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This article explores the origins of *Critical Quarterly*, situating it in relation to Leavisite ideas that were prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. It argues that *CQ* presented a modified version of the Leavisite project, stressing (against Leavis) the continued vitality of contemporary culture, and seeking to expand the readership for informed literary criticism beyond the walls of the university. This democratising mission was to some extent shared in common with the early years of English at UEA, where it contributed to the founding of Britain's first creative writing programme.

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Critical Quarterly, Leavisism, and UEA

When *Critical Quarterly* was founded in 1959, the powerful influence of F.R. Leavis could be felt everywhere in the discipline of English Literature. Leavis had argued in his famous essay 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture' that literary culture was in a 'desperate plight', assailed from all sides by the banal productions of mass culture, and above all cinema. Literary criticism had a crucial role to play in defending that past tradition and using it as a way of judging contemporary writing, and the people qualified to make such judgements constituted a small elite. Leavis wrote: 'The minority capable not only of appreciating Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire, Hardy, (to take major instances) but of recognising their latest successors constitute the consciousness of the race'.[1] His journal *Scrutiny* was the principal organ of the movement,

[1] F.R. Leavis, 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture' in John Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, Volume 1, 3rd Edn. (Harlow: Pearson, 2006) pp.12-19, p.13

and in a sense the institutional and intellectual centre of English Literature as a discipline in mid-century Britain.

Scrutiny ceased publication in 1953, and it was replaced by two journals: F.W. Bateson's *Essays in Criticism*, based in Oxford and commencing publication in 1951, and *The Critical Quarterly*, edited by C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson, based at the University of Hull.[2] Moving into the space left by *Scrutiny*, these two journals represent two somewhat different legacies for Leavisism. Bateson was in some respects 'Oxford's answer to Leavis', as Alexander Hutton puts it in an excellent article, though by contrast with Leavis, Bateson was a committed socialist.[3] His journal *Essays in Criticism* published many of the same writers as *Critical Quarterly*, including some of those I will discuss, such as Raymond Williams and Malcolm Bradbury. But Cox and Dyson repeatedly emphasised the difference between *CQ* and *Essays in Criticism*: Bateson's journal, they argued, was 'written by academics for academics', and moreover it had signed up to the embattled cultural pessimism they associated with the final years of *Scrutiny*.[4] It is not my purpose to revive a sixty-year-old beef with our sometime rival *Essays in Criticism*, but the things Cox, Dyson and others in their circle disliked about *Essays in Criticism* can help us to understand their positive agenda.

Before going into more detail on the founding ethos of *Critical Quarterly*, it might pay to sketch the institutional context in which it was founded. The late 1950s were an interesting time to be at the University of Hull. Philip Larkin was appointed as the university's librarian in 1955 and it was Larkin who lent *CQ* an office in the university library. Hull was then a small university with only 800 students and 80 academics, but among them could be found future *CQ* contributors and board members such as Richard Hoggart, who was working on *The Uses of Literacy*; Barbara Everett, publishing her early essays on Shakespeare; and Malcolm Bradbury, who was teaching adult education classes while writing his first novel, *Eating People is Wrong*. Bradbury was appointed to a lectureship at UEA in 1965, eventually retiring as professor of American Studies in 1995, and is one of several key figures who provides a historical link between *CQ* and UEA. A.E. Dyson was at Bangor when he co-founded the magazine with Cox, and took a part time post at UEA in 1966, dedicating the rest of his time to editing the magazine (Dyson's editorial project is explored in Vic Sage's article in this issue). When *CQ* moved its

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[2] The habit of referring to *The Critical Quarterly*—pervasive in the early years—seems to have fallen away by the time Colin MacCabe took over the editorship in the 1980s: now it is always just *Critical Quarterly*, or *CQ*.

[3] Alexander Hutton, 'An English School for the Welfare State: Literature, Politics and the University, 1932-1965' in *English: The Journal of the English Association* Vol.65 No.248, pp.3-34, p.19

[4] C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, 'Literary Criticism' in C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson (eds.), *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), vol. III, pp. 440–63, p.440

institutional base from the Cambridge English Faculty to UEA in Autumn 2018, a longstanding relationship—including, as I will suggest, a certain shared project for the discipline—was renewed and given institutional recognition.

Cox and Dyson were young Cambridge graduates who had secured lectureships in provincial universities—all other things being equal, one would naturally assume that they were dyed-in-the-wool Leavisites. The reality was a bit more complicated. The ambitious programme they set out for *CQ* was not simply a continuation of *Scrutiny*'s defensive cultural mission. Cox and Dyson began *Critical Quarterly* with the 'avowed purpose … to counter the narrowing effect of specialist academic criticism, and to oppose certain features of the *Scrutiny* creed.'[5] Indeed, Cox deplored what he called a 'puritanical narrowness of spirit in the Cambridge English school'.[6] The revisions to the Leavisite project that he and Dyson set in motion sought to offer an alternative to that puritanism and narrowness. The best statement of the magazine's early aims comes in an essay by Cox and Dyson from 1972. It articulates a project that is very close to my own personal understanding of what we, as teachers and researchers in literature departments, ought to be doing. But it also a project that is basically impossible to put into practice in the contemporary academic landscape:

> *The Critical Quarterly* took over the *Scrutiny* emphasis on the value of past traditions, but refused to accept its entire cultural pessimism about the present. *The Critical Quarterly* rejected the 'waste land' mentality, both in theory and in practice. From the beginning, we committed ourselves optimistically to faith in the possibility of an expanding élite, and gave an appreciable amount of space to the publication of new poets such as Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Thom Gunn, R.S. Thomas and Sylvia Plath. We believe that it is worth devoting a life to presenting, teaching and celebrating great art, both of the past and the present, and that academic criticism can be enormously beneficial to the new reading public. In contrast to *Essays in Criticism*, *The Critical Quarterly* discovered an audience among intelligent readers outside the university, particularly in the schools. The aim of our journal was to promote high standards in common educated discourse, to make literature accessible to any student with goodwill, and, in Northrop Frye's words, to prevent it from 'stagnating among groups of mutually unintelligible élites'.[7]

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[5] Cox and Dyson, 'Literary Criticism', p.440
[6] C.B. Cox, '*Critical Quarterly*—Twenty-five Years' in *Critical Quarterly* Vol.26 Nos.1&2 (1984), pp.3-20, p.8
[7] Cox and Dyson, 'Literary Criticism', p.441

The *CQ* approach modified the Leavisism of *Scrutiny* and *Essays in Criticism* in two ways. First, it was determined to be more open to contemporary literature and culture. Cox and Dyson felt that the *Scrutiny* tradition had 'lost [its] impulse to advocacy', as Leavisites merely bemoaned a culture in decline. *CQ* aimed 'to turn literary criticism away from puritanism and towards intelligent celebration of creative achievements.'[8] The short editorial in the inaugural issue argued that the role of the critic was not that of a priest or a prophet: the point was 'to assist rather than oppose the dangerous immaturities out of which truly creative writing, and reading, grow'.[9] In line with this emphasis on celebrating the best of contemporary culture, the first issue included an essay by Raymond Williams on Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, Cox on Philip Larkin, and a symposium under the heading 'Why Teach Literature?' with contributions from D.J. Enright, David Holbrook and others, alongside criticism on canonical themes, including a survey of *Hamlet* criticism and essays on Blake and Hardy.

Secondly, as compared with *Scrutiny* and *Essays in Criticism*, *CQ* conceived of its readership in a completely different way. Rather than being 'by academics, for academics', the magazine sought a much wider audience and emphasis was placed in particular on the need to address readers in schools. There were twice-yearly *Critical Quarterly* conferences for sixth formers, lasting four days and bringing together hundreds of girls and boys from grammar schools, public schools and secondary moderns. The students had four days of lectures and seminars with leading writers and critics. The first *Critical Quarterly* conference for teachers brought together 160 English teachers in Bangor—Huw Wheldon fell ill and cancelled at the last minute, and Stephen Spender agreed to step in: only to find himself grilled by the teachers over his attitudes to Marxism.[10] Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath read their poems at the conference in 1962. The magazine's circulation reached 5,300, and that subscriber base included English teachers in about half the grammar schools in the country. At best, *Critical Quarterly* was the place at which the academic discipline reached into the schools and beyond, creating an ideal community of intelligent readers, and lending a degree of plausibility to the slogan of its inaugural editorial: 'literature is for everyman'.[11] True, as Carol Atherton argues, the role that schoolteachers were to play in this ideal community was somewhat limited by the fact that they were not largely imagined as 'potential contributors'—only rarely was a schoolteacher invited to write for the magazine. Atherton feels that *CQ* did not entirely live up to its mission to create a dialogue between universities, schools and the general reader, seeing it instead as a space 'in

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[8] Cox, '*Critical Quarterly*—Twenty-five Years', p.8
[9] C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson, 'Foreword' in *Critical Quarterly* Vol.1 No.1 (1959), pp.3-4, p.3
[10] Cox, '*Critical Quarterly*—Twenty-five Years',
[11] Cox and Dyson, 'Foreword', p.4

which professional academics and writers carried on a dialogue that schoolteachers could only spectate on, with opportunities to participate being restricted to attendance at conferences.'[12] Still, the ambition was there: the idea of what Cox and Dyson called an 'expanding élite' was—in intention at least—a substantial modification of Leavisism that emphasised dissemination beyond the universities and engagement with contemporary culture and current events.

A key way in which *CQ* planned to address this expanding elite was by being general, resisting a tendency towards specialism that it detected within literary studies. Since the founding of the magazine in 1959, literary studies has become ever more divided into increasingly narrow period specialisms, and has also spawned subfields which quickly develop their professional apparatuses of subject associations, specialised journals, pools of sympathetic peer reviewers, and mutually unintelligible jargons. A similar diagnosis of a crisis of over-specialisation in literary studies is an important part of the debate that currently rages (in particular in North America) under the banner of 'post-critique'. Joseph North's influential *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History*, for example, registers in recent literary critical trends a 'frustration with field specialization or even scholarly specialization per se', suggesting that the dominance of 'scholarship' as a paradigm for research in literary studies has led, regrettably, to 'the loss of the generalist paradigm of criticism'.[13] North arguably goes too far in opposing criticism to historical scholarship, presenting a highly polarised history of the discipline. There has always been space in *CQ* for both scholarship and criticism, and I would suggest that, far from being naturally antagonistic, the two are manifestly complementary: the best criticism is informed by literary-historical scholarship, and vice versa. Nevertheless, North and other post-critiquers are right to identify over-specialisation by period as a major problem that the discipline now faces. And such over-specialisation is practically mandated by the institutional culture of higher education. Let me suggest one example that returns us to the British context. Imagine for a minute that, for some nefarious reason, you actually *want* literature to 'stagnate among groups of mutually unintelligible élites'. To achieve this ignoble aim you design a system of incentives that will permeate the professional structures of our universities. Congratulations! You have just invented the REF.

Leafing through the early years of *Critical Quarterly*, it is clear that its first editors and contributors saw the danger of over-specialisation absolutely clearly. In 1960, the second volume

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[12] Carol Atherton, 'Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience: the First Ten Years of *The Critical Quarterly*' in *English*, vol. 58 no. 220 (2009), pp. 75–94, p.91

[13] Joseph North, *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 2017) p.125. Eric Hayot, meanwhile, has condemned the 'near-total dominance of the concept of periodization in literary studies' as a 'collective failure of imagination and will'. Eric Hayot, 'Against Periodization; or, On Institutional Time' in *New Literary History*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Autumn 2011) pp. 739-756, p.740

of *CQ* carried Malcolm Bradbury's article 'The Idea of a Literary Élite'. Bradbury dwelt on the problems facing literary magazines. He argued that the Arnoldian idea of a literary review as 'an index of the active circulation of the animating ideas of the age' had come to be replaced by 'small specialist organs, maintaining the currency of intellectual debate among a few who are concerned.'[14] The result was that '[t]hose who are concerned with the maintenance of high culture dwell in separate and increasingly closed groups.'[15] Like others in the *CQ* circle, Bradbury made an example of *Essays in Criticism*, this time in his novel *Eating People is Wrong*, published in 1959, the same year that *CQ* was founded:

> Who was it that always tore pages out of *Essays in Criticism*? Professor Treece, penetrating into the Senior Common Room for tea, had found a new copy, mutilated as usual. He picked it up and shook it, scarcely able to believe his eyes; the world, he felt, was tumbling to pieces about him; people—people he *knew*, people he took coffee with, even—were chipping away at its hard, round moral core. Consider the circumstances: the Senior Common Room, entered only by persons of faculty rank; a serious intellectual review, of interest only to highly educated specialists. He was surrounded, it was clear enough, by intellectual crooks and vagabonds, people cultivated enough to teach in a university and read this, yet boorish enough to tear it up before anyone else had read it.[16]

Treece is Bradbury's image of the sort of ineffectual English professor who is the implied reader of *Essays in Criticism*. Though he is the object of the novel's satire, he is also a victim of his situation. His expertise has no purchase in the world, and the last bastions of culture and learning have already fallen to the barbarians: 'intellectuals, surely, have never had it so bad', he muses. He feels cut off even from the other members of the Senior Common Room. There is hardly anyone left alive with whom he can have an intelligent conversation—and *Essays in Criticism* is positioned both as the symptom and the cause of that fact.

Interestingly enough, Alexander Hutton brackets Bateson with other mid-century figures L.C. Knights, Bonamy Dobrée and David Daiches, as 'literary critics for a welfare state era', whose reforming missions at their respective institutions hoped to 'train graduates capable of upholding the values of democratic thought'.[17] Cox and *CQ* are pointedly excluded from

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[14] Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Idea of a Literary Elite' in *Critical Quarterly* Volume 2, Issue 3, pp.233-8, p.235
[15] Bradbury, 'The Idea of a Literary Elite', p.234
[16] Malcolm Bradbury, *Eating People Is Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962) p.170
[17] Hutton, 'An English School', p.5

Hutton's celebratory account of post-war criticism. And to be fair, they do not easily fit into the terms of Hutton's argument. The social mission Hutton ascribes to Bateson and his other three post-war critics—'creating a socially responsible, and above all humane, elite capable of withstanding the pressures of an unthinking world dominated by fascism, capitalism, and content-less mass media'—might have seemed too strong for Cox and Dyson.[18] Bateson saw the contents of *Essays in Criticism* as an essential resource in the fight against the 'extremist ideological polarities of the Cold War', but his editorial mission was not geared to tackle the immense problem of how these presumed political benefits might penetrate beyond the Senior Common Room. Bateson actively decried attempts to move beyond the specialised vocabulary of academic criticism as 'journalistic' and 'belletristic'.[19] Cox and Dyson reversed this model. They were hugely ambitious about the extent to which their activities might broaden the public conversation about literature, but comparatively modest about the political benefits of literary criticism. Their democratic emphasis was on extending the intelligent *pleasure* of reading to as many people as possible, and—much to their credit in my view—they avoided any overblown claim that literary criticism was an essential weapon against totalitarianism. Hutton argues that *CQ* failed to live up to the post-war promise (embodied by Bateson, Dobrée, Knights and Daiches) of a discipline deeply connected to social-democratic citizenship: 'its pages were steeped in pessimism and reaction against over-experimentation in the classroom', he writes.[20] I would suggest that Hutton's assessment is refracted through *CQ*'s publication of the 'Black Papers' on education, which defended the grammar schools against what Cox saw as the excesses of progressive education and became a major cause for the magazine the 1970s. This was a period in which the magazine became alienated from the progressive left, and was increasingly regarded as politically conservative. Its published output stagnated, and print subscriptions went into gradual decline.

It is nevertheless possible to see in the early years of *CQ* a successful project that—while it cannot be repeated in the present climate of scholarly communications—has lessons for us today. The humanities have borrowed a model of research from the sciences, which has proved incredibly successful as a way of justifying research funding. (For this strategic reason, I hesitate to advocate that the analogy with scientific research should be discarded). However, the price of this analogy has been to place a high value on specialised knowledge at the expense of a broad engagement with culture as such. As Bradbury contemplated the twentieth-century history of the literary magazine—the fragmentation of the literary marketplace into coteries and mutually

[18] Hutton, 'An English School', p.4
[19] Hutton, 'An English School', p.24
[20] Hutton, 'An English School', p.32

unintelligible niches—he quoted from another important early *CQ* contributor, Raymond Williams, whose *Culture and Society* has been published two years earlier in 1958:

> We lack a genuinely common experience, save in certain rare and dangerous moments of crisis. What we are paying for this lack, in every kind of currency, is now sufficiently evident. We need a common culture, not for the sake of an abstraction, but because we shall not survive without it.

Williams's notion of a 'common culture' should be treated with some caution. Specifically, it would be dangerous to locate it in any notion of 'Britishness' or 'Englishness'—a common culture based around nation (defined racially) rather than citizenship, *ethnos* rather than *demos*.[21] Bradbury took up Williams's notion that 'we need a common culture', in the spirit of the democratised version of Leavisism that Cox and Dyson promoted through their conferences and their contacts with schools. This translated into a more open attitude to popular culture than Leavisism would countenance. 'If you believe in the arts you must find a way of life for them which is part of the way of life of your society,' Bradbury wrote.[22] Bradbury discarded the Leavisite suspicion of film and television and became a distinguished writer of television plays and an advocate for the medium.[23] In a similar way, *CQ*, especially under the editorship of Colin MacCabe, has committed itself to taking film, television, radio and recorded music seriously—exemplified by recent special issues on *Game of Thrones* and on reality television. It was in this mood that Bradbury (along with Angus Wilson) established the first Creative Writing programme in the country at UEA, which sought to put the disciplinary tools of English studies at the service of contemporary culture.

It has long been assumed that the academic study of Creative Writing at UEA was an American import, a product of Bradbury's teaching experiences in the United States. Marina MacKay has recently qualified this narrative, suggesting that Ian Watt played a more important role than has previously been recognised, as the founder of the School of English Studies at UEA who took the crucial decision to appoint the eminent novelist Angus Wilson: 'the first time

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[21] Janice Ho explores this distinction in *Nation and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[22] Bradbury, 'The Idea of a Literary Elite', p.238

[23] Bradbury's introduction to a 1982 edition of three of his television plays is particularly fascinating. He lauded a British television industry in which 'a writers' theatre' could thrive, 'in the sense that a serious work will be seriously made by directors of a high standard and with able and notable casts, and the writers' work will be granted a reasonable measure of respect and a separate independence.' Malcolm Bradbury, 'Introduction' in *The After Dinner Game: Three Plays for Television by the Author of The History Man* (London: Arrow Books, 1982), pp.9-19, p.10

a creative writer had been hired *as* a creative writer into a British department of English'.[24] Watt himself had experience of creative writing in the USA, but even before that he had experimented extensively with creative writing exercises in the 'prison camp English department' he had established during the Second World War, while a prisoner of the Japanese at Tamuang and Kanchanaburi.[25] To cast further doubt on the idea that creative writing was purely an American import, I would suggest that Brian Cox and *Critical Quarterly* formed part of an important British context for the emergence of creative writing at UEA. Cox had been a keen advocate for the use of creative writing exercises in the classroom since the early days of *CQ*. As Professor of English at Manchester, he established a Poetry Fellow and a Poetry Centre there in 1971, leading in due course to the establishment of Manchester's own creative writing programmes. Writing in 1993, Bradbury closely identified the educational projects he had pursued in his career at UEA with the founding ethos of *CQ*:

> A profitable intimacy between contemporary creation and contemporary criticism was one of the prizes *CQ* pursued, and to my mind it is one of the reasons for its influence and importance. Later there came a sad decline in this to me invaluable relationship, as criticism grew more abstract and professionalised and often tugged itself theoretically free of these affiliations, and as writing grew more commercial. Whatever the reasons for or the inevitability of this balkanisation, it has certainly been one of the things I have tried to amend in my own academic-cum-literary life—and in concordance, or so I like to think, with some of the best intentions that surrounded the making of *CQ*.[26]

CQ and UEA in their formative years thus shared a cultural and educational ethos that was profoundly democratic, pitched towards the possibility of a common culture (rather than mutually unintelligible specialisms), but also not afraid to celebrate the best, wherever that be found. While the future for such a vision of the discipline is very uncertain, *CQ*'s move to UEA presents a valuable opportunity to reflect on this shared legacy.

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[24] Marina MacKay, *Ian Watt: The Novel and the Wartime Critic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) p.198
[25] MacKay, *Ian Watt*, p.195
[26] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Critical Years: Some Thoughts on Brian Cox and *CQ*' in *Critical Quarterly* Vol.35 No.4 (1993), pp.31-5, p.33