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**‘Beaming “English” at the oppressed layers’?
Henry Morley and his role
in establishing English as a discipline**

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He who desires thoroughly to know one subject should be possessed of so much intellectual geography as will enable him to see its true position in the Universe of thought.

Henry Morley, *A Defence of Ignorance* (1852)

In a well-known section of the chapter ‘The Rise of English’ in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton claims that in the Arnoldian period, ‘as religion progressively ceases to provide the social “cement”, affective values and basic mythologies by which a socially turbulent class-society can be welded together, “English” is constructed as a subject to carry this ideological burden’ (21; see also Baldick, Doyle). For Eagleton, Literature in general, and all the more so in its nationalistically binding form as ‘English’, was to be the new secular opium of the people, encouraging a quietist not to say idle contemplation of existence as analgesically multi-faceted, inspiring reverence for bourgeois achievements and culture through vicarious narrative experience, and cultivating the dissolution of individual working-class preoccupations

into the collective experience and glorious successes of the Nation and its bourgeois ruling classes. All these unconscious or conscious objectives (and Eagleton provides some degree of proof that Matthew Arnold and some of his contemporaries actually saw things this way) were means to close down both hard analytical confrontation with historical, economic and political realities and, on a less intellectual plane, the spectre of violent class conflict.

In this perspective, in the run up to the First World War, English was to become a tool amongst others to promote the frenzy of nationalism necessary to exact from the population mass self-sacrifice on the battlefield, with industrial levels of bloodshed never before beheld, and of course more specifically from the working-class population. Finally, in what was a deliberately provocative demolition of the sanctity of 'English' as a discipline, Eagleton sledgehammers the last vestiges of its historical shrine by asserting that this specific opium was a particularly cheap, low-value drug, an intellectually almost worthless field and for that matter perceived as such at the time: 'institutionalized not in the Universities, but in the Mechanics' Institutes, a cheapish "liberal" education for those beyond the charmed circles of public school and Oxbridge' (Eagleton 1983, 23). This cultural drug, like a narcotic cut with inexpensive adulterants, was 'specifically beamed' at the working class but also at women, a 'convenient sort of non-subject to palm off on the ladies' (24).

Writing in the 1980s, Eagleton's determined effort in the *Introduction to Literary Theory* to sully the spring waters of the origin narrative of 'English Literature' is part of a general onslaught intended to demystify the field and as such was certainly salubrious and invigorating at the time in its rhetorical intentions, as an act of language, as discursive battle tactics so to speak. However, after thirty years in which Eagleton-compatible approaches to culture and literature such as Cultural Studies and New Historicism have become an almost banal part of standard practice in university departments, it is worth thoroughly reopening the evidence concerning the rise of English as a discipline. Part of that evidence is one personality of the period who is as consistently as he is surprisingly neglected: Henry Morley (1822-1894), one of the first Professors of English Literature at University College London, frequently credited with

having been the first person to devote an entire academic career to the subject (although this is actually problematic in an interesting way) and author of the monumental, eleven volume *English Writers: An Attempt Towards a History of English Literature*, published between 1864 and 1894. In accounts of the emergence of English as a discipline, Morley's career tends to be signalled as an important landmark and a degree of cursory attention is habitually accorded to it insofar as it provides glimpses into what 'English' actually *was* at university in its early years, as for example in D. J. Palmer's important but early (and pre-Eagletonian) narrative of the emergence of the discipline, *The Rise of English Studies* (50-53). There has, however, been, to this day, very little published exploitation of the detail of Morley's career, his approach to it, or of his extensive writings, in order to attempt to answer questions such as, for example, whether or not Eagleton's narrative of the academic birth of the field of English Literature genuinely tallies with its day-to-day and year-to-year empirical realities, or the fierce debates that raged around them at the time.

Without dismissing the enduringly challenging aspects of Eagleton's critique of the rise of English, this chapter will embrace the complexity of the case of Henry Morley, firstly examining the detail of his career and the way in which, during that career, changes taking place in English academia and at the nascent University of London resist facile categorisation. In terms of an exercise in psychological or axiological or political profiling, Morley comes over as a miscast in Eagleton's narrative of bourgeois villainy. D. J. Palmer, it is true, probably correctly identified a 'missionary fervour' about Morley's personality and work, and those determined to validate a grand bourgeois-nationalistic project in the emergence of the discipline 'English' would probably have little difficulty in glossing over his career and writings as those of the eternal useful idiot: as blind to the ultimate machinations of power as the zealous pseudo-progressive Sunday School teacher or the colonial missionary convinced that they are helping their indigenous pupils along the path to Progress and Truth. Or it might be possible to expound upon the aporia of Victorian Liberalism, torn between, on the one hand, Rousseauistic avatars of belief in human progress, and on the other, a socio-economic

anchoring in the ruthlessness of classes best situated to benefit from laissez-faire economics and from colonialist exploitation.

And yet, the profile does not fit, or not well enough. Significantly, Eagleton conspicuously ignores Morley, in spite of the latter's multiple qualifications in terms of representativeness of the 'Rise of English', and this is certainly because his progressivist leaning is, in fact, a little too inconvenient for the bourgeois-nationalistic narrative. The same narrative also ignores multiple inconvenient details concerning the birth of the University of London and the way in which Morley's career and the Rise of English are intrinsic to and inseparable from that birth.

There is, finally, the question of the detail of Morley's rather neglected writings. It is striking that a source otherwise perfectly citeable as representative of the period's cultural history tends to be somewhat ignored, but this may be for very down-to-earth reasons. Morley wrote prolifically, but like many Victorians can come over as a more congenial version of Dickens' Gradgrind *Hard Times*, a relentless cruncher of facts racing through British History and Literature (unsurprisingly for the period, Morley does not always clearly distinguish the two) from before *Beowulf* up until Morley's contemporary Edmund William Gosse, more intent on encyclopaedic comprehensiveness than on comprehension. It can come over as dry reading, the work of an impressive scholarly workhorse, but with little intellectual content to analyse, and perhaps as a result of this, little attention has been paid to it beyond duly noting its existence. And yet there is intellectual content to be had in the *Attempt Towards a History of English Literature*, and in its more compact one-volume predecessor *A First Sketch of English Literature* (1873). Moreover, Morley is the author of at least one highly pointed publication taking radical positions on societal and educational questions, his ironically titled *Defence of Ignorance* of 1851, the year he began working for Dickens' weekly magazine *Household Words* and six years before he began teaching the new evening classes at King's College London intended for those unable to study during the day because of work. Unsurprisingly, given the polemical and progressivist content of the *Defence of Ignorance*, these classes were an anticipation of the University Extension Movement which Morley was wholeheartedly to support.

The relevance of the 'Morley case' here is in assessing the validity of a blanket narrative of the rise of English as a discipline portraying that emergence as an essentially top-down process, in which the ruling classes fobbed off a cheap secular substitute for religion on a passive proletariat and on passive women, in order not just to obtain minimal social order but an intensifying nationalistic mood of abnegation conducive to every level of sacrifice. This seems a fair summary of Eagleton's 1983 account of the discipline's nineteenth-century development. To assess the validity of that account, the following will examine the political and sociological locatedness of Henry Morley, and then his writings, restricting the exercise for reasons of scope to selected entries in the *First Sketch of English Literature* (1873) and to the earlier relatively short publication *A Defence of Ignorance* (1851). My purpose here is not to claim that the emergence of English as a discipline had nothing to do with nationalism, and nothing to do with social control; it certainly was connected to them and could easily lend itself to reappropriations which reinforced such purposes. Eagleton's best example, apart from Arnold, is certainly Sir Henry Newbolt, the author of the 1921 government report *The Teaching of English in England*, and infamously a member of the War Propaganda Bureau during the First World War. It is not even to attempt to completely dissociate Morley from, for example, a certain vision of 'English' as a substitute form of spirituality. This was a vision Morley seems to have adhered to, as he himself made clear on one single occasion in a letter to Fox Bourne written in his later years, in 1881, in the context of a reference letter Bourne had requested from him for teaching work at the Anglican institution Queen's College:

Only a line to thank you for your note, which has done away with a misconception. Some years ago some talk of yours here that I now forget left us with the impression that you had put away faith in a God altogether. Some of the friends whom I heartily respect have done so, and it is no part of my religion to think that God Himself weighs error as men do. My regard for you has not been less, but as the chief use to my mind of a study of English literature is to sustain the spiritual side of life, and it has been, at any rate, my chief aim so to teach it as to bring it into use as a natural corrective of the materialist tendencies of the age, as an embodiment of the religious life of England in every shape, and narrowed to the measure of no shibboleth,

while giving honour to each form of earnest thought, I fancied I had lost you as a fellow-combatant (Solly 330).

Morley had not refused the reference, merely suggested that if Bourne was an atheist then Queen's College (like King's College) might not be entirely compatible with such views, and the letter is clearly not only intellectually respectful of atheism but impatient with the 'shibboleths' of specific religious beliefs, as one would expect from the broad-mindedness of the Unitarian that Morley was. That notwithstanding, the 'chief use' of English is unambiguously asserted to be 'to sustain the spiritual side of life', and although in Morley's printed writings this sort of belief is rarely made explicit, there is enough of it scattered around to make an attempt to dismiss it fruitless.

What I would like to argue, however, is that nationalism and social control are not the necessary, central essence of the emergence of English and that Morley is an illustration of this. It is important to distinguish between the Morleys of 19th-century education on the one hand, and on the other jingoists like Newbolt, or Carlyle's advocacy of universal education in his 1840 *Chartism* (98) whilst simultaneously insisting on the role of authority. Nothing in Morley's writings suggests a view of the common man as Carlyle represents him, crying 'Guide me, govern me! I am mad, and I am miserable, and cannot guide myself!' (Carlyle 52). Similarly, Morley's association of Literature with the 'spiritual side of life' may bear some passing resemblance to Arnold's 'sweetness and light', but there seems to be nothing in his writings that resembles Arnold's sometimes openly brutal interest in social control, as when in the Conclusion of *Culture and Anarchy* (quoting his father), he insists that the only way to treat rioters is to 'flog the rank and file, and fling the ringleaders from the Tarpeian Rock' (149). Morley's thinking is probably closer to the reserved but genuine approval of democracy of a John Stuart Mill, with the same revision of utilitarianism in favour of the 'higher pleasures'.

Morley and the University of London

There is no biography of Henry Morley in print. Much of what is detailed in the following lines is drawn from his son-in-law Henry Shaen

Solly's 1898 *Life of Henry Morley*, published four years after Morley's death. Henry Shaen Solly was the son of the Unitarian, sometime Chartist and social reformer Henry Solly (1813-1903). He was also a student of Morley's from 1866 to 1867, and married Morley's eldest daughter in 1881 (Solly 258, 328). It is, then, necessarily a highly laudatory work, written in memoriam of the author's father-in-law. However, in making that memorial effort Solly seems highly conscious of the burden on his shoulders in producing a detailed trace of a man's life, not to say that of a family colossus, and as a result he is meticulous in drawing together letters, testimonies and data. He is also palpably keen to demonstrate how Morley's life and career was enmeshed with the genesis of both the University of London and the emergence of English as a discipline: by 1898, there was enough hindsight to analyse events in these terms. Finally, although it is quite possible or even probable that Solly omits messier aspects and ragged ends that might resist his narrative, in the very fact of clearly attempting to produce a portrait of Morley as the latter would have wanted to be remembered, he conveys a good idea of what his father-in-law's values were.

Solly's sense that demonstrable historical change had taken place during the lifetime of Morley is justified. Morley's career is significant in a number of ways. He was one of the first students of the University of London, at King's College, matriculating in 1838 at the age of 16 only nine years after King's was established as a riposte to University College, the 'Godless Institution of Gower Street'. This was moreover only two years after the government had solved the political deadlock between and around the two Colleges, by establishing the University of London by Royal Charter and bringing both institutions under its aegis. Partly through unwise flirtation with delusions of reinvigorated royal prerogative from a William IV worried that the 1832 Reform Act was pulling apart the existing social order, 'London University' had been refused the Royal Charter in 1826, whereas King's, for obvious reasons, had obtained it immediately. These were the vibrant, agitated times during which Morley was a student.

It is important to emphasise the degree to which the rival founding Colleges were both in their way part of a progressivist hotbed. The

foundation of King's College comes over in hindsight somewhat as closing the stable door after the horse has bolted: as staunch Anglicans and Anglo-Catholics of the Tractarian ilk correctly perceived between the 1830s and the 1860s, the only way to avoid a subversion of the aristocratic Anglican University's function was to not have a university in London at all (Rothblatt 20-21). Despite its Anglican credentials and the patronage of William IV to which it owed its name, King's was inevitably very different from, indeed incarnated difference from Cambridge, and especially from the centre of Anglican conservatism, Oxford. So although the (by then) Unitarian Morley's decision to work at UCL rather than at King's was to be later partly motivated by the fact that the latter college still insisted on a declaration of Anglicanism, the new institution had at least dropped the requirement for students¹. In contrast, the 1834 University Admissions Bill allowing non-Anglicans to enrol at Oxford and Cambridge had been defeated, and this was only reversed by the Oxford University and Cambridge University Acts of respectively 1854 and 1856. Despite its being founded in an effort to shore up the old order, the internal culture of King's was frequently progressivist, although certainly reformist rather than revolutionary. It was only half an hour's walk from its secular rival in Gower Street and despite the Oxbridge inspired quadrangle of its Strand buildings, intended precisely to shut out contamination by the urban values of the metropolis, it was unable to do so (Rothblatt 73). It is certainly true that under R. W. Jelf as principal, and in what seems like almost a caricature of ultra-reactionary zeal, the college council deprived the Christian Socialist F. D. Maurice of his professorships in English Literature and History and in Theology in 1853 because he was found to have the audacity not to believe in eternal damnation. On the other hand, the dismissals appear to have taken place despite widespread support from colleagues and the public (Tennyson even wrote a poem on the occasion)². More

1. This had actually had no incidence on Morley himself as a student as he was Anglican at the time, only converting to Unitarianism sometime during his period at Madeley, 1843-1849 (Solly 88).

2. 'For, being of that honest few / Who give the Fiend himself his due / Should eighty-thousand college-councils / Thunder "Anathema," friend, at you' (Tennyson, 'To the Reverend F. D. Maurice' (1854)). See the account of the episode in the entry on Maurice by Leslie

importantly, after first establishing Queen's College for the education of girls and young women in 1848, Maurice and others had been able to set up their evening classes at King's in 1852, with Maurice lecturing in English. The classes, foreshadowing the University Extension movements of the 1870s, were continued after Maurice's departure and it was to these that Morley would owe his transition to academia, lecturing in the evenings at King's for eight years from 1857 to 1865 before successfully applying for the Professorship at UCL. So both of the London founding colleges played their role in Morley's professional itinerary and in the fundamental transformations of the period: they were both, after all the first challenges in England and Wales to six to eight hundred years of Oxford and Cambridge's aristocratic hegemony and their apparition was not fortuitous³.

One of the many reasons Morley's career is significant is that it starts by illustrating what seems by 21st century standards the vaguest of ambient cultural attitudes towards specialisation and professionalization, only to then metamorphose into the kind of longevity in a profession and into the kind of expertise that is now associated with academic positions, not to say with a wide array of specialised occupations. Morley first studied 'general literature' in what was then the 'junior department' of King's College, and then in the 'senior department' studied medicine, the only one of the three courses it offered that continues to exist as a recognised discipline today. In 1843 at the age of 21 he became a professional doctor, not by taking a degree but by enrolling as a free member of the Society of Apothecaries, and having obtained a licence to practice medicine anywhere in England and Wales. He spent six years doing so, mostly as a country doctor in the colliery village of Madeley, Shropshire, where he can fairly be described to have experienced first-hand the front line

Stephen (the father of Virginia Woolf) in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885-1900), volume 37.

3. Oxford University was founded in around 1096, Cambridge in around 1209. Durham was founded in 1832 on the basis of a long tradition of theological teaching and quickly received the Royal Charter (in 1837) being perceived as a safe new bastion of Anglicanism. Oxford and Cambridge's hegemony concerns only England and Wales as four Scottish universities had existed for centuries: St Andrews since 1410-1413, Glasgow since 1451, Aberdeen since 1495, and Edinburgh since 1582.

of 19th-century Britain's industrialisation and its attendant social and sanitary ills. The latter do not seem to have been entirely responsible for the short-lived nature of this medical career, however: according to Solly, Morley was misled about the financial situation of the practice he had bought into, and for financial reasons among others, he dropped it in 1849 and took a gamble on setting up a school, an academic laboratory and a programme of Wednesday evening lectures in Manchester.

A political and philosophical profile: first careers in medicine and education

The Manchester school was extremely short lived, as by March an opportunity came up in Liverpool for full-time work as a private tutor which it seems to have been financially impossible for Morley to refuse. It is however fortunate for us that the episode took place because the experiment required Morley to advertise and so leave a public trace of his beliefs concerning education and of his profile within the ongoing crystallisation of knowledge specialisation. The question of educationalist philosophy will be returned to below. In the meantime, it is instructive to note passages from Morley's advertising that allude to the breadth of subjects proposed and therefore with which this ex-medical practitioner, and future Professor of English Literature, felt comfortable: he would have been personally teaching all of them. The January 1849 prospectus for the school part of the project included the following:

The course of instruction will comprise, in addition to the usual elements of a Commercial Education, French and German. Pains will be taken to give life to the study of the Ancient Classics. The structure of the English Language, its Literature, and the art of English Composition, will be taught somewhat more elaborately than is usual. A large portion of practical scientific knowledge, the first principles of useful and ornamental Arts, with outlines of the most important branches of Natural Philosophy and Science, will also be included in the ordinary course of study (Solly 102).

The part of the same prospectus concerning a programme of 'fifty Lectures' attempts to sketch its approach as follows:

Lastly, it is Mr. Morley's intention to commence a series of

WEDNESDAY EVENING LECTURES

upon any interesting topics in the range of Literature and Science.

[...]

The FIRST LECTURE, on The Crust of the Globe, will be delivered at seven o'clock on the evening of Wednesday January 17; to this all parties will be admitted gratuitously who shall have signified their intention of being present on or before the previous day. The probable subjects of some early lectures are subjoined, as the best means of explaining the nature of the intended course: (1) The Crust of the Globe; (2) The World of Plants; (3) The World of Animals; (4) The Human Body; (5) The Human Mind; (6) Critical Analysis of Spenser's 'Faerie Queene'; (7) National Mythologies; (8) The Races of Man; (9) Parallel Histories of English, French and German Poetry; (10) Great Wars of the Ancients; (11) Sanitary Law.

Mr. Morley is a member of the Medical Profession, who from choice devotes himself to Teaching (Solly 103).

This is the paradox of Morley's career, but also the evolution which it illustrates: known as a landmark in academic specialisation, in particular concerning the emergence of English as an institutionalised academic discipline, here we have him in 1849 before the period of his well-documented professorship at UCL, proposing to teach anything and everything from French to Ornamental Arts to the Crust of the Globe, and with an oddly prosaic incongruity in the final item for his Wednesday evening lectures, Sanitary Law. The cumulative list is interesting however in more ways than in the dizzying compass of its preoccupations. The latter are not entirely random, and frequently have a progressivist connotation, whether through the nascent interest in Psychology before the word had become common ('The Human Mind')⁴, or the cutting edge of Geology and its potentially proto-secular associations ('The Crust of the Globe'). It is worth dwelling on two of the subjects mentioned, Geology and the apparent oddity of 'Sanitary Law', to obtain a nuanced sense of Morley's precise brand of progressivism.

There were of course a range of strategies available in the mid-nineteenth century which could make Geology – and its attendant questionings on,

4. According to Solly, if Morley had ever specialised in one medical branch it would have been mental health, partly because Morley feared an ancestral 'trace of insanity' in himself (Solly 37-38).

say, the age and genesis of the earth – soluble in God’s Grandeur, and indeed Morley himself accepted manifest divine grandeur as a principle, but this was the limit of theological influence on his attitude to science. He was born into an Anglican family, but by 1849 he had converted to the Unitarian faith of his future wife Mary-Anne Sayer (Solly 88), partly it would seem as a result of lively intellectual epistolary debates between the two, with Sayer sending her for example in late 1843, in response to Morley’s ‘earnest plea for the acceptance in faith of mysteries which we cannot understand’, a ‘spirited reply in defence of human reason, with several quotations from Dr. Channing’ (Solly 43). Sayer herself, and indeed, the American liberal theologian and Unitarian preacher William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), seem to have been a substantial influence on Morley for the rest of his life (Solly 88, 138, 158). On the specific question of the articulation between religion and Geology, it is true that even that epicentre of intellectual Anglicanism, Oxford, had appointed the Reverend William Buckland as reader of Mineralogy as early as 1813, and Buckland had ably bridged the gap by both carrying out pioneering work in the field and yet for example championing the so-called ‘gap theory’ reconciling Genesis and the biblical flood with more recent discoveries on the age and formation of the earth. But this sort of attempt to bend the findings of Geology to conform to Scripture is demonstrably incompatible with Morley’s position in the 1840s. Solly, writing at the end of the century, visibly considered that approaches to Geology, ‘a subject beginning to attract much attention at this time’ (132) were a marker of more general positions, and goes out of his way to lengthily recount an episode in which Morley later explicitly addressed the controversy with his young pupils at Liscard (the small school established after the failure of the Manchester venture).

The matter arose in reaction to the Dean of York’s relatively recent forays into Young Earth theories and Scriptural Geology, and Solly quotes a June 1849 letter from Morley to Sayer in which Morley asserts that ‘the vulgar literal reading of the Cosmos in Moses [...] perpetually stands in the way of science, and if not set in its proper light, will always worry us and cramp our movements’⁵. He is confident of the enduring rationalism of

5. Solly does not name the Dean of York of the time but this was William Cockburn (1773-1858 and Dean of York from 1823 to 1858) and the publications in question must have included

his pupils: 'The truth was too much like truth not to be received instantly as a thing of course, and forty parson-power now will never make my pupils believe in a real talking serpent or a universal flood.' (Solly 132-133). Significantly, it is not just that Morley uses Geology and science to contradict the scriptural flood. In the same letter, he strongly hints at a historical and anthropological reading of the bible itself, and vaunts to his future wife the fact of having contaminated impressionable young minds with such potentially incendiary ideas. The passage concludes on a very Unitarian note of divine grandeur expressed through cosmic splendour, but not before it makes Morley's Deism very clear:

[I] pointed out the evidently legendary character of the history of Moses down to the Deluge, and the source of the legends, all of which I had weeks ago read to them out of Indian mythology. I had also twenty times before pointed out how there arose, now here, now there, the legends of a universal deluge, so it was easy to explain that of Noah. I showed them why it is *impossible* that a universal deluge can have occurred for the last many, many ages at the very least; pointed out how ill the interests of religion were served by misinterpreting the sacred books into antagonism with human knowledge; showed how little it was true that science led to irreligion; how infinitely grand and Godlike – truly followed by us – the works of Nature are; how immeasurably the true Cosmos is more worthy of a Divine being than that which is misinterpreted by a theologians of a past day from Moses (Solly 132-133).

Morley's conception of the relationship between faith, knowledge and human progress can be summarised in one stanza from an unpublished poem apparently written by him, with no title, reproduced by Solly:

God, whom our fathers revered, and we
Seek as the Source of all abiding strength
Thou art All Truth and Thou hast made man free
To question, and to find All Truth at length (Solly 4).

The precise contents of the eleventh Wednesday evening lecture subject for Morley's proposed school in Manchester, 'Sanitary Law' will never be known since the school never came into being. Did he mean to discuss 'sanitation' in the sense of that branch of both medicine, town

A Letter to Professor Buckland Concerning the Origin of the World (1838) and *The Bible Defended Against the British Association* (1839).

planning and civil engineering so wedded to social concerns in the age of the increasingly sprawling industrial city? Or was this merely to be a series of homilies on the godliness of cleanliness, especially with respect to the poor? In the second last year of his short career as a doctor working in the industrial area of Madeley, Morley in fact published two pamphlets that indeed directly targeted the poorer working population which seem to have made up the majority of his patients (Solly suggests that Morley was not skilled enough at making himself appear 'respectable' to attract enough of a more lucrative clientele). These were entitled *Tracts upon Health for Cottage Circulation* (1847). Although there are occasional passages in the *Tracts* that smack a little of 'godliness and cleanliness' Anglican Evangelicalism, they mostly read like hard-headed practical advice from an active professional with his own boots on the ground, doing the rounds of a population with whom Morley himself at least felt he had a relationship of mutual respect, as a thinly-veiled semi-fictional account of the period published in *Household Words* in January 1853 (and quoted by Solly) indicates:

The great majority of working men are from their hearts truly courteous and polite. I wish to say something about this. I began practice as an assistant in a purely agricultural district, employed by a practitioner of ample independent means. From the first day that I went there, very young and utterly unknown, every cottager touched his hat to me. Strangers who came on a visit to the place, if they wore good clothes, were greeted invariably with touched hats, bows, and curtsseys. That is not courtesy; it is a mark of a degraded state of feeling. When I first went among the colliers, I got no signs of recognition until I had earned them. Better wages and a little more to think about have made our workmen in the North more independent than the Southern agriculturalist; but it is precisely because they are less servile that they are able to be more really courteous. Now that I have made my way here, and am prosperous, many hat-touchings do indeed greet me – when, for example, walking against the stream, I meet our congregation coming out of church. But these greetings express a genuine respect. I have joined broken bones for the greeters, I have watched by their sick children, I have brought health to their wives, often receiving, and I may venture to say contented by, these kind looks, for my main remuneration (Solly 77).

Morley was certainly no Chartist, showing more interest in land reform than in, say, the abolition of the property qualification (Solly 169) but this extract from a fictionalised rendering of his Madeley days shows

an openness to or leaning towards a certain form of egalitarianism, and in any case a rejection of Tory agrarian paternalism and a fixed social hierarchy based on a 'degraded state of feeling'. This inclination towards a sense of fraternity between those different sociological products of the new industrial civilisation, the professional classes and the proletariat, comes over sporadically in Morley's writings and private papers, when for example he extols the moral and intellectual virtues of his third-class train carriage companions in January 1851 compared to 'the imbecility of the agricultural mind' experienced in second class the day before (Solly 172).

As for the question of sanitation itself and the *Tracts upon Health for Cottage Circulation*, they do directly address a working class reader with advice on matters such as choice of housing, maintenance of housing, and personal hygiene but also touch upon social responsibility for living conditions, advising direct confrontation with landlords if necessary:

If a drain be out of order near you, do not let your landlord rest until he has repaired it; one of your children may at any time fall sick, and it very easily may happen that the poison of that very drain shall cause the sickness to be fatal (6).

The *Tracts* were officially approved by, and subsequently sold for, the Health of Towns Association which had been formed three years earlier (Solly 82) and whose campaigns contributed to the passing of the 1848 Public Health Act, creating local boards of health responsible for control over sewers, ensuring proper water supply and public accountability concerning health risks such as slaughterhouses. In his first professional life, Henry Morley can be said to have been closely associated, at his level, with this social and political movement.

Beyond the sheer oddity, by our standards, of a career shift of this type, from medical practitioner with an avid interest in sanitary matters and reform, to progressive general educationalist, and finally groundbreaking academic of a new type, there emerges here a particular profile. Before he was to become an icon of academic specialisation, Morley was part of an older tradition of the polymath drawing on Enlightenment encyclopaedism and in England often associated with the emergence of the Dissenting Academies in the 17th and 18th centuries, in the style of Joseph

Priestley (1733-1804), theologian, natural philosopher, chemist, innovative grammarian, multi-subject educator, and liberal political theorist. Priestley had been educated at Daventry Academy, Northamptonshire, later taught himself at Warrington Academy, Cheshire, and in his *Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (1764) describes a course of education for 'the lower and middle ranks of men' which is both practical (the usefulness of modern languages for a merchant career falls into this category) and intellectually aspirational with a view to the freedom of the individual. Morley can be placed within a much broader historical sweep of educational reformism going back to and encompassing Samuel Hartlib's activity as a go-between for John Comenius and English thinkers in the 17th century, Milton's 1639 *Tractate on Education*, and Priestley and others in the 18th century. Traces of this continuous current in educational thought resurface in Morley's writings and are among the many factors which unsettle the easy Eagletonian narrative of educational reform in general, and the newly established discipline English in particular, as social manipulation. The *First Sketch of English Literature* does not have an entry on Priestley, but it has one on Hartlib and given that Morley's first attempt at an encyclopedic reference on Literature very frequently strives to remain as sober as possible, a certain warmth is apparent when discussing him:

In the midst of the strife of civil war, Hartlib was wholly occupied with scientific study, having especial regard to the extension and improvement of education, and the development of agriculture and manufactures. In 1642 he translated from the Latin of a Moravian pastor, John Amos Komensky, two treatises on *A Reformation of Schooles*. His zeal for the better education of the people, as a remedy for their distresses, caused him not only to give thought to the education of the poor, but also to attempt the establishment of a school for the improved education of the rich (583-584).

Presumably the wording of the last sentence here implies that a more just social order requires not only the poor to be less ignorant, but the rich, too.

As noted, Morley's school project never came to anything but he did end up acquiring general educational experience before a transition period in periodical publication leading ultimately to his career at the two founding University of London colleges. He was given an opportunity by relatively wealthy employers to set up a school within their own house

on Marine Terrace, Liscard, Liverpool, including the employers' children themselves of course, but to reduce the expense, including other children of various ages and both boys and girls. The experience appears to have been a positive one and he had time to reflect, including upon educational matters and education for girls and women. By staying up late writing he was also able to gradually get his foot into the door of journalism, first re-visiting once more that highly political question of sanitation, in satirical form now first for the *Examiner* and then for Dickens' *Household Words*, with his first pieces published in those periodicals respectively on 30th March and 8th May 1850. Until June 1851, he continued to work primarily as a teacher, supplementing his income with journalism, a situation which would have its mirror image once he began teaching in higher education in London.

Opportunities of the print economy: transition to academia via journalism

Then Dickens offered him a permanent place for five guineas a week working on the staff of *Household Words*, leading to a removal to London and earning a living through journalism. The decision to leave Liscard appears to have been painful, and essentially in the hope that it would prove financially rewarding enough to finally pay off Morley's debts, and this is significant because it underlines the strength of the lure of the burgeoning literary-cultural print economy. The detail of the period is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine but there was indeed a financial transition to better times which finally allowed Morley to marry Mary Anne Sayer and the newly-weds even to seek out a comfortable London house. In the course of 1856, Morley became the editor of the *Examiner* for literary, dramatic and art criticism, although not for politics (interestingly, again, these fields had by now subdivided in professional terms to a degree which involved separate pay cheques). But in the apotheosis of the journalistic segment of his career, from January 1861 to November 1867, Morley was the sole editor of the *Examiner*, now at long last financially comfortable and in a position which would be the springboard to the academic position which he is historically most remembered for. It should be emphasised that the *Examiner* (1808-1886)

was not just any broadly Liberal periodical. For most of its existence it was a radical intellectual publication which had made itself known, under the ownership of Leigh and John Hunt, publishing Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and William Hazlitt; and when William McCullagh Torrens bought it in 1867, initiating a three year period in which it appears to have lost its political direction, Morley resigned as editor. This is undoubtedly related to the fact that Torrens brusquely informed him that his salary was to be substantially reduced (Solly 249), but Morley arguably also sensed the coming transformation of the periodical. In the *Sketch*, in a somewhat disproportionately long and admiring entry for Leigh Hunt, his mention of the *Examiner's* foundation seems to note with some satisfaction that the early periodical 'fought for reforms in a way that gave some offence to Whigs and much to Tories' (973).

There is much to say about Morley's years as a journalist and editor, but it is worth persisting with the factual succession of events that finally include his best known legacy. As mentioned earlier, once he had become the literature, arts and drama editor of the *Examiner*, he was invited in 1857 to start giving evening classes in English Literature at King's College as part of the programme set up by F. D. Maurice. After he had become sole editor, he was offered in 1865 the post of Professor of English Literature at University College, and for two years he doggedly maintained both activities until he dropped the editorship in 1867, both because the work was too much and, importantly, because it was financially possible to do so.

Contrary to what is sometimes suggested, Morley was not the first to occupy the Professorship in English Language and Literature. It had been created at UCL in 1828, fifty-seven years before Oxford University finally created its Merton Professorship of English Language and Literature in 1885 – only to fill it, symptomatically of enduring indifference to the fledgling subject, with a philologist who was largely uninterested in any literary production after Chaucer anyway – and eighty-three years before Cambridge set up its first literature chair in 1911. The UCL chair was not initially endowed, however (and still was not endowed when Morley took it on), its incumbent receiving fees directly from the students who followed lectures; and so the Professor generally needed to have other

sources of income and often became distracted, so to speak. As well as a frequent lack of a sense of vocation and qualification for the job, the post suffered from an extremely high turnover, most occupants only averaging around three years. Even Morley's immediate predecessor, David Masson, who had beaten all records by sticking it out for thirteen years, left because he was offered the much better funded equivalent chair in Edinburgh. Morley was in fact only the ninth occupant of the post; but his occupancy transformed its status, for multiple reasons but in one respect simply because he stayed in it for twenty-four years, until retirement⁶. Two years before that retirement, in 1887, the Professor of Anatomy at UCL Richard Quain died and in his testamentary bequest created four endowed chairs, including English, and so Morley became not only the longest-running Professor of English Language and Literature at UCL (or indeed, anywhere in England), but the first to benefit from a properly financed post which was not at the mercy of the ups and downs of fee-paying enrolments on his lectures. And what changed during Morley's occupancy of the professorship did not undo itself afterwards: the equally distinguished scholar W. P. Ker succeeded him and spent thirty-three years in the chair until his retirement.

These details are not dwelt on out of a fixation upon minutiae for their own sake, but in order to obtain some kind of palpable sense of what the institutionalisation of a discipline means in material terms, certainly in some measure to demonstrate the key role of the emergence of English as an academic subject as regards the difference between the University of London on the one hand and Oxford and Cambridge on the other, and finally to raise the question of cause and effect between the personality and profile of Morley and the change in status of the professorship he occupied. As we have seen, although he is often referred to as the first person to spend an entire career in a university post teaching English

6. The list of the first ten professors of English Language and Literature at UCL, with the dates of their occupancy of the post, is as follows: Rev. Thomas Dale, 1828-1830 (2 years); Alexander Blair, 1830-1836 (6 years); Henry Rogers, 1836-1839 (3 years); Robert Latham, 1839-1845 (6 years); Tom Taylor, 1845-1848 (3 years); A. J. Scott, 1848-1850 (2 years); A. Hugh-Clough, 1850-1852 (2 years); David Masson, 1852-1865 (13 years); Henry Morley, 1865-1889 (24 years); W. P. Ker (by this date Quain Professor of English Language and Literature), 1889-1922 (33 years)

Literature, this is more the effect of a sudden twenty-four-year occupancy in contrast to the previous seemingly half-hearted and ephemeral tenures, than strictly factually accurate. To be more precise, this is someone who was a doctor for six years, a generalist teacher to (in modern terms) primary to secondary school age children for two years, a journalist with a dominant (but not exclusive) focus on Literature for seventeen years, and a university lecturer for thirty-two years in total (including the proto-Extension teaching at King's), with considerable overlap between the middle phases. Beyond the illustration in the space of one life that this evolution provides, as previously noted, of the emerging tendency towards specialisation and professionalization, the precise itinerary of Morley is again interesting.

Firstly, although he certainly had a predilection for Literature from the beginning and was arguably only pushed into what would be an abortive medical career by his apothecary father, the motivation for the transfer first to journalism and then to the academic teaching of English was also financial. Morley fell in love with his future wife Mary Anne Sayer in 1843; he was only able to marry her nearly ten years later in 1852 because in 1851 he had accepted Dickens' offer to come and work for *Household Words*. It would cross the mind of few academics in the humanities today that their field might be more lucrative than medicine. This profitability moreover raises a compelling question concerning the Eagletonian approach that the present chapter started out from: is the demystification of 'Literature' or 'English' inherent to that approach the *correct* demystification? If one is looking for a prosaic explanation for the emergence of the academic subject thus known, there is perhaps a simpler and more convincing one than that it was an institutional means to numb the potential rebelliousness of women and the proletariat. This would be a cultural materialist approach based on the concept of print-capitalism: English emerged as a discipline because the quantity of printed cultural production in English required it, because there was an immense market and demand for writing, to the point that a considerable market for writing about writing had in turn emerged, and once such 'criticism' was massively available and consumed in the periodicals, the final step

was departments and institutions specialised in that particular discursive practice (see Anderson).

If the Eagleton argument is that the State or the Establishment during the period in question was, to simplify, encouraging reading and setting up a loyally conservative institutional clerisy to guide that reading, to lead the 'oppressed layers' to correctly interpret the new secular scripture, then it is worth remembering that by at least one definition governments had spent much of the early nineteenth century doing what they could to curtail or slow the growth of literacy through the use of stamp duty, a deliberate attempt to keep reading expensive and so out of the hands of the unwashed masses (Jones). It could of course be argued that this approach had failed, that stamp duty, 'collectively stigmatized in bourgeois laissez-faire as well in plebeian radical politics as the "taxes on knowledge"', had been reduced to 1d in 1836 and was entirely repealed in 1854, two years after Morley had begun evening lectures at King's; and that having failed to stem the accessibility of print, the elites then began to try to channel and mould its reception (Jones 374). But even should this be true, and I would accept that to an extent it is, attempting to channel and mould a pre-existing voracious appetite, across classes and for reading of all kinds and of fictional production in particular, is a long way from 'beaming English at the oppressed layers' from on high. This is a fundamental weakness in Eagleton's argument and in accounts of the emergence of English as a discipline which continue to draw upon that argument.

One of the multiple advantages of examining the concrete case of Morley's career is that it is a way of contextualising the emergence of the study of English against the backdrop of mass demand. His precise approach to teaching in general and to teaching English in particular is of course important but on a simpler and more down-to-earth level, here was a man who found an opportunity in an industry which had been generating big money for some time now. It was showing no sign of running out of steam, figuratively or literally, whether in terms of the power driving the new rotary presses that became common in the 1850s, or the locomotion distributing the printed word around the country with ever greater effectiveness, just as in the 1860s and 1870s steam power

carried Morley on his financially worthwhile if exhausting speaking tours around the country⁷. It is also significant that Morley's transition, from his brief medical career to pioneering academic teaching of English, was via journalism. He thus participated in the journalistic expansion and professionalization of writing about writing – pre-academic, extra-mural institutionalisation – and also came to embody the academic intra-mural institutionalisation of the discipline.

Morley's academic production: nationalism, education, poverty, feminism

What, however, and finally, of the content of Morley's writing and teaching? The scope of this chapter does not allow an in-depth exploration of large swathes of his prodigious, not to say rather daunting, production. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile sampling attitudes from his *First Sketch of English Literature* (1873) and the earlier *Defence of Ignorance* (1851) with respect to four key themes: principally the nation and nationalism, because it is such a key dimension of Eagleton's argument, and much more cursorily, education, the poor, and women.

The *First Sketch of English Literature*, published six years after Morley felt sufficiently established in full-time work as Professor of his subject to give up the editorship of the *Examiner*, comes over as both expert and immensely erudite, even while epistemologically cautious, as is implied by the title. For one thing, although a list of canonical writers that would not surprise the 21st century student are included in the volume, these 'literary' writers rub shoulders unabashedly with a whole host of other writers running from Francis Bacon and Samuel Hartlib to David Hume and Adam Smith. So although the 'Sketch' is self-consciously attempting to delimit and define in published form a disciplinary entity worthy of the professorship its author holds, that attempt still has a very elastic approach to what should and should not be in its corpus.

7. For the effect of stamp duty abolition on printing technology investment, see Jones, 374. In his *Rise of English Studies*, D. J. Palmer finds the 'unflagging industry' of Morley's speaking tour schedule arresting in diary entries between 1869 and 1878 recording a 'bizarre mixture of literary giants and railway timetables' (Palmer 53).

Secondly, in terms of the cartographical delimitation of disciplines, there is considerable blurring of the lines, especially in the opening sections, between what would still now be considered History on the one hand and Literature on the other. Even approaches to Literature that have been influenced by schools of thought of the Cultural Studies or New Historicism sort – which is to say, almost all current approaches – make their incursions into History with a self-consciousness defined by the heritage of twentieth-century constructions of the autonomous literary object. This is not really the case in the early chapters of Morley's *Sketch*, the first of which are successively 'The Forming of the People: Celts', 'The Forming of the People: First English', and 'Transition English' (the *Sketch* comprises thirteen chapters in total). Even once the encyclopaedic ambition of the volume has hit its stride and Morley is marching through the post-printing press centuries in what is essentially a chronological listing of writers and their achievements, the organisation of chapters is historical, either via dates ('From the Year 1500 to the Year 1558') or monarchical reigns ('The Reign of Elizabeth', 'Under William III. and Anne', 'In the Reign of Victoria'), rather than, say, attempting a thematic analysis of emerging and declining genres. This is certainly in part to do with the youthfulness of English as an academic discipline, which at Morley's time was still searching for its own contours, lines of debate and ongoing discussions, a fact which in itself arguably demonstrates, pace Eagleton, a certain legitimate disciplinary autonomy: that we can see in Morley's writings a *savoir-faire* which has not worked out what it is yet, even though there is indeed a specific methodology or are indeed specific methodologies which the subject matter requires⁸.

In the *First Sketch*, however, the muddying of the waters between a nascent discipline, English Literature, and a better established one, History, has more to it than the former discipline using that latter as a scaffold with which to build its first walls, as a place in which to start, although this is certainly part of what is going on. Morley also undeniably

8. The argument, largely in reaction to the Eagletonian position and to those of Catherine Belsey, that the disciplinary space of Literary Studies can be legitimately defined with reference to demonstrable specialised knowledge and skills is developed in depth by Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small.

participates in a form of the nationalism and nation-building of his age. This nationalism and nation-building is undoubtedly grist to Eagleton's mill, as represented by the founding in the space of less than a century of the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885), the *Oxford English Dictionary* (first published in fascicles from 1884 with *OED* as unofficial title from 1895) and the National Gallery (1824).

Morley, then, does not escape this tidal current in his period, and his *First Sketch* in 1873 and the more ambitious multi-volume *English Writers* published from 1864 to 1894 can be seen as a kind of variation on the *Dictionary of National Biography*: monumental, if not in stone, then in scope and ambition and in institutional aspiration. He does however seem to be looking for something in particular in the ambient concept of nation. The opening lines of the first chapter attempt a definition of Literature in national terms, but simultaneously cast about for a specific sense of what is 'national' about 'Literature':

The Literature of a People tells its life. History records its deeds; but Literature brings to us, warm with their first heat, the appetites and passions, the keen intellectual debate, the higher promptings of the soul, whose blended energies produced the substance of the record. We see some part of a man's outward life and guess his character, but do not know it as we should if we heard also the debate within, loud under outward silence, and could be spectators of each conflict for which lists are set within the soul. Such witnesses we are, through English Literature, of the life of our own country (Morley 1873, 1).

There is a danger in seeming to fixate upon Eagleton, but his account of the 'Rise of English' has the merit of clarity in its radical portrayal of nationalism's role in that rise, and it is to this account therefore that Morley's figuring of the Nation needs to be compared. For Eagleton, English 'thrived' on 'the more strident forms of chauvinism' and 'English Literature rode to power on the back of wartime nationalism' (Eagleton 1983, 26). This sort of strident jingoism is difficult to find in the *Sketch*. If anything, while literature is quite definitely defined nationally, its relationship to the nation is expressed in terms of doubt: Literature is to the Nation, 'the debate within', the 'conflict [...] within the soul'. Morley's work certainly lends itself to an extent, from this point of view, to an Eagletonian critique of quietism, of Arnold's 'sweetness and light' hopefully quelling social disorder. But nationalistic jingoism there is none.

Solly records a poem by Morley, of limited literary value but interesting as a reaction to Disraeli's handling of the 1878 Berlin Congress and his assertion that he and Lord Salisbury had brought back 'Peace with Honour' (paraphrased by satirists as 'Peace with Honour – and Cyprus too' since Britain obtained the island as a result of the Congress's haggling). For the historian John R. Davis, Disraeli's conduct of the negotiations were driven by electoral considerations in the wake of the extensions of suffrage in 1867 and 1868: 'In post-1867 parliaments, nationalism, imperialism and jingoism appealed to the expanded electorate, and enabled Conservative governments to survive' (Davis 45; see also Taylor, Lowe). Morley, 'no lover of Disraeli', and during a period in which he had been asked to write a biography of Gladstone, reacted as follows:

ROBIN GOODFELLOW
TO A BROTHER WILL O' THE WISP.

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| Mar a nation, make a phrase, | Peace with honour! |
| Get some alderman to raise | Peace with honour! |
| Labels over dirty ways, | Peace with honour! |
| In big letters on red baize: | Peace with honour! |
| Turkey, plundered, hardly says, | Peace with honour! |
| Greece knows whose fair word betrays, | Peace with honour! |
| Austria bleeds, and deeply pays, | Peace with honour! |
| India next we'll set ablaze,— | Peace with honour! |
| Russia, faint from bloody frays, | Peace with honour! |
| Stab in back and steal her bays, | Peace with honour! |
| Pile the cost of evil days, | Peace with honour! |
| While an ass is left who brays, | Peace with honour! |
| Set up empire, freedom daze, | Peace with honour! |
| Up your sleeve a card yet stays, | Peace with honour! |
| Play it; set the world ablaze, | Peace with honour! |
| Dress shame in phrases, never mind detection, | Burn blue and crisp, |
| Dance till your light's out at the next election, | Will o' the Wisp |
| | (Solly 326-327). |

This is poetically and aesthetically clunky, perhaps, but hardly seems compatible with a view of English Literature as a means of firing up the masses for loyalty to the Nation on the battlefield, given the reference to 'empire' as precisely a 'freedom-dazing' opium and its critique of 'setting the world ablaze' as a means of winning elections.

Morley, then, is no jingoist, but is certainly, as a man of his time and looking for a *raison d'être* for literary study, in search of a national essence or genius or soul, and in this sense he is very much part of the foundation of academic literary studies as 'English', a nomenclature which still survives today in British universities and in sharp contrast with, say, the equivalent studies in France going under the non-nationally connoted 'lettres modernes', but similar to the way the cartography of disciplines has played out in Germany, where the label 'Germanistik' prevailed institutionally. Interestingly, Morley sees that essence of Englishness as progressivist, however, and it is in the name of that progressivist essence that he presents the *First Sketch* as something other than an avalanche of facts (as much as this might seem to be the case, some might say):

Let us not begin the study with a dull belief that it is but a bewilderment of names, dates, and short summaries of conventional opinion, which must be learnt by rote. As soon as we can feel that we belong to a free country with a noble past, let us begin to learn through what endeavours and to what end it is free. Liberty as an abstraction is not worth a song. It is precious only for that which it enables us to be and do (Morley 1873, 1).

So in spite of appearances, the *First Sketch* is not, Morley argues, just a question of encyclopaedically assembling all known data on 'English Literature' (whatever that is) in one place. It is firstly about exploring what it is to be English and the formation of the 'soul' of the nation, secondly about understanding that the soul in question was destined to be that of a 'free' people, and thirdly about understanding that the purpose of freedom is, as he puts it a few lines lower, 'to find out the right and do it, to root out the wrong, and labour ever onward for the love of God' (1). There is admittedly, at the end of the same paragraph, some slippage towards the language of English exceptionalism and missionary imperialism, vaunting 'how England won, and how alone she can expect to keep, her foremost place among the nations', but what is striking is how Morley links a sense of that exceptionalism to a struggle for moral exemplarity and social progress (2).

Morley spends much of his opening chapters, inevitably more historical than 'literary' given the sparsity of the written and the inexistence of the printed word during the periods in question, chasing the synthesis of

'race' and culture that in his teleological perspective would lead to the freedom-loving, progressivist genius of the nation. In an essay specifically devoted to the question of the development of nineteenth-century literary criticism and its relationship to nationalism – but in which Morley himself is not discussed – Julia M. Wright usefully frames the problem:

National literature is located in criticism of the long nineteenth century at the crux of a contradiction between neo-classical aspirations to empire, universal standards and the progress towards perfection on the one hand, and nativist longing for a specific territory, local cultural traditions and the conservation of the past on the other – a contradiction that troubles nationalism itself. The first is expansive, locating Britain, for instance, in an imperial genealogy that stretches back to Greece and Rome, and authorizing it to shape the world in its image and understand itself as the fullest expression of a universal modernity which others should seek; the other is insular, grounding individuals in the specific landscape, culture and history of the region in which they were born (Wright 99).

Morley can arguably be located within a certain 'troubled' nationalism of the sort Wright mentions, in the sense that there is a simultaneous insistence in the *Sketch* on a national calling or vocation for progress, orientated towards the future, and on geographical and historical locatedness, turned towards the past. As has been said, however, there is astonishingly little, if any, trumpeting about national glory in the English exceptionalist or Whig history vein in the *Sketch*. Interestingly, in his early chapters, Morley is keen to demonstrate that much of the 'genius of the nation' comes from its Celtic component. Commenting upon what seems to be an extract from the Welsh poem *Y Gododdin*, now dated possibly to the seventh century AD, Morley is at pains to emphasise 'the vivacity of Celtic fancy' and 'an outpouring of bold metaphor and effective simile', deploying some thorough textual analysis to support his point after quoting the poem:

Here, in a mere average stanza, containing one of the ninety celebrations of the Cymric chiefs who fell at Cattrath, we have more similes than in the six thousand and odd lines (English measure) of 'Beowulf', the first heroic poem of the Teutonic section of our people (Morley 1873, 10).

This insistence on the supposed dichotomy between the 'Celtic' and 'Teutonic' components of the English spirit or genius or soul is something

Morley comes back to repeatedly, and which his biographer confirms as being a consistent preoccupation, noting that 'he highly valued the influence of the quick Celtic imagination on the solid Saxon mind'⁹. And sure enough, when he comes to *Beowulf* in the opening chapters of the *Sketch*, it is valued for its perceived qualities of realism in its aesthetics, and practicality (that of, say, a nation of shopkeepers, for want of another stereotype of Englishness) and doggedness in the cultural values it conveys:

It brings before us the feast in the mead-hall, with the chief and his hearth-sharers, the customs of the banquet, the rude beginnings of a courtly ceremony, the boastful talk, reliance upon strength of hand in grapple with the foe, and the practical spirit of adventure that seeks peril as a commercial speculation – for Beowulf is undisguisedly a tradesman in his sword. The poem includes also expression of the heathen fatalism, 'What is to be goes over as it must,' tinged by the energetic sense of men who feel that even fate helps those who help themselves, or, as it stands in Beowulf, that 'the Must Be often helps an doomed man when he is brave (Morley 1873, 13).

However nonsensical one may find such musings over the posited cultural and genetic origins of the character of nations, Morley was far from alone in his period in indulging in them, and the interest of the double Celtic-Teutonic origin narrative lies elsewhere. It allows him to be selective with regard to the parts of the 'national genius' which he values the most, or with regard to the correct mix or balance between the Celtic, Teuton and later Norman components (though he insists heavily on the Normans being themselves of Scandinavian origin), and there is visibly a certain preference for the Celtic, to which he attributes the soulful, thoughtful and aesthetic strands of the collective English character.

Morley's *A Defence of Ignorance* from 1851, published in the year he accepted Dickens' offer of work on *Household Words* and moved to London, is primarily about the question of education, but also casts an interesting light on his view of England. The latter is presented in terms that are by no means idyllic, and what is wrong with the country seems at one point to be laid at the doorstep of the philistine and pedestrian, perhaps 'Teutonic' dimension of Englishness. The entirety of the *Defence*

9. *Life of Henry Morley*, 305. Solly additionally references a lecture given in Dublin in 1867 entitled 'The Influence of the Celt in English Literature'.

is written ironically, and in the following extract three members of the Select Committee for the Defence of Ignorance, Glaux, Ulula and Civetta, are congratulating themselves on the very limited resources devoted to education in England and here more specifically how quickly firstly primary education and then teacher training is wrapped up:

GLAUX. As for the children who are really taught, large numbers of them have a dame, licensed by us, for teacher. Go where they may, nearly all children taught, go to their school for a short time only, from the age of six until the age of nine or ten. [...]

ULULA. Good. We are a practical people, and just as the members of the middle class remove their children from a state of pupillage as soon as they are tall enough to climb an office stool or show their heads and shoulders over a counter; so the children of the people are reclaimed from school so soon as they have strength and lungs enough to scare away a crow.

CIVETTA. We have now, I think, four normal schools (not forty) ill supplied with funds; these polish off a pupil in about six months, and do not take three years about it like those dummy Germans. Brisk is the word in Britain. Say that a teacher cannot get his wheels greased properly within so short a time. The fact is that we know that they ought not to be greased at all (Morley 1851, 63).

The 'practicality' of the English character is here not favourably presented at all and England or Britain's educational provision is very unfavourably compared to continental standards. In this extract the comparison is specifically with Germany and its forty 'normal schools' or teacher training colleges with three-year programmes; elsewhere another 'Committee Member' takes up the question of how well education is financed in France:

Education may do for your foreigners; your frog-eaters who get 2,000,000l. a-year granted (and need it) to make them rational. Britons are born rational (Morley 1851, 62).

The sum provided for in England, we are indignantly given to understand elsewhere in the *Defence*, is around sixteen times lower (Morley 1851, 52). There is no trace of any complacent nationalism here, and as far as education itself is concerned, these extracts are representative of the *Defence of Ignorance* as a whole in point of its attention to factual detail and its thorough, rigorously-informed and scathing progressivist attack on the status quo. It is divided into four sections, respectively

concerning the education of the middle classes, that of the poor, the state of the universities (by which is primarily meant Oxford and Cambridge), and the education of women. In the first, mixed and equal education for boys and girls is advocated along with the abolition of all punishment and the promotion of secular education.

The final consideration is seen as the key to the education of the poor, as Morley sees squabbling about religious doctrine as the major obstacle to universal instruction, or as his Defender of Ignorance Glaux puts it, 'the Education-pox' (53), an epidemic according to him in continental countries ('The very air in Germany smells like a school-room' (53)). In the light of this long-harboured frustration with doctrinal wrangling, it is in fact unsurprising that the later *First Sketch of English Literature*, as noted earlier, places relatively little nationalistic emphasis on Protestant exceptionalism. In this section of the Defence, the defender of Ignorance Civetta glorifies a metaphorical great fire that is required to prevent the populace from crossing the gates towards knowledge:

Delicious is the fire of theologic zeal which wants the latitude and longitude of Heaven, takes the measurement of Satan's tail, sets brothers quarreling about a pinch of mint, and not unmindful of the Sermon on the Mount, endeavours to make all men blessed, by taking care that they shall all be reviled and persecuted, and have all manner of evil said against them falsely for the sake of the religion which their hearts adopt. O, Methodist! revile the Church; O, Church! revile the Methodist; O, Catholic! revile them both; O, both of ye, revile the Catholic. So keep this furnace hot, and let no mortal hand push at this gate. Ignorance of the poor! be thou a barrier for ever (Morley 1851, 43).

Underneath the thick irony this is a clear plea for secular, non-sectarian education. In continued inversion of Morley's own opinion, Civetta confirms this further on:

Do you say that Christians must learn to tolerate among each other with freedom of inquiry, and admit wide differences of opinion upon names and theories connected with that groundwork of religion, upon which we take our common stand! Sir, this is the very cant of Toleration. It would put our furnace out. The very next thing would be an establishment of schools for the imparting of our common knowledge – which, being truth, is part of God – to all the children of the poor, and leaving each child to receive lessons in religion from its own religious teacher (Morley 1851, 47).

It can be objected that the way in which continental countries such as France, in particular during the *Troisième République* period, both secularised and invested massively in universal education in precisely the way Morley is suggesting here, was no barrier to nationalism, and indeed, was arguably quite the contrary. From this point of view, universal education is merely means of national unification dissolving doctrinal ties and old feudal collectivities and channelling all loyalties towards the Nation. And yet, surely, no one would argue that the extension of education should not have taken place, on the continent and eventually in Britain. In any case, it is striking to notice that in Morley's expression of educational aspiration concerning the poor, there are no Arnoldian asides of the sort Eagleton is quick to seize upon: the education of the masses is never presented in terms of social control, but as simply good in itself. Civetta's wording is suffered to express a fragment of Morley's real opinion, a very Unitarian one: the 'common knowledge' imparted by secular education would, from the fact of 'being truth' would be 'part of God'. This is the position of someone for whom most doctrinal disputation is pointless given that Unitarianism excludes divine intervention in human affairs; all divine intervention ceased after the Creation, and the universe in all its wonder is there for science to explore and attempt to understand. Knowledge is therefore good in and of itself.

The section on the Universities is a caustic attack on the indolence, narrowness of scope, unprofessionalism and socioeconomic (not academic) exclusiveness of Oxford and Cambridge. Finally there is the section on the education of women. Only here is there any sense of hesitation in Morley's progressivism, and the subject is covered with an odd residual gallantry and very Victorian counterproductive idealisation of womanhood. The essence of the chapter is nevertheless that, just as Morley argued unambiguously in favour of equal education for girls, young women should have the same access to higher education as young men. Morley put his money where his mouth was by participating very considerably in Extension teaching for women; and the University of London of which he was a part began admitting women on the same basis as men in 1878, with the first two women ever to graduate with BAs in the country in 1880.

The *Sketch* is also interesting in this respect. Given its sparsity of analysis and assessment (there is some, but it is sporadic, and greatly outweighed by raw biographical data), one of the most cogent approaches to the *Sketch*, as one of the first attempts to produce a reference book on the whole of 'English Literature', would seem to be to observe whom it includes and whom it does not. A work published by a man in 1873 cannot be reasonably expected to read like Dale Spender's very necessary 1986 corrective to the literary canon *Mothers of the Novel: A Hundred Good Women Writers before Jane Austen*. It is, however, relatively gender-inclusive for its time, with the same occasional blurring as for male writers concerning the concept of 'literary' authors, and the same oscillation between brief mentions and multi-page entries. Women writers as recorded by the *Sketch* are of course hopelessly outnumbered by their male counterparts, and Morley does not register a hundred of them before Jane Austen; but he does include fifty-eight women writers from Behn onwards up until his work's publication (some of the last must be from post-1873 revisions)¹⁰. He cannot be accused of only including, tokenistically, 'the big names', many of the writers mentioned having now sunk into obscurity; and concerning the still enduringly admired writers his assessments are not misogynistic in the style of Samuel Johnson with his infamous quip about female preaching. Jane Austen is 'the Wordsworth of prose fiction' (905); 'George Eliot's novels (Morley's

10. Aphra Behn (*Sketch* 682-684), Katherine Philips (684), Susanna Centlivre (797), Elizabeth Carter (886-887), Fanny Burney (887), Anna Seward (887-888), Caroline Bowles (901), Maria Edgeworth (905-906), Jane Austen (912-913), Mary Lamb (933), Mary Power (936), Joanna Baillie (937), Lady Nairne (938), Charlotte Schreiber (940), Lady Morgan (940), Mary Somerville (940-941), Lucy Aikin (941-942), Mrs Hofland (942), Mary Brunton (942), Amelia Opie (942), Jane Porter (942), Anna Maria Porter (942), Harriet Lee (942), Mrs Hemans (942), Laetitia Landon (942-943), Frances Trollope (943-944), Mary Howitt (944), Anna Maria Fielding (945), Mary Cowden Clarke (945-946), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (946), Caroline Norton (947), Harriet Martineau (947-949), Mrs Houston (984), Adelaide Anne Procter (1003), Catherine Crowe (1038), Adelaide Kemble (1045), Mrs Richmond Richie (1060), Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë (1067-1069), Elizabeth Gaskell (1069-1070), Elizabeth Sewell (1070), George Eliot/Mary Ann Evans (1078-1080), Mrs Henry Wood (1085), Dinah Maria Mulock (1085), Mrs Eliza Lynn Linton (1085-1086), Amelia Edwards (1086), Matilda Betham-Edwards (1086), Baroness Tautphoeus (1086), Georgiana Fullerton (1086), Holme Lee/Harriet Parr (1086), Georgiana Craik (1086), Julia Kavanagh (1086), Mary Braddon (1086), Rhoda Broughton (1086), Mrs Macquoid (1086), Florence Montgomery (1086), Christina Rossetti (1086-1087).

quotation marks), pointedly mostly referred to without the shielding masculine pen-name, as Mary Ann Evans, are 'the work of a woman of rare genius, whose place is, for all time, among the greatest novelists our country has produced' (1080). The scientist Mary Somerville (one of many illustrations of the fragility of the term 'Literature' here, but no matter) is 'the first to shake man's comfortable faith' in masculine hegemony as regards science, and her work 'a powerful aid to the advance of knowledge into wisdom' (940-941).

Conclusion: Henry Morley and the progressivist founding of 'English'

An entire book could be, and perhaps should be, devoted to the case of Henry Morley. A plethora of questions could be raised, beyond the scope of the present chapter. I have tended to represent his political locatedness as identifiably progressivist in the 1860s-1880s, all the more so as there is a relative consensus between historians that Marxist thinking did not filter into the organised dissemination of political ideas in Britain until well after Morley's formative years, in the 1880s, with H. M. Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation (formed in 1881) and William Morris's Socialist League (formed in 1884). Morley retired in 1889 at the age of 67. A revised edition of the *Sketch* does include Morris's highly radical *Art and Socialism* of 1884, and it is striking that it does so in perfectly neutral, open-minded terms: the book 'turn[ed] with deep sincerity from poetry that he had been treating, perhaps, too much as an ornament apart from the real work of life, to verse and prose applied directly in aid of the socialist view of its chief problems' (Morley 1873, 1083-1084).

In spite of this accumulation of indicators of progressivism and indeed open-mindedness to even more radical political positions, there remain questions to be asked. Early radical feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft or Mary Hays do not feature in the *Sketch*; is this corrected in the longer ten-volume *English Writers*, and if not, does this indicate an outer limit on what was possible in broadly liberal thought during the period in which English was founded as a subject? Was the content of Morley's Extension teaching different from that of a contemporary pioneer of English such as John Churton Collins, and if so, how and why?

And on subjects less tightly centred on the political colouring of English in early Higher Education, what is to be made of certain assessments in the *Sketch*, such as Morley's assertion that Henry Fielding is 'our greatest novelist' (827)? Were such judgements consensual, or Morley's personal take, and in either case, why? And so on.

What I believe does come to light within the limited scope of this chapter is that although Morley was unable to entirely escape the *zeitgeist* and its intense fascination with the idea of the nation, his own intellectual reappropriation of this tendency in his treatment of English Literature was specific and was bound up with a national duty not just to promote liberty but to use liberty to promote in turn, social progress. In general writing not devoted to the new field of English, he was anti-imperialistic, a staunch advocate of mass education for its own sake, and a supporter of women's rights. There is a problem in the invisibility for Eagleton, and scholars subsequently influenced by him, of personalities like Morley in the reform movements of the period and in the 'rise of English'. It is tempting to feel that, writing in the *Introduction to Literary Theory* at Oxford in the 1980s (and indeed in the 2014 *Culture and the Death of God*), Eagleton is too preoccupied with irritating his fellow Oxford dons, however justifiable that preoccupation may have been at the time, to shift his gaze towards the foundation of the University of London, its fundamental role in the emergence of English as a discipline, and the degree of radical and progressivist thinking that thrived in and around it. This unawareness, indeed incomprehension, of the London factor is clear in such assertions as this:

It is significant, then, that 'English' as an academic subject was first institutionalised not in the Universities, but in the Mechanics' Institutes, working men's colleges and extension lecturing circuits. English was literally the poor man's Classics – a way of providing a cheapish 'liberal' education for those beyond the charmed circles of public school life and Oxbridge (Eagleton 1983, 23).

This seems to fail to understand, firstly, that the 'Mechanics' Institutes, working men's colleges and extension lecturing circuits' *were* either part and parcel of, or were in the process of becoming, the University of London. Secondly, as John Dixon has thoroughly demonstrated, it

ignores the degree to which the evolution of these new institutions was driven by demand and bottom-up movements rather than top-down impositions, with even King's College being caught up in the very socio-cultural evolution it had been founded to counter or absorb (Dixon 1-3, 13-26). In his account of the Extension movement, Dixon emphasises how the woman schoolteacher Annie Clough, and women like her, used combination between underfinanced endowed schools to invite university lecturers to teach in their towns. The first of these initiatives driven by Schoolmistresses' associations resulted in one James Stuart from Cambridge University lecturing in northern towns, in 1867, to girls, on 'elucidating the discovery and the meaning of gravitation' (Dixon 14), a much harder subject to somehow spin into a means of social control than 'English', and illustrative of a completely different dynamic at work than one in which ordinary people are malleable wax in the hands of the elites. A few months later Stuart ended up doing the same thing, on request from a junior manager at the Crewe Railway works, in front of an entirely voluntary audience of 1,500 workmen (Dixon 15). It is too easy to assert that Extension teaching of English, of the sort Morley participated in, was not equally demand-driven. It is reported of the Manchester Mechanics' Institute library in 1849 – largely funded by its upper-working-class members, and directed in its purchasing policy by them – that 'much the largest section in the library was that entitled "Novels, Romances and Tales"', despite its original solemnly pronounced mission having been the dissemination of vocationally applicable knowledge (Tylecote 151-154).

This is not to suggest that the emergence of English as an academic discipline never in any circumstances had anything to do with nationalism or anything to do with missionary zeal expended in the service of social control, but simply that the picture was more complex, involving a multiplicity of actors, motivations and always the possibility of reappropriation and subversion, cooption and recuperation, in either the direction of some form of egalitarian radicalism, or the reverse. One particularly interesting perspective in this regard, beyond the scope of this chapter but which begs further exploration, is that of temporary or more permanent bourgeois-proletarian alliances based on belief in

progress and a basic thirst for knowledge, identifying with a common cultural vehicle: the vernacular novel and literature.

As for the disciplinary space created for English by its first *real* Professor in England, and as has been seen in the *First Sketch of English Literature*, it is both methodologically and epistemologically tentative and tenuous, but it is the beginning of an existence defined by demand, and belief in professionalization and specialisation. Aziola, the only character in Morley's *Defence of Ignorance* whose contributions are not meant to be understood ironically (Aziola is not a Select Member of the Committee for the Defence of Ignorance), is asked in the section on 'Ignorance at the Universities' what a 'great establishment which had no other object than to foster learning' would be like, in other words something for Morley completely unlike the Oxford and Cambridge of the period. 'It would strive', replies Aziola, 'to represent, by numerous and active teachers, every branch upon the tree of knowledge.' Morley's calling at University College London, arguably the closest institution to Aziola's ideal yet to be achieved, was in one sense simply to endeavour to cover, to the best of his abilities, a branch whose existence appeared by then to be self-evident.

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