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## Review

Christopher Hilliard, *English as a Vocation: The Scrutiny Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 320pp. ISBN: 978-0-1996-9517-1, € 60,99.

Christopher Hilliard's book *English as a Vocation: The Scrutiny Movement* brings a fresh perspective to a much covered topic: that of the famous literary critic and scholar F.R. Leavis, and the Cambridge quarterly journal *Scrutiny* (1932-1953), through which Leavis and his collaborators ('Scrutineers') expounded and disseminated their ideas about literary criticism and methods of teaching critical reading. And although much has been written on Leavis and the project that he himself called the Scrutiny 'movement', not much research has been done towards that 'movement' itself: the effect and influence of its ideas beyond their immediate setting in Cambridge's Downing College.

These ideas consisted of, for instance, the notion that literature should be read critically and discriminately, and that it should be related to social issues as part of a wider criticism of (modern) life and culture. As the director of studies in English at Downing College, and as a founding member of *Scrutiny*, Leavis and his colleagues (among whom his wife, Q.D. Leavis) advocated a rigorous

standard of evaluating literature beyond what they believed to be the uncritical elitism of contemporary scholars. Their aim was to introduce a more serious critical approach to reading and judging culture and to train an intellectual elite (taken mostly from the upper middle classes) capable of discriminating works of literary value against the standardizing tendencies of modern civilization and mass culture.

Key to the method of Practical Criticism (discriminating between good and bad writing) was the teaching of critical reading skills to students, and so the Scrutiny movement was as much concerned with the teaching of literary criticism as it was with the practice of it. Though this may not seem so radical to a contemporary reader, the aim of a degree in English was until then largely based on acquiring knowledge of literary history rather than on developing critical skills to judge that literature: on scholarship rather than criticism. The development of a method of practical criticism, and of ways of teaching that method, is central to the Scrutiny movement. In that capacity, the movement was influential to generations and spheres well beyond the confines of the journal or the English departments of Cambridge.

Hilliard traces this wider influence

of the *Scrutiny* tradition, and focuses on the effect it has had on secondary school curriculums, adult education, English departments of universities in the former empire such as Ceylon and Australia, and the *Pelican Guide to English Literature*, which brought the *Scrutiny* view of literature to the general public. Moreover, he looks not only at the dissemination of the *Scrutiny* approach in its original form, but also at its application in new social, political and pedagogical contexts. Its approach of close reading of literary texts was initially developed as a tool of discrimination between works of high literary value, and those of lower quality. The method was also applied to other types of 'texts', such as advertisements and movies, in order to demonstrate the superior quality of literature. Such a method, however, proved surprisingly useful to the interpretation of modern cultural history and the emerging field of Cultural Studies, where non-literary 'texts' were taken more seriously than Leavis and his colleagues had intended.

As such, Hilliard's work makes a strong case for the influence of the movement being less dependent on F.R. Leavis' personal charisma than on the spread of the ideas of the *Scrutiny* movement. For this, Hilliard traces the work of major figures who were influenced by the ideas, but who were not necessarily disciples of the movement, such as Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall.

Hilliard brings together not only

essays from the journal, but also books from its main collaborators and correspondence between them in order to trace to what extent there was a common vision of literature and criticism that was central to the movement. The book then follows the dissemination and application of such a vision in a range of areas that spans from secondary schools and adult education to overseas English departments and the Penguin public.

Carefully researched, the book makes use of a wide array of sources that illuminate the influence of the movement such as college entrance examination papers, archival records of Downing College's undergraduate population tracing their backgrounds as well as their subsequent careers, classroom logs, school textbooks and other works directed at large, non-academic audiences. With such sources, Hilliard moves beyond anecdotal evidence of a concept as potentially elusive as 'influence' and evidences the direct effect of the teachings of Leavis on the work of his students and followers. The result of this thorough and resourceful study is a convincing case for the widespread influence of the *Scrutiny* movement beyond the confines of the British academic sphere.

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