INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 20th century, professional cultural critics—on other words, the term by which public intellectuals canonized works of art—were practiced by many. The interwar period was one defined by a crisis of culture, as professional intellectuals grappled with the rise of mass-media. Work by public intellectuals such as A. R. Richards and F. R. Leavis sought to respond to and engage with a culture perceived as declining. Historical narratives of interwar cultural critics have tended to underline the contributions of female critics, such as those of Q. D. Leavis, but the method and counterpoint her specific brand of cultural criticism, taking into account gender, religion and class subject positions. Leavis’ “habitus”—or “sense of the game” as articulated by Pierre Bourdieu—lay at the intersection of these different subject positions, inflecting her criticism in ways that are distinct from the criticism of others—especially her male colleagues and contemporaries.

This study aims not only to highlight the work of Q. D. Leavis, but to reveal and contextualize her specific brand of cultural criticism, taking into account gender, religion and class subject positions. Leavis’ “habitus”—or “sense of the game” as articulated by Pierre Bourdieu—lay at the intersection of these different subject positions, inflecting her criticism in ways that are distinct from the criticism of others—especially her male colleagues and contemporaries.

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