

ACROSS THE GREAT DIVIDE? NEW LIBERALISM, JOURNALISM AND MAJORITY CULTURE

Jock Macleod

For Andreas Huyssen it is “the great divide,” for John Carey “a gulf.” Whatever the metaphor, the idea of a split or division in English culture—particularly literary culture—has dominated our understanding of that culture for over a hundred years. The typical explanation for this split rests on an assumption that some time in the second half of the nineteenth century traditional minority culture constructed for itself an “Other”—a majority culture. As Peter Goodall recently put it, “the expansion of the middle class created by this industrialised society enlarged the reading audience, but for the first time divided and stratified it, with two classes of writing produced by two types of writer—creating in effect a high culture and a popular culture” (xvi). Adherents of minority culture usually came to call it high culture, but as often as not it was simply “culture” (or “art” or “literature”). Its opposite, depending on the particular context, was termed in various ways: in some arguments it was “mainstream” or (by the 1920s) “middle-brow” culture, in others it was “mass” culture. “Mainstream” and “mass” were increasingly conflated under the rubric of “popular,” although occasionally that term was also used to suggest an authentic folk tradition in contradistinction to the inauthenticity of mass culture. Such distinctions, important as they are, lie beyond the compass of this article and the term “majority culture” is used here to cover the variants.

Different kinds of cultural production and different audiences for these products have characterised English literary culture since well before the nineteenth century. However, as Raymond Williams argued many years ago, the reduction of difference or multiplicity to opposition in the second half of the century was a “really severe limitation” (146). The defining feature of this opposition has been its essentially defensive construction. For a broad range of English intellectuals from Matthew Arnold through to F.R. Leavis and extending to the present, high culture’s opposite was a threat to be feared and combated. Although the nature of the threat changed over time (mass culture could be perceived at times as revolutionary, at times as soporific), the key point is that for these intellectuals there was simply no other way of conceiving the issue: defending high culture against the threat of an opposing majority culture was the necessary conceptual horizon in their accounts of the broader cultural picture.

Yet for a group of liberal intellectuals, writers and journalists profoundly influential in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, difference and heterogeneity, not opposition, were the working assumptions behind their assessments of the value and place of majority culture. For them minority culture as a category simply did not exist. John Gross put it nicely a long time ago when he noted that “however critical of the established order, men like Shaw and Wells, Bennett and Chesterton, put their trust in a popular audience; they might promulgate minority opinions, but not the idea of a minority culture” (232). Gross’s foursome includes two

Fabians, but the general point holds well enough for a sizable proportion of a generation of writers, journalists and other intellectuals whose political liberalism was generally radical and specifically pro-democratic.

This was the generation, born a few years either side of 1860, that most powerfully came to articulate the politics and culture of social reform from the 1880s through the Edwardian years. Together with some younger colleagues born in the late 1860s and early 1870s, it was the generation of the “new” liberalism, the “new” journalism and the “new” novel. In the realm of politics it includes Haldane, Lloyd-George, Churchill (while he was a Liberal) and Edward Grey whose politics H.W. Massingham referred to in 1902 as “below the gangway Radicalism” (*Daily News* 8 November). In literature it includes Hilaire Belloc, G.K. Chesterton, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy; and in journalism, a veritable army of high-profile names: Henry Massingham (editor, at various points, of the *Star*, the *Daily Chronicle*, and the *Nation*), A.G. Gardiner (editor of the *Daily News* in the Edwardian years), J.A. Spender (editor of the *Westminster Gazette*), H.W. Nevinson, Charles Masterman, J.A. Hobson and L.T. Hobhouse.

Not all of these liberals figure in histories of the new liberalism, especially if that term is defined more narrowly than broadly emphasising social and economic policies based on carefully considered ethical and political philosophies. In that context, with the focus on the role of the state in bringing about social reform, Hobson and Hobhouse, and sometimes Masterman and Haldane, are seen as the key players. Yet, as Andrew Vincent has argued, “there was little systematic discussion of new liberal theory in the 1880s and 1890s, except on a more journalistic level” (388), and it was precisely at this level that we see the more strictly socio-political and economic arguments articulated with a range of cultural arguments. Overlapping and fluid networks in which individual new liberals participated and shared ideas about the state of civilisation and culture blur the edges of definition even further. To that extent then we can say there was something like a “cultural” new liberalism, more widely populated than the strictly “political” new liberalism, actively at work from the 1880s into the early decades of the twentieth century. The range of positions was considerable, differences striking, and contradictions apparent but there was a real sense of common purpose, perhaps best signified by the famous *Nation* lunches instigated by Massingham in 1907.

The aim of this article is to lay bare the essential features of such a “cultural” new liberalism and in particular to demonstrate that the views of its adherents regarding the conditions and products of majority culture had a democratic flavour overlooked in histories of the period. If extending political democracy to social democracy is one way of describing the purpose of the new liberalism, this article suggests that what we might now call cultural democracy was also a central—if sometimes ambiguous—ideal. Ultimately these ideals were marginalised as the modernist reading of English cultural history came to dominate the newly formed English departments and other media of cultural dissemination after the first world war, but their very existence challenges the modernist reading, conceptually (as a critique of “the great divide”) as well as historically.

The focus here is primarily on journalists, or at least on those new liberals who, in addition to their other activities, contributed frequently to the daily and weekly press. This is partly because it was in the world of journalism that political and cultural debates were most publicly carried out. But it is also because that world, especially after the influx of Oxbridge graduates in the 1880s and 1890s, comprised a “semi-intelligentsia” (Lee 115) networking with intellectuals, artists, politicians and business leaders in ways that acted as real conduits to the flow of new ideas. According to T.H.S. Escott in 1911 this influx was due in no small part to Balliol’s Benjamin Jowett who, “not satisfied that his College should produce an unbroken succession of illustrious citizens and imperial rulers, thought that it should be the nursing mother of their public critics as well” (326). We might want to look for better explanations today, but regardless of the explanation the intellectual quality of many of these journalists should not be doubted. As Hobson expressed it with hindsight in his autobiography:

Within the last generation I find more vitality and fineness of expression in the journalistic work of Lowes Dickinson, H.W. Nevinson, Havelock Ellis, J.A. Spender, A.G. Gardiner, H.N. Brailsford, and Ivor Brown than in all the more formal volumes of contemporary prose. It is not merely that these able, well-equipped writers have embarked, as editors and writers, upon a distinctively journalistic career . . . but because the article or essay furnishes a better vehicle for their variety and versatility of interests in the life in which they live and move and have their being. (*Confessions* 87-88)

Such intellectual quality and versatility meant that in critical weeklies such as the *Speaker* and the *Nation*, and in those dailies—especially the *Star*, the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily News*—which at particular moments were staffed by the same journalists, we find press organs which not only articulated cultural and political issues but also played a mediating role between the *avant garde* and mainstream culture. As powerful and influential cultural arbiters in the late Victorian and Edwardian decades their cultural agendas were closely bound up with strong political opinions. Committed as they were both to social reform and political democracy, and to some version of cultural democracy, their editors and journalists simply do not fit into our received history of an essentially divided culture.

“Liberal” and “democracy” tend to go together naturally in the modern consciousness, and there are good historical and theoretical reasons for this. However, there is in fact no necessary connection between them, indeed at a deep level there is an inherent contradiction between them. Liberalism, for all its fluidity as a concept, has at its heart an insistence on individual rights and freedom from coercion, an insistence antithetical to the democratic ideal that political decisions should be determined collectively. Middle-class pressure for constitutional reform in the 1830s, followed in the 1840s by working-class pressure for social reform, started to lay bare these contradictions. The arguments took different forms and relied on different justifications but what we find time and time again is a conflict of authority between the “natural”

authority of the governors and an “imposed” authority of the majority. For all the differences between them the fundamental problem facing liberals was how to limit the effects of what de Tocqueville had called “the tyranny of the majority”: how to ensure that “natural” authority won out over “imposed” authority. Imposed authority was perceived to extend in two ways: in the years leading up to the 1832 Reform Bill in particular, the rights of property dominated the fears held towards democracy but it was the second fear, that of conformity and levelling-down, which dominated the debate from the 1860s, particularly from the 1880s. Here the central concern was that the supposed characteristics of the Demos—irrationality, addiction to sensation, unruliness—would come to dominate the cultural landscape, just as they might the political landscape.

It is in this context that we can read Arnold in 1887 criticising the new journalism by linking it to the working class:

But we have to consider the new voters, the democracy as people are fond of calling them. They have many merits, but among them is not that of being, in general, reasonable persons who think fairly and seriously. We have had opportunities of observing a new journalism which a clever and energetic man has lately invented. . . . Well, the democracy, with abundance of life, movement, sympathy, good instincts, is disposed to be, like this journalism, feather-brained. (Qtd Weiner 15)

As we can see in the awkward shift from the second to the third sentence Arnold’s juxtaposition of “the democracy” with the new journalism is not thought through in this particular; at most, each is understood to share certain characteristics summed up at the end by “feather-brained.” But his solution to the dangers of the “new journalism” is unmistakable: it is “culture,” as he had already argued in *Culture and Anarchy*, understood both as product, “the best that has been thought and known in the world” (70), and process, “disinterested intelligence” (33), “a balance and regulation of mind” (44), leading to “harmonious perfection” (20). Culture is Arnold’s way forward, “the great help out of our present difficulties” (6). Arnold was no pie-in-the-sky idealist, and his arguments for a central state-sanctioned authority (the academy) attest to the practical bent of his proposal. Furthermore—and however we regard the fears driving it—Arnold’s social agenda extended to the working class, as we can see in his claim that culture “does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes . . . and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time” (70).

Even if the word “inferior” has resonances that are uncomfortable to modern ears, the thrust of Arnold’s argument should alert us to his essentially inclusive liberalism. But it is a liberalism that is fundamentally patrician, one guided by an effort to educate, to civilise, to bring “culture” to the masses in order to counteract the effects of “sensationalist” journalism and fiction. He explicitly rejects, for example, the use of

“ordinary popular literature” as a way of “working on the masses” (70), and while it is likely he has in his sights the moralising literature of various Nonconformist groups, it is clear that he sees the products of the lower-middle and working classes as having little value in themselves—as not being “culture.”

This “civilising mission,” as Chris Baldick termed it long ago, is the liberal response to majority culture with which we are most familiar, and is characteristic of many late-nineteenth-century social reform enterprises. Samuel Barnett’s cultural agenda as a crucial aspect of Toynbee Hall is a typical example at the practical level: influenced by what Melvin Richter has called the “semi-tutelar relationship Green and Toynbee assumed towards the working class” (340), Barnett instituted a wide variety of artistic events and literary readings for the local inhabitants of Whitechapel. While some of these—notably the annual art exhibition—succeeded, the memoirs of former settlers attest to the utter failure of many.

Once we look beyond the figure of Arnold, however, the idea of “culture” as a fairly narrow set of imperatives, the long and intensive training of which necessarily opposes them to the ideals of democracy, starts to look less clear-cut. For example W.T. Stead, editor from 1886 to 1890 of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, whose articles in 1886 were the trigger for Arnold’s disparagement, saw himself very much as the voice of the people. The journalist’s function, he argued in “The Future of Journalism” (1886), is “to give utterance to the inarticulate moan of the voiceless . . . it is almost equivalent to the enfranchisement of a class” (671). Stead’s sense of the journalist’s task as expressing the feelings of an inarticulate populace is a clear recognition of the *legitimacy* of those feelings, moreover a newspaper run on such principles “would indeed be a great secular or civic church and democratic university” (671). The specifically cultural mission of these sentiments is radically different from that of Arnold. Rather than bringing culture *to* the masses (with its inevitable sense of futility), Stead’s enterprise is the expression of a broad-based popular culture. Certainly it doesn’t do to overplay this. After all the readership of the *Pall Mall Gazette* never rose much beyond 10,000 (even during the exposé of the “Maiden Tribute”), and it was very much a middle-class audience. But Stead’s campaign of saying to his middle-class readers “look, here are these people whose conditions are dreadful and whose lives are like this but they need to be taken seriously” was very different from Arnold’s urgings towards self-perfection.

The distinction between the cultural liberalism of Arnold and that of Stead is of course overstated. But the advantage of presenting it so starkly is that it jolts us out of the commonly held assumption that Arnold’s views on the incompatibility of culture and democracy are prevalent across the broad spectrum of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century liberalism.

The link between the new journalism and democracy observed in Stead was extended to include a broad range of political radicalism with the establishment of the *Star* in 1888 by T.P. O’Connor, a Pamellite MP with strong Liberal credentials. Edited initially by O’Connor, the *Star*—unlike the *Pall Mall Gazette*—was aimed at a mass readership and from 1888 to 1891 was unique amongst metropolitan papers in having both a radical political policy and a very large circulation. On its first appearance the *Star* sold 140,000 copies and within two years circulation had doubled. Its place in

metropolitan radical politics was assured by its trenchant support for the Progressives in elections for the newly created London County Council, and its strongly pro-Union stance on the industrial disputes of the late 1880s and early 1890s. This radical political policy went hand in hand with a broadly based series of features ranging from theatrical and musical gossip columns through fashion and sport to book reviews whose main function was construed as entertainment. Although it was the case that the evening papers traditionally were “lighter” than the morning dailies, what is interesting is that the journalists who wrote these columns—George Bernard Shaw on music, A.B. Walkley on theatre and Richard Le Gallienne on books—were (and still are) associated with “high” culture. Le Gallienne, for example, contributed frequently to the *Yellow Book* and was a reader for John Lane’s Bodley Head Press, chief outlet for much of the aesthetic movement in the 1890s.

The extent to which the *Star* specifically embodied new journalism is a moot point and any judgment will depend on our definition of the term. O’Connor himself stressed “the more personal tone of the more modern methods” (422) which he coupled with a newspaper’s task of “honest criticism” in the cause of “the protection of the public against robbery” (432). The focus on personal features such as the interview, the sketch, and the human interest story, together with stylistic features such as shorter sentences and paragraphs, and new typographical features is the common point of departure in many accounts of the new journalism. As Alan Lee declared many years ago in his invaluable study of the origins of the popular press in England, the new journalism “can best be described as a mixture of journalistic and typographical devices, which taken together constituted a new style of journalism, a style which reflected a changing relationship between the newspaper and its readers” (120). For Lee this relationship “was . . . being changed from the ideal one of a tutorial and intellectual nature, to one of a market character” (121). Such a change accords with the generally received view of the demise of the political press and its replacement with a “commercial” press in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see the two volumes by Stephen Koss for the most developed version of this history).

The separation of new journalism from politics in the service of entertainment and therefore commercial success was certainly to become an issue for Henry Massingham, initially the paper’s assistant editor and then its editor from July 1890 to January 1891. Writing perhaps out of irritation at the political differences which forced his resignation, Massingham, who had actually introduced to the *Star* several of the features that we associate with the new journalism, claimed in 1892 that “the *Star* . . . represents the most complete adaptation to this country of the method which gives the American press its vast circulation and immense popularity, balanced, however, by an almost complete absence of real political power” (183). The sting in the last phrase should alert us to the real villain here: it is not so much the new journalism in itself, but the new journalism divested of its political agenda. As Massingham goes on to say:

The experience, indeed, of the new journalism would seem to show that it has sharper limits to its sphere than was at first predicted of it. It looked at first as if it would completely overshadow the older

methods, and build up a social power of unexampled force. . . . But the belief so conspicuously shared by the early promoters of the *Star*, that a newspaper could shape the whispers of a democracy, and mould the vague desires for a new social synthesis, has not been developed. (191-92)

Perhaps not. As Stephen Koss has argued, both O'Connor and Stead "could navigate more easily between the cross-currents of the old and new journalism . . . than between those of the old and the new liberalism" (*Nineteenth Century* 319).

Yet the *Star* was a critical force in the development of the mixed commitment to radical politics and popular journalism generated by liberal intellectuals we can see throughout the 1890s and into the early decades of this century. Massingham, who went on to edit the *Daily Chronicle* (1895-99) and the *Nation* (1907-23), was largely responsible for this. No new liberal in the narrow definition of the term, Massingham's regular shifts in enthusiasm and allegiance confirm his biographer Alfred Havighurst's assertion that "he could not abide strategy of any kind" (96). Unlike Haldane, Hobson, Hobhouse and Masterman, Massingham did not develop any extended critiques of or solutions to contemporary social problems and never joined groups such as the Rainbow Circle or the London Ethical Society where such critiques and solutions were debated. Only during his brief flirtation with Fabianism (1891-93), when he was also involved with various liberal political clubs, was there any sense of an interest in "practical politics." For the remainder, he preferred the "journalistic response," as Havighurst has called it (96). Yet Massingham, with his commitment to social reform, his commitment to democracy, and his recognition that the state had a key role to play in improving the lot of the nation at large, was temperamentally in tune with much of the work of the new liberals and provided invaluable public space in both the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Nation* for the articulation of their views.

When he left the paper the *Star* lost much of its drive. Speaking generally, we can say that the *Star* in this period trained many of those who were to play crucial roles in the development of the new journalism and that when they left they tended to move in one of two directions. Some found work in the Harmsworth papers where their liberalism, acceptable while Harmsworth was still a Chamberlainite, evaporated as he and his papers moved closer to the Tories. Others followed Massingham's lead and worked for papers or journals where the new journalism intersected with the new liberalism, particularly the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Daily News*, the *Speaker* and the *Nation*. At first glance we might expect a move from the *Star* to the *Daily Chronicle* to signify a move away from a commitment to cultural democracy. The key symbolic difference between the *Star* on the one hand, and the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Daily News* (both morning papers) and the *Pall Mall Gazette* (evening) on the other, is the price. As a halfpenny evening paper the *Star* (together with the *Echo* and *Evening News*) was staple diet for London's working-class readers. As penny dailies the others (together with their Tory equivalents) were geared more towards the middle and lower-middle classes than the working class. But Massingham, who makes this very point himself (176), also claims that the *Daily Chronicle* "enjoys the confidence of trade-unionism

and of the London working-men. . . . It touches more surely, more seriously, the great main arteries of English middle and working-class life, the doings of the churches and missions, the development of social movements, the personal record of labour leaders, than the *Times*, the *Standard*, the *Daily News*, or the *Telegraph*" (123).

While it might be tempting to dismiss this as special pleading (Massingham had joined as a leader-writer in late 1891), and while we cannot infer connections between readerships and voting patterns (especially given the limited franchise of the time), the well-documented role of the *Chronicle* in the success of the Progressive Party provides some support for Massingham's claim. Indeed the *Chronicle* provides us with a case study in the connections between radical liberalism in the 1890s and a view of culture which, in the context of the time, is relatively democratic in temper.

The *Chronicle* was acquired by Edward Lloyd in 1876 to compete with the *Daily Telegraph*. With the appointment of A.E. Fletcher to the editorship in 1890 it "veered far to the left" (Koss, *Nineteenth* 288) but, significantly for our purposes, this left-leaning developed in tandem with a lively commitment to literature. Although it had devoted some space to book reviews throughout the 1880s, there was little consistency in location or day. At the beginning of 1891, however, a two-page supplement "*The Daily Chronicle Literary Supplement*" appeared on Wednesdays (pages 7 and 8) given over entirely to book reviews and advertisements for publishers. The supplement comprised reviews of individual books under their own headings, plus catch-all batches of reviews with the headings "On Our Book Shelves" or "New Novels." A section titled "Literary Notes" provided gossip in a tone that suggests intimacy and inclusiveness with the reader. Sometimes we find a serialised novel: for example throughout 1891 there was a regular serial (usually by a well-known liberal romance/adventure writer such as William Black or Arthur Quiller-Couch) taking up three to four columns of the first of the two pages, the remainder being taken up with the individual reviews. The feel of the two pages is that the first has a more "serious" feel than the second.

From 30 November 1891 more wholesale changes occurred. These coincided with the appointment of Massingham but there is no evidence of his influence on the process. The paper increased to ten pages every day and reduced its columns from eight to seven (though from time to time there were still eight-page editions). The really significant feature from our point of view is that the book section became a *daily* feature on page 3. These daily reviews cover three to five columns (a lot of space over a week). The "Notes" edited by James Milne were retitled "Writers and Readers" and usually took the form of readers' responses to some controversial article written a day or so before. This technique, probably brought to the *Chronicle* by Massingham (see Havighurst 22, on his use of this on the *Star*) is clearly of a piece with the new journalism's aim of developing an active relationship between paper and reader. Milne's cultural position is typical of the paper in this respect. Committed to "the Commonwealth of Reading" "because in its many mansions there lodges a great democracy," as much as to "the Republic of Letters" "meaning that those labouring in it are equals, though their gifts to it may not be," Milne believed that the popular and the literary were not opposed, that "lightness of touch . . . is the friend, not the enemy of artistry" (5, 161). The success of the literary pages continued further under

Massingham's editorship and by 16 May 1896 the paper increased its Saturday edition to twelve pages, primarily to accommodate "matters interesting the social and literary world."

According to Havighurst the *Chronicle* "established a reputation for influencing the taste and ideas of the middle and lower classes" (60). If this was really the case, it behoves us to look to the review pages to see what, if any, ideas emerge about majority culture. The perceived readers of these reviews are addressed as "intelligent laymen," "any tolerably educated person," "general readers," and the like. Preference is given to works that evince better than "average" skill or are raised above the "ordinary" level where average and ordinary might be glossed as "conventional." As Milne says:

The reviews were written with knowledge and yet in a popular style, and this owed much to the inspiration and counsel of Henry Massingham, while he was literary editor. They could be read with interest by the learned and at the same time could be "understood of the people." They aimed at interpreting a book, showing how it bore upon thought and action, and so how it might help the reader as a citizen and as a man [sic]. (95)

The general tone is one of equality between writer and reader, but there is often a note of ambiguity as well, as we can see in the following extract from what is largely a very positive review of Conan Doyle's *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*:

There are indications all through the three volumes that the story was written as a serial, but he would be a hypercritical critic indeed who should cry out because so many chapters end with a thrilling sensation. The general reader likes this sort of thing, and Mr Conan Doyle is fully justified in supplying that masterful person's demands. (*Daily Chronicle* 17 May 1893)

While the general reader might not altogether be this reviewer's choice as a dinner companion, the following review of a collection of poetry by Joe Wilson a working-class poet from Newcastle provides a clear message: "We have a tenderness for all genuine local literature, for any work racy of the soil, and especially for such local poetry as comes from those grimy industrial districts where the muse might be expected to "dwindle, peak and pine" (*Daily Chronicle* 11 March 1891). The clichés are there, of course (the review goes on to speak of the poet's "genial, human, rough-hewn songs," but the placing of Wilson in the context of other contemporary working-class writers (Edwin Waugh and Joseph Skipsey) is part of a strikingly positive assessment of at least some elements of working-class culture.

Not all reviews, however, took such a democratic line. The review of Walter Leaf's *A Companion to the "Iliad" for English Readers*, for example, suggests that the book will be of use only to "the University Extension person, who reads to talk concerning his or her subjects, or to be talked to in lectures, or, basest of all, with the

avowed purpose of improving his or her mind" (19 July 1892). The review goes on to argue that "the mind is developed, not by knowledge, but by the labour of acquiring knowledge" and that manuals such as this are fit only for "chatter." "Even so," it concludes, "it is better to extensionise on Greek than on English literature. 'Chatter about Homer' can never be quite so useless as 'chatter about Shelley.'"

But such reviews are in the minority, and as we trawl through the 1890 issues of the paper we can see the practical manifestation of Massingham's early claim that:

[It] has been the first paper to grasp the meaning of the "nationalisation of letters"—the fact that the best books are to-day within the reach of all but the very poorest of our population. Its daily issue consists of a ten-page paper, one tenth of which is regularly devoted to the world of books and the almost greater world of periodical publications. The value of this serious concentration on the best things in life has been conspicuous. The *Chronicle* depends less for its large and growing circulation on the baser sides of English life—scabrous divorce cases, vulgar scandal, and the great betting madness—than any of its contemporaries; it has largely dethroned the criminal from his place as the hero-in-chief of the English newspaper; and it has set up instead the social reformer, the practical worker, and the pioneer to fields of fresh intellectual and moral interests. (123-24)

As John Morley remarked to E.T. Cook in 1898, it is this "width . . . of range" (qtd Koss, *Nineteenth* 380) combined with a sense of inclusiveness that gave the *Chronicle* the edge over the *Daily News* in the 1890s. Its mass readership was clearly regarded not as a cultural problem to be addressed but as a powerful cultural voice having a range of interests with the potential for good. Even if the reviews at times appear to speak down to their readers the general tone is one of a common language, a common set of cultural values and tastes, and a common commitment to a sense that artistic value because it resides in authenticity, sincerity and realism can be found in working-class poetry and fiction just as it can in works of high culture.

In fact the criticism that Massingham and others on the *Speaker* and the *Nation* were later to make of the new journalism as "the yellow press" was really a critique of its failure to uphold its original democratic aims of attracting a large new voting and reading public to the politics of progressivist liberalism. In its frivolity and pandering to material self-interest the Harmsworth Brand (the title of a series in the *Nation* in July/August 1908) was increasingly seen as new journalism "gone wrong."

The decline of the new journalism as a force for an enlightened progressive democracy manifested itself most clearly in the years leading up to and during the Boer War. Through its strident jingoism the daily press not only contributed to the prosecution of the war but also to a profoundly irrational nationalism and bigotry. Even the liberal press was not immune. E.T. Cook, editor of the *Daily News* and an Oxford friend of Milner chief architect of Britain's South African policy, took that paper increasingly down the Imperial path. And at the *Chronicle* Massingham's anti-Imperial

position led to his departure from the paper in 1899 after he refused to curtail his criticism of the government's policy. At the turn of the century all the large circulation London dailies—Tory and Liberal—were Imperialist, much of the literature being published had Imperial sympathies, and the Tory government had the overwhelming support of the voting classes.

For new liberals looking back from the middle of the Edwardian years when the worst excesses had passed, the whole of the 1890s leading up to the war was a period of "reaction" in the long and slow march of progressive improvement that had characterised British history in the nineteenth century. Hobhouse described it this way:

From the rejection of the Home Rule Bill in 1886 to the Peace of Vereeniging in 1902 English politics passed through a period of reaction . . . in which the older conceptions of civil, political and religious liberty lost their vital force; when the middle class, frightened by the first murmurings of Socialism from the cause of progress, and satisfied with the rights which they themselves had won, transferred their influence to the side of established order, when the dominant social philosophy of the day confronted the plea for justice and equality with the doctrine that progress depends on the survival of the stronger in the struggle for existence. The idealism which is essential to modern nations was diverted from the cause of social reform to that of imperial expansion. (247-48)

Hobhouse, who had worked for C.P. Scott on the *Manchester Guardian* and who wrote regularly for the weekly *Speaker* (where the substance of this book was first published in 1901-2) and later the *Nation*, was not alone in this assessment. Charles Masterman, literary editor of the *Daily News* from 1903 (after it had been recaptured for the anti-Imperial camp and placed under the radical editorship of A.G. Gardiner), a regular contributor to the *Speaker* and *Nation*, and a Liberal MP after the 1906 election, saw the same shift in the realm of literature:

Literature, after its long alliance with the party of reform, had deliberately deserted to the enemy. . . . This new spirit of the Reaction gathered itself especially round two men, each possessing more than a touch of genius—Mr W.E. Henley and Mr Rudyard Kipling. Mr Henley's denunciation of the accepted codes of life, the thirst for blood and violence of one physically debarred from adventure, became reflected in a hundred eager followers, who plied the axe and hammer of sneer and gibe round the humanitarian ideal and the house of the good citizen. Mr Kipling's proclamation of the Imperial race co-operating with God in the bloody destruction of alien peoples was interpreted into the commonplaces of a journalism demanding above all things sensation. The toiler of the cities in his life of grey monotony, labouring for another's wealth, found existence suddenly

slashed with crimson. And every morning the astonished clerk was exalted by the intelligence of his devastation of Afghanistan, or civilisation of Zanzibar, or slaughter of ten thousand fantastic Dervishes in a night and a day. (*In Peril* 5-6)

The reference here to “the astonished clerk” is the cue for the real focus of Hobhouse’s and Masterman’s interest: the failure of the newly educated and newly enfranchised classes to commit to the democratic and progressive causes. For Hobhouse:

Both the friends and enemies of democracy inclined to the belief that when the people came into power there would be a time of rapid and radical domestic change combined in all probability with peace abroad. . . . As it turned out, almost the first act of the British democracy was to install the Conservatives in power, and to maintain them with but partial exceptions for nearly twenty years. Never were the fears or hopes of either side more signally disappointed. (49-50)

Hobhouse goes on to list those hopes from the liberal side (social reform, the “raising” of all classes “in the scale of culture” through the effects of education, an undivided community) and concludes that “in the light of the past ten years the bare statement reads like a satire on the vanity of human effort” (51-52).

Does this critique of the lower middle class imply a related critique of the majority culture its members consume? The answer is ambivalent. Certainly there is a level of distaste, as is apparent in the following description by Masterman:

Listen to the conversation in the second-class carriages of a suburban railway train, or examine the literature and journalism specially constructed for the suburban mind; you will often find endless chatter about the King, the Court, and the doings of a designated “Society”; personal paragraphs, descriptions of clothes, smile or manner; a vision of life in which the trivial and heroic things are alike exhibited, but in which there is no adequate test or judgment, which are the heroic, which the trivial. Liberated from the devils of poverty, the soul is still empty, swept and garnished; waiting for other occupants. This is the explanation of the so-called “snobbery” of the suburbs. (*Condition* 64-65)

Much of the blame for this condition is laid squarely at the feet of its “mean and tawdry and debased” literature—read “journalism”—which “becomes—to its victims—an epitome and mirror of the whole world,” “a complex, artificial city civilization” (75). Hobhouse is even more scathing. For him the suburban clerk is the representative of a new abstraction, “the man-in-the-street” who is “the faithful reflex of the popular sheet and the shouting newsboy” and to whom “it is useless to appeal in terms of reason” (70-

71). Perhaps because they were written closer to the Boer War, his words have a greater sense of frustration than Masterman's: "For here is a class educated, as education goes, too convinced of its own virtue and enlightenment to tolerate a prophet or a teacher, respectable to the point of being incapable of reform" (69). Education, and its corollary, reading, are again the key signifiers for this class. They effectively are what they read, and what they read is ultimately anti-progressive:

That the people as a whole have learnt to read has no doubt had the result that a certain portion of them have read the literature that is worth reading. Another result has been that the output of literature that is not worth reading has vastly increased. Once again, to suit the man-in-the-street, everything must be chopped up into the smallest possible fragments to assist digestion. . . . It must be diversified with headlines and salted with sensationalism; if it is to sell, it must appeal to the upper-most prejudices of the moment. . . . [P]eople do not really read in order that they may know, but in order that their attention may be momentarily diverted from the tedium of the train or the tramcar. . . . It is, of course, the athletic and sporting news which in the main sells the papers in the streets. . . . No social revolution will come from a people so absorbed in cricket and football. (74-76)

On the other hand, Masterman still holds out hopes for this class. It exhibits "a clean and virile life: forming, when criticism has done its worst, in conjunction with the artisan class below, from which it is so sharply cut off in interest and ideas, the healthiest and most hopeful promise for the future of modern England" (*Condition* 76). But more significantly, its literature does not necessarily have to be artificial. His project for a study of the condition of England in the book of that name suggests that "it will study the most sincere of the popular writers of fiction, especially those who from a direct experience of some particular class of society—the industrial peoples, the tramp, the village life, the shop assistant, the country house—can provide under the form of fiction something in the nature of a personal testimony" (11). That notion of sincerity, hand in hand with "true to life" is the key literary criterion for these liberals and cuts across the minority/majority culture distinction. The fact that so much lower-middle-class writing is false and artificial is not something inherent to the class as individuals but the consequence of the boredom of most of those individuals' lives.

Indeed Masterman sees in the upper class a similar (though differently caused) boredom, a "strange mediocrity" (25) in which "what passes for British Art . . . a decadent French play . . . an audacious novel or two, a passing scandal, serve to infuse the concoction with some lambent vitality. But, for the most part, it is talk—talk—talk" (38). And it is precisely this boredom, with its attendant need for diversions, this self-satisfied cynicism, this "chatter," that Masterman sees the middle and lower middle classes copying in their own lifestyles and literature. Hobson, too, gives upper-class culture short shrift:

Where a leisured class, by the very condition of its economic independence, is severed from close contact with, and direct experience of, the larger social life, its art, its literature, its science and philosophy alike suffer. . . . Great literature cannot proceed from such class life; it inevitably lapses into verbal elegance, recommending itself by decorative form in order to conceal the poverty of spirit. A class-life remote from the people has never produced, and never can produce, great literature and art. (*Social Problem* 125)

While Hobhouse does not share Hobson's extreme version of Ruskin's aesthetic, he too makes it clear that the upper and upper middle classes are no more "cultured" in Arnold's sense of the word than their supposed inferiors:

Nor is the corruption of opinion and the lowering of the moral standard in public affairs which has so profoundly depressed all thoughtful observers by any means especially imputable to the popular element in our government. Nor is there the smallest reason for thinking that it would be corrected by a government of select Balliol men. All classes alike give way to Jingoism, and shut their ears to reason and humanity; but the initiative comes from the world of high finance or of high officialdom. (168-69)

Hobhouse's critique of the lower middle class and Masterman's ambivalence towards it, do not extend to their views on the working class. In the example of William Crooks, for instance, Masterman claims that "the proletariat of London has found voice" (*Condition* 113). Crooks, a cooper by trade, became mayor of Poplar in 1901 and later Labour MP for Woolwich. To Masterman's mind Crooks signifies the essential East End, "its cheerfulness, its energy, its humour, its unquenchable patience" (113). Even the East End's "weaknesses" are given a positive spin comprising "its willingness to think well of others, its readiness to make allowances and to forgive . . . its reckless, wholehearted charity . . . its perpetual search for short cuts" (113-14). If this seems a little romanticised we might temper our scepticism with the knowledge that Masterman had undertaken social work as a Guardian of the Poor in Camberwell at the turn of the century and had lived in a south London tenement between 1900 and 1901, so he clearly had some grounds for his assessment. Within this picture, romanticised or not, Crooks's cultural profile clearly establishes him as someone who straddles the supposed gap between minority and majority culture:

He has obtained education as so many quick and intelligent East End boys are still obtaining it: from the riotous revel of the "penny dreadful", through the *British Workman*, and the *Sunday at Home*, and similar literature which good people scatter gratuitously amongst the working classes; to the *Pilgrim's Progress* and Shakespeare's

“Recitations”, and those social appeals of John Ruskin which have become the sacred writings of the new Labour revival. (114)

The difference in tone between this description and the one about lower-middle-class reading is striking. Whereas the earlier one stressed the artificiality of sensationalism, here it manifests itself as a “riotous revel.” Why the difference? Here the reading includes “serious” material (Bunyan, Shakespeare, Ruskin)—material, if you like, that has “ideas.” In Masterman’s account of lower-middle-class reading there is no sense of this serious element. Indeed, as he points out, that class is “cut off” from the artisan class in “interest and ideas.” Although he does not spell it out, the inference we can draw is that majority or popular literature *in itself* is not the problem; the problem occurs when that literature is consumed in the absence of countervailing material in which serious ideas are given consideration. This, clearly, is of a piece with the critique of the new journalism for failing to maintain its radical political agenda.

A working-class hero like Crooks then is to be taken seriously. His reading and his general cultural outlook might not be the same as those of Masterman himself or his new liberal confrères, but they evince a real value. The crucial point here is that the one not be judged by the “standards” of the other: difference is an acceptable and valued criterion. Masterman, for example, quotes approvingly from a 1908 survey of the working class by Miss M. Loane who argues that “their ethical views, taken as a whole, can be more justly described as different from those of the upper classes than as better or worse” (*Condition* 89).

The importance of recognising difference in contradistinction to imposing uniformity is a common theme amongst the new liberals. Hobson makes the point frequently in his critique of imperialism and Hobhouse’s organic metaphor for diversity in the following passage is clearly housed within liberalism’s emphasis on liberty: “The world advances by the free, vigorous growth of divergent types, and is stunted when all the fresh bursting shoots are planed off close to the heavy, solid stem” (164). Neither Hobson nor Hobhouse makes the point specifically in relation to different cultural products. However, given their general aesthetic criteria of sincerity, craftsmanship and realism—criteria which are of a piece with those that dominate the book reviews of the *Chronicle*, the *News*, the *Speaker* and the *Nation* throughout much of the 1890s and Edwardian years—there is every reason to think that like so many of the reviewers they too would take many of the products of majority culture as seriously as those of minority culture. While they might have despaired of some of the products and effects of that culture, these new liberal writers did not dismiss the culture as a whole. And, while they might have been less ambivalent about a Will Crooks than a Leonard Bast, even a land full of Leonards held more attraction for them than it did for the modernists.

Of course, as we see so often today, it is easy enough to trumpet the importance of difference, but not so easy if we also want to develop some sense of mutual commitment or obligation. In one sense for the new liberals that mutuality was an expression of traditional liberalism’s ideology of consensual rather than conflictual politics. But in another sense it meant a commitment or obligation to a set of ends we might gloss as “social reform.” For a brief moment, from roughly 1906 to 1910, it

seemed that a political consensus that allowed for cultural difference might just be possible. We see amongst the new liberals an optimistic belief that this was a moment of potential for a common or national culture, a "classless" culture comprising a readership with catholic tastes (manifested as "the bookman") and writers as socially committed craftsmen pushing beyond the conventional. It was a moment signified in the change of name from the *Speaker* to the *Nation*, each with its attendant connotations. And it was a moment when political radicalism and cultural radicalism seemed about to merge to create a political and cultural environment where difference did not mean hierarchy and equality did not mean sameness. In the cultural realm there was certainly "good" and "bad" literature. And while the criteria of judgment might now seem a little naive because they did not accord with those that have been with us since the modernist ascendancy, they did not necessarily result in the one being equated with a minority culture and the other with a majority culture.

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