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Introduction

Although Arnold Bennett is remembered chiefly as a novelist, he was also one of the most pre-eminent journalists of his day. One of the last truly great ‘men of letters’, with the agility of a literary acrobat he manoeuvred skilfully between brows and genres, one day attending to the psychological dramas in his latest novel, the next penning an article on the pros and cons of daylight saving for the downmarket *Sunday Pictorial*: ‘Except in summer, when the great event happens too early, I see the dawn on most mornings. It never ceases to be marvellous.’¹ While – quite rightly – Bennett’s novels have received the lion’s share of critical attention, with a few notable exceptions his journalism, particularly his general interest journalism, has yet to be fully excavated and examined.² There is a vast body of it ranging from his first articles for *Tit-Bits* in the early 1890s to his last column for the *Evening Standard* published on 26 February 1931, a month before his death. Some series of his newspaper work, for example his ‘Books and Persons’ columns both for the *New Age* and *Evening Standard* have been published in book form. Much more is still on hard-to-use microfiche or on original copies in library archives meaning there are tens of thousands of Bennett’s words still waiting to be scrutinised in the modern age.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, journalism was still seen as being ‘the first rung of literature’.³ Late Victorian writers, as Coleridge, Dickens and George Eliot before them, easily combined the two genres of journalism and literature, in the days before ‘the invention of news’.⁴ Bennett began his professional writing career on *Woman*, a conservative ladies’ magazine (‘Our *raison d’être* is neither politics, dress, the doings of the ‘society’ of reality or imagination, the ventilation of imaginary grievances of the sex...’).⁵ His great contemporary Rudyard Kipling had begun his career, at a younger age, on the

Lahore *Civil and Military Gazette*. Other contemporary writers: Jerome K. Jerome, J. M. Barrie, P. G. Wodehouse and Edgar Wallace all began their writing life on newspapers.⁶ None of Bennett's contemporaries had quite his range, from the popular *Home Chat* and *Evening News* to the literary *New Age* and the political *New Statesman*, the old-school *Daily News*, once edited by Charles Dickens, to the brash new *Sunday Pictorial*, launched in 1915 and reaching 1.5 million copies in its first week.

Journalism was, even at the height of Bennett's success as a novelist, a financial necessity.⁷ The money he earned from it outstripped earnings from his novels until 1912 when he earned £16,000 in total, 'which may be called success by any worldly-minded author'.⁸ Word for word, journalism paid considerably more than his imaginative writing, even more than the lucrative serialisation deals his agent Pinker brokered for him. Chatto and Windus paid him a £150 royalty advance for the 200,000-word manuscript of *The Old Wives Tale* in 1908 whereas he could earn £100 for a 1,300 word article in a popular newspaper, week in, week out. He earned £300 a month from his *Evening Standard* 'Books and Persons' column.⁹ This made him the highest paid journalist in Britain at the time – indeed Bennett speculated that the column represented 'the highest paid book articles in the world'.¹⁰ As a comparison, in 1927 the *Daily Mail* women's page paid its freelance contributors between 10 shillings and sixpence and 25 shillings per article; the literary and feminist journal *Time and Tide* paid its regular contributors one to two guineas per thousand words.¹¹ Journalism, then, to Bennett was – as it was to many early twentieth century authors - often a tedious necessity.¹² A 1918 diary entry, written while Bennett was working for Beaverbrook's Ministry for Information (for free) reads: 'I have now abandoned literature until either I am chucked out of the job or the job ends or I am called to a better one. But I do journalism and a damned nuisance it is. Two articles this week. Three next week.'¹³ What this rather irritable comment doesn't mention, however, is the enormous influence, particularly his *Daily News* articles were then

enjoying with the political establishment. In February 1918, three months before the ‘damned nuisance’ comment, he had recorded that his *Daily News* article on a policy for the Liberal Party had made a ‘deep impression’ on the Chief Whip, who had said of it: “show it to Asquith”. Majestic and impressive phrase, “Show it to Asquith”¹⁴ But above all, journalism provided him with direct access to the reading public. Bennett’s journalism can be seen as a prism through which to view and understand the rapidly evolving marketplace for journalism in the early twentieth century from the rise of the popular press to the death of the Victorian ‘man of letters’. It can also be read as a critical commentary to his fiction and, because of the large quantities of biographical details it contains, as a kind of memoir for a man who famously failed to provide us with a formal autobiography. This chapter will attempt to draw out some of these complex threads and will use as a structuring tool Bennett’s relationship, both professional and personal with the two most influential figures in early twentieth century journalism, the press barons Northcliffe and Beaverbrook.

A Man for all Genres

Through his contributions to magazines and newspapers Arnold Bennett both reflected and influenced early twentieth century culture in significant ways. John Shapcott has described how the *Evening Standard* columns ‘set the cultural agenda of the late 1920s in an authoritative, stylish and accessible format that has never subsequently been equalled in the pages of a popular newspaper.’¹⁵ Bennett’s wartime contributions to the *Daily News* stand as the finest and most clearly articulated expression of British liberalism during those turbulent years. With an almost unique clarity he saw through the fog of wartime propaganda, opposing conscription, criticising what he saw as the brutal treatment of the common soldier by the officer class, supporting striking workers and calling for better pay for the fighting men. With

eerie prescience he predicted the social unrest and bitterness of the returning soldiers after the war: 'Nothing is more certain than that after the war whole regiments of men, women and children will be made desolate by the ingratitude of a saved nation' (*Daily News*, 7 January 1915).

His series of contributions to the New York *Metropolitan Magazine* in 1913 represent a careful crafting of his public persona for a large and lucrative market he was in the process of breaking into. In these articles a diffident, candid and slightly accident-prone persona emerges. There is the young boy who secretly ordered French novels under the nose of his parents, almost getting caught out in these 'secret contracts with French thought and manners' when a bookseller disobeyed his instructions not to deliver the forbidden volumes to his home (*Metropolitan Magazine* January 1913 p. 12). Then there is the wide-eyed Parisian adventurer who, alone in an apartment and hearing Verdi being played through the walls in a neighbouring apartment, both extremely close yet at the same time separated by the vast psychological distance cities create, realises the nature of urban isolation. 'Some interior, some existence of an infinite, monotonous sadness was just at hand and yet hidden away from me, inviolate...The secret life of cities is a matter for endless brooding' (14). In these thoughts, obtained during his years in Paris in the early 1900s (according to the 1913 article) we can see, as well as the writerly persona created for his American public, the emergence of ideas that would inform the imagination of this very urban novelist.

Yet another series of articles, this time in the popular Northcliffe-owned *Evening News*, and written in 1907 while he was still emerging as an author present a subtly different persona. This time he is the erudite yet down-to-earth guide to the readers of a popular paper who want to better themselves, and furnish their newly acquired suburban homes with books, yet who don't know where to start. The series, 'An ideal library for £20.00', first reassures readers on the rightness of their literary taste:

I have heard say by some enthusiastic, half-apologetic reader of a book “It may not be good from a literary point of view but I thoroughly enjoyed it.” No need to apologise. There is no literary point of view – in the sense that you mean. There is only the “thoroughly enjoyed” point of view....It is people such as you who make a book a classic, not examiners in universities¹⁶

The second article then gently removes the fear his readers might have of showing their lack of funds in buying cheap editions. He lets the reader know he or she is one of the millions of newly literate people all wanting to better themselves and metaphorically takes the reader by the hand, deliberately using ‘us’: ‘Let us now go out and look at books. A vast crowd, millions of people, are thronging to the Fair of Cheap Editions. Let us therefore join them.’¹⁷ The third article offers practical advice on how to find the best cheap edition, and to test it by opening it at any page to see if it lies flat. Having been the generous-minded friend, the reassuring guide, Bennett can’t then resist in also establishing himself as the rather romantic literary adventurer, a kind of latter-day H. M. Stanley or G. W. Steevens who has seen horizons far wider than his readers:

Though it is not exactly cheap according to the latest notions, better value cannot be obtained than the lambskin binding at a florin. I have carried Temple Classics in my pocket into the Sahara Desert, and they have withstood ocean tempests much better than I¹⁸

It is hard – impossible even – to describe, analyse and categorise such a vast and diverse body of work in one chapter. But even reading just a small fraction, three things become abundantly clear. Firstly, all of it, even that which he wrote for the more lowbrow publications, is exquisitely crafted: Bennett never underestimated or patronised his readers. This marks him out from fellow literary writers who developed an abhorrence of the popular

press (and by extension its readers) as it grew from an interesting novelty to what they saw as a standards-lowering behemoth.¹⁹ One only needs to compare the engaging, carefully structured ‘Savoir-Faire Papers’ Bennett wrote for the popular *T.P.’s Weekly* in the early 1900s with Joseph Conrad’s appalled, violent reaction to being associated with that same journal when money worries forced him to accept an offer of serialisation of *Nostromo* in it. Bennett’s January 1903 ‘Savoir-Faire’ article on ‘The Modern Woman’ for example, begins disarmingly with his apparently taking sides with fellow clubmen on the bewildering experience of a modern woman taking him out to lunch – not only paying the bill, but smoking too: ‘When luncheon was over and my hostess had called for the bill, paid it and ordered coffee in the smoking room...’ By the end however, Bennett has turned the tables on his prejudiced, stuck-in-the-mud old-fashioned readers: ‘In 1903 a woman expects you to believe that she has brains, and to prove that belief in your speech, And she is a thousand times right.’²⁰ Conrad, by contrast, on being congratulated by the art critic Charles Lewis Hind on his *T.P.’s* serialisation, tried to throw that ‘unfortunate’ man down the stairs at one of Ford Madox Ford’s parties: ‘...then I was aware that Conrad had a hold of Lewis Hind’s tie and was dragging him towards the door that gave on to the corkscrew staircase. If he had thrown Hind down it the poor man would have been killed.’²¹

Secondly: he was a writer who understood his market perfectly, altering complexity and nuance according to which publication he wrote for. As such he was a consummate ‘professional man of letters’, one of the finest of the breed, even as seismic changes in the literary marketplace were already slowly killing him off.²² Thirdly, no matter which publication he wrote for, from the downmarket Northcliffe-owned *Sunday Pictorial* to the highbrow liberal *Daily News* his journalism never compromised his politics or personal philosophy: indeed in many cases it more clearly enunciated his deeply held views about inequality and social justice than his novels do. While the novels highlight a wide range of

social issues, many of them highly contested at the time, such as sexual mores during wartime (*The Pretty Lady*, 1918) and sexual hypocrisy and the plight of the intelligent, educated woman (*Hilda Lessways*, 1911), Bennett's direction to the reader can be at times opaque.²³ But the words in his 1915 article 'The Sexes After the War' could scarcely be clearer: '...the struggle between men and women will be concluded in favour of women, and we shall be wondering why so many people made such a dreadful fuss about so simple a matter of plain justice'.²⁴

Northcliffe: 'the most startling phenomenon of the age'²⁵

Arnold Bennett embarked upon his London journalistic career at a time of profound and transformative change in the British newspaper industry. While he was working at *Woman* magazine, an ambitious Irish lawyer, Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe), launched a new daily morning paper priced at one halfpenny and aimed at the vast and newly literate 'clerk' class which had had neither the time, nor the education, nor the money to buy or read a newspaper like the *Times* or *Daily Telegraph*. The style, content, circulation and readership of the morning daily press underwent a revolution in just a few decades so that by the interwar years, morning papers were unrecognisable from those of the late Victorian era which were 'suitable only for those who could retire to their clubs at four o'clock and spend two or three hours digesting' them.²⁶ The launch of the *Daily Mail* started a huge rise in circulation, and proliferation of newspapers in Britain. In 1887, for example the *Daily Telegraph* claimed the largest circulation of any newspaper in the world, at close to 250,000 copies a day. By 1902 the *Daily Mail* was selling 1.2 million copies a day – what Harmsworth himself then felt was the 'limit of circulation'.²⁷ By 1914 even the *Observer*, which in 1905 had been selling between 2,000 and 4,000 copies a week, had reached the

200,000 mark. By 1918 the total circulation of the national dailies stood at over three million with the Northcliffe-owned *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, and the *Daily Express*, controlled by Beaverbrook since 1915, the market leaders.²⁸ Bolder typefaces, more sensational headlines, shorter sentences and shorter articles, the condensing of political speeches, greater emphasis on general news and entertainment articles, women's pages and features are all ways in which newspaper content changed, and continued to evolve in the twentieth century.²⁹

Bennett first set eyes on Alfred Harmsworth in the autumn of 1896, shortly after the successful launch of the *Daily Mail*. His observation, recorded in his *Journal*, reveals much about Bennett's position as a 'player' in the London journalistic scene:

Newnes and Harmsworth, chiefs of the two greatest 'popular' journalistic establishments in the kingdom, each controlling concerns which realise upwards of £100,000 net profit per annum, talking together...Harmsworth (director of 14 weeklies reaching 3,300,000 copies, and three daily papers) with the head of a poet and thinker; blond hair; quiet, acute, self-contained; a distinguished look about him. One would take him for a Saturday Reviewer or the editor of some *Yellow Book*. A young lion of the people-despising kind, a contemner of popular taste and of everything that caught the public fancy. Never did a man's appearance so belie his true character. He cannot be more than 30. He too had a pleasant, good natured face.³⁰

The careful enunciation of profits, circulation and numbers of titles in Harmsworth's possession are evidence of Bennett's interest in the business of which he was a small part, now editor of *Woman*. The 'pleasant, good natured face' belying the true character, juxtaposed with Bennett's views of Harmsworth as the opposite of the 'young lion of the people-despising kind' reveal much about Bennett's complex and contradictory ideas on the

influence of the popular press. Bennett's *Journals* reveal a cheerful interest in popular newspaper content (24 March 1908: 'Great fun reading the account of the 200-million franc *krach* by a financial swindler in all the papers today') combined with unease over unnecessary stories of private human suffering (22 May 1908: 'Continental *Daily Mail*... was full of its third anniversary and of the horrible agonies of a man in USA who died slowly of hydrophobia).³¹ This unease over the trivial obsessions of Harmsworth's newspapers is revealed in his reaction to seeing *Daily Mail* placards colourfully denouncing 'Vice in the Potteries' on his arrival back in England after a visit to France in December 1903. Although the articles in the *Daily Mail* on December 15 and December 21 are in response to the pulpit moralising of a Staffordshire vicar, Leonard Tyrwhitt, Bennett clearly felt the vicar should be ignored rather than publicised in a popular newspaper. Bennett wrote a rebuttal of the newspaper articles in a letter to the local Staffordshire paper the *Sentinel*: 'half England has been feasting upon the panorama of our alleged enormities... For my own part I regard the theory that the Potteries is ultra-vicious as unworthy of discussion.'³²

Gradually these ideas about the new popular press would coalesce into Bennett's 1909 play *What the Public Wants*, a – very thinly – veiled examination of a Northcliffe-like newspaper entrepreneur who cynically and hypocritically manipulates public prurience to make himself a vast fortune. In *What the Public Wants* Sir Charles Worgan is proprietor of a new popular paper, the *Mercury* 'written by errand boys for errand boys'.³³ Worgan is: 'Brusque. Accustomed to power. With rare flashes of humour and of charm... Strong frame. Decided gestures. Age 40.'³⁴ Worgan attracts the opprobrium of both his family and his fiancée by initially refusing to drop a scandalous article about his mother's friend's family in his scurrilous Sunday newspaper, the *Sunday Morning News*. As he tries to justify his decision he reveals himself as a hypocrite, banning the coverage of a celebrated divorce case in the *Mercury*, but running a salacious murder story in the *Sunday Morning News*:

I simply give our readers what they want. I'm not a guardian of public morals... If I go on the moral lay for a bit in the *Mercury* that's because I think the *Mercury* public want it. But the Sunday public want something else, and I give it them... circulation has gone up a couple of hundred thousand in four months³⁵

Worgan is by no means a black and white pantomime villain. His papers bring news of new books and theatrical productions to a section of society that had never read about culture before. Worgan saves a failing theatre with a sell-out production of the *Merchant of Venice*, bringing Shakespeare to the masses. The effete theatrical manager Holt St John, who would rather a play fail than see it achieve commercial success (his way of measuring artistic worth) is as bad as Worgan in underestimating the British public. However the play is a very early flag of warning over the implications of one man being able to control 'several hundred million copies' of newspapers, a theme that would be taken up with gusto by the intellectual establishment in the interwar years.³⁶ While Northcliffe/Worgan was only interested in selling papers and making a fortune, his influence, although regrettable, would be limited. When he started to want to dictate government policy, he would be downright dangerous. Bennett hints of this at the end of *What the Public Wants*. Worgan loses his lover, and his brother's respect but, like a force of nature now, he continues onwards: 'nobody can stop me from going ahead and I shall end in the House of Lords' – an uncannily accurate presaging of Northcliffe's (and also Beaverbrook's) elevation to the Lords and Government during the First World War.³⁷

As if confirming his fears over this new guardian of public opinion, the play received mixed reviews and consequently had a short run. Arnold Bennett complained of the 'cold, carping tone' of most of the reviews of *What the Public Wants* in his journal.³⁸ *The Times*, then owned by Northcliffe, was particularly spiteful, commenting:

It never rains but it pours. On stage it is just now pouring Newspaper Kings. Mr Fagan gave us one the other day. Mr Arnold Bennett gives us now another, and if there is a difference between them it is that ‘twixt Tweedledee and Tweedledum³⁹

In fact in a 1922 letter he describes the play as ‘my previous record failure’, in the context of his current play *The Love Match*, which was losing £100 a night.⁴⁰

It is hard, today, to overestimate Bennett’s courage in mounting such a clear attack on such a powerful figure. Not even Rupert Murdoch today controls such a concentration of newspapers and magazines, in the pre-multi media days, then the only access to public opinion available to writers. Letters written to Northcliffe by writers as prominent as the best-selling novelist Hall Caine as well as less successful freelancers reveal helpless resentment at the way their words are treated by the powerful proprietor and his sub-editors. Perhaps most pathetic is Twells Brex, a popular author and journalist who had written a regular full column on the leader page of the *Daily Mail* since the paper’s launch. In 1917, the column was cut in half to make way for more War news and to mark its curtailment, Brex wrote an article: ‘Mr Half Column Introduces Himself...Mr Whole Column, whom you have known in this page day after day for twenty-one years, will talk to you less often’.⁴¹ In a letter to Northcliffe, Brex complains at his effacement in favour of news and concludes: ‘you have no room now for the [humorous] sort that I have always done.’ The letter ends with a despairing realisation that his brand of writing cannot compete with sensational news articles.⁴² Another writer, John Foster Fraser wrote, in June 1911: ‘I would break my heart if my stuff were cut to ribbons and to paragraphs by sub-editors in the interests of space, it kills good work.’ His request for ‘one thousand words a night’ was met with a terse reply from Northcliffe who informed Fraser he was ‘staggered’ by the demand. Golfing writer Henry Leach, who had written twice the number of words Northcliffe required in a feature ‘Golf in Paris’ was told: ‘The article is too long and therefore in accordance with what usually happens in such cases,

has had to wait...I think we had better hold this article until the Spring' (the letter is dated 12 February 1912).⁴³ Both Leach and Fraser, as well as Bennett, would write 'op-eds' for the new *Sunday Pictorial* Northcliffe launched in 1915 but only Bennett was able, through Pinker, to dictate terms: 'He [Pinker] suggested me at £100, and said I was the greatest and most expensive star.'⁴⁴ Even best-selling author Hall Caine had battles with Northcliffe over space for his work, writing in 1908, when his star was on the wane: 'You cannot have meant to insult me by sending me the sub-editor's message to cut down an article out of which nobody living could remove a line without injuring it'.⁴⁵ Only a writer of the stature of Arnold Bennett appeared able to challenge the press baron's dictatorship of the written word. In his letters he rejects an invitation from Northcliffe in 1913 to write an article in the *Evening News*. He tells his agent J. B. Pinker: 'I haven't the time and my ideas would not perhaps rouse sympathy in his noble breast and even at one shilling a word it would not pay me.'⁴⁶ Bennett also rejected the request to write a short story for the Harmsworth-owned *London Magazine* as well as a pair of columns on the future of newspapers for £150, also for the *Evening News*.⁴⁷ During the First World War, especially towards the end, Bennett used his 'Observations' column in the *New Statesman* to take almost weekly pot-shots at 'Northcliffian...oxygenated headlines'. He attacks 'Harmsworth Hirelings' and the 'yellow press'; he accuses *The Times* (then owned by Northcliffe) of being either 'an organ of the Government or the Government is an organ of the *Times*.' Bennett disagreed with Northcliffe's pro-conscription stance as well as his attacks on the League of Nations, which Bennett supported, and which he accused Northcliffe of making 'violent and misleading attacks' on.⁴⁸ Like many writers, Bennett was now very uneasy at the way in which Northcliffe, through his newspapers, appeared to be able to dictate the policy of a democratically elected government. However while many writers, particularly those on the Left, would conjoin Rothermere (who took over his brother's news empire in 1922 after

Northcliffe's death) and Beaverbrook as a dual target (W. H. Auden's 'Beethameer, Beethameer, bully of Britain/ With your face as fat as a farmer's bum' is a good example), Bennett was loyal to Beaverbrook, his new friend, patron and travelling companion until the end.⁴⁹

Beaverbrook, the 'loveable peer'⁵⁰

In the mid 1920s Beaverbrook, now owner of the *Daily* and *Sunday Express* and the *Evening Standard*, which he was quickly transforming from a minor London paper to one with enormous literary clout, was a fascinating, magnetic social figure. He had a wide circle of literary friends including Bennett, Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells and George Moore and an even wider circle of other influential acquaintances including Bertrand Russell, the Aga Khan, John Middleton Murry and Lloyd George who drank and partied at his London residence, Stornoway House.⁵¹ Bennett and Beaverbrook had become friends after Beaverbrook hired him to work for his Ministry of Information during the war and Bennett began writing articles for the *Daily Express* after negotiating with Beaverbrook and *Express* editor Beverley Baxter while on a train from Paris to Madrid. He gleefully conveyed news of his successful negotiations to Dorothy Cheston from Madrid: 'I said I would write four articles for the *Express* – Baxter stuck out for five, and yesterday Max [Beaverbrook] in the train said he would like six. My child, I struck.'⁵²

Beaverbrook exercised control over contemporary writers by offering patronage, serialising their novels and short stories in his newspapers as well as commissioning articles. By paying generously both for fiction and journalism, he operated as a financial gatekeeper at a time when most writers still earned more from journalism than fiction.⁵³ Crucially too, he provided them with access to millions of his newspaper readers. Margery Allingham, E. H. Young and H. G. Wells were given space in the *Daily Express* and Harold Nicolson, George Bernard

Shaw, Viola Tree, Arnold Bennett, George Moore, Horace Vachell and others in the *Evening Standard*. Another writer, whom Beaverbrook patronised (but whose novel he later refused to serialise), William Gerhardie, describes his patron's magnetism in his memoirs: 'The man at once attracted me irresistibly. He was irresistible. His force and charm were irresistible'.⁵⁴ The 'lovable peer', wrote Gerhardie in 1930, 'has inspired all the novelists of his day to create newspaper proprietors in his image'.⁵⁵ This may have been a slight exaggeration, but, as well as Gerhardie's *Doom* (1928) in which 'Lord Ottercove' is vaporised in an atomic reaction at the end of the world, Arnold Bennett's complex portrayal of *Lord Raingo* (1926) and H. G. Wells' Sir Bussy Woodcock in *The Autocracy of Mr Parham* (1930) are certainly at least partly inspired by Beaverbrook.⁵⁶

In *Lord Raingo*, Sam Raingo, like Beaverbrook, is a millionaire and failed MP who is ennobled so he can work for the wartime Government, in the novel as Minister for Records, in charge of newspaper propaganda. Raingo's relationship with newspapers is not as clear-cut as Beaverbrook's was (although Beaverbrook did not assume direct control of the *Daily Express* until late in the war and he did not acquire the *Evening Standard* until 1923).⁵⁷ Sam Raingo had 'bought and sold' a daily paper over the head of its editor; he 'had the knack of winning over journalists; he always had it – was born with it,' a characteristic of Beaverbrook who attracted the finest journalists in Fleet Street to his papers.⁵⁸ Although Sam Raingo could be ruthless and hypocritical, he could also be very generous, as seen in his treatment of the shabby and unfortunately pregnant Mrs Blacklow. Raingo's combination of self-confessed '*folie de grandeur*', insecurity and isolation in the face of the aristocratic establishment into which he has been catapulted is treated with a broad measure of sympathy.⁵⁹ The novel raises the intensely problematic issue of Minister Raingo's bullying of newspapers, as Lloyd George's government had, with the help of Beaverbrook, during the War. Raingo admits he 'debauched' one newspaper by forcing it to print an article on French Anglophobia to

increase a sense of British outraged patriotism.⁶⁰ The severe implications of a Government having ‘nobbled the working journalists...and even the editors’ are not fully explored however, even though by 1925-6, when Bennett was writing the novel the unhealthy relationship between press and power during the War had been a major topic of intellectual concern for several years.⁶¹ This could be partly because Bennett, as Director of British Propaganda in France played his own part in cajoling newspapers and journalists to do his bidding.⁶² During the time of researching and writing *Raingo*, Beaverbrook, like Northcliffe before him, was attempting to use the political influence of his newspapers to challenge the democratically elected government of the time. In 1924 Stanley Baldwin had bitterly complained of his treatment at the hands of Beaverbrook and Rothermere who had joined forces in buying up and controlling newspapers following the death of Sir Edward Hulton who had owned several national and provincial newspapers.⁶³ A contemporary political commentator, James Margach describes Rothermere and Beaverbrook as ‘drunk with power...Beaverbrook and Rothermere really did believe that they were more powerful than the elected Baldwin.’⁶⁴ Bennett is mute on this subject in his *Journals* apart from an oblique reference in 1927 to Beaverbrook’s ‘marvellous narrative’ in the rise of Baldwin, which Beaverbrook told Bennett for a political article Bennett was writing.⁶⁵

The question then arises: why did Bennett, so dismissive and critical of Northcliffe, and so opposed to plutocratic challenges to democracy, like and admire – and forgive – Beaverbrook so much? They certainly had much in common. Both Bennett and Beaverbrook had risen from humble origins: both had started their professional lives as clerks in a lawyer’s office.⁶⁶ Both suffered from various gastric ailments, which they discussed over simple lunches.⁶⁷ Margaret Drabble’s biography of Bennett describes how both men were fascinated by each other, and fed off each other’s intellect.⁶⁸ Beaverbrook’s subtly different approach to newspaper proprietorship also provides an explanation. While Northcliffe at one time owned

seven London newspapers including the *Daily Mail*, *Times*, *Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Pictorial*, *Evening News* and *Sunday Dispatch*, as well as dozens of provincial papers, Beaverbrook contented himself with the *Daily* and *Sunday Express* and the *Evening Standard*. While the *Express* newspapers were unashamedly populist – Bennett himself had written on ‘footling subjects’ in the *Express*, the *Evening Standard* was different.⁶⁹ When Beaverbrook bought the *Standard*, Bennett wrote to him suggesting ways to improve it:

I should have that whole paper well written...Books, pictures, theatres and music are none of them well done at present. There is a great interest in springing up in architecture, but I don't know any London paper that attempts to touch it⁷⁰

It appears that Beaverbrook listened to his erudite friend (although he did not hire an architectural correspondent). An analysis of arts and culture coverage in the *Evening Standard* before Beaverbrook bought it reveals that, on average, the newspaper devoted 10 – 11 columns a week to book and theatre reviews, a film column and a very rare column on visual art. Some of the coverage was downright philistine (‘Bolshie Art at Tate Gallery’ 5 April 1923) and much of the theatrical coverage was little more than a vehicle to carry photographs of young starlets, the regular ‘Theatre Gossip of the Week’ column. By 1925, arts and culture coverage had increased to 16 columns a week and subjects expanded to classical and popular music and travel. Page seven became dedicated to cultural and philosophical discussions on art, science and religion (‘Pirandello: A Very Modern Dramatist’ 7 April 1925; ‘The Public and Improper Plays’ by George Bernard Shaw, 16 April, 1925). The important leader column tackled cultural topics too such as ‘The Best Authors’ (14 April 1925) and, on 16 April 1925 the leader was devoted to the death of the artist John Singer Sargent. By 1926, the year Bennett began his regular column, the paper was covering such esoteric subjects as Japanese film (6 April 1926), the composer Weber (8 April 1926), a discussion of art and music under the headline ‘What is Beauty?’ (5 April

1926), Jacob Epstein's Strand sculptures (9 April 1926) and now carried a regular serial story. Columns devoted to arts and culture now averaged 28 a week with the prominent page three dedicated to discussions on the arts often by established writers.⁷¹ This expansion of arts and culture coverage in a popular newspaper went against the usual trend, which was of arts and books reviews being squeezed either for advertisements or for increasingly sensational news stories.⁷² The paper also employed several prominent women journalists, still a rarity on Fleet Street at the time, including Stella Gibbons, who would later write the sublimely comic novel *Cold Comfort Farm* and the actress and writer Viola Tree who regularly contributed to the arts coverage on page three. In 1923 the *Evening Standard* carried the first newspaper article written by a female correspondent reporting on proceedings from the House of Lords. That correspondent, Edith Shackleton, would briefly take over Bennett's 'Books and Persons' column after his death, at Bennett's recommendation.⁷³ In effect, then, in his newspaper, Beaverbrook was doing what Bennett had tried to do all his professional life: expand the intellectual and cultural horizons of the 'middlebrow' reading public, without either 'talking down' to them, or scaring them off. Bennett's influential books column – for which Beaverbrook had guaranteed Bennett total editorial freedom - can be seen as the apogee of this achievement.⁷⁴

Bennett's differing attitudes towards the two greatest Press Barons of the early twentieth century, then, can be seen as reflecting the seismic changes in British newspapers that were being wrought during the first three decades of the twentieth century. These attitudes concern the rise of the popular press, the political interference of Press Barons and their conduct during the War. While Bennett disapproved of Northcliffe's strategy of 'giving the public what it wants' his friendship and influence with Beaverbrook appeared to reap rewards on the *Evening Standard* at least. The echoes of that great battle, between a race to the bottom for readers, and genuine attempts to raise their sights can still be heard today.

- ¹ Bennett, Arnold, 'Too Fond of the Dark?' *Sunday Pictorial* 3 April 1927.
- ² Bennett's literary journalism, particularly his two 'Books and Persons' columns has now received critical attention. John Shapcott has analysed Bennett's interwar contribution to literary criticism in his *Evening Standard* columns in 'Aesthetics for Everyman: Arnold Bennett's *Evening Standard* Columns' in Erica Brown and Mary Grover (eds) *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows 1920 – 1960*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 pp. 82 – 97. Anthony Patterson has done some work on the earlier *New Age* columns (1908 – 1911) in 'Books, Persons and Censorships: Bennett's Defence of the Sacred Cause of Literature' in John Shapcott (ed) *An Arnold Bennett Companion: A Twenty-First Century Perspective*, Leek: Churnet Valley Books, 2015.
- ³ Elliot King and Jane Chapman, *Key Readings in Journalism*, London: Routledge, 2012 p. 5.
- ⁴ This quote is taken from Jean Chalaby's *The Invention of Journalism*, London: Macmillan, 1998, which traces the evolution of journalism from Victorian political discourse to news as a commodity.
- ⁵ Quoted in Pound, Reginald, *Arnold Bennett*, London: Heinemann, 1952 p. 96.
- ⁶ Lonsdale, *The Journalist in British Fiction and Film: Guarding the Guardians from 1900 to the Present*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016 p. 21; J. M. Barrie began his career on the *Nottingham Journal*, immortalised as the *Silchester Mirror* in his novel *When a Man's Single* (1888).
- ⁷ Reginald Pound is very good on the difficulties Arnold Bennett had managing his household on his income. He was generous and extravagant and for the last few years of his life was plagued with worry that he would not be able to leave Dorothy Cheston Bennett, and his daughter, Virginia with enough money to live on.
- ⁸ Bennett, Arnold (ed Newman Flower) *The Journals of Arnold Bennett, vol II* (1911-1921), London: Cassell and Company, 1932 p. 56. Henceforth referred to as *Journals*.
- ⁹ Pound, Reginald, Arnold Bennett, p. 193; *Journals*, vol II p. 125.
- ¹⁰ Arnold Bennett letter to Eric Pinker (quoted in Pound, Reginald, *Arnold Bennett* p. 322).
- ¹¹ A comprehensive analysis of interwar freelance payment rates is found in *The Woman Journalist*, the journal of the Society of Women Journalists, May 1927.
- ¹² For the often agonised relationship early twentieth century novelists had with their journalism see Lonsdale, Sarah, *The Journalist in British Fiction and Film: Guarding the Guardians from 1900 to the Present*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- ¹³ *Journals* Vol II p. 231 (14 May 1918).
- ¹⁴ *Journals* Vol II p. 220 (8 February 1918).
- ¹⁵ John Shapcott, 'Aesthetics for Everyman' p. 83.
- ¹⁶ *Evening News* 9 July 1907 p.2.
- ¹⁷ *Evening News* 12 July 1907 p. 2.
- ¹⁸ *Evening News* 16 July 1907 p. 2. We have Nicholas Redman to thank for piecing together Bennett's understudied trip to Algeria, which included venturing deep into the Sahara Desert, in 1903 before he settled in Paris. 'Bennett in Algeria', *Arnold Bennett Society Newsletter*, 4/18, Winter 2011-12, pp. 10-23.
- ¹⁹ See for example Carey, John, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Amongst the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1938*, Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1992; LeMahieu, D. L., *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.
- ²⁰ 'Savoir Faire Papers', *T. P.'s Weekly* 2 January 1903 p. 243.
- ²¹ The incident is related in Ford Madox Ford, *Return to Yesterday*, Manchester, Carcanet, 1999 pp. 25 – 26, 175).
- ²² The date of the 'death' of the Man of Letters has been put at somewhere between 1939 and 1969 although the death throes were long and lingering (see Gross, John, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: English Literary Life Since 1800*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).
- ²³ As well as foregrounding sexual mores during the First World War, *The Pretty Lady* comments obliquely on the plight of an underclass, barely seen or noticed by others, but the backbone upon which society rests. Kinley Roby highlights a passage in *The Pretty Lady* when 'a horrible, pallid, weak, cringing man' who apparently lives underground in fashionable St James, emerges into a bootmaker's, polishes Hoape's shoes and then vanishes underground again (Kinley Robey, 'Bennett's Social Conscience' in *Modern Fiction Studies* 17 (4), Winter 1971 p. 521.
- ²⁴ *Sunday Pictorial*, 14 March, 1915. Kinley Roby has examined what he describes as Bennett's failure to ram home social comment in his novels and calls it a product of 'his determination to remain the objective recorder of life' (Roby, Kinley, 'Arnold Bennett's Social Conscience' pp. 513 – 524.
- ²⁵ Francis Worgan to his brother, Sir Charles, newspaper magnate in *What the Public Wants* (1909), Elibron Classics, 2006, p.19.
- ²⁶ Political and Economic Planning (PEP), *Report on the British Press* London: PEP, 1938, p. 93.
- ²⁷ 141.

- ²⁸ Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, 'The Structure, Ownership and Control of the Press, 1914 – 76' in George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate (eds), *Newspaper History: From the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, London: Constable, 1978, p. 130.
- ²⁹ For a thorough examination of the changes in early twentieth century newspaper content see, among others, Colin Seymour-Ure, 'Northcliffe's Legacy' in Colin Seymour-Ure, Mark Catterall and Smith (eds), *Northcliffe's Legacy: Aspects of the Popular Press 1896-1996*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000; Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain 1850 – 1950*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004; Jean Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998.
- ³⁰ Arnold Bennett *Journals*, vol I (1896 – 1910) p. 19.
- ³¹ Arnold Bennett *Journals* vol I p. 283 & 291.
- ³² Arnold Bennett, letter to the *Sentinel* 30 December, 1903 (quoted in Reginald Pound, *Arnold Bennett* pp. 145-146).
- ³³ Bennett, Arnold, *What the Public Wants* p. 37. This is a direct echo of Lord Salisbury's famous put down of the *Daily Mail* when it was first launched as being 'for office boys written by office boys' (Griffiths, Dennis, *Fleet Street* p. 131).
- ³⁴ Bennett, Arnold *What the Public Wants* p. 7.
- ³⁵ Bennett, Arnold, *What the Public Wants* pp. 108-109.
- ³⁶ Bennett, Arnold, *What the Public Wants* p. 119.
- ³⁷ Bennett, Arnold, *What the Public Wants* p. 141.
- ³⁸ Arnold Bennett, *Journals* vol II, p. 317.
- ³⁹ *Times*, 4 May 1909. By a curious coincidence the Irish playwright James Bernard Fagan had also produced a newspaper play, *The Earth* about the owner of a new popular newspaper in 1909. Fagan's play is more sinister than Bennett's, with the proprietor, Janion, attempting to use his newspapers to blackmail a Liberal MP.
- ⁴⁰ Letter to Hugh Walpole, 25 March 1922 (quoted in Pound, Reginald, *Arnold Bennett*, p. 286). The play toured the US in 1913 and in 1922 received a Broadway Premiere. It was most recently revived in 1913 in New York by the Mint Theater (<http://www.broadwayworld.com/off-broadway/article/Mint-Theatre-Presents-WHAT-THE-PUBLIC-WANTS-Closes-313-20110313> accessed 14 June 2016).
- ⁴¹ *Daily Mail*, 21 February 1917.
- ⁴² Twells Brex to Lord Northcliffe, 29 May 1918, Northcliffe Papers, British Library, Add 62220.
- ⁴³ Lord Northcliffe to Henry Leach, 12 February 1912, Northcliffe Papers, British Library, Add 62219.
- ⁴⁴ Arnold Bennett, *Journals* vol II p. 125.
- ⁴⁵ John Foster Fraser to Lord Northcliffe 14 May 1912; Hall Caine to Lord Northcliffe 8 May 1908, Northcliffe Papers, British Library, Add 62178. Hall Caine's great best-sellers had been published several years before: *The Christian* (1897) and *The Eternal City* (1901).
- ⁴⁶ Bennett, Arnold, *Letters* Vol I p. 195.
- ⁴⁷ Pound, Reginald, *Arnold Bennett*, p. 208 & 244.
- ⁴⁸ 'Sardonyx', 'Observations', *New Statesman* 25 May 1918; 16 March 1918; 27 April 1918.
- ⁴⁹ W. H. Auden *The English Auden* p. 86.
- ⁵⁰ This description of Beaverbrook is from fellow writer William Gerhardie's memoir (see note 55).
- ⁵¹ Dido Davies, *William Gerhardie*, Oxford: OUP, pp. 153 – 4; Kipling would later quarrel with his once great friend, after Beaverbrook started to use his papers to attack Kipling's cousin the Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin.
- ⁵² Letter to Dorothy Cheston, 9 April 1924 in Dorothy Cheston Bennett, *Arnold Bennett*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1935, p. 216.
- ⁵³ For a comparison of interwar writers' earnings from fiction and journalism see Sarah Lonsdale *The Journalist in British Fiction* pp. 93-94.
- ⁵⁴ William Gerhardie, *Memoirs of a Polyglot* (1931), London: Robin Clark (1990) p. 240.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid* p. 252.
- ⁵⁶ Rebecca West, who had interrupted her long-running affair with H. G. Wells to have a brief and unsatisfactory one with Beaverbrook also wrote a love-hate portrait of him in her suppressed novel *Sunflower* (1928). Bennett makes several references in his *Journals* to Beaverbrook helping him out over details in the novel. Beaverbrook also vetted the manuscript for political errors (*Journals* Vol III entry 11 November 1926 p. 108).
- ⁵⁷ Dennis Griffiths, *Fleet Street: Five Hundred Years of the Press*, London: British Library 2006 p. 212.
- ⁵⁸ Arnold Bennett, *Lord Raingo*, London: Cassell and Company, 1926, p. 76 & p. 103; Dennis Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, pp. 244 – 246.
- ⁵⁹ There is also much of Bennett's own dislike of War Office politicians in the portrait of Raingo. The incident in the novel when Sam comes under criticism from the 'War Office. Admiralty. F.O. War-Aims Committee.

God knows what all' (*Raingo* p. 234) mirrors an incident in which Bennett was censured by the War Cabinet for a pro-France article he had written for the *Observer* (*Journals* II p. 233).

⁶⁰ Arnold Bennett, *Lord Raingo* p. 226.

⁶¹ See for example Norman Angell's *The Press and the Organisation of Society* (1922), C. E. Montague's *Disenchantment* (1922) and H. G. Wells' *The Salvaging of Civilisation* (1921).

⁶² Peter Buitenhuis' *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda 1914-18 and After* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1989) suggests that *Raingo* is partly an attempt by Bennett to account for his role in wartime propaganda.

⁶³ Dennis Griffiths, *Fleet Street* pp. 210-211.

⁶⁴ James Margach, *The Abuse of Power*, London, W. H. Allen, 1979 p. 24.

⁶⁵ *Journals* vol III p. 234.

⁶⁶ Margaret Drabble, *Arnold Bennett* (1974); London: Futura, 1975 p. 232.

⁶⁷ See for example diary entry 1 March 1924 'He said he had been cured of his illnesses (whatever they were) by cutting off all fleshmeat and wine...at lunch he had nothing but an omelette *fines herbes*, boiled potatoes and carrots' *Journals* vol III p. 35.

⁶⁸ Margaret Drabble, *Arnold Bennett* p. 233, 237 & 350.

⁶⁹ Arnold Bennett, *Journals* Vol III 18 June 1926, p. 141.

⁷⁰ James Hepburn (ed), *Letters of Arnold Bennett III* 1916-1931, London: Oxford University Press pp. 203-4.

⁷¹ This analysis took the form of counting columns (but excluding news stories) on arts and culture during a two-week period in April for 1923, 1924, 1925 and 1926.

⁷² See *PEP Report on the British Press* (London: PEP: 1938) for surveys of newspaper content. There is an interesting fictionalised account of how Northcliffe approached arts coverage in Keble Howard's novel *Lord London* (1913) about 'Hannibal Quain' who took the London newspaper world by storm. In the novel Howard describes how Quain squeezed more advertising into his papers by 'keeping his literary matter, such as dramatic criticism and literary reviews down to the smallest possible limits' *Lord London* (1913); New York: McBride, Nast and Co., 1914, p. 234.

⁷³ Brenda Maddox, *George's Ghosts: A New Life of W. B. Yeats*, London: Picador, 1999, p. 316.

⁷⁴ John Shapcott, 'Aesthetics for Everyman: Arnold Bennett's *Evening Standard* Columns' p. 83.