the kinds of reader and their relation to the novel are ignored'.²⁵ In a letter of 19 June 1975 to John Culkin, he presents his interest in 'figure' and 'ground' and the interplay between them as an interest in 'formal cause'.

I realized that the audience is, in all matters of art and expression, the formal cause ... e.g. Plato's public is the formal cause of his philosophy. Formal cause is concerned with effects and with structural form, and not with value judgments. My own approach to the media has been entirely from formal cause. Since formal causes are hidden and environmental, they exert their structural

pressure by interval and interface with whatever is in their environmental territory. Formal cause is always hidden, whereas the things upon which they act are visible.²⁶

In this context, McLuhan reads as addressing the 'reading public' Q. D. features as such a 'ground' and 'formal cause', but given the language here (a 'formal cause' as 'hidden' and 'environmental', exerting 'structural pressure'), his language also suggests the forces witnessed and carried by the material of an archive. And insofar as Q. D. Leavis's work often seemed to be the source, usually 'hidden', of much of the work of the *Scrutiny* group, 'ground' as McLuhan uses it (suggesting 'formal cause'), this train of thought also pertains to the role of Q. D. Leavis in the cultural system that gave rise to the development of English as a field. That McLuhan uses 'formal' here is striking: in the Aristotelian line of thought McLuhan uses, while such 'hidden' forces might be interpreted as material that is then formed so as to be visible, here they are further read as involved in and shaping that which is 'formal'. Also notable is that McLuhan uses 'environmental' in his remarks, given the 'grounding' in QDL's work of *Culture and Environment*, which clearly exerted such formative impact on his own thought.

McLuhan again used 'ground' in a 1977 letter to New Critic Cleanth Brooks describing his methodology. As he said, the 'pattern used by all phenomenology began with Descartes in selecting *figures* without *ground*, the Norrie Frye style of classification without insight'. In contrast: 'My media studies work entirely by *figure* and *ground*, both the input and the consequences.'²⁷ 'Input' suggests that for McLuhan, 'ground' sometimes designated not only the 'reading public' or audience (which he took as 'formal cause'), but more generally also the cultural environment and resources informing a text. In this formulation, 'ground' both informs and shapes 'figure', beyond allowing for interpretation thereof. Given this, it is also striking that McLuhan called himself in a letter 'the only man in the USA who has thorough *grounding* in the techniques of Richards Empson and Leavis at Cambridge'.²⁸ In the light of McLuhan's associational linkages, the term 'grounding' points not only to the Leavis overtly noted here, F. R., but also to the work of QDL. In the lexical subtext is the other Leavis.

With 'ground', McLuhan thus designates both a context against and in relation to which a text can be read, as part of his favoured hermeneutics, and, as his word 'input' suggests, the cultural conditions for the production of a certain figure, which exert shaping and formative pressure: that is, a kind of matrix. In fact one of the definitions of 'matrix' includes the concept of 'ground': 'the ground substance in which structural elements (e.g. of a shell, cell wall, etc.) are embedded'. In view of the figure-ground binary, even what Q. D. Leavis and F. R. Leavis meant by their master term 'culture' begins to read as the crucial cultural 'ground' that classic New Critical readings (famously focused on form and the 'work itself') characteristically elide, in favour of figure. Thus in this force field of tropes, including QDL's work in this narrative as crucial influence on not only McLuhan but also the *Scrutiny* group from which McLuhan drew, in turn pivotal

to the evolution of 'English', makes QDL's work read here as part of the often elided 'ground' of 'English' as a field.

Again, one sense of 'ground' suggests context for reading, the other kindred sense a source or basis, a matrix. And both of these map onto significances sometimes attached to the 'archival' – on the one hand, relevant archival material can be used to shed light on the significance of a text (read as 'figure'), and in other cases, archival materials witness, even constitute, the occasion and cultural resources for the making of a certain text, its provenance.

At this point, as inspired by the terms of McLuhan's tribute to Q. D. Leavis, I'll turn to exploring the concept of 'ground' in the thought of Q. D. Leavis herself – how she construed concepts adjacent to what McLuhan indicates by the term – since these prove pivotal to her thinking as well. This then leads to the question of how to reckon with a notable wealth of archival materials now newly available at Girton College, Cambridge, about Q. D. Leavis herself, about what QDL's daughter calls her 'creative domestic life'. The material in this archive brings out QDL's own ideas about the 'grounding' or matrixes for scholarly, critical, and intellectual practice. In my reading, Q.D. Leavis's perspective on this topic, signalled implicitly through her work, notably diverges from, even counters, McLuhan's vision of the gender and positioning of both archive and cultural critic, emerging from his conceptual circuit about 'ground' and 'figure'. If McLuhan's homage to Q. D. Leavis serves to surface her cultural contributions, in some respects her own ideas on such contributions read as McLuhan (to adapt Willmott's phrase) nearly 'in reverse'.²⁹

Apart from the kind of research she pursued for *Fiction and the Reading Public*, providing a vital resource for the *Scrutiny* group, Q. D. Leavis clearly valued other kinds of cultural production as important to intellectual work. A salient register of this is her now famous attack on Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938),³⁰ the terms of which suggest her objections not only to Woolf's claims (which she reads as unfortunately emotional rather than rational) but also to the cultural 'ground' from which, in her reading, these arose – Woolf's class positioning and life experience. The review is usually noted for QDL's vitriolic quarrel with the class insularity associated with Bloomsbury. It also, however, articulates QDL's position on what she construes as a vital matrix for intellectual practice. For QDL, what Woolf lacks, crucially, is understanding of what QDL calls, in what feels like a turn on Montaigne, 'the art of living' (208, 210).³¹ (Here I think of the comparable emphasis on the concept of 'living' in *Culture and Environment*: one chapter is entitled 'Substitute Living'; the commentary emphasizes ways to improve, through reading and 'scrutiny', 'quality of living'.) For QDL, Woolf's conception thereof (and this stings) is that of an 'idle charming cultivated' woman – a 'parasite'. QDL's vision of what's needed for 'sterling qualities of mind and character' comes through in her reading of Woolf's experiential limitations. When Woolf lauds the heroic achievements of women who managed to think 'while they stirred the pot, while they rocked the cradle', this line of thought taps into what QDL finds important. While in QDL's reading, Woolf knows nothing

of this domain, she herself does: 'I myself, however, have generally had to produce contributions for this review with one hand while actually stirring the pot.' QDL's daughter recalls, in the archival notes, 'My mother did much of her thinking while making jam and doing the myriad other household jobs.'³² What follows reveals more about QDL's quarrel with the direction of Woolfian feminist thought: 'I feel bound to disagree with Mrs. Woolf's assumption that running a household and family unaided necessarily hinders or weakens thinking.' In fact, for QDL, such activities ('living') vitally nourish 'thinking'.

One's own kitchen and nursery, and not the drawing-room and dinner-table ... is the realm where living takes place, and I see no profit in letting our servants live for us. The activities Mrs. Woolf wishes to free educated women from as wasteful not only provide a valuable discipline, they serve as a sieve for determining which values are important and genuine and which are conventional and contemptible. ('Caterpillars', 210–11)

Thus the engine room of QDL's model of intellectual practice turns out to be the kitchen and nursery. Before letting our minds scroll onwards to thoughts of grease fires and squalling infants, I'd offer that QDL's 'kitchen' and 'nursery' are significantly related to, if not aligned with, the concepts of 'ground' and 'archive', at least if these are construed in certain ways. Again, a term apt for what QDL values here is 'matrix'. Given QDL's accent on kitchen and nursery, the 'maternal' labour of a culture is also clearly germane. For QDL, what counts as essential ground for intellectual practice is very much about the zone of experience suggested by McLuhan's 'egg-tarnished spoons on the daily table', though with a significant (and gendered) difference.

This again indicates the Leavisite sense of 'culture': when the Leavises, in a post-Arnoldian vein, thought of their master term 'culture' (their acute sense of the interwar crisis in which drove their work), they saw what F. R. Leavis tellingly called 'a real culture' as grounded in folkways – dancing, handcrafted products, folk music: these were the practices, customs and traditions, associated with an older village-England lost, vital to what they construed as cultural health.³³ For them, literature, somewhat surprisingly, was in many respects only a 'substitute' for such 'real culture' and 'living culture'.³⁴ As *Culture and Environment* has it:

[L]iterary education ... is to a great extent a substitute. What we have lost is the organic community with the living culture it embodied. Folk-songs, folk-dances, Cotswold cottages and handicraft products are signs and expressions of something more: an art of life, a way of living, ordered and patterned, involving social arts, codes of intercourse and a responsive adjustment, growing out of immemorial experience, to the natural environment and the rhythm of the year. (1–2)

The phrases ‘art of life’ and ‘way of living’ here resonate notably with QDL’s ‘art of living’ from the review of *Three Guineas*. Given this, it follows that Leavis would privilege the kitchen and the nursery as sites providing the conditions of possibility for the kind of intellectual practice she endorses. If folk songs and dances and handicraft products imply a realm of ‘patterned’ custom and ceremony, whereas the kitchen implies everyday prosaic details, both of these draw attention to material, sensory realities, daily rhythms and experience derived from these as deeply important to forming what the Leavises see as thinking, cultural commentary and vital judgements about taste. If, for Matthew Arnold, ‘culture’ qua ‘the best which has been thought and said in the world’ is needed for ‘nourishing’ creative work, in the Leavisite vision, English folkways represent a ‘real culture’ needed for nourishing and grounding these ‘best’ ideas. Moreover, the ways of such a ‘real’ culture are themselves practices for which ‘literary education’ is merely a ‘substitute’, which makes them not just ground, but in this version of the scheme, figures, practices themselves meriting reading and valuation.

In turn, QDL’s emphasis on ‘the art of living’ for valuable intellectual practice sheds light on the significance of this trove of materials recently gathered and made available by Q. D. Leavis’s daughter, Kate Varney, about what Varney calls in her introduction to the archive the ‘creative domestic practices’ of her mother. This collection of materials shows QDL making the home space in ways that recall such customary, embodied practices as folk songs and dances: her daughter even registers a memory of QDL singing folk songs to children in the family.

I discovered this archival windfall at Girton College: it offered a rich array of information, often in the form of fine-grained memoir from Varney about the rituals and dailiness of her childhood and the physical details of the home at 6 Chesterton Hall Crescent. One category foregrounded in this wealth of notes is headed (3) ECONOMY, FOOD, HOSPITALITY, KITCHEN AND GARDEN. The concatenation of terms here suggests the framework of values within which the family culture understood the work of the ‘kitchen’. Kitchen provisions were gathered according to careful ‘economies’, especially given conditions of the 1930s and 1940s. Varney mentions war rationing. Other comparable headings include (1) Pets and animals, (2) Shopping, (4) Health and illness, (5) Junk shopping and china and (6) Furniture and fabrics. The specificity of Varney’s record is compelling:

There were several greengrocers in Chesterton road, Victoria Avenue and Milton Road. That in Victoria Avenue smelled of the beetroot always on the boil....

We were also registered with Mr Onyett the grocer. Each week a notebook with our order – eg ‘fats for 5’ (how much butter, marg, lard depended on the grocer’s quota that week), back bacon cut at number 4, ‘scouring powder’ (=VIM) and so on was handed over the counter and a box subsequently delivered to the back door, and either unpacked then or collected next week as containers were in short supply.

Varney's notes detail the particulars of the home space and its daily routines and practices in vivid detail. Here are the spoons on the daily table. Among other things, she remembers the objects her mother loved to acquire from their 'junk shopping', browsing second-hand shops for crockery, sometimes 'blue and white':

There were 'real' junkshops in [the] 1950s and 1960s where Victorian transfer ware, Edwardian glass etc languished under piles of house clearance items. Our first treasure trove was Mr. Turpin's Most items were not priced, so one sought him out to ask him. It was said that he sold Georgian silver at a time when it was not valued. I have a charming blue and white 'Asiatic Plants' pattern soap dish, recently admired by a museum curator.³⁵

For me the fine grain of this archival record reads as even more fascinating than a rich account of some of this material Varney provides in an interview in *Women: A Cultural Review*.³⁶ In another context, I'd like to unpack the distinctive significance and value of such 'textured' accounts of memory, which I read as quintessentially archival, located in and focused on objects and sensory experience. Carolyn Steedman's *Dust* on archival experience comes to mind – especially her chapter 'What a Rag Rug Means', invoking Bachelard's concept of 'topoanalysis', in which the modelled analysis of domestic interiors resonates with the analysis of what one finds in an archive – that is, archival objects.³⁷

Derrida famously reads the archive as domicile, wherein objects are under 'house arrest' (*Archive Fever* 2). What Varney has made available in this archive at Girton, in the form of reminiscences about the home life of the Leavises, suggests two related ideas: on the one hand, the idea of domestic space *as* archive, tracing the origins of those who once dwelled there, and on the other, archive as house or room left behind. What I read as QDL's implicit theory of the archive reads the archive as more generative domicile than troubling 'domiciliation', more house than 'house arrest'. Steedman's epigraph to *Dust* offers a memorable passage from the 'Time Passes' section of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, a vision of the house space, from which the people have departed, but whose objects still bear the impressions of their living:

What people had shed and left – a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes – these alone kept the human shape and the emptiness indicated how they were once filled and animated; how once hands were busy with hooks and buttons; how once the looking glass had held a face.³⁸

(The sound play of 'hooks' and 'buttons' here suggests 'books'.) What Varney's archive witnesses is not just archival resources and 'stuff' of the home space, but also the choice-making and thinking arising therefrom. Some of what Varney registers in her reminiscences accents conscience and good judgement. As Varney notes, 'My mother was extremely thrifty and resourceful and used to say that

in some ways she enjoyed the challenge of the wartime.’ In line with the theme of ‘hospitality’, the sense of bounty made possible through frugality and good judgement is also often vividly on display:

[My mother] entertained my three cousins She was very fond of the girls ... During and after the war she knitted them jumpers and found them little items and food to sustain them while two of them were working in the Land Army³⁹

Why was Varney moved to add to and curate this new archive on the ‘creative domestic life’ of her mother? In part, as corrective for the perception that QDL was merely a harsh critical voice, as she is portrayed in many accounts. Varney wants it known that her mother was generous and resourceful, a devoted spouse and parent. Of her notes, she says,

I hope they will be able to contradict the many snide references bandied around about her. It has to be appreciated that no one endowed with her creative genius, energy and spontaneity could have survived such vicissitudes without at times feeling both depressed and bitter at times.

She notes of further reasons:

I did not write with the idea of publication but just to put in an archive for future reference the background against which, indeed often despite which, my mother’s output of literary criticism was achieved.⁴⁰

McLuhan mentions ‘input’; here, as Varney invokes the ‘archive’, she notes the ‘output’ of ‘literary criticism’, whose ‘background’ in QDL’s life Varney accents. Again, carrying on from McLuhan, especially in view of Q. D. Leavis’s implicit model of intellectual practice, I would suggest that this ‘background’ (richly traced through this ‘archive’) deserves to be read not only as that which facilitates reading the significance of the ‘literary criticism’, but also as ‘ground’ and generative matrix for QDL’s prolific literary criticism. And for QDL, this was a ‘ground’ not ‘against’ or ‘despite’ which she produced her intellectual work, not so as to foil or cast into relief what she did, but rather *from* which she did. The archive at Girton, in other words, witnesses the ‘art of living’ that QDL reads as pivotal to critical and intellectual practice.

The extraordinary specificity of Kate Varney’s notes rhymes with the lavish sensory specificity with which Q. D. Leavis’s own letters and notes typically brim, often about the home space and daily practices.⁴¹ Varney shares with her mother a bent for richly detailed sensory knowledge and memory, grounded, one might say, in particular dense with colour, texture, quantities, precise names, numbers and images, detailed accounts of spaces and solid objects, furniture, and food. QDL’s criticism, in contrast, often features a language of rational abstraction, and it’s good to discover what feels like a basis of her criticism in such sensory detail.

Striking is that, though she notes in her letters the prospect of the study of her dreams, QDL in the end never enjoyed a room of her own. The Girton finding aid records of Varney's comment, 'Whereas my father worked in the solitude of his study in peace and quiet my mother never had the luxury of her own room.' Varney concedes that about this state of affairs, her mother had mixed feelings. Yet in the light of what this paper addresses, we might also read QDL's situation in the home space as also suggesting a model of female intellectual practice alternative to both that of F. R. Leavis and that of Woolf, which neither needed nor proceeded from a 'room of one's own', one from which she saw women as uniquely (and fortunately) well positioned to benefit. At least some women, those overseeing the kitchen, could access much more readily than their male counterparts the stuff, the ground, of actual 'living' that QDL read as essential to the formation of judgement and taste, and to a critical idiom: these were crucial to the kind of intellectual practice the Leavises valued. This archive, filled with details on domestic dailiness and the daily table, clearly diverges from the usual archive featuring letters and manuscripts: but it literalizes and makes plain the kind of 'matrix' that QDL favoured, not just for making sense of intellectual practice but also for grounding and giving rise thereto. It also suggests the archive as re-theorized by way of QDL's thought.

In McLuhan's thought, in contrast, 'ground' is a matter of structural relation – that which stands in relation to text/figure as illuminating and formative. He takes as complementary the 'ground' and 'figure', genders ground 'feminine', and although he suggests that ground is essential, in his conceptual work, the idea of 'ground' is ultimately subordinated. When aligning the concept of ground and 'formal cause', for instance, McLuhan linked these, in turn, to strains of his religious thought; McLuhan was a devout Roman Catholic. He aligned 'formal cause' and 'ground' with the concept of the 'feminine' congregation – necessary to religious practice, complementary to the priest, who could never become priests – gendered masculine. As he wrote to Marion Hammond on 20 June 1975:

This is just a note about the ordination of women which concerns 'formal causality', i.e. structural form The writer's or the performer's public is the formal cause of his art or entertainment or his philosophy. The *figure/ground* relation between writer and public or between the artist and his making is a kind of interplay, a kind of intercourse There is, as it were, a sexual relation between performer and public The congregation is necessarily feminine to the masculine role of the priest It is, therefore, this inherent sexual aspect of the priesthood that makes the ordination of women impractical and unacceptable to a congregation in their feminine role.⁴²

McLuhan's scheme requires the congregation, as ground, 'formal cause', in its 'feminine role', supportive of and subordinate to the priest. In my reading, Q. D. Leavis's thought on the archive turns this logic around. So too to a considerable extent does the *Scrutiny* work on literature and culture. For the *Scrutiny* group whose work was formative for the development of 'English', the 'figure' of literature

is merely a 'substitute' for the materials of what functions here as 'ground' and which also constitutes the stuff of 'real living' and 'real culture'. My reading is that if Leavises had had the hierarchy their way, the stuff of the cultural 'archive' would be published rather than concealed and would step forth from the archives rather than remain merely hidden, ancillary and supportive. For them, it was this which counted most, not only as formative force, but even as a set of sustaining cultural practices, figures in their own right.

With Q. D. Leavis's vein of thought on the 'kitchen and nursery' as archive, have we begun to step beyond the 'patriarchive'? My sense is yes – what Q. D. Leavis suggests is archive as maternal space, one not altogether read through patriarchal logic and binaries, nor patriarchal conceptions of the 'feminine'. In QDL's thought, this material, maternal space is not just supportive helpmeet to the 'figure' (whatever her own role was with respect to FRL within their marriage and career). Instead, it is what allows one to decide values and standards, what is 'important' (and what is merely 'conventional' and 'contemptible'), what qualifies as 'the art of living'. Moreover, the work of the kitchen itself represents metonymically the 'art of living', not just that on which 'art' depends. If in McLuhan's scheme the 'feminine' archive is necessary but may never become the priest, in QDL's lines of thought, the 'feminine' archive both provides resources that give rise to the priest and itself becomes a site for cultural work. QDL herself was raised in an Orthodox Jewish household. QDL's thinking, as I read it, suggests that the maternal archival space may itself become the locus for rabbinical cultural work.⁴³

Whether or not we accept this line of thought, it guides us to construe the material of this archive at Girton in certain ways and read it as illuminating richly the Leavisite idea of 'real culture' both so central to the 'rise of English' – and underwriting QDL's idea of critical and intellectual practice, the formation of what she calls in *Fiction and the Reading Public* a 'first-class fully-aware mind' (74).⁴⁴

What implications might this have for archival practice more generally? Most archival material, I would suggest, implies this kind of physicality and granularity: Varney's archive only writes large what the archive often makes available through its solid objects: a kind of sensuous scholarship, as Paul Stoller notes.⁴⁵ This example from Girton, replete with sensory images and grounding in cultural particulars, right down to the 'junk shop', discoveries from the cultural archive Q. D. Leavis herself loved, again encourages a reading of archive as matrix, as kitchen, as associated with the domestic, familiar and often maternal, the object-oriented. In the information housed in the archive, we are moving through the intimate domestic interiors of Bachelard's topoanalysis such that the notes from Varney herself begin to feel like such domestic objects. The Girton archive thus encourages attention to what, borrowing a term from close reading, I call the 'texture' of the archive – that is, to its objects and sensory particulars, their colours, materials, surfaces, sizes, grain. How might we take such cues into our own practices?

Especially in view of Q. D. Leavis's 'creative domestic practice', and her emphasis on values, this case might heighten our sensitivity to the 'values' by

which, as researchers, we create accounts and narratives from what we find in the house of the archive. Hal Foster reads archives as sites of not just excavation but construction.⁴⁶ Indeed this case invites us to read archives as a call to construction – to ‘making’ and intellectual practice. How might our immersion in such archives, their texture, their physicality, sensory particulars, provide what QDL calls in ‘Caterpillars’ a ‘sieve’, an alembic, for deciding the ‘values’ that will inform that construction? How might this process, furthermore, help us guard against mere accumulation, so as to consider and judge what we will include in accounts of what we find and decide what kind of narratives, in our own kitchens, we will make? All this talk of ‘ground’ may also spur critical interrogation of the definition of this term in any given context: as in gestalt theory, what qualifies as figure or ground depends on the case, and how each of these signifies likewise depends on the instance. For us today, as for Varney when she sifts through materials indicating the ‘making’ of QDL, the home space that she made and that made her thought, perhaps the poetic ‘figures’, what deserves reading, will often reside in what we find among the textured particulars of the archive, among the dusty and somewhat tarnished spoons.

Notes

I am very grateful to Kate Varney and the Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge for permission to quote from her notes in the archive on the ‘creative domestic practice’ of Q. D. Leavis (Q. D. Leavis Papers at Girton College, University of Cambridge). Warm thanks also to Hannah Westall, archivist and curator at the Girton College Archive, for expert support.

- 1 Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, Ch. 1, ‘The Rise of English’ (Minneapolis, MN: U Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 15–46.
- 2 See Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1994), p. 4, note 1. I take this phrase to suggest the ‘archive’ as understood and gendered through patriarchal logics.
- 3 Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 31–3.
- 4 In other words, the desire for the womb need not read as thanatotic. See Paul Flaig, ‘Supposing the Archive Is a Woman’, in *New Silent Cinema*, ed. Flaig and Katherine Groo (Routledge, 2016), pp. 180–99.
- 5 Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* [1932] (London: Chatto and Windus, 1939).
- 6 See Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 7 In the work on the development of English as a field, I am indebted to the work of Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848–1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), Joseph North, *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), and Christopher Hilliard, *English as a Vocation: The Scrutiny Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 8 Mark Krupnick, ‘Marshall McLuhan Revisited: Media Guru as Catholic Modernist’, *Modernism/modernity* 5/3 (1998), p. 108.

- 9 John Guillory, 'Marshall McLuhan, Rhetoric, and the Pre-History of Media Studies,' *Affirmations: Of the Modern* 3/1 (Autumn 2015), pp. 78–90.
- 10 Donald Theall, *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), p. 4.
- 11 Krupnick, 'Marshall McLuhan Revisited: Media Guru as Catholic Modernist', p. 109.
- 12 Marshall McLuhan, *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, selected and edited by Matie Molinaro, Corinne McLuhan, and William Toye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 157.
- 13 McLuhan, *Letters*, p. 166.
- 14 McLuhan, Diary 2 November 1937. Qtd. in Terence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan: Escape into Understanding*, 78. Walter Ong noted that when teaching at St. Louis University in Missouri, during this period, McLuhan 'was an outpost in mid-America for the Leavis school ... Cambridge New Criticism', which 'was a tremendous breath of fresh air' (cited in Gordon, p. 79).
- 15 'Foreword', in *The Interior Landscape: The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan 1943–1962*, ed. Eugene McNamara (New York: McGraw Hill, 1969), xiii–xiv. On McLuhan and Cambridge-inspired close reading, see also Jessica Pressman, *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), especially Chapter 1, 'Close Reading: Marshall McLuhan, from Modernism to Media Studies'.
- 16 Here I think in terms of what Derrida, referring to Sonia Combe's phrase, calls the 'repressed archive' (cited in *Archive Fever*, p. 4).
- 17 McLuhan, *Letters*, p. 67. At the time, McLuhan found F. R. Leavis 'an uncompromising idealist, tactless, impatient, vain, and affected'. According to Muriel Bradbrook, QDL said years afterwards that 'McLuhan impressed me ... as a rather loud, aggressive person, always running around arguing with everyone' (cited in Philip Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998], pp. 39–40).
- 18 G. Singh, *A Critical Study of Literary Critic Q. D. Leavis's Published and Unpublished Writings* (Lampeter, Wales: Mellen, 2002), p. 2.
- 19 Ian MacKillop, F. R. Leavis's biographer, suggests that Q. D. Leavis's decision to assist her husband in founding *Scrutiny* the same year that she published her book 'blocked the development' of QDL's own career, 'despite [*sic*] the enthusiasm with which she helped him' (cited in Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* [New York: St Martin's Press, 1995], p. 132).
- 20 F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1933).
- 21 As Philip Marchand notes, 'F. R. Leavis's book *Culture and Environment*, written with Denys Thompson and published in 1933, showed Leavis's Canadian disciple how the analytic powers of the critic could be exercised not only on literature but on the social environment. Leavis adopted a tone of moral urgency as he lamented the passing of what he termed the "organic community," in which people were educated in folk traditions, crafts, and ways of life based on the soil and cottage industries. This was entirely congenial to McLuhan's outlook', p. 40.
- 22 Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848–1932*, p. 187.
- 23 For instance, *Culture and Environment* refers to and relies upon the work of George Sturt (who wrote under 'George Bourne'), *Change in the Village* (1912) and *The Wheelwright's Shop* (1923), on which Q. D. Leavis's work often depends, as an important register of cultural change in England from the late nineteenth to

the early twentieth century (see *Fiction and the Reading Public*, 283; *Culture and Environment*, p. 3).

- 24 Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*.
- 25 McLuhan, *Letters*, p. 467. Marchand notes of this: 'A book published by Mrs. Leavis in 1932 was also seminal in McLuhan's thinking. *Fiction and the Reading Public* took a novel approach to the examination of fiction: rather than viewing it as an entity generated from the brains of writers in a vacuum, Q. D. Leavis studied it as a kind of response to the various reading publics or audiences that demanded fiction. The cultivated and highly literate public of the eighteenth century, for example, called forth from its writers a very different fiction than did the readers of the cheap mass periodicals in which Dickens's novels were serialized. Here was a suggestion that McLuhan also developed in his later years when he began to insist on the audience as a *cause* of any work of art, a cause that should be studied almost as carefully as the work of art itself', p. 41.
- 26 McLuhan, *Letters*, p. 510. In Aristotelian thought, 'formal cause' is the pattern or design which determines the form taken by something.
- 27 McLuhan, *Letters*, p. 529.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 29 This idea plays on Glenn Willmott's title, *Modernism or McLuhan in Reverse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).
- 30 See Q. D. Leavis, 'Caterpillars of the Commonwealth Unite', *Scrutiny* 7 (1938), pp. 203–14.
- 31 *Ibid.* See also Q. D. Leavis's comment on where, for her, 'living' actually takes place – in the 'kitchen' and the 'nursery' rather than in the 'drawing room' (211). This calls to mind remarks in *Fiction and the Reading Public* on 'living at the novelist's expense' (235 ff.), suggesting that real 'living' has been replaced by fiction in a fallen modern age, and the parallel concept, 'substitute living', from *Culture and Environment* (99 ff.).
- 32 Girton College Archive and Special Collections, Girton College Private Papers (Q. D.) Leavis 1/2/1. Section: (3) ECONOMY, FOOD, HOSPITALITY, KITCHEN AND GARDEN, comments from Kate Varney, daughter of Q. D. Leavis. Permission to quote from the notes in this archive, thanks to Kate Varney and the Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge.
- 33 See F. R. Leavis, *How to Teach Reading: A Primer for Ezra Pound* (Cambridge: G. Fraser, Minority Press, 1932), p. 3.
- 34 See Leavis's and Thompson's recommendation of *Rustic Speech and Folk Lore* by E. M. Wright and *Words and Idioms* by Logan Pearsall Smith. Again, the Leavises also often point to George Sturt, who wrote under 'George Bourne', *Change in the Village* (1912) and *The Wheelwright's Shop* (1923). Sturt was an English writer on rural crafts and village life:
- What we had to do was to live up to the local wisdom of our kind; to follow the customs, and work to the measurements, which had been tested and corrected long before our time in every village shop all across the country ... A good wheelwright knew by art but not by reason the proportion to keep between spoke and felloes; and so too a good smith knew how tight a two-and-a-half inch tyre should be made for a five-foot wheel ... He felt it, in his bones. (Sturt, *The Wheelwright's Shop* [1923] [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], pp. 19–20)
- 35 Girton College Private Papers (Q. D.) Leavis 1/2/1. Section: (3) ECONOMY, FOOD, HOSPITALITY, KITCHEN AND GARDEN, comments from Kate Varney.

- 36 Kate Varney and Jan Montefiore, 'A Conversation on Q. D. Leavis', *Women: A Cultural Review* 19/2 (2008), pp. 172–87.
- 37 See Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester University Press 2001), chapter 6. See also chapter 4, 'The Space of Memory: In an Archive', 79, on Bachelard's 'topoanalysis': 'the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives' (Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon, [1958], 1994), p. 8).
- 38 See Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester University Press 2001), epigraph.
- 39 Girton College Private Papers (Q. D.) Leavis 1/2/1.
- 40 Girton College Private Papers (Q. D.) Leavis 1/2/1, Introductory note from Varney.
- 41 For an example, see G. Singh, *A Critical Study of Literary Critic Q. D. Leavis's Published and Unpublished Writings*. Singh quotes this passage from QDL's 'Notes' for a memoir of her husband, detailing their cycling tours:
 'We naturally took holidays on *bike* ... and this time (summer 1930) we took our cycles on the train to Winchester and then cycled through the New Forest (also comparatively unspoilt then) ... Of course being so hard up we stayed each night at small inns or bed-and-breakfast-for-cyclists cottages or farmhouses. The food always seemed, whether 'tea' or breakfast, to bread and jam (homemade if you were lucky), boiled egg, watercress or lettuce, and ham (at farm-houses, sometimes delicious home-cured and boiled) and a big pot of strong Indian tea. Their coffee we soon learnt was undrinkable (made from a poisonous liquid in a bottle), and many an aspidistra we watered with it to spare our landlady's feelings'. (cited in Singh pp. 7–8)
- 42 McLuhan, *Letters*, p. 511.
- 43 As Singh notes in his study of Q. D. Leavis, she 'was born in London in 1907 into a cultivated Jewish family of Polish origin'. When Q. D. Leavis married F. R. Leavis, who was not Jewish, her family cut her off, making of this upbringing and its domestic environment and culture yet another repressed archive. As Singh observes, 'Marriage to a Gentile caused Q. D. Leavis to be ostracised by her family, which she never forgave', p. 2.
- 44 In forthcoming work, I pursue the implications of the underrecognized impact of QDL's work on historiography of 'the rise of English'.
- 45 I borrow this concept from Paul Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).
- 46 See Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October* 110 (Autumn 2004), pp. 3–22.