

Speakers, Listeners, and the Power of the Platform

You should have seen him [Richard Mutimer] addressing a crowd collected by chance in Hackney or Poplar. The slightest encouragement, even one name to inscribe in the book which he carried about with him, was enough to fire his eloquence; nay, it was enough to find himself standing on his chair above the heads of the gathering. His voice had gained in timbre; he grew more and more perfect in his delivery, like a conscientious actor who plays night after night in a part that he enjoys. And it was well that he had this inner support, this brio of the born demagogue, for often enough he spoke under circumstances which would have damped the zeal of any other man. The listeners stood with their hands in their pockets, doubting whether to hear him to the end or to take their wonted way to the public house.

George Gissing, *Demos* (1886)¹

A mechanic by trade, with the pale ‘air of the workshop’, yet a strong voice which can ‘ring out well in public places’ (64), Richard Mutimer is one of London’s ubiquitous socialist orators of the 1880s and 1890s. They were to be found sounding out on street corners, in parks, lecture rooms, and meeting halls, and in the dingy backrooms of pubs and coffee shops. While, in *The Secret Agent*, Conrad’s Verloc is too inherently lazy for a role as a ‘workman orator’, Gissing’s protagonist is ambitious and self-improving, a ‘working man gifted with brains’, who is an ‘eloquent hero’ (64) at meetings.

At a time of ‘riots and revolutions’, to borrow Ford’s terms in *Return to Yesterday*, popular oratory and the noise of social protest were familiar features of London’s soundscape.² However, the influence of this on writers’ representations of the late Victorian city remains under-explored. Where these are discussed, fictional impressions of social unrest are often approached from the perspective of individual writers’ political attitudes. Yet, as this chapter will study, this feature of London’s soundscape had a far wider impact. First, the figure of the popular orator had particularly engaged the literary imagination, as reflected in Gissing’s characterization of Mutimer. This figure is a familiar one in fiction of the time, as will be explained in the first section of this chapter, including characterizations by Besant, James, Conrad, and Harkness. The 1884 Reform Act extended the franchise to most working men, and the emergence of the ‘eloquent heroes’ who addressed them reveals how the working classes were asserting their right to be heard. Later sections of the chapter focus on Gissing’s *Demos*, in particular his representation of working-class speech and the sound of the protesting crowds.

At the outset, it should be noted that in the 1880s and 1890s the ‘platform’ played a significant role in London’s cultural life, as Martin Hewitt, among others, has argued.³ In addition to socialist meetings, Londoners flocked to lectures, debates, and sermons, both religious and secular. Olive Garnett’s diaries from the 1890s give a very vivid account of these oratorical times, recording an eclectic range of speakers, discoursing in London’s churches, meeting halls, parks, and streets.⁴ As well as partaking in the fashionable practice of ‘sermon tasting’ at various West End churches, she attends lectures at, for example, Essex Hall (off the Strand) and the South Place Ethical Society (at Finsbury).⁵ Garnett’s diaries include descriptions of the ubiquitous anarchist orators of her time, both at ‘open-air’ meetings in Regent’s Park, and at more formal gatherings, such as in the Portman Rooms (off Baker Street), where, in February 1892, she observes a ‘large and fashionable audience’ listening to the Russian exile Prince Kropotkin.⁶

There was also a ready audience for accessible means of learning and general self-improvement, which the 1870 Education Act had helped to create. As the lists of ‘Lectures and Meetings’ published by contemporary newspapers indicate, Londoners could hear speakers on a wide range of popular concerns. In July 1897, for example, T.P. O’Connor’s *Weekly Sun* lists talks on such matters as ‘Is the Cosmos Ethical?’, ‘Shall we Live after we are Dead?’, ‘The Art of Living’, and, encapsulating the

great *fin de siècle* dilemma, ‘Religion and Science’.⁷ An article from 1902 gives an impression of an audience at one of London’s institutes, noting the ‘mechanics, law students, City clerks, and shop assistants’ attending a debating society at the Working Men’s College in Great Ormond Street.⁸ This is the world of earnest autodidacticism and political engagement described by H.G. Wells in novels such as *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900). There the eponymous hero delivers a paper on socialism to his college’s debating society, having pledged himself to the cause of ‘Social Reform’, signified by ‘humming the *Marseillaise*’, the sound of which is frequently referenced in other fiction of the period.⁹

Late Victorian London was certainly a talkative city, and the awareness of new working-class voices on the political scene had revitalized an interest in the impact of spoken language. As R.B. Cunninghame Graham observed in the *Saturday Review*, the unique ‘power of speech’ should not be underestimated:

The writer writes, toils, waits, publishes and succeeds at last, but feels no flush of triumph like to that which the ‘cabotin,’ preacher, pleader or mob-orator enjoys when he perceives the eyes of the whole audience fixed upon him like a myriad of electric sparks; their ears drink in his words, and men and women, rich, poor, old, young, foolish and wise alike, bound all together by the power of speech.¹⁰

While Cunninghame Graham describes the wider emotive influence of oratory, many writers also became engaged more specifically with the perceived grammatical/linguistic traits of working-class speech. Consequently, the sound of the ‘crowd’, a familiar trope in London fiction, takes on a wider symbolism at this time through its association with the sound of populist speech. This was heard as the oral equivalent of ‘journalese’, occasioning similar concerns (typically informed by social prejudice) about a denigration in the quality of language, as promoted through a (seemingly) less well-educated and informed populist ‘voice’. And while the speakers themselves were duly regarded as problematic, so were their listeners in the crowd, this being an era defined by social disorder on the city’s streets and the threat of revolution. The associated noise of social protest also raised inevitable concerns about the use of London’s public spaces, at a time when, as discussed in the previous chapter, the city was being culturally reconfigured as a less anarchic and more orderly imperial centre.

Gissing's *Demos* was published in the wake of the February 1886 unemployment riots, an event that came to be especially associated with the revolutionary fervour of this period, while also revealing the influence of popular oratory. A large meeting of the unemployed, originally organized in Trafalgar Square by the Fair Trade League, was later taken over by the Social Democratic Foundation (SDF); its leader Henry Hyndman and the trade unionist John Burns (who was something of a model 'workman orator' of this era) then orchestrated events through powerful speeches to the crowds. Reports in *The Times* suggest that plunder, destruction, and revolution were being 'preached unchecked, almost within earshot of the responsible governing authorities' at Whitehall.¹¹ The scenes that followed over a few days that February—demonstrations, marches through the city's streets, and, famously, the attacking of West End clubs—led to fears that, as Gissing describes in a letter to his sister, London seemed to be a 'in a state of riot and threatened revolution', although he had personally witnessed nothing of the 'uproar'.¹²

In a period when the popular press had begun to exert its own influence over a newly enfranchised and educated audience, the 1886 disturbances illustrate that the more immediate and visceral power of the spoken word was still a pertinent issue, specifically, the problem of 'seditious talk', with which both Burns and Hyndman were charged, although later acquitted. Gissing's particular interest in socialist discourse was in evidence in his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, published in 1880, where he describes how the 'glorious spirit of radicalism' had spread across London in the 1870s, while the 'notes of the "Marseillaise"' were occasionally heard in the open streets (312–313). Gissing's impressions of the working men's club near Oxford Street, which is frequented by Arthur Golding and other eloquent speakers such as Will Noble, recalls a now often overlooked feature of urban life. In addition to these clubs, there were the parks and other open spaces that had traditionally symbolized London as a city where free speech and noisy demonstrations of social protest could be liberally exercised; aside from Trafalgar Square, these included Hyde Park, Tower Hill, Kennington Common, Clerkenwell Green (scene of the riot in *Demos*), Dod Street (Poplar), and Victoria Park in Mile End, which was also home to an area known as 'The Waste', a gathering place for strikes and demonstrations.¹³ There is mention of the Mile End Waste in Harkness's *Out of Work*, where she describes how working men gathered there for

meetings on Sunday evenings. Her impressions reveal the impromptu nature of their oratory; as a dock labourer tells Jos Coney, ‘I won’t speak tonight [...] there’s someone at it already’ (65). As I will discuss further below, this was a milieu familiar to the politically active Harkness. However, when considering other writers’ responses to popular oratory, the random nature of its appearance is an important factor to bear in mind. While this was a sound more readily associated with the East End, even the most politically disinterested urban *flâneur* would have heard such speakers on street corners and in central locations such as Hyde Park.

However, while the 1884 Reform Act had extended the right to ‘speak’ at the ballot box (for more working men, at least), such public oratory and crowd gatherings were subject to increasing control by this time, in response to fears about a Continental-style revolution. According to Anna Davin, this evolution of a concern for greater control over London’s noisy ‘mob’ can be traced back to the 1850s, and is epitomized by the transformation of Kennington Common, where the Chartists had gathered in 1848, and which by 1853 had become a ‘park’, at the request of the local gentry.¹⁴ By the 1870s, the increased control over public speaking and gathering was indicated by the situation in Hyde Park, where oration was now limited to a specified distance from the ‘Reformer’s Tree’.¹⁵ Over the following decade, protection of the right to speak freely and to gather became a regular source of conflict between the police and SDF, and was an issue particularly taken up by John Burns, who had begun his political career as an orator on street corners and in parks, a tradition now increasingly under threat in a city whose governing authorities were less tolerant of the random ‘rant’. In response, Burns protested about the ‘chain of police repression’ surrounding Dod Street in the East End (where the SDF had several violent clashes with the police in 1884 and 1885) and the control over more central locations: ‘It is said that Hyde Park and other places are open to us. But in all these places attempts have been made to restrict the rights with a view, I believe, to abolishing them altogether’.¹⁶ This was an issue also taken up by fellow orator Cunninghame Graham, who argued for the poor’s right to free speech as the ‘only safety-valve left to them in so large and dense a population as London’.¹⁷

By the time of *Demos*, the populist orator was, then, a conflicted figure, as Gissing’s characterization of the tragic Richard Mutimer reveals. While having a symbolic status as a mouthpiece of modern democracy,

the workman orator can also be regarded as a figure from a noisier and more unruly age. Before considering *Demos* in detail, Mutimer benefits from being located in the context of other fictional orators, the characterizations of whom also reflect writers' engagement with wider issues of social identity, education, and language.

SOME PLATFORM PERFORMERS IN BESANT, JAMES, CONRAD, AND HARKNESS

When describing working-class oratory, writers were often, of course, engaging with an unfamiliar social soundscape, although, as noted above, they would have had some awareness of its impact on the city's streets. A more detailed knowledge, however, required research, and at this time the 'listening point of view' was sometimes that of 'social tourist'. As research for *The Princess Casamassima*, for example, Henry James became a self-confessed 'Naturalist', visiting Millbank Prison in August 1884 to make notes of working men's conversations, and recording in his notebook some characteristic 'Phrases, of the People'.¹⁸ Similarly, as research for *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, Walter Besant had spent the summer of 1881 wandering through East London, 'that great and marvellous unknown country'.¹⁹ In this novel, Besant focalizes his impressions of socialist agitation onto two wealthy and well-educated protagonists, 'Harry Goslett' and 'Angela Kennedy', who adopt working-class personas while living in Stepney. Goslett is the adopted son of Lord le Breton but has more humble roots in the East End. During time spent there to reacquaint himself with his social origins, Goslett listens to his East End cousin, Dick Coppin, a 'born orator', who promotes his socialist cause with 'great freedom of language and a great natural eloquence of a rough and uncultivated kind' at the 'Advanced Club' (255). Besant's impressions of this club encapsulate how the sound of London's reformist past echoed into the present of the 1880s. Coppin is of a younger generation, but the club where he 'thunders' is also frequented by elderly men who remember 1848 and the 'dreams of Chartism'. They have achieved 'pretty well all they clamoured for in their bygone days' but, we are told, 'the reformer is like the horse-leech and still cries for more' (251). Such terms seemingly dismiss the reformist agenda, while parodying the unsophisticated speaking styles of the worker-orator, and when, for example, upper-class Goslett gets up to speak, his style is notably more measured than that of his cabinet-maker cousin.

However, as Helen Small has suggested, there are ‘alternative currents’ running through the speech of this novel, and Besant’s treatment of socialist discourse benefits from a closer listening.²⁰ In particular, there is a revealing intergenerational conversation between an ‘old Chartist’ and Coppin on Stepney Green. The Chartist recommends Coppin that he distance himself from the thundering and bellowing of old-style political agitation. The Chartist tells Coppin that ‘we [the workers] must be educated’ (314) and, counselling him against making speeches that ‘come pretty nigh to the bellows kind’ (315), he also urges him to ‘get reported’ (315). This transition from speech into print was a significant marker of modernity for the populist orator, and one which is at play, as we will see, in *Demos*. Ironically, in *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, Besant ascribes the voice of modernity to the Chartist, and we later witness Coppin musing that ‘the old indignation times were over’ (316).

Coppin’s political ambition is to become a member of parliament, a symbolic trajectory from Whitechapel to Whitehall later achieved in actuality by John Burns. Besant characterizes Coppin in optimistic terms, anticipating that social progress and widening democracy might one day be achieved through influence within the establishment, rather than by railing against it. Near the end of the novel, we learn that Coppin has become one of the trustees in Goslett and Kennedy’s philanthropic project the ‘Palace of Delight’, a site of entertainment, art, music, and education, later to be replicated by its real-life counterpart, the ‘People’s Palace’ on the Mile End Road. Besant thereby imagines a democratically symbolic space, supported by the ‘old Chartist’ and Lord Jocelyn alike. In the context of Coppin’s longer-term aspirations, this is also a transitional site. However, the ‘Palace of Delight’ offers the sound of musical recitals, military bands, and theatre, not the sound of sedition, and thereby represents the future as surely as the vociferous social agitation of the East End was slowly being relegated to the past.

Coppin has a more sinister counterpart in Henry James’s chemist Paul Muniment from *The Princess Casamassima*, published in 1886, the same year as *Demos*. The narrative focuses on the experience of Hyacinth Robinson, raised in genteel poverty in Pentonville but with, like Goslett, aristocratic origins. He becomes embroiled into the city’s anarchist circles, and begins frequenting meetings in the back room of the Sun and Moon pub, a fictitious location in Bloomsbury, where working men, political exiles, and potential terrorists gather together. While rooted in the actualities of revolutionary activity on the Continent and the

terrorist incidents in London in the early 1880s, the novel also engages in more abstract terms with the nature of popular influence, as personified by Muniment, and also demonstrated by the political exile Eustache Poupin.²¹ In particular, James reveals how this influence was dependent on an eloquent ‘performance’ over a characteristically less well-educated crowd, like the ‘little band of malcontents’ who gather at the Sun and Moon (282). Here the men thump the table, ‘repeating over some inane phrase’, and there is a generally ‘low’ tone of discourse (280–281)—terms through which James reveals their inherent vulnerability to skilled performers like Muniment and Poupin. Muniment is ‘listened to unanimously’ (281) by these men, over whom he has established a quietly impressive presence, suggestive of a superior intellect which can ‘see further than most’ (281).

Meanwhile, Poupin stirs up a revolutionary fervour in the men through talk of London’s unemployed and his own tales of hardship. His status among the listeners is ascribed to the ‘brilliancy with which he represented the political exile [...]. Poupin had performed in this character now for many years’ (284). The power of manipulative eloquence and a persuasive persona over a less sophisticated audience becomes tragically evident in this novel, as the men are moved from their ‘crude’ discussions to talk of revolution and terrorism. Robinson’s own vulnerability derives from his social sensibilities: he is viscerally shaken by the plight of London’s poor, heard as that ‘deep perpetual groan of London misery [which] seemed to swell and swell and form the whole undertone of life’ (283). Robinson gets swept away by a ‘breath of popular passion’ (291) of a type associated with Muniment. This is a novel where the popular ‘platform’ exerts a particular significance, as its narrative turning point occurs when Robinson transforms from listener to speaker, standing on a chair at the Sun and Moon, and pledging to ‘do anything’ (294) for the revolutionary cause. As a result, Robinson becomes embroiled into a failed assassination attempt, and eventually commits suicide, but here we witness his new identity as the men’s hero. As Muniment proudly asserts, Robinson has taken to the ‘stump’; this gains approval from Robinson’s audience: ‘He felt himself, in a moment, down almost under the feet of the other men; stamped upon with intentions of applause, of familiarity; laughed over and jeered over, hustled and poked in the ribs’ (294). Robinson has also gained an *entrée* into a completely different social milieu, notably that of the Princess Casamassima, for whom revolutionary politics are little more than a

fashionable game. But while Besant's Coppin achieves a new status and identity within London's social order, Robinson is ultimately fated to feel 'extinct' (582) within the city, as his suicide comes to symbolize. Meanwhile, Muniment lives on, asserting to Princess Casamassima that he is 'genuine' (578) about his cause, and thereby personifying a kind of malign modernity within the anarchic city.

Like Besant and James, Conrad also responded to the new discourse of workers' rights, although he did not need to undertake specific research, due to his experiences as a ship's captain and his familiarity with London's docks. There, random oratory, street discussions, and more formal demonstrations were characteristic sounds, notably during the Great Dock Strike of 1889. In particular, Conrad would have frequently encountered the 'casual speakers', those men who, as the *Morning Advertiser* reports, gathered informally to debate and discuss:

The men who did not accompany their fellows to town assembled at street corners in little groups, and with solemn voices, and in low and earnest tones, discussed the situation. Occasionally, one of their number, credited with what they term the 'gift of the gab,' would be called upon to deliver an address, and the burden of his song was usually the tyranny of capital over labour.²²

The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' was published in 1897, but set in the wake of the 1884 Reform Act, and the sound of workers' rights being asserted is evident throughout the novella, through the 'impassioned orations' of work-shy agitator Donkin, who attempts to stir the crew into a mutiny.²³ They nickname him 'Whitechapel', and Donkin is very much a stereotypical product of that area, insofar as he personifies both its impoverishment and associations with noisy strikes and demonstrations. Dismissed by James Wait as 'East-end trash' (45), Donkin is always ready to challenge authority and to start a 'row'. He urges the crew to 'strike, boys, strike' (121) a possible allusion to the rallying song heard on the streets in 1889, 'Strike, boys, strike, for better wages'. This was a parody, as Derek B. Scott notes, of a conservative song from 1867 entitled 'Work, Boys, Work', apparently sung to the tune of another song, 'Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!'.²⁴ Conrad was in London at the time of the strike, looking for a ship's berth, and so is likely to have heard this song. If he was also aware of its origins, an association with the work-shy Donkin would have been especially ironic. More generally, a pun on 'strike' is probably

intentional: Donkin does indeed ‘strike’ when he throws the belaying pin, an action which makes the crew aware of his innate violence. His attempts to stir a mutiny having failed, Donkin eventually returns to shore life, rejoining London’s great crowd and, as the sailor-narrator ironically suggests, probably taking on a role as a labour leader: ‘And Donkin, who never did a day’s work in his life, no doubt earns his living by discoursing with filthy eloquence upon the right of labour to live’ (172).

Peter McDonald has identified Donkin as a ‘*failed* agitator’, who ‘serves as the focus of the novella’s attack on Socialism’.²⁵ As McDonald points out, such a political stance may signify Conrad’s intent to appeal to W.H. Henley, the reactionary editor of the *New Review*, where the novella was first serialized.²⁶ However, Conrad’s attention to Donkin’s speech also suggests a more general interest in the discourse of ‘rights’, and specifically in the denigration of language signified by the type of ‘filthy eloquence’ used to incite violence. For all his wild loquacity and Cockney phonetics, there is something of the skilled orator about Donkin. At the beginning of the novella, for example, he engages the crew’s sympathy with some artfully constructed parallels. Having established his general impoverishment, he continues: ‘No bag, no bed, no blanket, no shirt’ (12). This is a style which suggests the emotive rhetoric of the contemporary social reformer or philanthropist—a call to sentiment and sympathy which was very much in tune with the popular oratory of this period. In *Return to Yesterday*, for example, Ford recalls an 1892 speech by Charles Booth, where he asked of his audience whether they knew that London’s poor had, for example, ‘no fire in the grate, no meal on the table’ and even ‘no candle to go to bed by’.²⁷

The manner in which the sailor-narrator recalls Donkin’s attempt to stir up a mutiny are also interesting in this context. The narrator has clearly heard Donkin use a series of rhetorical questions, like an orator addressing a crowd, and he recounts these using indirect speech: ‘Who thanked us? Who took any notice of our wrongs? Didn’t we lead a “dorg’s loife for two poun’ ten a month?” Did we think that miserable pay enough to compensate us for the risk to our lives and for the loss of our clothes?’ (100). This, according to the narrator, is speech imbued with a ‘picturesque and filthy loquacity’ (101). Conrad was alert to the qualities of spoken language, and elsewhere wrote of the potential of ‘cheap oratory’ to stir up the types of fears and antagonisms that could

lead to war.²⁸ Like his contemporaries, he was aware of the power of the eloquent demagogue for whom language was being used for emotional effect, without attention to meaning. The agitator Donkin is a ‘consummate artist’ (100) in that regard, who treats the ship as his platform and the crew as his audience. A destabilizing feature of London’s ‘shore-life’ is thereby transported onto the ship, disrupting its stable community of sailor-workers.

As the above accounts of populist orators suggest, this was still predominantly a male role, despite some renowned women speakers such as Annie Besant. In *Demos*, Mutimer’s wife Adela takes to the platform, but notably only to speak in support of her husband:

The committee-man roared for silence, then in a few words explained Mrs Mutimer’s wish to ‘make a speech’. To Adela’s ears there seemed something of malice in this expression, and she did not like, either, the laugh which it elicited. But quiet was speedily restored by a few men of sturdy lungs. She stepped to the front of the platform. (435)

Adela’s situation is particularly difficult, as her husband’s reputation has been compromised by rumours of financial corruption, and therefore the audience is naturally hostile. Nevertheless, Gissing’s description conveys some of the challenges encountered by women speakers, particularly when facing an all-male audience. In Margaret Harkness’s *In Darkest London* (first published in 1889 as *Captain Lobe: A Story of the Salvation Army*), the labour mistress Jane Hardy describes a ‘charming little lady’ speaking on anarchism to ‘eighty practical working men’, and having to endure their scornful laughs when it transpired she had no pragmatic solutions for their plight.²⁹ Such a scene seems typical; as Deborah Mutch has noted, political clubs were usually limited to male membership only, with women attending by invitation.³⁰ Whatever the statistics, the presence of women at such clubs was still a cause for comment, as contemporary descriptions reflect. In *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, for example, Angela Kennedy is invited to attend the Stepney Advanced Club by Dick Coppin, where she observes of the audience that ‘chiefly they were men and young men, but among them were a good many women and girls’ (254). Elsewhere, in Margaret Harkness’s *A City Girl* (1887), Nelly Ambrose goes to a meeting at the Radical Club in Whitechapel where there are ‘about a hundred men, but only two women’ (55).

Despite still being denied the vote, women increasingly had a symbolic and actual voice in public affairs. As Judith Walkowitz has discussed, the opportunity to be a 'platform woman' was enhanced by important legal advances in the 1880s, such as the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 and, in 1888, being granted the right to vote for membership of county councils.³¹ This increased women's independence and confidence to take on roles requiring public speaking, including philanthropic work. Even in liberal circles, however, women could encounter resistance when they wanted to make a speech. The correspondence of Beatrice Webb reveals that on one occasion her husband Sidney vetoed her from speaking at a Fabian meeting, leading her to comment to another member of the party: 'See how skin-deep are these professions of advanced opinion, with regard to women, among your leaders of the forward party!'³² Women still tended to find themselves in a 'behind the platform' supportive role, like Margaret Harkness, Webb's second cousin, who was active in the SDF between 1885 and 1887; during the 1889 Dock Strike, Harkness supported key orators such as Burns and Hyndman through fundraising, helping workers' families, and advising at committee meetings.³³

As her novels *A City Girl*, *Out of Work*, and *In Darkest London* reveal, Harkness was a particularly acute social listener, and considered together these novels help recover the aurality of competing political and religious discourses in the East End's chapels, halls, and parks. *Out of Work* provides a particularly dialogic account of different 'preachers', set in the context of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee celebrations. This novel opens with an impression of the queen's visit to the London Hospital in Whitechapel; straightaway Harkness establishes an auditory contrast between the cheers of the West End visitors to this event, and the 'hisses' which were 'mingled with faint applause' (1–2) from the slum dwellers. This sets the auditory scene for what follows, as Harkness describes the different locations, such as Victoria Park, where a working-class woman like Polly Elwin would be assailed by the sound of speakers from different causes. Harkness brings these into direct engagement through a scene at a Wesleyan chapel, where hearing Mr Meek the preacher atone the virtues of a godly and virtuous life, an impoverished-looking man interrupts him by asking if he has ever been hungry, a question that temporarily disrupts the preacher's oration about the 'glory and the pageant' (14) of the jubilee. John Goode has suggested that by not giving this man a name (like others Coney encounters at the docks and the

work-house), Harkness asserts a 'context of anonymous voices', which signifies working-class history as the 'voice of many voices'.³⁴ To extend this reading, by not naming this man Harkness suggests that his is a symbolic cry of poverty, from a city, not an individual, as enshrined in Andrew Mearns's famous pamphlet from 1883, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*. The appeasing and patriotic tones of the preacher are thereby starkly contrasted with this questioning voice. However, as Harkness reveals, the voice of the poor is frequently ignored; Meek chooses to end his discourse with a hymn, a symbolic sound of resignation and diversion in her narratives.

Elsewhere in *Out of Work*, Harkness sets the sounds of political and religious discourse into direct conflict, notably in an episode in Victoria Park, where Polly Elwin and Jos Coney encounter a familiar scene:

They reached the trees, and found a thick mass of men and women tightly wedged together, revolving around some men who were arguing and lecturing on all sorts of subjects connected with politics and religion. (46)

Yet, Polly would rather hear hymns than the 'wicked talk' of a socialist urging 'Claim your rights!' (48), a response through which Harkness alludes to the influence of the church on working-class lives, and how the urge to be quiet and respectable could conflict with engagement with unsettling political ideas. Polly goes off to join in with the hymn-singing, which signifies her resignation to the social status quo, while Jos looks around and perceives an 'ugly contrast' (48) between the poor ragged men lying around on the grass and the people listening to the hymn-singers, speakers, and a band. Through the perspective of Jos, Harkness presents a troubling social soundscape, which contrasts with more sentimentalized views of happy East Enders enjoying their Sunday in the park. The music-makers provide entertainment, which diverts people's attention away from the social injustice in their midst.

Harkness also introduces her readership (who would have been predominantly middle class) to the potentially unfamiliar location of a typical East End park.³⁵ Like Harkness herself, the readers thereby become social listeners, and are simultaneously alerted to the situation of poor girls like Polly Elwin, for whom, unlike their better-educated and wealthier counterparts, political discourse is something heard in the background, but not actively engaged in. In *A City Girl*, Harkness characterizes a similar heroine through the seamstress Nelly Ambrose, who

falls victim to a 'Radical' speaker, Arthur Grant. In the context of the narrative, Grant is the archetypal villain, who seduces Nelly and then abandons her with his baby. However, Grant's characterization as a political speaker is more nuanced; here is a character quite different from the emotive 'thunderer' Dick Coppin, the manipulative anarchist Paul Muniment, or the Cockney loafer Donkin. In Grant, Harkness personifies another type of political speaker, that of the middle-class careerist, driven by self-interest, not reforming zeal, whose speeches sound correspondingly inauthentic and derivative. Grant is a political dilettante and dabbler, of a type later echoed in Wells's characterization of Masterman in *Kipps*; as Sid describes therein, Masterman is 'a sort of journalist. He's written a lot of things [...]. He writes for the Commonweal sometimes [...]. When he really gets to talking—he *pours* it out'.³⁶ Grant is a similarly vague figure, who, we learn, had 'enveloped the jargon other people talked into his own phraseology [...]. He knew a little of everything. He could play a little, paint a little and lecture a little' (65).

The reference to 'phraseology' reflects Harkness's alertness to the language of political discourse, an interest that becomes more apparent in *In Darkest London*. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, attendance at lectures and debates played a significant role in working-class self-education in the 1880s and 1890s. Harkness acknowledges this social phenomenon here, commenting: 'The East End is full of people who seek to educate themselves with the help of secularist and socialist lectures, Sunday discussions in the parks, and circulating libraries' (125). *In Darkest London* includes one such self-educator, the labour mistress Jane Hardy, who is able to give the Salvationist Captain Lobe a detailed survey of the different socialist factions speaking across the city. However, Hardy is a pitiful figure, a characterization reflecting contemporary concerns that the working classes were too educationally ill-equipped to meaningfully engage with political discourse.

The pain these men and women suffer from mental indigestion can be witnessed in lecture-halls on Sunday evenings, while they listen to things that are beyond their understanding. They carry away words and phrases to puzzle over during the week, and sometimes they give the things they have heard quite a wrong interpretation, or use them in an exaggerated sense that take away their meaning. (125)

The position of these comments within the narrative implies that this is Harkness's authorial voice and such a response suggests contemporary social prejudices about the mind of the 'proletariat'. However, Harkness's particular characterization of Hardy reveals more pragmatic, economic concerns: as a working woman, her ideas about socialism are 'vague', we learn: 'for she has no time to study, and little time to think' (89). Harkness's citing of the 'string of words and phrases', which 'dangle like charms before [Hardy's] eyes' (89) further reveals her interest in working-class education. Hardy has picked up the discourse of socialism both from her reading and her listening, but by dint of her economic position she has not benefited from a sufficiently thorough education; such terms as 'the emancipation of labour' elude her understanding, 'for they were not written in her School Board lesson book' (89) and she can not afford to buy a dictionary. This sort of interest in the impact of education on political discourse was common to many of Harkness's contemporaries, particularly Gissing, whose novels reveal a similar preoccupation with how his working-class characters sounded, and also how they listened, within those potentially disruptive crowds gathering across the city.

SPEAKERS AND THE SOUND OF SOCIAL CLASS

As Pierre Coustillas comments, *Demos* is full of characters 'whose speech might have sprung straight from observation'.³⁷ Indeed, this novel is notable for its long passages of direct speech, the orthographic detail of which was no doubt informed both by Gissing's early studies of linguistics and his frequenting of socialist meetings. As a letter written to his sister Ellen in November 1885 records, Gissing had felt 'obliged' to attend such meetings as research for *Demos*, including gatherings at Kelmscott House, William Morris's home in Hammersmith.³⁸

Some years earlier, Gissing had undertaken similar research for 'Notes on Social Democracy', published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1880, after the magazine's editor, John Morley, had asked him to write a series of articles, including, he suggested, 'a good paragraph giving us a concrete picture of one or more of the London clubs: tobacco, style of speech & c'.³⁹ These were German working men's clubs, to which Gissing may have been introduced by his friend Eduard Bertz, who had left Germany in 1877 as a political exile.⁴⁰ As Robert Hampson notes, there were many such political refugees in London at the time, the city having

become something of a centre for European anarchism in the 1880s and 1890s.⁴¹ For ‘Notes on Social Democracy’, Gissing visited five (unidentified) ‘London centres’, where he found ‘anything but a threatening impression’, and families ‘dividing their attention between the orator on the platform’ and the refreshments provided by the ‘obliging *kellner*’.⁴² While acknowledging that some leaders possessed ‘striking powers of emotional oratory’, Gissing continues by musing whether working men had enough ‘self-reliance, self-control, self-respect’ to set up a ‘Socialist State’, concluding that in any cases the masses needed education rather than ‘agitation’ in order to progress.⁴³ Such a response is consistent with Gissing’s preoccupation with social class and education, as *Demos* would later reflect. In this novel, it is evident that Gissing was particularly interested in how wider access to education had impacted on working-class speech, and his detailed representation of this consistently draws our attention towards form rather than content: how his *dramatis personae* sound becomes as significant as what they say.

Via the specificities of linguistic detail in *Demos*, Gissing uses speech as a modus operandi through which he can contrast the class, education, culture, and social aspirations of different characters. For example, when Mutimer, the engineer, and Westlake, the artist (who is generally presumed to be based on William Morris) take to the platform at the Commonwealth Hall, the reader is made aware of an audible contrast in tone between the two men:

To the second speaker it had fallen to handle in detail the differences of the hour. Mutimer’s exordium was not inspiring after the rich-rolling periods with which Mr. Westlake had come to an end; his hard voice contrasted painfully with the other’s cultured tones. (247)

These social contrasts in speech reveal recurrent differences between the loci across London where political meetings took place. The milieu of Commonwealth Hall is, we learn, rather different from the back-room of the Hoxton coffee shop where Mutimer more usually makes his speeches: ‘The people who occupied the benches were obviously of a different stamp from those wont to assemble at the Hoxton meeting-place’ (246). As Debbie Harrison explains, Commonwealth Hall is a fictional location, and Gissing may be alluding to *Commonweal*, the socialist publication edited by Morris.⁴⁴ However, it is also likely that Gissing was using the name to make a further social contrast. The

description of the audience at Commonwealth Hall is suggestive of a central location such as Essex Hall, where the Fabians held their meetings, and frequented, as her diaries record, by liberally minded and well-heeled young people like Olive Garnett. At Commonwealth Hall, we discover, there are ‘perhaps a dozen artisans’, the rest of the audience consisting of young men and women ‘who certainly had never wrought with their hands’ and for whom understanding of social injustice is ‘theoretical’ (246).

Gissing contrasts the scene at Commonwealth Hall with the Hoxton coffee shop, a place of vituperation, haranguing, and roaring, where the roof rings with ‘tempestuous acclamations’ and the speakers use ‘words and phrases of a rich vernacular’ (246). The coffee shops were often on the premises of converted pubs, a testament to the efforts of the Temperance Association and the Coffee Tavern Movement (1840s–1890s) to reduce alcoholism among the working classes. In the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the coffee houses were gathering places for London’s radicals, exemplified by Lunt’s Coffee House on Clerkenwell Green.⁴⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century, the coffee shops had a more general function as workers’ club rooms, where social/educational events took place, in addition to political meetings. As an example, Wroots’ Coffee House in Poplar High Street was the initial headquarters for committee meetings during the 1889 Great Dock Strike.⁴⁶

Throughout *Demos*, Gissing describes his working-class speakers’ linguistic challenges, and they are typically self-conscious in their rhetorical efforts. Mutimer, for example, ‘struggles with the h-fiend’ and has ‘syntactical lapses’ (89). While he manages to contain these in his lectures, his speech ‘deteriorates’ when he is under emotional pressure. When he confronts his wife Adela, for example,

his accent deteriorated as he flung out his passionate words; he spoke like any London mechanic, with defect and excess of aspirates, with neglect of g’s at the end of words, and so on. (365)

Meanwhile, Cowes, another coffee shop speaker

prides himself upon his grammar, goes back to correct a concord, emphasises eccentricities of pronunciation; for instance, he accents capitalist on the second syllable, and repeats the words with grave challenge to all and

sundry. Speaking of something which he wishes to stigmatise as a misnomer, he exclaims: 'It's what I call a misnomy!' (90)

Gissing was evidently sensitive to, and judgemental of, the grammatical errors he had encountered by the speakers at socialist meetings.⁴⁷ As a letter to his brother Algernon in November 1885 reveals, he was also not averse to making prejudicial divisions between the 'roughs' and better-educated 'artisans':

There is a Socialist candidate standing for Hampstead. I heard him ranting in the street on Sunday morning; – the roughest type of working man, & – ye Gods! – breathing maledictions! He described the House of Commons as a 'decippled institootion'.⁴⁸

Gissing's phonetic representations of Cockney speech are very much of their time. Less nuanced examples occur in other contemporary realist fiction, as is particularly recalled by the title of Arthur Morrison's *Lizierunt* (1893). Raymond Williams suggests that in these 'Cockney School' stories we can hear a 'new sound of the city', as writers sought to evoke, through the 'orthographic simulation' of dialect, a naturalistic slice of London's working-class life, without the intervention of an authorial commentary.⁴⁹ However, Williams distinguishes Gissing from the populist Cockney School writers because his authorial voice is ever present, parodying and surrounding the speech he reports with explanatory detail, and thereby foregrounding wider social issues. Among these was the new phenomenon whereby the working-class autodidact would frequently have been negotiating new words and terms that they had read, but not heard. This experience is suggested in Gissing's parodying of mispronunciation in Cullen's speech, another coffee shop lecturer in *Demos*:

Another word of which Mr. Cullen is fond is 'strattum,' – usually spelt and pronounced with but one t midway. You and I have the misfortune to belong to a social 'strattum' which is trampled hard and flat beneath the feet of the land-owners. (90)

At a time haunted by the potential of 'seditious' talk to incite and enflame the 'mob', it is perhaps unsurprising that middle-class social 'observers' like Gissing were similarly astute 'listeners'. Gissing's detailed

representation of speech is consistent with a contemporary curiosity, on the part of sympathetic social commentators, about how wider educational access was beginning to affect working-class discourse. Such an interest is reflected in Olive Garnett's diaries; listening to the speakers in Regent's Park, for instance, she notes that while David Nicoll (a well-known anarchist of the time) was 'inclined to rant', the other men 'spoke very well and used excellent phrases and words'.⁵⁰ In similar terms, Beatrice Webb's diary for 1887 records the religious and political speakers one Sunday in Victoria Park, in east London, where 'From a platform a hoarse-voiced man denounced the iniquities of the social system; in one hand he held Malthus, in the other, *Fruits of Philosophy*'.⁵¹

It is notable that Mutimer is self-educated; through a description which echoes Webb's, we learn that his humble Islington home is filled with 'cheap reprints of translations of Malthus, of Robert Owen, of Volnay's ruins, of Thomas Paine, of sundry works of Voltaire' (72). This signifies him for Gissing as an 'English artisan' (63), and the type of working-class autodidact with the potential to escape the confines of this class. Gissing also reveals the different ways in which working-class Londoners like Mutimer engaged with the press. As discussed in the previous chapter in the context of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, the 1880s had witnessed an especially complex relationship between orality and print. This impacted on the style of the popular orator, for whom this relationship would, of course, have been symbiotic, without tangible borderlines between the influences of speech and print: the populist speaker borrowed 'catchwords' and phrases from newspapers; the penny press journalist created an idiomatic and informal style more suggestive of speech than writing. This type of influence is echoed in the comments made by James's Paul Muniment in *The Princess Casamassima*: 'Look at the way he [Hyacinth Robinson] has picked up all those catchwords [...]. You must have got that precious phrase out of the newspapers, out of some drivelling leader' (151). The natural progression of this interrelationship was the gradual supplementing of the orator's role by the journalist's, as newspapers offered working-class audiences with an alternative 'platform'. As Ford suggests in *The Soul of London*, the 'London mechanic' (90) now listened to two types of 'preachers': speakers at such locations as the City Temple (in Holborn), and journalists in the press.

There was, therefore, an implied modernity in the speaking style adopted by successful orators like John Burns, who had, as his contemporary biographer notes, 'learned the art of oratory in the best

academy—the park and street corner’.⁵² Burns came from impoverished beginnings in south London, and like Mutimer was largely self-educated. Gissing’s diary for 1888 records that he heard Burns speak at the Mile End Waste in support (alongside Cunninghame Graham and Annie Besant) of the protesting Bryant and May match girls, who were demanding better working conditions.⁵³ While this particular experience post-dates the publication of *Demos*, Gissing would have known Burns by reputation before then, specifically from newspaper reports of the 1886 riots.⁵⁴ Gissing’s characterization of Mutimer may have been influenced by Burns, who was something of model ‘workman orator’ for his time, and whose oratorical skills attracted contemporary interest. Like Mutimer, Burns seems to have been something of a ‘conscientious actor’: he was a ‘born showman’ and had a ‘voice like a megaphone’, according to his fellow trade unionist Ben Tillet.⁵⁵ Burns knew how to make his speeches accessible to working-class audiences. As H. Llewellyn Smith and Vaughan Nash suggest in *The Story of the Dockers’ Strike* (1889), the popular influence of Burns’s speeches was generally ascribed to a clever combination of impressive allusions drawn from a well-stocked home library (newly acquired, not inherited), a hint of morality, and a range of ‘jocular’ phrases of the type and tone which his audience might have read in a newspaper, seen in advertisements, or heard in a music hall.⁵⁶ During the Great Dock Strike of August–September 1889, Burns addressed the crowds each day on Tower Hill. As Smith and Nash recount, he delivered the ‘news’ of the strike in ‘short, sharp, picturesque sentences’ to the crowd, for whom Tower Hill had become their ‘morning’s newspaper’.⁵⁷

In *Demos*, Gissing represents this type of interaction between popular oratory and journalism through the prism of social class and education. Westlake, the ‘man of letters’ makes an appropriately seamless transition from speech into print, his lectures possessing ‘literary qualities’ which are duly admired in the ‘leading periodicals’ (246). Meanwhile, the ‘eloquence’ of lower middle-class Alfred Waltham is ‘supplemented’ by reading periodicals such as *The Fiery Cross* (111). However, the mechanic Daniel Dabbs, a ‘proletarian pure and simple’ (64), has a rather more problematic engagement with his reading. Dabbs just scans the columns of the *Tocsin* for sensationalist words, as ‘reasoning muddled him’, and he only understands socialist theories by ‘hearing them incessantly repeated’ (384). Written just over a decade before Le Bon’s *The Crowd*

(1895), *Demos* anticipates the concerns it raises, suggesting Dabbs has the type of ‘popular mind’ which renders him dependant on demagogue and journalist alike:

The majority of men, especially among the masses, do not possess clear and reasoned ideas on any subject whatever outside their own speciality. The leader serves them as a guide. It is just possible that he may be replaced, though very inefficiently, by the periodical publications which manufacture opinions for their readers and supply them with ready-made phrases which absolve them of the trouble of reasoning.⁵⁸

Such simple-minded and politically indifferent listeners could not, according to Le Bon’s terms, distinguish between reasoned argument and empty sentimental rhetoric. This, he suggests, made them vulnerable to the inflammatory speeches of demagogues:

Given to exaggeration in its feelings, a crowd is only impressed by excessive sentiments. An orator wishing to move a crowd must make an abusive use of violent affirmations. To exaggerate to affirm, to resort to repetition, and never to attempt to prove anything by reasoning are well known to speakers at public meetings.⁵⁹

It is through such ‘violent affirmations’ that Gissing’s chief ‘ranter’, the extremist Colonel Roodhouse seeks to stir the crowd. Roodhouse’s progress into print is correspondingly problematic, as his ‘open-air’ discourses and ‘fiery eloquence’ (238) are, unlike the more measured and cultured tones of Westlake, too inflammatory for publication, even in—somewhat ironically—the ‘*Fiery Cross*’.

However, while such characterizations, particularly of Dabbs, reflect the familiar stereotyping of social prejudice, Gissing’s treatment of Mutimer’s relationship with the press is more complex and sympathetic. Gissing personifies modern journalism in ‘Mr Keene’, whose presence asserts the emergence of new spheres of public influence, away from the noise of the streets and parks. Whereas Mutimer possesses a strong voice, Keene speaks in a ‘mincing way’, with ‘interjected murmurs’, which nevertheless expresses ‘a deep satisfaction’ (133). In a novel where the aurality of individual voices has a wider cultural and social significance, this is a suggestive contrast. As H.G. Wells would later speculate in *Anticipations* (1901), the democratic power of the ‘flushed man with a vast voice’ talking on ‘tubs, barrels and scaffolding’ seemed to be on the

wane in the modern city.⁶⁰ In this context, Keene's is surely the voice of the future: as he tells Mutimer, he has heard 'most of our platform orators' (134), and duly exerts his influence by offering him a rather more modern stage, as one of the 'Men of the Day' in the '*Belwick Chronicle*'. The professional agitator now has the opportunity to be a popular hero in newsprint, and to develop a new public identity, ostensibly less ephemeral than the one honed in meeting halls. However, Mutimer wants to regain his more authentic identity as a 'professional agitator', as his reflections will later reveal:

there arose in his heart a longing for the past, it seemed peaceful and fuller of genuine interests than the life he now had [...]. Yes, the old and natural way was better [...]. at least he would have continued truly to represent his class. (406)

Mutimer begins to rail against the diluted language of the 'drawing-room', as expressed through the over-stylized prose of the '*Beacon*', a retitled and comically dampened '*Fiery Cross*', which has grown 'more and more academical':

Those who wrote for it were quite distinct from the agitators of the street and of the Socialist halls; men – and women – with a turn for 'advanced' speculation, with anxiety for style. (409)

This feeling of disillusionment is encapsulated in his assertion to Adela, 'You don't find Socialism in drawing-rooms' (409). Through Mutimer's personal dilemma, Gissing foregrounds a class-based conflict, using spatial and linguistic terms to assert a contrast between the world of West End drawing rooms and East End meeting halls. Gissing had little time for the socialist 'ranters', as is revealed by the letter (cited above) to his brother, and his unsympathetic characterization of the extremist Roodhouse. However, Mutimer's ultimately tragic struggle to negotiate the class divide does engage our sympathy, in particular his final and futile attempts to regain influence through the 'platform'. Gissing's treatment of popular oratory also benefits revisiting in the context of *New Grub Street*, where the 'orderly' and 'inoffensive' existences of Reardon et al. define a modern London of quiet reading rooms and subdued acceptance of poverty. As I have noted in Chap. 1, Reardon makes a *cri de coeur* about

the possibility of becoming one of the noisy ‘savage revolutionists’ who, by the time of this later novel, seemed out of place in the quietly modern city.⁶¹

LISTENERS AND THE ‘WILD BEAST ROAR’ OF THE CROWD

From early on in *Demos*, Gissing makes explicit contrasts between Mutimer and his friend Dabbs, whose intellectual simplicity predisposes him to treat oratory as a form of popular entertainment like the pub, music hall, or theatre. Dabbs gets into the ‘habit of listening to inflammatory discourses every Sunday night’.

He enjoyed the popular oratory of Messrs Cowes and Cullen; he liked to shout ‘Hear, hear!’ and to stamp when there was general applause; it affected him with an agreeable sensation, much like that which follows upon a good meal, to hear himself pitied as a hard-working ill-used fellow, and the frequent allusion to noble qualities sweetly flattered him. When he went home to the public-house after a lively debate, and described the proceedings to his brother Nicholas, he always ended up by declaring that it was as ‘good as a play’. (383–4)

In the novel’s penultimate chapter, when the warring socialist factions gather on Clerkenwell Green, Dabbs is ‘mainly interested in the occasion as an admiral provactive of thirst’ (441). While Mutimer personifies the populist speaker, Dabbs is the archetypal listener, a characterization which, as I have suggested earlier, anticipates Le Bon’s identification of a ‘popular’ psychology in the crowd.

Gissing’s ironic description of Dabbs further demonstrates his interest in spoken language, and in particular the type of sentimental and emotive language often used by social reformers. The maritime reformer and philanthropist Samuel Plimsoll had attracted particular opprobrium in this regard, as Gissing may have been aware. Like John Burns, Plimsoll was a familiar figure in East End oratory in the 1870s and 1880s, but his reputation was damaged by suggestions of his gullibility (some of the stories of hardship told to him later proved to be false), and his economy with the truth, expressed through speeches which were emotionally over-charged but weak on facts.⁶² This had come to public attention in 1880, when Plimsoll had distributed handbills with inflammatory language about his political opponents, leading to a House of Commons

discussion about, as *The Times* noted, ‘what should be done with a philanthropist who will use violent epithets’.⁶³ There is a cameo of a ‘Plimsoll man’, tasked with checking for over-loaded ships, in Conrad’s *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*. Conrad was antipathetic to the type of ‘well-meaning’ philanthropists like Plimsoll who could engender a self-pitying attitude: while asserting their rights, he suggests, a new generation of sailors have also ‘learned how to whine’ (25).

As Conrad’s response to the discourse of workers’ ‘rights’ reflects, Gissing was not alone in his concerns about the influence of this on working-class listeners, not all of whom, in the 1880s, would have been beneficiaries of the 1870 Education Act. In *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, Besant expresses similar worries through Harry Goslett, who describes the ‘red-hot speeches’ at the ‘Stepney Advanced Club’, full of ‘sham grievances’ (151), which aimed to stir the audiences, but not necessarily to inform them. The establishment’s fear was that the ‘whines’ and ‘cries’ of individual workers would turn into the merged ‘roar’ of violence, the situation that had briefly come to fruition in the unemployment riots of February 1886, and subsequently in the ‘Bloody Sunday’ demonstrations of November 1887. ‘The meeting was over, the riot had begun’ (443): this is a key point of transition for Gissing’s crowd in *Demos*, evocative of just such a moment when a group of clearly identifiable people somehow transforms into one animalistic mob, who duly give vent to ‘a wild-beast roar, for a taste of bloodshed’ (443). It is significant that Gissing begins by reacquainting his readers with individual characters in the crowd:

Colonel Roodhouse was busy in the crowd, sowing calumnies and fermenting wrath. In the crowd were our old acquaintances Messrs. Cowes and Cullen, each haranguing as many as could be got to form a circle and listen, indulging themselves in measureless vituperation, crying shame on traitors to the noble cause. Here, too, was Daniel Dabbs [...]. He stood well on the limits of the throng; it was not impossible that the debate might end in the cracking of crowns. (441)

The auralty of Gissing’s scene alerts us to the manner in which a crowd could be stirred by such ‘speech bubbles’ within its midst, while the key orators from different political groups would take up their positions, often on carts around a park or, as in this case, that ancient site of protest Clerkenwell Green. Gissing also alerts us to another group here, an ‘indefinable mob’, whose individual characters are

unknown but who can nevertheless be located as the ‘raff of a city’; indifferent to the speakers, this group are in anticipation of an ‘uproar which would give them unwonted opportunities of violence and pillage’ (440).

Gissing’s social observations are consistent with the approach taken in the newspaper reports of the 1886 disturbances, which categorize the crowd into familiar groups, and in so doing attempt to shed some light on the process by which a meeting might turn into a riot. In its report, *The Times* divides the crowds in Trafalgar Square into ‘workers from the suburbs’, ‘unskilled labourers from the docks’, ‘artisans’, and finally ‘that large body in London’, those who do not want to work.⁶⁴ It was this last group, London’s ‘vagabondage’, or, to use Gissing’s term, the ‘indefinable mob’, that were deemed to be the most problematic. The unemployed and the socially marginalized had long been associated with outbreaks of mob violence. As Ian Monroe has revealed, the outbreak of rioting in late-Elizabethan London was blamed on the city’s vagrants, ‘a huge but superfluous and malign population fundamentally out of place in the economic function of London’.⁶⁵ By the 1880s, this impression of malign redundancy was much more acute, as the city’s position as an imperial trading centre was dependent on its workers contributing to that characteristic ‘hum’ of industry, a status threatened by these disaffected group on the margins.

In *Demos*, it is notable how Dabbs disengages himself from the rioting crowd. Dabbs is employed and has a keen eye on his ‘weekly profits’ (441), terms that suggest he has too much to lose. Unlike Conrad’s Donkin, Dabbs is not, in contemporary parlance, a ‘loafer’. This perceived gulf between the genuine ‘workers’ (particularly as personified by the shopkeepers) and the ‘loungers’ and ‘loafers’, who seemingly had no interest in working, is particularly apparent in newspaper accounts of the 1886 unrest. As *The Times* comments, the ‘loafers contented themselves with hooting and hissing at the inmates of passing trams, omnibuses, carriages and cabs’.⁶⁶ A marked contrast is evident between the ‘outside’ world of the streets—now increasingly associated by the establishment with such aimless ‘loafing’—and London ‘indoors’, as suggested by those quiet, orderly citizens travelling to work within different forms of public transport. But for more politically sympathetic commentators like Margaret Harkness, who describes the ‘hissing’ demonstrators in *Out of Work*, this is a symbolic sound demanding of sympathy. The scene in Trafalgar Square is, she suggests, like a ‘nightmare’, but

the hisses were real enough, for they meant starvation and hopelessness. And since Justice rules the universe, those hisses rise up into the ears of the Lord God of Sabbath. (200)

In contrast, Gissing's representation of the crowd in *Demos* is unsympathetic, echoing establishment concerns about the city's 'raff'. However, in a novel where speech and different levels of articulacy are consistently foregrounded, Mutimer's eventual silencing by the mob (killed by a flying stone) takes on a symbolism that is socio-linguistic as much as political. Here the rise of 'Demos' signifies a triumph for inarticulacy, as individual voices, having abandoned trying to make themselves heard, merge into one composite roar. Such terms recall Conrad's crowd/crew in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, where once stirred, the individual sailors on the *Narcissus* merge into a mass, a process represented in auditory terms: this is a composite sound, in which individual voices have merged into 'mixed growls and screeches', 'menacing mutters', and 'gesticulating shadows that growled, hissed, laughed excitedly' (121). In *Demos*, the civilized practice of listening to 'articulate speech', and using it for debate, has similarly been abandoned, and the impression of Mutimer standing 'without the power of speech' (442) is ultimately a poignant one. For all his moral flaws, and his compromised engagement with the socialist cause, the educated and socially aspirant Mutimer personifies the potential of democracy, and with that of a civilized existence, which, as Gissing narrates, has been 'blotted out' (444).

As we have already seen in Chap. 1 in the context of the Armistice celebrations, the behaviour of the city crowd continued to be regarded as problematic, particularly when it seemingly lacked an aim and purpose. In auditory terms, the crowd signified the assertion of an urban multitude over the individual, with correspondingly 'monstrous' results, as Gissing's imagery implies. As Chap. 3 will explore, the sound of the crowd could also be perceived in musical terms, as music became increasingly associated with the tastes of the masses, and the evolution of a distinctly popular, and urban, tone.

NOTES

1. George Gissing, *Demos* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2011), 410. Subsequent page numbers refer to this edition.
2. Ford, *Return to Yesterday* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999), 34.

3. Hewitt notes a revival in the popularity of the public lecture in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and argues for the platform as 'a cultural form in its own right': see 'Aspects of Platform Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 29.1 (2002): 1–32 (1). See also Joseph S. Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) and Robert T. Oliver, *Public Speaking in the Reshaping of Great Britain* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1987).
4. See *Tea and Anarchy: The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett 1890–1893*, ed. Barry C. Johnson (London: Bartlett's Press, 1989) and *Olive & Stepniak: The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett 1893–1895*, ed. Barry C. Johnson (Birmingham: Bartlett's Press, 1993). Olive was the sister of Edward Garnett, Conrad's editor, and friend of the Rossetti sisters (Ford Madox Ford's cousins), who, as noted in the previous chapter, ran their own printing press for anarchist publications.
5. See Meisel, 163, who describes the fashionable practice of 'sermon-tasting' in this period.
6. See *Tea and Anarchy*, 63.
7. 'Today's Lectures and Meetings', *Weekly Sun*, 18 July 1897, 11.
8. Hugh B. Philpott, 'Institute London', in *Living London*, vol. 2, 195.
9. H.G. Wells, *Love and Mr Lewisham* (London: Penguin, 2005), 53.
10. R.B. Cunninghame Graham, 'Sursum Corda', *Saturday Review*, 19 June 1897, 682–683 (682). Cunninghame Graham was a well-known socialist orator of the period, imprisoned for six weeks for his role in the 'Bloody Sunday' riots of 1887.
11. 'The Riots in London', *The Times*, 9 February 1886, 6.
12. Letter from Gissing to his sister Madge, 15 February 1886, in *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, ed. Paul Matthiesen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, 9 vols (vol. 3), 6.
13. The Mile End Waste was the remaining section of Mile End Green, which originally encompassed an area between Stepney Green and Whitechapel. See T.S. Ridge, *Mile End Green and Stepney Green Open Space; and A History of Garden Street* (privately printed, 1988), in London Borough of Tower Hamlets Local Archives.
14. See Anna Davin for a detailed study of street debate earlier in the nineteenth century: "'Socialist Infidels and Messengers of Light": Street Preaching and Debate in Mid-Nineteenth Century London', in *The Streets of London From the Great Fire to the Great Stink*, ed. Tim Hitchcock and Heather Shore (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1979), 165–182.

15. See John Ashton, *Hyde Park from Domesday Book to Date* (London: Downey & Co, 1896) and Leslie Jones, *Hyde Park and Free Speech* (London: Museum of Labour History, n.d.).
16. London Metropolitan Archive, Publications by John Burns, no. 4504, 'Trafalgar Speech for the Defence', 18 January 1888. Along with Cunninghame Graham, Burns was imprisoned for six weeks for his role in the 'Bloody Sunday' demonstrations of 1887. There are examples of Burns's notes for his speeches in the British Library: see John Burns Papers, vol. XXV, Speeches, memoranda, Add. Ms. 46, 305.
17. Cunninghame Graham, *Hansard*, 2 March 1888. Quoted by Cedric Watts and Laurence Davies in *Cunninghame Graham: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 75.
18. See *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 32; and Patricia Crick, Notes to Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima* (London: Penguin, 1997), 592. Subsequent page numbers refer to this edition.
19. Walter Besant, Preface to *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3. Subsequent page numbers refer to this edition.
20. Helen Small, Introduction to *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, x–xxv (xxi).
21. See Hampson, *Conrad's Secrets*, 86. In 1883 and 1884, London was subjected to attacks by the Fenians, which included explosions on the railway and underground.
22. *Morning Advertiser*, 30 August 1889, n.p. (Newspaper Cuttings Book 2, Museum in Docklands Archive).
23. Conrad, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (London: Dent, 1951), 101. Subsequent page numbers refer to this edition.
24. Derek B. Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour*, 2nd edn (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 220. See also Roy Palmer, *The Sound of History: Songs & Social Comment* (London: Pimlico, 1996), 109–110. The Great Dock Strike took place between mid-August and mid-September 1889, in protest at the casual process of hiring workers at the docks' gates, and in demand for better terms, including a 'tanner' an hour. The strike was successful and the dockers' terms were met.
25. See Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice 1880–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 62–63.
26. *Ibid.*, 27–29.
27. Ford, *Return to Yesterday*, 83.
28. See 'The Nursery of the Craft' (1906), in *The Mirror of the Sea/A Personal Record* (London: Dent, 1923), 149.

29. Margaret Harkness [John Law], *In Darkest London* [first published as Captain Lobe] (Cambridge: Black Apollo Press), 114.
30. See Deborah Mutch, in Margaret Harkness [writing as John Law], *A City Girl* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2015), 54n.
31. See Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 64–65.
32. Letter to Edward Pease, of the Fabian Party, 18 April 1893, in *The Letters of Sidney & Beatrice Webb*, vol. 2, ed. Norman Mackenzie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 5.
33. See Mutch, Introduction to *A City Girl*, 5–30 (28).
34. John Goode. ‘Margaret Harkness and the Socialist Novel’, in *The Socialist Novel in Britain: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition*, ed. H. Gustav Clams (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 45–66 (61).
35. *Ibid.*, 17. As Mutch describes, Harkness’s novels were hard bound, making them too expensive for the less well off.
36. H.G. Wells, *Kipps* (London: Penguin, 2005), 224. Subsequent page numbers refer to this edition.
37. See Pierre Coustillas, Preface to *Demos*, 5–7 (7).
38. Letter from Gissing to his sister Ellen, 22 November 1885, in *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, 367.
39. See Note 1, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 298.
40. Jacob Korg, Introduction to Gissing, *Notes on Social Democracy* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1968), i–x.
41. Hampson, *Conrad’s Secrets*, 91–92.
42. *Notes on Social Democracy*, 1.
43. *Ibid.*, 13–14.
44. Debbie Harrison, Explanatory Notes to *Demos*, 466–474 (468).
45. See Markman Ellis for a detailed history of the coffee house movement.
46. See Tom Mann, *Memoirs* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), 61.
47. Harrison, Introduction to *Demos*, 9–20 (12).
48. Letter from Gissing to his brother Algernon, 24 November 1885, in *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, 370–371.
49. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, (St Albans: Paladin, 1975) 271–272.
50. Garnett, *Tea and Anarchy*, 66.
51. Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 305–306.
52. Arthur P. Grubb, *John Burns* (London: Dalton, 1908), 59–60.
53. See *London and the Life of Literature in Late-Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), 35.

54. See newspaper reports of the unemployment demonstrations: 'The Unemployed in London', *The Times*, 9 February 1886, 6; 'The Riots in London', *The Times*, 11 February 1886, 6.
55. Ben Tillett, *Memories and Reflections* (London: John Long, 1931), 136.
56. H. Llewellyn Smith and Vaughan Nash, *The Story of the Dockers' Strike, Told by Two East Londoners* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1889) 36–37. Burns later became MP for Battersea and, in 1905, joined Campbell-Bannerman's Liberal government, the first working man to achieve a Cabinet position.
57. *Ibid.*, 79–80.
58. Gustave le Bon, *The Crowd: a Study of the Popular Mind* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), 99–100.
59. *Ibid.*, 44.
60. See H.G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Social Progress upon Human Life and Thought*, 8th edn (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1902), 146.
61. Gissing, *New Grub Street*, 367.
62. See David Masters, *The Plimsoll Mark* (London: Cassell, 1955).
63. Editorial, *The Times*, 21 February 1880, 10.
64. 'The Unemployed in London', *The Times*, 9 February 1886, 6.
65. Ian Monroe, *The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London: The City and its Double* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 37–38.
66. 'The Riots in London', *The Times*, 11 February 1886, 6.

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