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"IT IS NOBBUT (ONLY) AN OLIGARCHY THAT CALLS ITSELF A 'WE'"
Perceptions of journalism and journalists in Britain 1880–1900

Martin Conboy

The period between 1880 and 1900 was rich with discussions of the role of both journalists and journalism in Britain. Not only did the period witness the intensification and systematization of technologies associated with the gathering and dissemination of news but it was also a time when journalists were beginning to identify themselves collectively and professionally. The technological developments and corresponding professional reassessment provided the periodicals of the time with a rich source of debate, disagreement and delineation regarding the function of journalism. While considering contemporary discussions of the social and political purposes of journalism, we should be aware that definitional problems have beset the practice for well over a hundred years and across very different technological and cultural regimes. This paper explores a range of periodical discussion with the intention of highlighting key points in the debate from the late nineteenth century and asserts the continuing relevance of defining the roles of journalism in the present day.

KEYWORDS   fear of the masses; journalism and style; journalism definitions; perceptions of the role of journalists; professionalization; technology

Introduction

Contradictory views of the journalist and the relationship of the journalist to journalism and indeed the status of journalism are nothing new:

> There is a story told that an old retired veteran who spends his days at his club reading all the newspapers fell asleep in his chair and dreamt a curious dream. He thought he went to heaven, and that the first thing he asked for was the newspaper. It was a miserable production; there was not a brightly written report or paragraph in the whole sheet, and, regarding it as a sort of personal grievance, he complained to St. Peter. "Oh," said the Saint, "it's not our fault. We never get any good reporters up here!" Some might at first sight regard this as a reflection upon the character of reporters; but the explanation, of course, is obvious—as no newspapers are published in the other place, and the reporters prefer to go there. (McDonagh 1899, 518)

Context

The long end of the nineteenth century signals one of the most important moments in the formation of modernity. The convergence of political, economic and technological developments was perhaps nowhere more prominently demonstrated than in the world

of communication. The political revolutions of France and America, the industrial revolution emanating from Britain and the extension of the franchise insisted upon wider dissemination of information for modern citizens. As it emerged from the series of convulsions that brought this new political-economic order into existence, journalism was both a conduit for and a product of modernity. As well as having this dual function, any definition of journalism is further complicated by the unstable nature of characteristics that had been both contested and idealized in relation to public periodical communication across the best part of three centuries before our era begins.

Cook argues of the newspaper and periodical press in general that they:

> coincided historically with the affirmation of new kinds of freedom. One of these was the freedom of self-expression, the valuing of activities in which, as Charles Taylor has described it, "each of us has to live up to our own originality." (Cook 2000, 15)

The journalism of the end of the nineteenth century was shifting in a different direction from the expression of individuality to the articulation of the interests of the masses. This shift becomes apparent in the sometimes conflicting imperatives of modernity and journalism as the century progresses:

> Modernity, as Dickens presents it in the journalism of the 1850s and 1860s, is registered in the emergence of structures and institutions which enable the people to function coherently as a mass, but it apprehends the contending values of sameness and diversity in contradictory ways. (Hemstedt 2001, 40)

Conflicting, confused and ambivalent views are therefore inevitably woven deeply within perceptions of journalism and its functions. Even some of journalism's traditionally more assertive claims to have contributed to public discussion and political debate are at best partial since it is well documented that it had concentrated, by and large, on addressing an audience it took as homogenously bourgeois until relatively late in the day (Black 1991, 246). Olivia Smith has gone further in contesting the reach of newspapers before the early nineteenth century:

> The press could record public events and it could enliven debate among the politically involved. But as a means of social communication, it was, in the eyes of many, a non-starter … Journalism was kept from communicating between classes, from spreading its truths in such a way as to allow the crowd to set up in judgment against the governing classes. (Smith 1984, 165)

Integral to these perceptions of journalism was journalism's own assessment of its audience. It had long sought to claim its distinctiveness through calls, rhetorical or otherwise, to be addressed to and align with the interests of a public. However, as the size and social composition of that public grew, it engendered concerns about the consequences of developing as a medium for the masses (Perkin 1991; Lee 1976). Anxieties about the popular audience were nothing new. Journalism in many ways has perfected commercially acceptable ways of harnessing the interests of the popular without losing control of them and this has long drawn criticism from cultural and political elites. Our period may simply present us with a characteristic moment in a longer and ineluctable process not on account of a changing audience but because of journalism's inherently contradictory features.

The entry of the word "journalism" into the language can be seen as a key moment that prefigures many subsequent debates. Although the timing of the import of the word into English is disputed, its resonance has no more definitive claim than Campbell's:

> Acknowledging "the intercommunication of opinion and intelligence", the neologism allowed for generic linkage between high cultural forms such as the periodical *Edinburgh* and *Westminster Reviews* and the mundane daily press. The word's subsequent history is of attempts to curtail—otherwise, the often unbearable weight of—this cultural commonality. (Campbell 2001, 3–4)

It was precisely to encompass the yoking together of the high and the low that this new word was coined. The question of social class was omnipresent throughout nineteenth-century British society and it is inevitable that it shapes discussions of a communication form that sought to address readers as social and political agents. Thompson (1963) has provided an exhaustive account of the role of periodical publication, especially the "Unstamped", in making social class consciousness apparent and Chalaby's account of the shift to a more commercially successful form of journalism in the mid-century has class very much written through its ideological heart (Chalaby 1998). This complex association within journalism that was attempting to combine popular culture and political information in a commercially driven, generic experiment was inextricably linked to social class. We might argue that it was the more opinionated, politically oriented "publicists" not the later commercially inclined, market-driven "journalists" (Chalaby 1998) who had hitherto provided expression for popular debate beyond the political and commercial elites from the early nineteenth century; this despite the fact that the contribution of journalism specifically to the development of public opinion is one of its most oft-heralded contributions to democracy. From the beginning of our era, journalism's contribution to social and political life was beginning to be contested and, as we will see, with more questions and disagreements about its identity than answers or coherence. Such debates emerge in different national contexts at different historical junctures. Schudson (1978) provides an illuminating account of the fertile soil for the development of cheap commercial journalism from the 1830s and Broersma (2007) has assembled a wide-ranging account of the various traditions that accompanied the development of journalism across Western Europe in the nineteenth century. This brief exploration will concentrate on the very specific context of Britain.

The period 1880–1900 is an important transitional period in the history of journalism. It is the period when technologies of communication and the efficiencies of market distribution combine with increased advertising revenue and improved commercial illustration. Expectations of journalism shift dramatically during this period and they are captured in the pages of the periodical reviews of the time. Journalism in the twentieth century may not be as stable a set of traditions and practices as it is sometimes presented to us retrospectively (Witschge 2011) but, then again, neither was it in the late nineteenth century as we move discursively from ambiguity to ambivalence.

A Word on Method

In addition to the wide range of secondary literature available to support considerations of changing role perceptions of journalism during this period, we are fortunate to have an expanding range of digital materials on which to test our hypotheses

(Mussell 2012; Steel 2014). Some of this material has been mined and mapped by colleagues on our behalf and we should thank them for their contribution in absentia. The most significant of these is provided by Palmegiano (2012), whose *Perceptions of the Press in Nineteenth-century Periodicals: A Bibliography* has provided me with a substantive point of departure for my own research for this paper. The bibliography provides a list of contents 48 British journals published across the nineteenth century up to 1900. These publications range from the long-standing high-brow to the more recently minted middle-brow but all share a desire to act as spaces of public discussion for contemporary middle-class readers. Their concerns are by-and-large restricted to Britain and this parochialism, reflecting Britain's own view of its dominant position in the world at that point, is manifest in their concentration on British journalism. Their focus can be described as representative of the views and concerns of their middle-class readerships. I narrowed down my search to 19 journals covered in her bibliography that cover the period 1880–1900 to establish what sort of common perceptions of journalism's role were being propagated through the two decades under review. Articles of relevance to my investigation numbered in excess of 400. I will attempt to outline the main features and themes of this coverage.

The nineteenth-century periodical press is a rich resource for charting discussions of journalism among the literary classes. Here, the historical antecedents and the traditions of journalism are being established discursively and these build into a set of perceptions of the role of both journalist and journalism. Yet despite this flurry of opinions, certain of journalism's core social and political claims appear to predate this era with, for example, the liberty of the press and the Fourth Estate in Britain, concepts which were very much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, respectively (Boyce 1978), threaded through much of the discussion. Indeed, much of the writing concerning journalism provides context for such concepts through accounts of the lives of printers and publishers which go a long way towards securing—possibly for the first time—a chronology of press history drawing upon a multitude of accounts of the role of periodical publications in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Professionalization is a key theme across these publications but there are also other claims which would appear to be ostensibly incompatible with the high ideals of a profession: serving a readership and selling to a readership; reader as subject and commodified object. The rhetoric of the engaged journalist serving a public may have its roots back in the mercurist/publicist continuum from the time of the English Civil War (Frank 1961) but once we have a fully commercialized journalism this rhetoric appears, especially in the daily newspapers, to be a very outdated idealization apart from when it is deployed as heroic self-justification among journalists. The journals and magazines considered in this piece, because of their distance from the pursuit of daily journalism and its characteristically topical "report", are well positioned to provide a sceptical view of the journalist as public servant.

During these years, definitions of journalism are in flux, self-perceptions of journalists and editors are changing as professionalization and unionization become key insider debates; elite perceptions of journalism are changing, and at the same time, elite anxieties concerning the potential impact of journalism on the masses are growing. The Royal Commission on the Press of 1949, in a long retrospective, identified this period as key to the development of a commercial press that offered a low-brow, populist product for what was perceived as a largely apolitical audience and with consequences which have resonated to the present day:

The appearance of a new type of newspaper at the end of the century led to developments which have transformed newspaper production into a major industry and largely replaced the family business by the great commercial corporation. The eighteen-nineties saw the introduction of newspapers sold at a halfpenny and addressed, not to the highly-educated and politically-minded minority, but to the millions whom the Education Act of 1870 had equipped with the ability but not with the capacity or desire to absorb the material offered by the existing dailies. (Royal Commission on the Press 1947– 1949 1949, 14)

The key points that I identified across the 19 journals during this period are as follows. All of them betray conflicting and contradictory views which blur our understanding of any claims journalism's identification may have had to linear progression; a blurring which may have continue to have consequences for journalism's contemporary predicament.

The History and Heroification of Journalism

Journalism is regularly presented in our selection of journals as the continuation of a long and noble tradition of public communication and articles regularly refer to the Acta Diurna and even individuals of Roman times as the predecessors of today's practice:

The man who established Satire as an unspoken review of Roman life was essentially a slashing journalist. This was Lucilius, who lived in the last two years of the second century BC. (Jebb 1884, 582)

The use of classical allusion was a common means of emphasizing the prestige of and status of institutions in the Victorian era and the male middle classes were familiar with Latin and Roman references as part of a grammar school education (Edwards 1999; Clarke 1959). However, journalism did not necessarily need to resort to such ancient frames of reference. Addison and Steele, Swift (referred to as "the prince of journalists"), Johnson, Wilkes, Hazlitt, Coleridge, Dickens and Mayhew are regularly cited as individuals who had contributed to the emergence of journalism as a vital literary and political tool. Even more recent figures could be encompassed within this retrospective account of the glories of journalism, indicating already the division which had recently opened up between its elite and popular traditions, exemplified in the account of the life of influential leader-writer James McDonald, which emphasizes his ability to discreetly guide or sway the powerful through the educational/leadership function of journalism (Anon 1890). This fits perfectly within accounts of perceptions of the "higher journalism" at that time as a form of "clerisy" (Kent 1969).

It is to be expected, perhaps, that one newspaper is personified on its centenary, located in the tradition of heroic actor within this elite tradition. W. Fraser Rae quotes Sir Bulwer Lytton from 30 years previously to congratulate the achievements of this paper:

if I desired to leave to remote posterity some memorial of existing British civilization, I would prefer, not our docks, not our railways, not our public buildings, not even the palace in which we hold our sittings: I would prefer a file of The Times. (Rae 1855, 65)

Nevertheless, even this heroic narrative is compromised by less than triumphant recollections:

Moreover, till those times journalism was hardly allowed to be respectable even with writers like Coleridge and Hazlitt to ennoble its practice; and if in the third and fourth

decades of the century it was less looked down upon, it was a poorer trade than ever, I fancy, for any but a few writers in one or two newspapers alone. (Greenwood 1890, 836)

What this clearly acknowledges is that for all the trumpeting of a journalism of the Great and the Good, there had persisted a long alternative tradition of an unheralded and populist lower variety; unskilled and derided. This tradition was that of the "hack" and had sustained generations on Grub Street (Pinkus 1968). What was crystallizing in the era under consideration in this piece is the erosion of the gentlemanly tradition of the scholar-journalist as well as the political champion seeking publicity in periodical form but they were not about to be usurped by any alternative champion-figure that could be associated with either the democratic or the commercial imperatives of late nineteenth-century journalism.

Elite narratives of the emergence of journalism as a powerful political broker acting on behalf of democratic imperatives are nevertheless becoming formalized within Whiggish accounts of journalism's history as typified by the general emphasis of reviews of Andrews's *History of British Journalism* from 1859 in which newspapers were seen as embodying the wishes and political power of the public:

> the public voice steadily demanded their emancipation … and with the improved tone of their leaders, and stricter accuracy in their information, they gradually and fairly won the immense power which they at present wield … so vast an influence has rarely been so well employed. (Anon 1859, 7–8)

This account could easily be challenged as demonstrated 30 years later by someone who is much more sceptical of this interpretation. In this version, concerns about claims of the unitary nature of journalism are clear for all to read in a review of Bourne's history of journalism of 1888:

> Before entering upon such a task as his with any hope of success the writer ought to show that he can answer two questions. The first is, What constitutes a journalist? The second is, What constitutes a newspaper? If he may be judged from the preface, Mr Fox Bourne is not prepared with satisfactory answers to these questions. (Anon 1888a, 43)

The review identifies a fundamental binary opposition that stretches to breaking point any claims of journalism as a coherent practice:

> Mr Fox Bourne's chief sin consists in confounding the representing, and enlightening, or leading public opinion in politics or literature within the mere collection of news, which is largely a mechanical employment. (Anon 1888b, 107)

Literature and Journalism

One of the prime confusions about journalism that becomes clear in these journals lay in its relationship to or its distinctiveness from the broader field of literature. Brake (1994) has alerted us to the changing parameters of definition, indicating that not until the late nineteenth century were "literature" and "journalism" differentiated, and then only in order to set apart the "higher" fiction from the "lower", not to distinguish fiction from non-fiction. As a consequence, during our period, all printed matter is frequently described as "the Press" and compared to the highest standards of cultural production, often to unflattering effect:

> But if by Journalism you mean only the daily effusions of the newspapers, admirable as for their purpose they so often are, they cannot rightly be included under the head of Literature, though possibly a little more of the latter element might do them no great harm. The very essence of their production inevitably forbids the qualities of Literature,—balance, measure, arrangement, lucidity of thought, and clearness of style. (Morris 1887, 305)

So, according to this view, there's "Journalism" and then there are—"newspapers". The qualitative drift asserted here from reviews and periodicals all along the spectrum to newspapers is very revealing about the social reception of this latter genre. Through this period, to further problematize any claims of journalism to the stylistic traditions of literature, it is the newspaper journalist who comes to occupy the definitional centre of journalism. He or she is also the newcomer, the embodiment of the shift in the definitional parameters, demarcated from the older traditions of the elite cultural commentators at one end of the occupational social scale or the specialist commercial scribes of the magazines but also from the scriveners and Grub Street hacks at the other. In a final riposte to a long set of contributions to a debate on "The Profession of Letters", the journalist is presented as imprisoned institutionally within the newspaper and within its political stance:

> In Journalism alone of the professions the time of emancipation can never come. It is the peculiar lot of the journalist that he can never set up for himself. He is merged in his paper: like the actor of the Athenian stage, his face is hid in a mask and he speaks in tones not his own. He must speak the tongues of this party or that in the Church, in the State, in Trade, or in some other one of the many channels into which the great current of human affairs is parcelled. (Morris 1888, 383–384)

This is a remarkably prescient view of the journalist subsumed within an editorial identity for whom professionalism incorporates an ideological alignment with the particular voice and constituency of a publication. It has departed significantly from a view of the "publicist" free to circulate his/her own views as an individual agent. Journalism is a range of "parcels" associated with various political, commercial or religious factions; one form among many.

Popular/Yellow Journalism

One recurring debate within the journals of the period concerns the rupture between higher and popular journalism, sometimes categorized as "yellow" journalism in the style of its American precursor and model. The Boer War provided an interesting watershed in opinions on the popular press, articulated here as the "lower" journalism, its journalists and their readers:

> The war, if it was ever popular, is certainly not popular now, except with the unthinking mob fed upon the flatulent diet provided by our "Yellow press." (Reid 1899b, 1030)

Sometimes we read of the positives of democratization or even the "massocratic" impact of the new popular press (Wiener 2011, 136), but both high and low journalism were criticized for reasons which identified their differences. They were, by this stage in journalism's evolution, being judged by vastly different sets of values and expectations as highlighted in the following assessment. While one author bemoans the lack of reports

from correspondents on respectable, elite newspapers ("gagged by the authorities"; Reid 1900b, 315) and the "meekness" (316) with which the press has submitted to censorship, the Yellow press is condemned as:

> full today of the wild gossip of Shanghai. Whole columns of it are telegraphed to the halfpenny newspapers, and it is not too much to say that much of it is only fit for the waste-paper basket. Horrible details … without any authentification. (Reid 1900b, 327)

With regard to the content of the popular press, there was a widespread fear of the impact of something that was called "snippet journalism". In an article from 1899 entitled "Why Are Our Brains Deteriorating?", concern was expressed for the perceived decline in the ability to pay sustained attention to reasoned and argumentative discourses; a fear placed firmly at the door of *Tit-Bits* and its allegedly pernicious influence (Elsdale 1899).

An Explicit Range of Functions

At the same pace as newspapers became increasingly successful as commercial enterprises, debate about their functions flourished, often differentially from the older, more sedate and more purely political traditions. There are clear ideological assumptions expressed in the contradictions between these commercial realities and the more idealized aspects of a newspaper's role:

> It must not be forgotten that a newspaper is a commercial venture, and regarded in this light, our modern newspapers present some very strange anomalies. Thus, it will be seen that Newspapers are in reality somewhat in a false position. They profess to sell news and to give advertisements to boot. What they really do is sell publicity for advertisements and to give news to boot. (Bowles 1884, 24–25)

Even at the highpoint of conviction that the press could be considered as a Fourth Estate (Boyce 1978), there is much scepticism towards the idea that such a commercial press could furnish the best possible intelligence for the needs of a democracy:

> now it is the first business of the corner of the newspaper to make sure that his property flourishes; it is the first business of the editor of a newspaper to give his employer assurance of that fact. We are asked, therefore, to believe that it is for the best interests of the State that its chief engine of power (for such the Press claims now to be) should be guided by men whose first concern is to make the most they can out of the job. The demand on our credulity is preposterous. (Morris 1888, 388)

This is reinforced by frequent observations that journalism has a confused and potentially contradictory mission, for example: "Journalism serves a double purpose: the distribution of news and the distribution of principles" (Low 1893, 363).

Some stressed that despite the grand ideas sometimes presented by commentators and journalists themselves, ultimately the goal was economic: making money out of the people. Massingham typifies this when writing on the ethics of journalism having at heart the political economy as their bottom line: "a big daily newspaper, is run on lines calculated to secure the largest and swiftest return on investment" (Massingham 1900, 261).

Editors are often described in terms of the older traditions of journalism as quasi-political or religious figures: "Apostles", "statesmen", "oracles", "monastic leaders". Yet at an

operational level they are described as serving two masters: "his country's welfare and the reading public" in a variation on the typical contradictory binary (Templar 1899, 306).

The combination of information and entertainment in a highly diverting and commercialized package is best captured by *Tit-Bits* from 1881 that contained both features from magazines and elements of news. These began to intersect in further publications under its influence, obscuring the difference between these two forms of journalism (Wiener 2011, 164). One of these rival publications, *Pearson's Weekly* from 1890, aimed to: "To Interest, To Elevate, To Amuse", thus demonstrating an editorial commitment to more than the traditional claims of truth-telling or factual exposition in isolation, with amusement as a key component of this commercial blend. Journalism has always been characterized as a process of accretion and, as evident in these mass popular publications, incorporating all three of the functions mentioned above while maintaining the prominence of its core business of the "truth". Broersma may have justification in foregrounding the longer-term, truth-telling claims of journalism as a form of identification that has enabled it to distinguish itself from other information media (Broersma 2013, 31–34), but there is evidence that during this period both the truth claims and the distinctiveness of journalism were viewed with increasing scepticism.

It is true that during the late nineteenth century journalism comes to claim that it is concerned with that simplified delivery of truthfulness and reliability and that at the same time it becomes far less reliant on the commentary and opinion that had been the specialisms of the quarterlies and later monthlies. Yet scepticism towards the truth-claims that some argue are at the core of journalism's credibility are already in evidence, as in the following example:

> As with news so it is with opinions for the purpose of a daily newspaper. The opinion expressed need not be true, it is enough for it to be new and plausible. Nay, for it to be true is a fatal defect, for in that case it can only be asserted once as a new thing and must henceforth be merely repeated as an old and stale thing, whereas if it be false any number of new changes may be rung upon it. Truth is one, but falsehoods are many. (Bowles 1884, 27)

There is also a class perspective in credibility towards newspapers expressed thus:

> In old times—the days of Pitt, for example—those in position to know had generally a wholesome contempt for newspaper reports; there was amongst them a general feeling, "I read it in the newspaper, therefore it is probably a lie!" whilst, on the other hand, readers of the humbler classes used to say, "oh, I know it must be true, for I have read it in print". (Solly 1884, 92)

Once scepticism about the truthfulness of newspapers becomes an issue then, as has become usual since, the readership can be blamed as in a piece where commercialization is implicitly blamed for a prioritization of a market-based approach to the truth; a shaping of the truth to suit the readers' tastes: "it produces … not truth but an audience" (Anon 1883, 42).

Debates on Journalism's Style

The style of the newspaper was a frequent topic for discussion in the pages of the journals. This went beyond merely criticizing the aesthetics of journalism as it entered a

modern, commercialized age and reflected more often on the impact of shifts in language on the readers and the implications of language change for the producers of journalism:

> *Garniston*. What, Warnford! Corrupting your style by studying a newspaper? … What you are reading in your newspaper is not your own writing, in the sense of being your own thoughts expressed in your own language. It is the thoughts of your political party expressed in the language of—well, in the language of your guild. (Trail 1884, 436)

More specifically, concerns are expressed about the relationships of the New Journalism which emerged in the 1880s to its readers: "The new journalism is occasionally, it must be confessed, apt to put too great a strain on the credulity of its dupes" (Reid 1900a, 675).

The articulation of style, as a reflection of the readers' tastes, has been categorized as an important aspect of the "representative" function of journalism that Hampton (2004) has argued was winning the rhetorical war with the educational ideal at this point. Within this process, the emergence of the mirror metaphor was a striking illustration of the visualization of this function of the press. To complement this, voice, sound, mimicry would become dominant tropes expressing journalism's communicative patterns in the coming century of popularization.

The impression within the dynamics of the massification of the newspaper press was that its language was also being massified with implications for its reception. Quantity was taken as equalling a sort of impact, and this in turn related to indicators of style. This relationship was measured against the standards of high literature with clearly negative implications for journalism:

> Journalism, the ideal journalism, consists in formulating brilliantly what the man in the street was on the verge of saying … journalism which is to literature what a wall-paper is to a picture. You must be able to command it in large quantities before it begins to count. (Anon 1900, 309)

Tensions Relating to Social Class

Hampton claims that in one way or the other, laments concerning the commercialization of the press usually took on a class dimension (Hampton 2004, 82). An ample illustration is the well-known expression of disgust from Lord Salisbury in 1899 on the *Daily Mail* being "written by office boys for office boys" (Koss 1981, 369). In fact, class anxieties structured the polarities of journalism's identity in this period as at no time before; not just *what* but *who* was it for. Commenting on the perceived impact of the 1870 Education Act, an article entitled "Lament of a Leader Writer" proclaims judgementally:

> The mental condition of the masses is such that they cannot sustain any process of thought which extends beyond a short paragraph, and for this large, indeed the largest, class of readers, long leaders are of no avail. (Anon 1899, 606)

The linkage of role perceptions and social class is often expressed in the discourse of the Fourth Estate, articulated as inclusive solely of middle-class sentiment and political engagement. The following example demonstrates a class perspective to this regularly idealized function of the journalism of the nineteenth century. Despite the diversity of views of journalism expressed and the clear understanding of the complex and often contradictory range of meanings of the term and its practice, there is often a corresponding

uniformity of view relating to the new reading classes and their tastes in newspapers. The fear of the tastes and passions of this largely homogenized working class indicates in the eyes of this critic the commercial self-interest in pandering to their basest passions:

> The press of this country, in overwhelming numbers, and with few exceptions, sets itself against any real efforts for the good of the working classes. We very rightly reprobate certain abominable illustrated papers; but are some of our leading journals much less guilty of a breach of that trust which their influential position imposes upon them? Do they not, almost without exception, pander to the worst propensities, play upon the ignorant prejudices, and make their miserable capital out of the vices or the passions of the class which they profess to educate? (Humphery 1893, 690–691)

The increase of the numbers enfranchised by voting rights as well as by the benefit of elementary education could often be viewed as inevitably bringing about the decline of the political influence of newspapers because of the consequent "babel more tiresome than impressive" (Greenwood 1890, 836) of voices in this post-bourgeois hegemony. In effect, social class was another of the bifurcations between the two journalisms, articulated by Campbell above, and this spills into discussion of the categories of journalists: just as divided. Written by someone calling himself a "veteran journalist", in fact the distinguished editor of the St James's Gazette, Sidney Low, this article rails against the idea that there are many openings for leader writers, critics and reviewers:

> Your contributor rightly draws a distinction between the two classes of journalists; those who are concerned with the editorial management and the literary part of newspapers, and those who occupy themselves with the collection and arrangement of news … speaking roughly, it is true to say that the soldiers of the Press are divided into the commissioned and the non-commissioned ranks … "officers and gentlemen" [and] youths from the Board Schools. (Low 1898, 212)

Furthermore, critics could combine such class-based scepticism towards the role of the press in a democracy in the wake of the franchise extension and the 1870 Education Act and conclude that what they perceived as the low quality output of the New Journalism was the inevitable result:

> 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. Well, the democracy, with abundance of life, movement, sympathy, good instincts, is disposed to be, like this journalism, feather-brained. (Arnold 1887, 638–639)

Technology and Speed: Paradoxes

The regularly asserted triumph of facts over opinion in the daily newspaper of the nineteenth century, the demise of the descriptive style and the decline of the perceived influence of the leader were all seen as evidence of the impact of the telegraph which had increased the speed and quantity of information available to newspapers. Although in our period the telegraph appeared to be viewed in a rather negative light, there had been fulsome praise of the potential of a technological enlightenment in the early years of the telegraph's introduction into news dissemination. Some were positively utopian in tone:

> The public, however, will profit immensely by the change; with more extended and general knowledge, there will be more liberality of sentiment, and more cosmopolitan spirit, and less bigotry and one-sidedness between man and man. Verily, for the coming generations there are great and grand things in store. (Anon 1858, 728)

Even at the cusp of our era, the combination of telegraph, telephone and phonograph were held to offer the potential for, "reporting parliamentary speeches with a rapidity and accuracy never hitherto attained" (Anon 1879, 65). However, the deployment of technological innovation brought with it a range of views on its impact on the quality of public discourse and inevitably on journalism itself. Assessments of the influence of the telegraph on the sophistication of content could be sharp: "It cannot but offer crude and undigested sentiments for weighed thought" (Morris 1888, 390). An author who styles himself "Staff Officer" bemoans the impact of speed on both the accuracy and decorum of military communication, indicating that the telegraph, even prior to the "sensationalism" of the daily press, was still considered by some to provide a distorting contribution to the public's understanding of military matters. Technology, in his view, was shaping expectations of news to be strung between the need for: "facts … or racy fiction? … The blunder of the hasty correspondent, the bazaar rumour that has been telegraphed today to be contradicted tomorrow" (Maurice 1882, 133). Reflecting on the process and the drivers of news gathering through the medium of the telegraph, this critique is taken further in a piece on Foreign Correspondents where the journalists are seen to be positively subservient to the technology, generating a problem for the esteem of journalism *per se*:

> But elucidation and comment are held to be exclusively editorial functions, for the exercise of which the correspondent is merely expected to supply material. He is, therefore, become a collecting-clerk in the news trade, attached for so many hours or minutes per diem to the tail of a telegraph-wire. (Beatty-Kingston 1886, 382)

There was a growing sense that the public was rushed in its consumption of news:

> The public does not read unless it can run as it reads (Linton 1890, 530), amidst general fears concerning the impact of the speed and intensity of information flow on the public. These are articulated in a consistent stream of articles generally highlighting the deleterious effect of telegraphy on the quality of journalism and its impact on readers and the producers of news: "…no time should be left for thought or sentiment." (Gosse 1891, 531)

Professional Status and Education

Journalism is widely if loosely referred to as a profession throughout the era. This was frequently seen as a form of progression from the older times with the consensus that it had become better regarded over time (Perkin 1989, 116–170). It possessed a rising status yet at the same time it could be described as overcrowded, in transition, and journalists as mere mechanical tools referring back to longer established fears of the encroachment of technology on practice. The difficulty comes when one looks for a coherent sense of how this "profession" may compare to others in the process of establishing itself. There was still a huge range of disagreements as to what professional journalists might share in terms of education, qualification, background, common knowledge or sense of collective ethics in a commercial pursuit (Elliot 1978). There was also a split in opinion, with contrary views that had, as we have seen, become part of

journalism's longer narrative of decline, in which progress had been reversed and accounts of the ancient and honourable antecedents of journalism's civilizing claims are held as noble but irreconcilable with the demands of a fully modernized communication system. Some commentators remarked upon the "scandalous 'license of the press' reporting details such as now disgrace our 'leading journals' … Here we have not advanced, but receded in the last fifty years" (Anon 1887, 555), while another could add the steady inclusion of women as an additional hindrance to its reputation, arguing by implication that women's "journalism" has played its own part in declining rate of literacy (Anon 1897).

Despite well-documented liberal accounts of journalists as operating within a politically important forum of communication (Lee 1976, 15–41; Curran 1978), daily journalists themselves suffered from a reputation as scoundrels with no scruples, in great part, on account of their need to get a story, meaning that bribery and blackmail were frequently imputed to them (Aspinall 1945). This has been expressed in the following terms:

> In the second half of the nineteenth century, a contrast existed between the important political position attributed to the daily press and the low social status accorded to journalists. (Hampton 1999, 183)

An essential means of professionalizing was to persuade those outside their ranks to accept the special value to society of journalism and journalists. One way of addressing this was through the creation of interest groups to boost the standing of journalism such as the National Association of Journalists founded in 1884 as an attempt to professionalize, which was reformed as the Institute of Journalists in 1888 and received its Royal Charter in 1890. Another strategy for incorporating occupations as professions was to introduce a formal educational route as a mechanism designed to exclude, often subtly, on the grounds of class, gender, ethnic background or religious belief. Exclusion could then be used to bolster the status of the insider group. However, a crucial aspect of professionalization to many, that of education, was treated with little short of contempt by many at the time within journalism. Educationally, it presents a pattern of division familiar from other discussions on journalism: "it may be entered from the bottom or the top … the best schools of journalism are the University of Oxford and extensive foreign travel" (Shadwell 1898, 847): journalists should be "taught to box, to ride on horseback, and to use a revolver" (Blowitz 1893, 43).

Speculation on the future of journalism at the very end of our era demonstrates how respect for journalism had still not been fully justified and this lack of credibility seems destined to be carried forward into whatever the future holds for it. The Institute of Journalists is assessed in the following terms:

> [It] has done excellent work in … defining professional usage as far as the occupation is concerned. But it has a higher and a wider task before it. If the newspaper press is to deserve the respect of the public, and to be worthy of the great influence which it exercises in our national life, certain abuses now connected with it must be sternly suppressed … filching … recklessness of statement … an infirmity which pervades the press as a whole. (Reid 1900a, 680)

Conclusion

Journalism is a characteristically modernist institution and print, in particular, has had what we could describe as a long potential to align itself thoroughly with the political developments of modernism such as democracy. However, it is interesting to reflect on how little of the democratic discourse is actually developed within the periodical journals of the late nineteenth century as if the fear of the masses and the eruption of a new commercialized form of writing for those masses was a less than desirable element. This era can be seen as one in which a discursive resistance attempts to define the true function of journalism as a backward-looking, elite practice with conservative concerns for the quality of information which is released to ordinary people and in the main it is a view which is adopted by journalists themselves as they contribute to these discussions.

For all its claims to inject a radically populist element into the democratic process, British journalism has too often exploited the contours of its American counterpart to mask the fact that it has always been a culturally conservative and institutionally retrospective set of discourses. It is notable that in such an era of genuinely radical technological innovation and political and social change, journalism is confused in both its functions and motivations and begins to look retrospectively to justify them. It is true that the Anglo-American model of journalism gained its majority throughout the same period as first industrialization then mass suffrage became embedded within society. This has led to perceptions of the linkage of journalism with the "democratic market society" (Schudson 1978). Yet this ignores many of the conflicting discursive exchanges concerning the role and perception of the journalist (often humble, jobbing, grafting) and the role and perception of journalism (idealized, publicly oriented, democratic). As some ideas are converging, others are fragmenting and to complicate this still further one of the convergent points around which consensus builds is a sense of an honorable lineage in journalism's contribution to democracy: the "Whiggish" account. As journalism enters its commercially most successful period, it defines itself increasingly upon retro-idealizations of its status and function, selecting the best chapters from its back catalogue. The nineteenth century's crisis of modernity was, for journalism, a missed opportunity; missed because the money was rolling in.

A Yorkshire politician is credited with the observation that the Press was "nobbut an oligarchy that calls itself a 'We'" (Reid 1899a, 848) and so widespread was the suspicion of a Press which routinely masked institutional opinion behind the collective pronoun that bringing the 'arrogant "we" off its pedestal' (De la Ramée 1899, 810) was often claimed to be a fundamental part of the process of the democratization of the press. This almighty "we" may have been deposed to a certain extent by the end of the nineteenth century, leading to celebrations that, "The press is more and more taking the tone of a man speaking to a man. The childish imposture of the editorial We is already thoroughly exploded" (Morley 1882, 516). While this might well have rectified one perceived shortcoming of the newspapers of this age, it had been supplanted by another. The presumption of the press to talk on behalf of the reader had now shifted into a rhetorical styling of the readers' opinions in a representative mode (Hampton 2004). It continued as a "we" but now one less literal and more a marketed version of a plural and commercially viable public. Its arrogant and elitist implications may have been swept away by popular and commercial engagement with a wider spectrum of public engagement but journalism itself was no closer to reconciling its contradictory

tendencies; neither was it any nearer to settling on any unitary vision of what it did or what its purpose was.

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