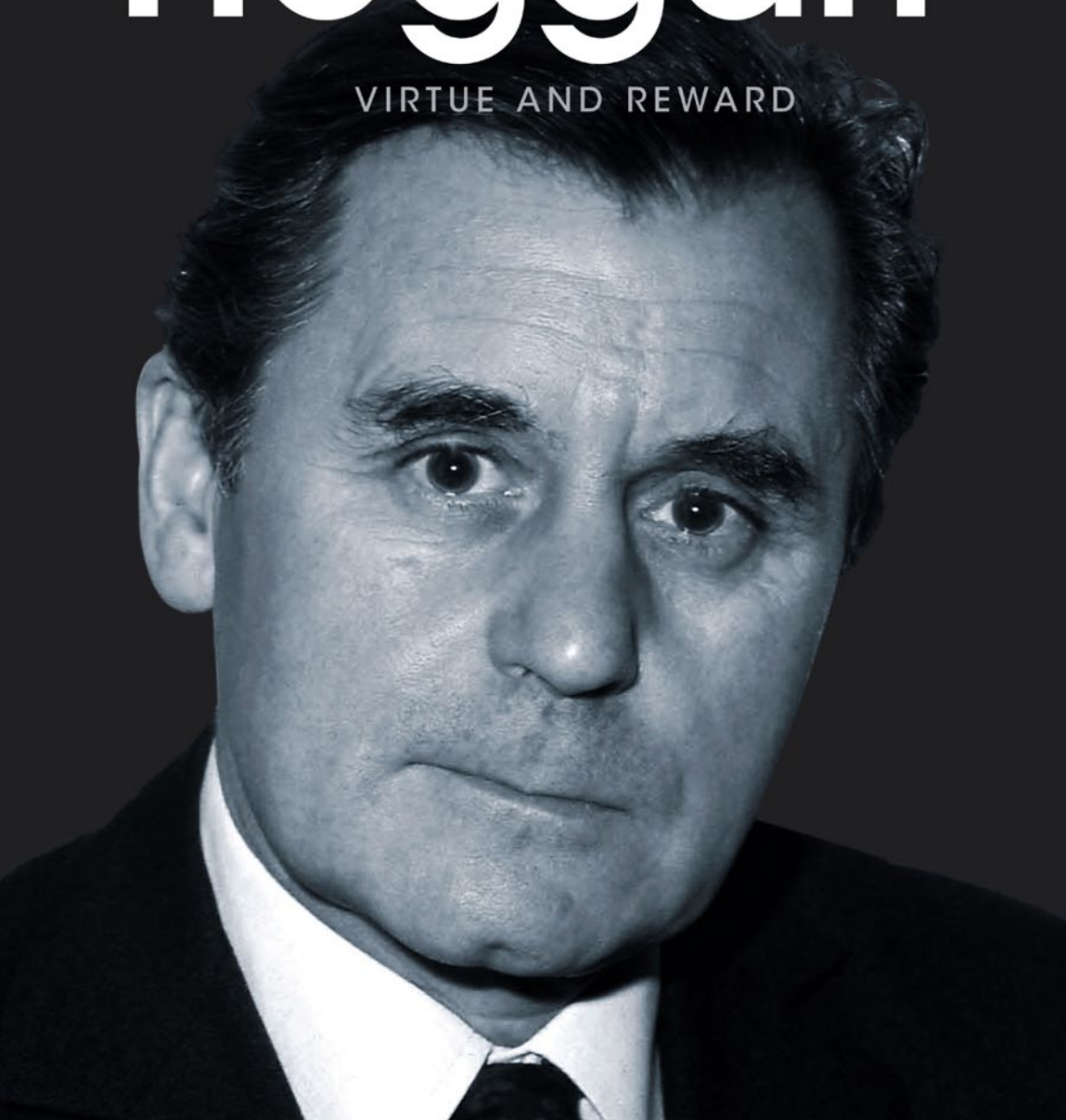


FRED INGLIS

# Richard Hoggart

VIRTUE AND REWARD





RICHARD HOGGART

To my grandchildren, Sasha, Harriet, Louisa, Kit, Millie and Daniel:  
users of literacy

RICHARD HOGGART

*Virtue and Reward*

FRED INGLIS

polity

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is usual and proper for a biography such as this only to be published after the subject's death. But as I write, Richard Hoggart, though naturally much reduced by time at the age of 94, is still here and, on occasions, able to reminisce with his faithful family, while for the author of his biography, who met his subject in 1969 and is turned 75, it's getting late, and it will be just as well to complete the thing while he can.

Since that date, visiting him once or twice every year, I have come to know Richard Hoggart fairly well and always to hold him in strong affection as well as awkward reverence. When, some ten years ago, I dedicated my *People's Witness: The Journalist in Modern Politics* to him, he was typically cordial and warmhearted in his approval and so, when in 2005 I wrote, with well-merited diffidence, to ask if I might be his biographer, it was a source of keen pride as well as pleasure when he sent back one of his rapidly written postcards saying simply, 'I can think of no one better.'<sup>1</sup>

I was at the time just beginning a biography of the philosopher R. G. Collingwood, later published by Princeton as *History Man*, and I conceived of a Hoggart biography as standing in an essential continuity of social thought. Research for the Collingwood biography had been handsomely supported by the Leverhulme Foundation, but by the time I resolved to begin the present book in 2010 the great crash had happened, and research funds for elderly biographers were much harder to come by.

In the event, there was to hand the ready and plentiful help provided by Hoggart's three children and their spouses: Simon, Paul and

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence now among the Hoggart Papers at the University of Sheffield.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

his wife Elizabeth, Nicola and her husband Richard; and, of course, by the incomparable archivist, Jackie Hodgson at the University of Sheffield, where the copious Hoggart papers were lodged after the University awarded him an Honorary Doctorate in 2000. These papers had been carefully retained by Hoggart all the way from his early school reports to personal notes and memoranda from his years as Warden of Goldsmiths.

Family help and the Sheffield archive apart, I am also grateful for generous help of many kinds from all of the following (one thing that struck me whenever I asked for such help was the warmth with which people expressed their interest, and the pleasure they felt that the man who had written what had been for them a life-changing book was to have that life celebrated in a biography).

So, my great gratitude once more to the Hoggart family, and to Deyola Adekunle for her help at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris; Lois Aitkenhead for consistent encouragement; Michael Bailey for the indispensable gift of his two collections of essays about my subject and for cordial letters; Richard Beck for useful criticism and his hospitality; Hilary Britland, as before, for her accomplishments with camera and keyboard; Dennis and Mary Butts, as so often, for critical reading and their plumbing science; James Curran, old friend, for his detailed information about his time at Goldsmiths while Hoggart was Warden; Andrew Davies, former colleague, for a helpful conversation about his screenplay for the 2006 BBC production of *The Chatterley Affair*; Stuart Hall for his reminiscences (a few years ago now) of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and Chelly Halsey for the same; Lord Peter Hennessey, for recollections of his long friendship with Richard Hoggart; the late David Holbrook for his familiarity with Hoggart's work; Eric Hoyle, for appreciative reading and knowledge of Potternewton; David Howe, for reminiscences of Leicester University when he was Hoggart's student; Jean Humphreys, though I have never met her, for her so very affecting two letters about Hoggart's autobiography; David Lodge, much-respected novelist, for his recollections of his time as colleague and longstanding friend of Hoggart's; Krishan Kumar, a dear friend since we first met at the 1969 CCCS potlatch, for many acute and sympathetic readings of Hoggart's work; Pat Loughrey, present Warden of Goldsmiths, for help with the history of his institution and his generous hospitality; Sue Owen, custodian of Hoggart's studies, for her invitation to me to present a paper at her Sheffield Conference in 2006, the first shaping of the present book (the last such occasion, I think, which Hoggart himself attended); Major David Ryan, for military-historical help

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

with the Pantelleria operation; Greg Sporton, prompt, caustic and loyal as always, sometime Head of Research at the Laban Institute, for his thorough account of Hoggart's complicated dealings with that recalcitrant body; Laurie Taylor, for encouragement and his blithe recollections of the Video Appeals Committee.

Lastly, this is a deliberately short biography. A convention has grown up over the last several decades whereby biographies swell to ponderous and very portly sizes. I have kept this book to the shape in which it may still be held easily and finished – for naturally I hope it will grip its readers tight – within a day or two. Accordingly, I have cut out minor details and extended reviews of each and every book in order to make it above all a good read, taking for granted that that is the best way to vivify and honour my great subject.

## PREFACE BY PAUL HOGGART

As I write this my parents, both aged 94, are living together in a care home near my house. Both suffer from advanced dementia. The loving father his three children have known all our lives remains, as does his sense of humour, for he still laughs happily if I tease him in the old way. Occasionally memories of his mother, grandmother or brother Tom well up and threaten to overwhelm him, but most of his working life has vanished in the fog of memory-loss.

This is particularly poignant because this generous, evocative and insightful biography is part of a recent revival of interest in his work, which has brought new books, conferences and appreciative assessments in radio and television documentaries of which Dad is only dimly aware. He listened with pleasure when I read him drafts of the early chapters, however, saying they created 'vivid pictures' in his mind. After decades when his ideas had become unfashionable, this rediscovery has been gratifying for his children. Our lives have been punctuated by approaches, often from complete strangers, eager to tell us how much his work meant to them. Dad himself has had countless letters to that effect.

*The Uses of Literacy*, it seems, has spoken to successive generations. In 1957 the bold assertion that the culture and values of working people needed to be understood on their own terms and merited serious analysis caught a changing national mood, but it was the story of the scholarship boy's conflicted transition from one social stratum to another which seems to have struck deeper personal chords.

As children we lived with that unfolding story, and it is fascinating to see it here through the eyes of a sympathetic, though not uncritical, chronicler. Shielded from the more vituperative attacks (I did not learn of the post Chatterley trial dog-mess through our letterbox

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until years later), our own lives became richer and more interesting as Dad's fame grew. Few small boys get to kick a ball about with the England football captain in their own back garden.

As a father he could not have been more devoted. In a typical example, when, in my mid-thirties I was in hospital for several weeks with cancer, he insisted on driving with my mother from Farnham to London to see me every single day. He would have done the same for any of us. We have always talked a lot. When I was a boy, he read me Dickens novels at bedtime. On family walks he would recount the plots of Victorian novels, and he never lost his belief in the enlightening power of literature. In the 1990s he astonished me by revealing that he felt a failure because he had never written fiction. 'I wanted to be the next Hardy or Lawrence', he said. After retirement, an Indian summer writing autobiographies and reflective social commentaries brought some compensation for that.

In my early teens we would go for evening walks around the suburbs of Birmingham. He would linger too long looking through front windows, fascinated by the furnishings and décor as I tugged anxiously at his sleeve. This unselfconsciousness sometimes made us cringe when he made amused 'sociological observations' about fellow diners in cafes and restaurants, barely lowering his voice.

In later life he would relieve the tensions of work with detailed accounts of battles with UNESCO bureaucrats or Senate House mandarins. He always seemed to feel a need to fight harder to compensate for his origins and his non-Oxbridge education. He remained unusually sensitive to slights and simply could not bear to feel he might be in the wrong. This could make him vehemently dogmatic at home and, I gather, at work. Doubtless due to his puritanical upbringing, arguments, whether about the cynicism of commercial culture or the status of Goldsmiths College, always had a fierce moral edge for Dad.

He was always driven. Long after retirement he was up by 6.00, putting in an hour or two before breakfast. After family supper he would retire to his study until bedtime, though his door was always open, and he liked us to wander in for a chat. On holidays with the extended family, he would sip wine on French terraces, reading and scribbling notes on scrap paper held on a battered old clip-board with rubber bands.

Even in his current confusion he remains utterly devoted to my mother. In his prime he was charismatic, witty and energetic. I once asked if any of the women he met had ever shown flirtatious interest. 'Not really', he laughed. 'I think I had an invisible *Keep Off the Grass!* sign.' He was indignant when a colleague's wife once accused

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him of having a patriarchal marriage. In fact he would have been happy for Mum to continue her wartime teaching career. She herself decided she should be at home with her children. Years later she told me that she had indeed feared patriarchal disapproval, not from Dad, but from her own father.

But Dad's punishing work ethic could blind him occasionally. After the move to UNESCO in 1970, Mum, recently bereaved of her mother, uprooted, with an 'empty nest' and feeling dowdy and overweight among the chic Parisiennes, teetered on the brink of serious depression. Dad, more embattled than ever, seemed oblivious. Then an unfocused and feckless student, I summoned my meagre reserves of moral courage and took him to task about it. 'I never discuss my marriage with anyone!' he told me tight-lipped. Gradually Dad relaxed, Mum recovered and they became as inseparable as ever.

I often wonder what would have happened if he had not left for Paris and a career as an administrator. Before he left Birmingham, *Cultural Studies* had begun its passionate affair with continental cultural theory, quite alien to his attitudes and instincts. Would he have become a 'fellow-traveller' and interpreter like Raymond Williams? Or angrily rejected it all like E. P. Thompson? Neither, I suspect, but I am sure of one thing: he would have insisted that the discipline remained accessibly engaged with public debates in a way that resonated clearly beyond academia.

His work has never been easy to categorize. Over the years he has been accused of being theoretically naive, patronizing, a Maoist (absurdly) and an elitist. But as these pages make clear, always at the core was a fierce belief that ordinary people should not be underestimated culturally or, in a favourite phrase, 'sold short'. That is as relevant today as it was in 1957.

Paul Hoggart



# PROLOGUE: THE CONDITION OF ENGLAND

## I

Richard Hoggart was born in 1918, a short time before the war to end all wars came to a brief stop before resuming, in China, Abyssinia, Spain and then the whole world, twenty years later. For a working life which stretched over seven decades, from the small jobs he took while still a schoolboy to the publication of his last book at the age of 86, it is fair to say that his preoccupation was never smaller than the condition of England.

The so-called 'condition of England' debate was initiated by assorted commentators, essayists and intellectuals towards the middle of the nineteenth century and remained in currency as token of an unresolvable altercation not only about English imperial might as opposed to national squalor, hideous inequality and gross philistinism, but also about that always elusive and collective formation, 'the English temper'. It was Matthew Arnold, perhaps the best-known, as well as with John Ruskin and William Morris, the best-equipped of those bold intelligences fluently ready to speak to the nation for the nation's good, who identified the dire cultural properties and emotional thicknesses which characterized the three social classes, 'Populace', 'Philistines' and 'Barbarians'. A century later Hoggart himself entitled one of his own books *An English Temper*.

Few things are less plausible or more exigent than generalizing about the state of a nation. It has to be done; it can't be done. Politicians must attempt the task in order to win over an electorate to their leadership and Party; they must aim to tell sufficient truths to the people about the people such that a majority believe themselves to be *recognized* for what they are and hope for, and feeling themselves

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recognized, extend recognition and support to the man or woman who names them so.

There again, this is also the artist's and the thinker's duty and purpose. The painter, supremely the landscape painter, paints a picture of the place he or she belongs to: its hills and houses, a view from a window, a bunch of flowers, a letterbox. The picture is a recognition looking for recognition in return, and it is a judgement. So, too, the composer. When Vaughan Williams adorns his theme from Thomas Tallis or summons the ghosts of Wenlock Edge, he gives musical body to the places and the hold they have on him, for better and worse. When D. H. Lawrence utters his memorable curse over the ugliness of the Nottinghamshire townscape as Lady Chatterley drives through it in 1928, his anger and detestation are the obverse of his longing that his country be a beautiful place to live and that the society which is settled there be as good as may be. Patriotism is the powerful emotion which takes the measure of the distance between how things are and how they ought to be. If the gap is wide, patriotism comes out as baffled rage and wretchedness; if the gap is narrow, patriotism issues as pride and admiration.

According to this rather partisan view, all art is an essay in home-making, and every narrative an attempt to imagine the finest life one can think of. So a novel or a biography or a movie, even one picturing lives of quiet desperation or shocking ugliness, should be written in such a way as to check what it tells against the best way of life the author might fashion for the people in the tale.

These imperatives are all the stronger for those writers turning to the very facts of life in front of them, and arranging them for the readers' benefit as both recognition and representation of how things really are or were in the society to hand. At this point a writer such as Richard Hoggart is working very close to the novelists, but what he says must not be fiction; his truths are harder to fix and tell, for he cannot reply to his critics by saying, 'this is how life *might* be represented', for they will retort, quite rightly, 'But you said you would tell us how life truly was and *is*.' Hoggart stands in a great tradition of English, Scots, Welsh and Irish social commentary and representation, peopled by those already mentioned – Ruskin, Morris, Arnold and dozens more, among the throng such honoured names as John Stuart Mill, William Cobbett, Friedrich Engels, George Eliot, Robin Collingwood, Beatrice Webb, Edwin Muir, R. H. Tawney, George Orwell, F. R. Leavis, let alone Hoggart's great contemporaries E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams.

I let drop this little shower of names briefly to recall the truism



that a book such as this, a biography of a splendid man, can only take shape within the frame of a tradition, a concept which needs constantly to be wrestled out of the hands of the political Right and returned to our common intellectual vocabulary, as designating the necessary formations of our every waking thought and feeling. Without a tradition, without, that is, a mobile but holistic ambience of ways of thought, modes of speech, forms of argument, a characteristic idiom *and* a shelf of classic texts by venerable ancestors, no one can think, write or even perceive what there is to see and interpret.

Reporting the world of homemaking and homewrecking is therefore no slight matter, quite apart from its being the civic duty of us all. Of course, it is the daily stock-in-trade of the middle pages of the once broadsheet newspapers and even today, for the rapidly diminishing numbers of their readers, opinionators report, as calmly as they can in the hothouse hysteria of the struggle for circulation sales, on the imminent end of British civilization set against a sky darkened by the storms of climate change, currency collapses and the smoke of war. A life spent, between 1918 and the present, looking for truths about the condition of England, of Britain, of the world itself, and setting down the truths in twenty or so books, takes more than sheer nerve to sustain. It takes extraordinary resolution, coolness and poise also, let alone the hearty catchall, *experience*, which is to say the conscious and protracted transformation of mere eventuality into the passages of significant living and intelligible history.

Effecting that transformation in a way that experience of such a kind as attracts the adjective ‘personal’ can then adequately stand for the condition of a nation requires all those formidable qualities I have named. But it also requires a particular intelligence, a gift amounting to genius for living forcefully in the actual present while separating that forceful life from another zone of the self where different emotions and the thoughts they direct sort, retain, describe and evaluate the facts, the acts of daily doing. If this turns out to mean that all such thinking, and the writing it may give rise to, is autobiographical, then that is no more than to say that history can only be grasped as a process of self-knowledge, but that this knowing of the self is a fractional discovery in a collective act. It was Hegel who, two hundred years ago and in exceptionally difficult, even tortured prose, first taught the lesson that only from our history can we find out what on earth is going on, so the making of that history had better be the product of the best that has been known and thought, and then retrieved and restated by the best individuals we can appoint.

To say so, so blithely and roundly, is to give that ‘we’ enormous

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force and simplicity. For it is obvious that ‘we’ quite fail to decide what is best about the past and who are the best people to have and to hold the best. The terrific cacophony of the argument about best and worst is what we call our politics. For all that ‘politics’ is a word from which, in the rich and self-regarding nations of the world, so many people recoil in ignorant revulsion, politics is only another name for the self-knowledge deposited like veins of energy in our history, which it needs to be our common pursuit to discharge as energy into the present.

## II

The whole point of this book is to nominate its subject as someone who has met the moral duty of the citizen to look out hard for the best parts of our history and has sought to make them tell in later generations. The subject being Hoggart, this is an easy claim to vindicate. His memorials in the social history of the twentieth century are many and, in Britain at least, as well as not least in the offices of the hopefully titled United Nations, where he spent a few years, prominent enough and often revisited.

The most accessible of the memorials are books, naturally, but it will be a main contention of the narrative which follows that the books cannot be understood as separate from the life. The textbook designation ‘life and work’ is only any good to us if we take the two as much more intimately imbricated than is usual. People are quick to pounce on biographers with the old injunction coined by D. H. Lawrence, ‘Never trust the teller, trust the tale.’ More technical objections are also made deploying the ‘intentional fallacy’<sup>1</sup> which rebukes those who look for explanations of what a writer meant by identifying his or her intentions and motives. That mischievous goblin of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, destroyed many careers by advising everybody that the thing simply could not be done.

R. G. Collingwood,<sup>2</sup> on the other hand, said firmly and, to my mind, rightly, that

... you cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In

<sup>1</sup> W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, ‘The Intentional Fallacy’, *Sewanee Review*, 54, 1946.

<sup>2</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938, pp. 28–9.

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order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer.

A person's thoughts over a lifetime, tabulated, as in Hoggart's works, in a long series of books aspire (this is true of all human beings in all their unwritten narratives) to the condition of art. That is to say, the thinker searches for the words which best express the thought he or she is trying to discover. That thought is only known at its best when the words deployed are right. We are all well aware of this, which is why we say, when the words are wrong, 'No, no, that's not what I mean.' Of course, the thinker, whether writing or speaking, may sometimes say, 'Oh, well, that'll have to do', but on such occasions there remains a dissatisfaction, a sense that truth itself has been disfigured, for the best thoughts demand, as a necessary condition of their discovery, the best and therefore most beautiful expression. Art speech is the only speech.

Every human being thinks. 'Thinker' is not a grand or exclusive term. Rodin's great statue might be of anyone. Human thought transpires from the individual's engagement with a subject or topic. Wallace Stevens describes the activity of thought at its highest pitch like this:

Three times the concentrated self takes hold, three times  
The thrice concentrated self, having possessed  
The object, grips it in savage scrutiny,  
Once to make captive, once to subjugate  
Or yield to subjugation, once to proclaim  
The meaning of the capture, this hard prize,  
Fully made, fully apparent, fully found.<sup>3</sup>

This *is* high-pitched but it is also everyday. Any serious person will recognize the descriptions of the effort of hard thought, the discipline of it and the quiet jubilation of the capture of the discovery when it is, however rarely, fully made, apparent, found. If little of our thoughts is so hard won, the struggle for such victories is common human endeavour whether the subject-and-object of thought is ordinary domestic life or the tungsten topics of physics or philosophy.

Wherever one's thoughtful attention is directed, towards the immovably commonplace or unfathomably profound, thought and feeling are inseparable. To say so is to flout the ancient principle

<sup>3</sup> Wallace Stevens, 'Credences of Summer' in *Collected Poems*, New York: Vintage Books, 1982, p. 376.

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that reason and emotion are forever at odds and clear, truthful and beautiful thought can only be attained by the exercise of pure reason, unpolled by the passions.

No one doubts that passion may prevent one's thinking clearly, but neither does anyone doubt that feelings shape the intrinsic lines and directions of thought. These bromides take us to the heart of moral understanding, and their relevance just now is that for us to understand the stature and the significance of the thinker-about-society who is our great subject in this biography, we must learn from him to direct the right, the best feelings of which we are capable (and of which we are made the more capable by reading him, thinking and feeling through his words) towards the subject-matter he has chosen, and which has chosen him.

This little detour into what Adam Smith, 250 years ago, called 'a theory of the moral sentiments' returns us to the purpose of this prologue, placed as it is as a gateway to a life-history. That purpose, in this one modest enough volume, is to argue by example against some of the toughest conventions of contemporary intellectual life, especially those which counterpose subjective to objective, fact to value, quantitative to qualitative inquiry.

If I am right about the mutual shaping and intercalation of thought and feeling, the practice of all human inquiry simply cannot purport the separation of subject from object, the effortful putting down of what is called the 'personal' in order to treat things-out-there as if they were detached from human interests.<sup>4</sup> Language itself won't permit it. Even science, in its long, successful endeavour to master the natural world and its cosmic enormousness, selects the facts according to its humanly ordered values. (The fact, for instance, that phenomena may be lethal to humans is hardly independent of the value of remaining alive.)

For our immediate purposes, now and as is more motivated by courtesy than philosophical rigour, let us accept the conventional distinction as between the natural and the human sciences. Then let us say that in our inquiries into human quiddity and its always *historical* making, we seek to summon up and shape those feelings which most

<sup>4</sup> Here I gesture towards an extensive critique in the human sciences conducted over the past half-century, the ambitions of which have been precisely to oppose the antinomies I have named between subjective and objective and so forth. See as a beginning, Richard Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978; Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972.

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conduce to the right kinds of interpretation and judgement of the subject-matter before us.

This is not a matter of piously arranging feelings in a mush of amiability. Right feeling, as we shall see in Hoggart's case, may at times certainly start from anger – the anger of a generous-hearted man at the way people disgrace themselves, and defile their own humanity. Right feeling is a product of moral sympathy which is in turn a function of a strong imagination. (These complex movements of mind, body and spirit are very difficult to arrange in a causal order; that is no reason for not naming them, or not using the words as readily as we do in normal conversation.) As a common principle of inquiry into any human dealings, whether the day-to-day business of, on a grand scale, politics, or the day-to-day business of a school or a hospital, a bank or a department store, we learn from example (Hoggart the example to hand), as well as by bringing to the inquiry our own best self, how judicious objectivity and loving kindness (harsh if it has to be) become synonymous. When this happens, keen moral sympathy dissolves into historical understanding.

So a brief opening attempt at an essay on the condition of England is as comparative as, indeed, this whole book is to be. Comparativism is a working method. It jolts or disconcerts us into seeing how things might be otherwise than as they are. It forces on our attention 'how other people's creations can be so utterly their own and so deeply part of us'.<sup>5</sup> There is always the danger that George Santayana pointed out when he said that people compare when they can't get to the root of the matter. But if the root of the matter is made visible then comparison brings into relief the different particularities of each side of what is being compared. Then one can see the sharp, living particularity of each, and what each is worth.

In the study of a life's work, one is comparing how things were with how things are. One is making the very idea of 'progress' work for its living. One is also comparing the person – this writer, this thinker – with how he was and how he appears decades later. With that, we arrive at full justification of biographical writing. A biography, insofar as it is any good (and an unhappy consequence of the happy fact that biography is so thriving a genre is that lots of biographies are awful) dramatizes a life and in doing so actualizes a period of history, or rather, that sliver of history illuminated by that single life. With the much-to-be-welcomed demise of Grand Theories of both

<sup>5</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, New York: Basic Books, 1983, p. 54.

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historical movement (Marxism, neoliberalism, postmodernism) and of intellectual method (structuralism, discourse theory, imperializing psychoanalysis, postcolonialism) the small tenacious form of biography proves as good a way as any of grasping fragments of the times.

### III

Hoggart's life-work was, like that of all great writers, to live, with his kind of vitality and vigour alongside his careful detachment, in the main currents of the historical river. Only by so doing could he find the direction of change, feel its earlier origins, judge it for temperature, volume, for the sheer variety of the waters which composed the flood of time, their thickness, thinness, saltiness and taste. He elected to do this not as novelist but as man of action.

This is rare in British life. American, or Russian, or French political history all have notable figures who were both prominent actors in their epoch as well as its intellectual commentators. The accidents and conventions of British history have tended to separate, as it were, executive from judicial agents. Hoggart brought them together and this placed on him the exceptional strain of being utterly true to the facts of cultural and political life in his writing and of maintaining full responsibility for his actions and decisions as these affected those facts of life. To take two of the most prominent moments of his career, in his strong influence on the Pilkington Committee and his brief, dramatic intervention in the Chatterley trial, he had to make the judgements he did swiftly and in collaboration with an unusual assortment of other people, and he had to be right.

This is to say that he had to have an unusually fine and acute response to the combined mysteries of common sentiment, of popular mood and meaning, of domestic practices and beliefs, all those commonplace oddities which we generalize as culture and which impel the surges and stagnations of a nation's life. Every op-ed journalist or television reporter makes, of necessity, a stab at such an evaluation any week of the year, but the results are rarely either accurate or percipient. They rest on vague notions of mood and impressions of the feelings they guess to be present in a motley succession of individuals the journalists themselves have spoken to or known about. If there is a crowd in the action, then that too will have its temperature taken on the evidence of its collective conduct, a few sudden episodes (violent for preference), its applause for a leader, its banners, T-shirts and heroes. In grosser instances, a journalist will make appeal to such

elusive quantities as ‘a sense of optimism’, ‘a feeling of wellbeing’, ‘a large proportion of pessimists among those I spoke to’ and wait to be vindicated by events.

This is not to deride such spokespeople. We need them to give some intelligible shape to the world’s news, and to reassure us that the present will lead controllably out of the past into the future. But even the most sensitive and percipient of television’s daily storytellers – the John Coles and Walter Cronkites of its great days – have to work from scraps and fragments of evidence while being at once tentative and firm.

This is a long way from the kind of thing Hoggart and the tradition in which he stood were attempting. Now to attempt, as I shall, to compare the huge fresco of working-class culture which he finished in 1957 with a hasty drypoint of the same colossal subject fifty-odd years later is to do no less than draw a moral horizon against which to set this book and the life-story it contains.

To say this is to take for granted that Hoggart’s most important book is *The Uses of Literacy*. For my purpose, I would rather say that it presages the shape and significance of the life. After all, its author wasn’t yet forty when the book came out; there was a lot of public life as well as published pages to come. Rather, the classic work indicates a strikingly consistent way of life, which is why I contend that the life *is* the work, the one only to be understood as the other. *The Uses of Literacy* teaches us to understand this paradox.

After all, Hoggart is perfectly plain about the necessary restrictions of his vision. In the first half of the book he is recreating the southern parts of working-class Leeds between 1925 and 1936, when he went to university. He then offers to connect these years with the continuities he detects as still alive and strong in 1957. As we shall see in detail in chapter 7, he was repudiating those aspects of his intellectual tradition which had moved against the moral and cultural continuities Hoggart himself so convinces us were still thriving as he wrote. He returned to the content of their culture what he knew and saw to be such strong parts of working-class life as its family solidarity, the great but living archetype of its matriarch, its ‘good table’ and the ‘tastiness’ of its tinned food (salmon, pineapple), the swell of feeling accompanying the songs at the club. He found not a brutal, lost proletariat but a thick-textured, active culture, carried by the old big words, for sure – solidarity, neighbourliness, community – but also by its jokes, its tiny gestures, its biking excursions and seaside outings, its downright bloodymindedness before the dreadful creepiness of status and snobbery.

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Without blinking at the nastier parts of working-class life, its sometime cruelties of men to women, their intermittent drunkenness, their physical cruelty, by playing down the political radicalism Hoggart reports as true only of a minority, noting the trivial sentimentality of much childcare and most ornaments, he reverses the downward inflection of so much of the social commentary he inherited.

At the halfway mark the book, famously, changes. ‘Unbending the springs of action’ tells us of the softening of old resilience and uncovers on the page a new literacy of reflex cynicism. Hoggart takes a grim but minutely careful rollcall of an imaginative class life nourished by a corrupt and phoney matiness in its daily and weekly papers, and distracted from boredom by the deathly fictions of brutal punch-ups and panting, pointless sexual sadism.

If the people’s narratives are indeed one moral measure of ‘the condition of England’, then the ghastly thrillers Hoggart so faithfully mimicked in the book have become by now nursery school trifles, compared with the images of shocking violence easily available on the dozens of television’s digital channels, let alone the officially more genteel storybooks of the BBC and other terrestrials. As each evening advances so the tales of murder and rape become more explicit and protracted. It is as though, in Hoggart’s own graphic metaphor, a fingernail is drawn down one’s opened nerve-endings with a fierce thrill of pain indistinguishable from pleasure. Even mainline series, mostly shipped over from the USA, about cops and robbers in the terrifying outreaches of Baltimore, Detroit and Los Angeles, a heavy succession of socially purposeful and aesthetically serious dramas, all deploying the conventions of the genre as formally as Jacobean melodrama, but all taking for granted an explicitness of violent action and luscious atrocity, plunge into much lower depths than could have been plumbed in 1957.

*Are* these abominable things measures of a nation’s soul? That same nation, according to its state tabulators,<sup>6</sup> watches more than 27 hours per week of television, not including DVD, Blu-ray and – so far unmentioned as well as unmentionable – video games. Much of this latter is the stuff of thrillers such as Hoggart names but, as I say, vastly more explicit, brutal and extended.

The deep puzzle is then to determine what these desperate legends do to us as well as to decide who the ‘we’ are to whom whatever it is is duly done. There can be no doubting Hoggart’s conclusion to his book as a prophecy fulfilled since he ended it in the way he did.

<sup>6</sup> *British Audience Research Board*, London: HMSO, 2012.



## THE CONDITION OF ENGLAND

Again, to define the limits of freedom in any single case is, I have admitted, extremely difficult. But many of us seem so anxious to avoid the charge of authoritarianism that we will think hardly at all about the problem of definition. Meanwhile, the freedom from official interference enjoyed in this kind of society, coupled with the tolerance we ourselves are so happy to show, seems to be allowing cultural developments as dangerous in their own way as those we are shocked at in totalitarian societies.<sup>7</sup>

He has plotted the move from a class to a mass culture. His contention was, even more than fifty years ago, that although the exploitation of some of the dismal aspects of contemporary humankind is plain as day to see, that exploitation is not irresistible and that the idea of free and open choices by freely choosing individuals is not completely vacuous. The heaps of malodorous garbage peddled on TV and DVD along with the worked-up frenzies of a revolting yellow press (to which we shall return) penetrate only a little way into many spirits, into many others not at all. That much is plain from the continuing kindness of everyday street conduct – the helpful attention certain to be given at a road accident, say, or to a lost child in a playground, amiable greetings at the supermarket checkout (even if all part of the training), the friendliness of policewomen, the brisk accessibility of hospital nurses . . . these gestures give the lie to the supposition that doses of television horrors or the ludicrous bawling of the tabloids make the language of everyday ethics – ‘decent’, ‘healthy’, ‘serious’, ‘valuable’, ‘poor’, ‘weakening’, ‘hollow’, ‘trivial’<sup>8</sup> – unusable and inaccurate.

What one can surely say is that, as the shaping spirit of class-consciousness has been relaxed by the dissolution of class membership in the sexual divisions of heavy industrial labour – coal, steel, ships, docks, chemicals, warfare – a different kind of free-and-easiness has fashioned itself out of mass culture. Now that not so very many people go hungry within the nation (though the numbers are rising), now the people have thrown off patched and re-stitched and cast-off clothing and can dress freshly and comfortably most of the time, now the action and iconography of class confrontation – long strikes, pickets, lockouts, factory gates – has dimmed for a season, a different kind of popular self-determination is devising a new guise for the citizen.

This character takes liberty for granted. In politics, for most people

<sup>7</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958, pp. 344–5.

<sup>8</sup> Hoggart (1958), p. 344.

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never a social or intellectual category of great importance, there is a not-so-new dismissal of *all* politicians as ‘just in it for themselves’. In the now-notorious expenses scandal of 2008 when a number of members of Parliament were discovered to have over-claimed thousands of pounds for subsistence, not so much criminally as in a lax atmosphere of over-permissiveness, the common reaction of most people was no doubt contemptuous but also indifferent – ‘what do you expect?’ In an attitude almost universal towards state institutions, people commended and felt warmth towards the local MP who had, as most do, given conscientious help when asked for it, but waved away all other MPs of whom they knew nothing as mere politicians, self-seeking and irrelevant. They were perfectly well aware that Britain is a much less uncorrupt country than it was in 1960 – there are far more tax-dodgers, the excessively rich are far less public-spirited and responsible, toadying and time-serving among the powerful much more common, everyday dishonesty taken-for-granted. But rottenness of this kind is tolerated as being beyond reach. Home is where you live and the rich are somewhere else.

This strong localism goes back deep into the soil of the old working class. It transpires in the way people refer admiringly enough to the schools their own children attend, and praise in passing that majority of teachers who do a decent job. It certainly issues in the trust placed in family doctors, direct social exchanges with whom have in so many urban instances done much to mitigate the mild, casual racism of English culture.

Indeed that last point, to my mind, admits of bolder generalization about the moral condition of the country. Perhaps the biggest change in the culture and customs of the country since the *Empire Windrush* arrived in 1948 has been the arrival and settlement of large numbers of mostly black immigrants from the sometime colonies and dominions of the Empire. They arrived with their rights to do so intact from India, Pakistan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa and the constituent islands of the West Indies. They had been preceded of course by many tens of thousands of white and therefore invisible Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, but the black arrivals were pretty new, and they came for the money, for the chances, for the homes, and they came to stay, even if that wasn’t what they first intended.

What is more, they did their own colonization such that Bradford, a few miles up the road from Hoggart’s Leeds, is now almost a majority black city, Birmingham is surrounded by black, once white working-class neighbourhoods, London, especially in the east, is

thronged with black faces, and so too is a host of the biggest cities – Bristol, Manchester, Liverpool. There are third and fourth black generations now long-standingly English (not to go west to Cardiff and Tiger Bay nor north to Glasgow), and one may readily detect as active forces in their formation some of those antique decencies which found their predecessors in the old working class.

#### IV

What calls for celebration in Hoggartian language, however, is the slow, uncertain, sometimes grudging accommodation of the English people to the human facts of immigration. In a way exceptional on the globe, an unignorable quantity of black newcomers have had ceded and have won for themselves a recognized new home, have largely overcome gross prejudice, have proved indispensable to the domestic economy. The passable open-mindedness of the old democracy, a culture which, grotesque disparities in wealth notwithstanding, struggles to honour the idea of equality, has brought off – a race riot or two aside – the peaceable provision of home and membership to a large number of black people formerly treated for half a millennium and worldwide as either subhuman or stripped of rights and freedom and fit only for slavery.

That massive achievement itself bears witness to the continuities Hoggart affirmed and may be counted one big sign of good health in the condition of uncertain unity among the four nations of Britain. Even if senior politicians on the political Right will beat from time to time the old, vicious drum against immigration, their targets are these days more likely to be from Latvia or Romania than the Caribbean.

This rather abstract even if commonly known and felt victory over human meanness gives us some reassurance that there remains an old acceptance of things still playing its ground bass in *British* culture, that ‘live and let live’ retains its benignant and bracing force, that ‘the immediate, the present and the cheerful’, in Hoggart’s words, still find their happy and glorious expression in everyday life. But another unmistakably huge cultural change may at this distance also be understood as expression of these same tolerant and understanding habits of moral vocabulary. That change, which so casually and explicitly marked the whole society after precisely 1963 when the contraceptive pill became publicly available, was the quite sudden concessiveness agreed upon as to sexual permission and conduct. Probably this delicate ground had been prepared by the loosening of

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moral vocabulary permitted (and quite right too) by the conditions of warfare, but pharmacology was the real authority. Yet credit may as well be given to the moral language of those classes who found, for by and large generous and genial reasons, that sex could be given a more playful arena in cultural life than had been counted safe before, and thereby initiated a quiet upheaval in social habits which may be allowed, by subsequent history, to be emancipatory and enlarging of human happiness.

Today no one can doubt the losses in cultural life caused by the disappearance of the strong (and killing) disciplines of physical labour, the manly pride taken in the many crafts of that labour, at the ship's hull, at the coalface, in the foundry or beside the blast furnace. By the same token, the loss of the powerful, kindly, portly matriarch as well as of a calmly authoritative father, seen only after work, away at the football or the club on Saturdays, collarless, shirtsleeved, self-confident, this loss is keen and painful. George Orwell wrote in a similar vein of feeling in 1937:

In a working-class home – I am not thinking at the moment of the unemployed, but of comparatively prosperous homes – you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not so easy to find elsewhere. I should say that a manual worker, if he is in steady work and drawing good wages – an ‘if’ which gets bigger and bigger – has a better chance of being happy than an ‘educated’ man. His home life seems to fall more naturally into a sane and comely shape. I have often been struck by the peculiar easy completeness, the perfect symmetry as it were, of a working-class interior at its best. Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking chair at one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat – it is a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently *of* it to be taken for granted.<sup>9</sup>

There is a wistful though not a sentimental note here, and Orwell himself says that he is recollecting homes seen in his childhood before 1914; visions of the good society are mostly set by the almost-elderly in order to bring into focus the time when the promise of happiness could be kept to the children who heard it made.

<sup>9</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1937 and 1959, pp. 117–18. I also realize that I am much more blithe and indiscriminate about these matters than Krishan Kumar in his admirable *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.