

# On The Importance of Culture: Spirituality for Secular Humanists

**Sophie Dulesh**

**W**hat is Culture?

As defined in 1959 by noted American anthropologist Margaret Mead, culture is “the systematic body of learned behavior which is transmitted from parents to children.”<sup>1</sup> Culture is critical for an individual and for a society, we consume it daily, hourly, and it shapes us as humans in the way that air, water and food shape us as mammals. We are very much aware of how dangerously our air and water can be polluted; does anyone care about our culture? As humans and as humanists, it is vital that we pay at least as much attention to the quality of our culture as we do to that of our air and water.

## **A Brief History of the Middle Class in the West**

How did the Middle Class develop? The Industrial Revolution in the West (1760-1840) provided a dramatic increase in productivity; the average income and consequently the population underwent unprecedented growth. It began in England, whose population had remained steady at 6 million from 1700 to 1740 but more than doubled from 8.3 million in 1801 to 16.8 million in 1850 and, by 1901, nearly doubled again to 30.5 million.<sup>2</sup> The European population increased from about 100 million in 1700 to 400 million by 1900.<sup>3</sup> According to some sources, by 1650, the proportion of city dwellers in Europe finally became higher than in China.

## **What does that mean?**

It means that the masses had arrived at an historical place where they no longer had to focus exclusively on procuring their daily bread simply to survive. As a result, a new and mass-based social force arose in the West, namely the bourgeoisie or middle class – the nouveaux riches whose heretofore unheard of work ethic became the driving force of (1) the Industrial Revolution, (2) the European Enlightenment’s trend toward individualism (in contrast to traditional communality), and (3) the Protestant Reformation, supportive of the trend toward individualism, starting with Martin Luther’s emphasis on individual faith and personal interpretation of Scripture.

These three historical social cataclysms were of unparalleled importance. Furthermore, bourgeois liberalism as the dominant philosophy of the middle class “was precisely what created the necessary conditions for the emergence of popular cultures of reason. ...No other class would have promoted as cardinal virtues such unheroic and unglamorous traits as reasonableness, moderation, prudence, thrift, and sobriety – the boring virtues, from the point of view of the aristocrat or the working man. ...Yet these were the values necessary to create a society in which violence and fanaticism, despotism and mob rule, could be eliminated. Only through the hegemony of the middle class could a society be

made safe for the rational actor.”<sup>24</sup> [A rational actor is defined as someone who pursues his own enlightened self-interest rather than adhering to tribal group fanaticism.]

Our topic, however, is not the celebration of the middle class, regardless of how richly deserved it may be. Therefore, having given the middle class its due, we now dialectically turn our attention to some less celebratory items, namely, to some of the costs that society has been paying for this new development in terms of the spread and quality of general culture. Was it Disraeli who memorably said that the human mind needs three “I”s for awakening its creativity: “Intelligence, Income and Idleness” (the luxury of free time)? Perhaps “Inquisitiveness” could be added to the list (unless it is considered to be included in “Intelligence”). The birth of the middle class was a time when people, having become liberated en masse from the daily struggle for survival, started getting those three Is: the living breathing space where they could satisfy their natural inquisitiveness and inventiveness, and have some free time to focus on their intellectual quests. Consequently, the sciences and arts exploded.

This remarkable process was not uniform even in the West: it was best expressed in Europe. De Tocqueville wrote in 1835: “In America most of the rich have begun by being poor; almost all the idle were, in their youth, employed; the result is that when one could have the taste for study, one does not have the time to engage in it; and when one has acquired the time... one no longer has the taste for it... There does not exist in America, therefore, any class in which the penchant for intellectual pleasures

is transmitted with comfort and inherited leisure, and which holds the works of the intellect in honor...” As the result, he asserted, “Primary instruction [in America] is within reach of each; higher instruction is within reach of almost no one.”<sup>25</sup> Consequently, Europe led the way in those social changes and North America followed closely.

### **Social characteristics of the middle class**

Not rooted in a former aristocracy, the nouveaux riches, by and large uneducated, often morally indiscreet, vulgar and pretentious, even if naturally gifted, driven, and hard-working, craved to climb the social ladder at all costs, relying on the power of money. The high standards of the comparatively small aristocratic elite, with its civility, manners, good taste, self-restraint, and ease with Greek, Latin, music and the arts,

were quickly dissipating.

But already toward the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the nouveaux riches had become fair game for satire. They were making “discoveries” not unlike the one of Monsieur Jourdain in Molière’s *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, who learned that he had “...been speaking prose all my life, and didn’t even know it!... And to think: I’ve never studied, and yet I did that one right on the first go!” Molière hit the nail on the head: everything is here, the character’s profound ignorance, his curiosity for the unknown “culture” and – last but not the least – his egocentric over-inflated self-assurance.

Molière’s play was soon translated into Russian under the title “Meshchanin among Dvoryan.” *Dvoryane* means “gentry.” Prior to the translation of Molière’s play, the Russian

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word *meshchanin* simply referred to the third estate of the urban middle class as compared to *dvoryanin* (aristocracy, gentry) or labourer. In the new (that is to say, Molière's) context, the word *meshchanin* quickly acquired decidedly negative characteristics. V.V. Nabokov, the Russian-American writer, offered: "The *meshchanin* is an adult with a practical mind, with profit-centred conventional interests and with the low ideals and principles of his time and place... The bourgeois is a self-satisfied petty *meshchanin*, a commoner with an absurdly inflated self-image."<sup>6</sup> The key word here is "profit-centred," namely, the profound conviction that everything (including moral and cultural values, ideas and principles) has a monetary value. English synonyms for *meshchanin* are "petty bourgeois," "cheap and narrow-minded," and "philistine," similar to "Kitsch" in German. The term "middlebrow" as a synonym appeared in Britain between WWI and WWII and was imported to America by journalist Russell Lynes in 1949.<sup>7</sup>

#### **"Middlebrows" as reflected in literature and art**

The new social development and its general assessment as negative and contemptible was early recognized in Europe: Molière's play, first performed in Paris in 1670, was a discovery and biting satire of the social phenomenon of the *nouveaux riches* that remained a favourite topic for a good three centuries. Various European thinkers were vocal in their agreement with Molière's perspective, including Honoré de Balzac, Stendhal, Guy de Maupassant, Jonathan Swift, William Thackeray, Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, and Heinrich Boll, to name just a few. Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand on May 10, 1867: "Axiom: hatred of the bourgeois is the beginning of wisdom."

Virginia Woolf declared in an unsent letter to *The New Statesman* in October, 1932: "If any human being, man, woman, dog, cat or half-crushed worm dares call me middlebrow, I will take my pen and stab him dead." Woolf feels herself belonging to the highbrows (those with *Bildung* in German, the *Intelligentsia* in Russian)

and declares: "Now there can be no two opinions as to what a highbrow is. He is the man or woman of thoroughbred intelligence who rides his mind at a gallop across country in pursuit of an idea," while the lowbrows are those labourers who are as committed to living as highbrows are to thinking. "I honor and respect lowbrows and I have never known a highbrow who did not... I myself have known duchesses who were highbrows, also charwomen, and they have both told me... that they would rather sit in the coal cellar together than in the drawing room with middlebrows and pour out tea."<sup>8</sup>

There is, however, something odd in Woolf's strong statement: her "thoroughbred" sounds distinctly elitist rather than egalitarian. Was she "nostalgic" for the long-lost dominance of the aristocracy as opposed to the forward-marching middlebrows with their undeniably mass democratic base? A democracy (and the democracy of the USA in particular) is understandably suspicious of any elitism, including that of high culture and irreproachable manners, as it carries the inherent threat of self-isolation and non-engagement in the affairs of the untutored public. But even if the pursuit of high culture is not the highest priority in a democracy, it is exactly that democracy that keeps the mass culture alive.

Why are the highbrows and lowbrows so much against the middlebrows? It is because of the latter's wrong priorities, namely, putting profit and reliance on the power of money above everything else, above the highbrows' "natural noble" craving for finesse and intellectual pursuits and the lowbrows' struggle with the realities of daily life. Indeed, in North America, gainful employment ("success"), not intellectual endeavours, is still considered a priority, at least in the early stages of one's professional life.

In Russia, one of the first to publicly identify the new social phenomenon was D.I. Vonwizin (von Wizen), the author of a satirical play "*Nedorosl*," first performed in 1782. The title literally means "immature," while the best-fitting synonym for its meaning is "ignoramus." *Nedorosl* was an official term for the sons of the *dvoryan*, assigned to army regi-

ments at the age of 8 or 9 so as to rise in rank by the time of real service.

Vonwizin's play centres on the backcountry, petty-gentry family of pigeon-chasing, late-teens Mithrophan, who are all militantly against education. The mother supports Mithrophan's delinquency and addresses her spite to his tutor: "People of nobility need no mathematics or geography... What? Geography may help one reach a distant destination? But what are coachmen for then?" The expression "Geography? But what are coachmen for?!" instantly became a folk proverb. Nedorosl was still mandatory reading in the school curriculum in my time, some two and a half centuries later. And in his time, as with Molière in Europe, Vonwizin opened the gate for a Russian stream of characters, who satirically and sarcastically exposed the poshlost (banal vulgarity) of the bourgeois meshchan (e.g., the characters of A.S. Griboedov, N.V. Gogol, I.S. Turgenev, M.E. Saltikov-Shchedrin, A.N. Ostrovsky, F.M. Dostoevsky, M.M. Bulgakov, to list a few – and, of course, of A.P. Chekhov).

In both Europe and Russia, literature and the arts exposed the roots, the obvious causal connection of mushrooming industrialization and urbanization and the concomitant growth of the middle class (or in Russian, the *meshchanstvo*).

In both Europe and Russia, strong and successful attempts were made to identify the middle class phenomenologically: to reveal and make public the meshchans' priorities, values and beliefs, their lifestyle and tastes, such as in their preferred garments, housing, and art; and their typical craving for posh cheap pseudo-grandiosity (as exemplified by fake gold and plush).

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In both Europe and Russia, the literature and arts exposed much the same thing: the deficit of intellectual questing, of high standards, the lack of spirituality, the money-driven "might-makes-right" psychology and loss of civility and good manners, and the ignorance and plain illiteracy, with an attitude to vocabulary of "the sparser the better" – to the point of Orwell's notorious "newspeak" of 1984, that in its extreme tends to reduce the human vocabulary to just two "necessary AND sufficient" terms: "Away with...!" and "Hurrah!"

What else might ever be needed to express oneself?

The craving of the meshchan for posh garments, furniture and art was exposed, as was the way they decorated their living space to show off their social status, even if it was often unappealing due to their lack of cultured good taste. Some identifiable and identifying key details of the meshchan were recognized early. In Russia at the time they included, in addition to an expensive albeit tasteless lifestyle, their bullying my-way-or-the-highway-attitude, the illiterate speech of which they weren't ashamed (as they were ashamed of nothing since money made up for everything), as well as some minor specifically Russian features, such as the potted ficus trees and caged canaries common in meshchan houses.

Two great satirists and coauthors of the Soviet era, Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, exposed and ridiculed the meshchanstvo in the USSR; a few fragments of their work are provided below. After the world's first successful flight into the stratosphere (by Auguste Piccard in 1931), they told their readers with a straight face that a local workshop in a god-forsaken Russian village

that manufactured dress-protectors (attachable pads inside the garment covering the armpit) had labelled them “the armpit-area-protectors Stratosphere,” no less.

Among the many unforgettable characters created by Ilf and Petrov are Ella (Ellochka) Shchukina and her friend Fima (Fimochka) Sobak in their novel *The Twelve Chairs*.<sup>9</sup> Readers learn that while a member of the cannibalistic tribe Mumbo-Jumbo has a lexicon of three hundred words, Ellochka gets by with only thirty, earning herself the nickname “The Cannibal.” She limits herself to expressions like “Ho-ho!” (which could indicate joy, hatred, disdain, rapture, and much more), “I smacked him like a baby!,” “Don’t teach me to live!,” or “Your back is white,” which served as her only joke. “Ella never needed any more words to express herself...”

“Mademoiselle Sobak was known to be a cultured lady: in her vocabulary there were some 180 words. She even knew one word that would never even have been dreamt of by Ella. It was a rich word: ‘homosexuality’. Doubtless, Fima Sobak was a cultured girl.”

Once Fima gave Ella an old French fashion magazine. A picture of a Vanderbilt daughter in an evening dress with fur, silk, gold jewelry and feathers hit Ellochka hard. She wanted to tell how hard, to say something like “This Miss dares to think that she is superior to me – this is intolerable! It’s either her or me!” – but there were only 30 words in her possession, so she simply groaned “Ooh!” But it meant a lot! With this began a grand rivalry, albeit one of which Miss Vanderbilt was not aware. (One must remember that the all-dominating official Party slogan in the USSR had for decades been “To take over and to surpass America! Steel and coal, not shoes or butter!”.)

The next day, Ellochka had her long braid cut off and her hair coloured red. She bought some dog fur, which she colored green with watercolour, on workers’ credit (that is to say, on borrowed money) and attached it to her best dress; then she refashioned her husband’s new jacket into a ladies’ one.

The next issue of the fashion magazine had photographs of the Vanderbilts’ estate in Florida, and Ellochka was compelled to buy two auctioned chairs to beat the insolent American. Without asking her husband, she used the family grocery fund; ten days and four roubles remained till his next paycheck. The book, published in 1928, instantly became a bestseller in Russia.

### **Public attitude toward the middlebrows in Europe (and Russia) versus North America**

Public conceptualization of the mass arrival of the middlebrows in America was launched by R. Lynes in 1949 and brought to Canada by his intellectual heirs in 2015, when Environics Analytics, a Toronto-based marketing company, unveiled its new “population segmentation system” called PRIZM5, which divides Canadians into 68 demographic profiles. People with an average annual household income (AAHI) of \$53,694 enjoy skateboarding, playing basketball and gambling. They shop at second-hand stores, and discount groceries. In neighborhoods with an AAHI of \$67,248, people enjoy knitting, fishing, going to movies, country music, casinos and... the thrill of buying lottery tickets. At \$126,272, people favour aerobics classes, yoga, theatre and ballet. When the AAHI reaches \$469,882, Canadians support the opera, ballet, and symphony, enjoy traveling to Europe, the UK and Asia, go on cruises, live in expensive homes, enjoy luxury imports, and send their children to private schools.

While annual income understandably defines one’s cultural preferences to some extent, it alone can’t explain why basketball, movie-going, knitting or typically inexpensive aerobic classes should be a priority for one but not another population group. Clearly, cultural traditions matter a lot.

But Lynes and his followers offered an approach that differed from that of the Europeans. Lynes described the phenomenology in much more detail: “...their clothes, the furniture, the useful objects, the entertainment, salads, drinks, reading material, sculpture, records, games, causes, etc.” For instance, in an interview on the

TV program *The Open Mind* with host Richard Heffner, Lynes astutely “assigned” wine as the drink of choice for the highbrows, martinis for the middlebrows, and beer for the lowbrows.<sup>10</sup> This seems to have struck the American public as a recognizable pattern inasmuch as they conferred the name “taste-maker” on Lynes. But, as Lynes put it, “Some of the people, especially the highbrows, [were quite furious at me] because nowhere... did I take one side against another.” Lynes reiterated this attitude in his response to a remark by Heffner: “You’re putting a moral thing on this, which I don’t.”

This attitude was vastly different from the sarcasm with a powerful undercurrent of harsh moral judgement in Europe and Russia, where those documenting the new and growing social phenomenon, with its canaries and beer, did not just report about it; rather they wanted to erase it from society with their bitter assessment, their irony, and their ridiculing and indignantly negative attitude.

In Russia, special words sprung up for the newly exposed lifestyle: “poshlost” for the phenomenon, “poshlyak” for the person – which had exceptionally strong negative connotations. To label someone as poshlyak meant to ruin his social reputation. The closest English terms would be “devoid of spirituality,” “trite,” “petty,” “banal,” “vulgar,” or “trivial.” To these, Nabokov added “promiscuous.”

This attitude reached its peak on the verge of the 20th century in the works of Chekhov, who was a sublime psychologist and great writer with the unique sense of humour, a humanist and a tireless warrior against poshlost. He dissected this phenomenon as if with the scalpel to let the pus out (Chekhov was also an MD) and exposed it so all could see its cheap lowly essence.

Maxim Gorky, another influential writer, said: “No one understood as clearly and finely as Anton Chekhov, the tragedy of life’s trivialities, no one before him showed men with such merciless truth the terrible and shameful picture of their life in the dim chaos of bourgeois every-day existence. His enemy was banality; he fought it all his life long; he ridiculed it, drawing it with a pointed and unimpassioned pen, finding the mustiness of banality even where at the first

glance everything seemed to be arranged very nicely, comfortably, and even brilliantly...”<sup>11</sup>

Below are two short extracts from Chekhov’s stories as examples. In *Ionich*, when a young Dr. Startsev “...tried to preach in high society salons that everyone has to work, that a life without work is a meaningless shameful waste, the listeners always got very angry as they perceived it as a personal condemnation, and they would argue against it importunately... But none of the Philistines, that they all were, worked, they all did nothing, absolutely nothing.”<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, it did not take long for Dr. Startsev to betray his high principles and start neglecting his ordinary patients for the benefit of those few who paid well.

In the second story, *An Enigmatic Nature*, the writer enters a train compartment to find another passenger, a young and beautiful woman, sitting there alone and quietly sobbing. She tells him her story: she was born into a big and dirt-poor family. At sixteen she fell in love with a young and handsome neighbour who, unfortunately, was also very poor. So, when an old rich man proposed, she said, she sacrificed her love for the sake of her family and accepted on the condition that he would provide for them too. The arrangement worked – he supported her parental family and she was his faithful wife. He was old, and ten years later he succumbed to disease and left all his money to her, making her rich! She and her young ex-neighbour, who remained unmarried and available, were still in love. “Our happiness, finally, seemed so close, so real. But now it will never, never happen!” and she burst out sobbing. Full of sympathy, the writer cried, “But what on earth could stop you NOW?” “Oh,” she went on, still crying, “You wouldn’t believe it...another old rich man proposed!”<sup>13</sup>

North America, the land of “equal opportunity” and high social mobility, the land without an old hereditary aristocracy (the only minority to whom the three Disraeli “Is” were granted as a birthright and who, consequently, constituted the narrow breeding grounds of the highbrows), was, in a sense, created by the middlebrows. The exposure of their social nature in the literature (from Faulkner to Mark Twain and a great

many others) was no less spectacular. “Middlebrowness” as a concept, spelled out in America in 1949 by Lynes, was immediately widely recognized as a societal phenomenon. But it was exposed in a venue of informing and entertaining rather than educating and criticizing in an attempt to improve public customs.

A decade later, however, this indulgent attitude changed: the same phenomenon was reanimated and harshly criticized in the essay *Masscult and Midcult* by American critic Dwight Macdonald.<sup>14</sup> He was concerned about the perceived commodification of traditional cultural values due to mass cultural consumption and commercialization, rampant in postwar North America.

The primary meanings of “culture” in the Oxford Dictionary are “The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively” and “A refined understanding or appreciation of such manifestations.” It was the expanding loss of ability and interest in the second definition that made Macdonald sound the alarm. Here is a typical expression of the time: “Expanding a museum means less art for more people.” Macdonald made a fine distinction between Masscult that aims “to please the crowd by any means” and Midcult that “pretends to respect the standards of High Culture while in fact it... vulgarizes them. [In 18th century England] the mass audience was taking shape and a corresponding shift in literary criticism was beginning, away from objective standards and toward a new subjective approach in which the question was not how good the work is but how popular it will be” – that is, cash-value was distinctly becoming ascendant.

Macdonald continued: “The same goes even more strongly for the Soviet Union... [even if] for political more than commercial reasons... Its quality is even lower and... there no escape is possible... The totalitarian regimes, which have con-

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sciously tried to create the mass man, have systematically broken every communal link – family, church, trade union, local and regional loyalties, even down to ski and chess clubs – and have reforged them so as to bind each atomized individual directly to the center of power.” Furthermore, “...A work of High Culture, however inept, is an expression of feelings, ideas, tastes, visions that are idiosyncratic and the audience similarly responds to them

as individuals... Both creator and audience accept certain standards... But Masscult is something else. It is not just unsuccessful art. It is non-art. It is even anti-art.”

The harm inflicted by that loss to the arts and science as well as to the public, the consumers of culture, is self-explanatory and enormous.

It is perhaps inevitable that there should be a very minor devaluation of highbrow concepts as they filter down and spread out to the less-educated masses. It is also hard to assess how minor such a change would be, that is, to what degree of it might be considered “natural.” Nevertheless, by and large this detrimental process should be resisted by all means; otherwise, the most high-minded ideas become parodies of themselves.

Consider, for example, how the noble principles of sacrificing oneself for one’s country or faith and performing one’s social duty with valour might reach the poorly-educated, the low- and middlebrows. In a pathetically inadequate way, as it turns out. Frank McCourt described his childhood in Ireland: “...the loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother... The master says it’s a glorious thing to die for the Faith and Dad says it’s a glorious thing to die for Ireland and I wonder if there’s anyone in the world who would like us to live...”<sup>15</sup>

And here is a second example of the pathetically inadequate ways in which high-minded concepts are transmitted: I grew up in the USSR at the time of the WWII. We, the children, heard

a lot about self-sacrifice for one's country, but we weren't taught anything about human rights. When we later started to listen clandestinely to Voice of America, the very idea that a person had "rights" was stunning. Word spread fast and soon I started hearing declarations such as "Why am I constantly being told that I'm indebted to my country? I want my freedom!" This interpretation of "freedom" was primitive, ultra-libertarian, and vague to the point of plain anarchy. This is a classic example of middlebrow vulgarization of the ideas that least deserve it.

### **The sad consequences of the pollution of culture**

But the harm spreads farther. The debasement of our standards makes our ability to communicate and to understand one another more and more difficult. Complaints that President Obama is "detached, aloof, in a parallel universe," etc., show that he has lost touch with the commoners of his country and is evidence that the highbrows (who "speak in complete sentences") are losing contact and mutual understanding with the middlebrows.

En masse we are losing our civility. Joseph Heath, a Canadian writer, offered: "The decline of rationality in public life bears more than a passing resemblance to the decline of civility, which has been ongoing for more than forty years. As time goes by, people seem to get ruder and ruder, while popular entertainment becomes more and more vulgar... The problem is that, in the competition for attention, being rude (or vulgar) is a way of getting noticed. In order for it to work, however, you need to be ruder than everyone else. Everyone else, of course, is not about to stand idly by and let you steal all the attention. They will respond in kind."<sup>16</sup>

A.O. Scott warned: "Universities and colleges, the seedbeds of a cultural ideal consecrated to both excellence and democracy, to citizenship and to knowledge for its own sake, are becoming either hothouses for the new dynastic elite or training centers for the technocratic debt peons of the digital future..."<sup>17</sup>

Those are some of the consequences of the mushrooming of middlebrow attitudes that need urgent correction. Scott continued:

"'Middlebrow' is the kind of word rarely said without a sneer [similar to poshlost in Russian]. How can pretension and mediocrity enjoy a golden age? ...Middlebrow is a name you would never call yourself, but rather a semantic shoe that belongs on someone else's foot. It is also, however, a workable synonym, in the sphere of art and culture, for democracy." Democracy, by definition, encompasses the masses.

So, the three great Western cultures, whose economic foundations have developed in parallel – from feudalism to capitalism within the last few centuries (albeit at different times and with varying degrees of acceleration and intensity) – have all discovered and exposed the phenomenon of mass culture as something increasingly worrisome even if undeniably based in democracy: first Europe, then Russia, and finally North America. Their attitudes toward the new development have been uniformly negative, but the intensity of their wrath varies greatly. The development of mass culture was rejected most vigorously in European and Russian literature and art, where it was astutely perceived as a denigration of cultural, intellectual and humanistic values. The Russian intelligentsia (in particular, Chekhov) was perhaps the first to conceptualize it. (Could this be at least in part because Russian capitalism has historically been the weakest and the last to arrive?)

"How much money do you need to make to be 'middle class' in America today? 'Being middle-class often seems as American as apple pie or baseball. Even though the middle class has technically shrunk since the financial crisis, Americans are still more likely to identify as middle class than as any other stratum, whether they make \$20,000 or \$200,000 a year. In 2012, nearly half of Americans identified as middle class, according to the Pew Research Center."<sup>18</sup> And, in 2015, the pre-election slogan of the NDP in Canada proclaimed: "New Democrats are fighting for middle-class families."

Nobody has all the answers on how to fix the situation, particularly in our times when big corporations seem more and more to be hollowing out the middle class of "classical" capitalism. Once again, the trusty old battle-cry of the humanists, "Education, education and more,

broader, and better education,” particularly in the humanities, seems self-evidently appropriate. More may be needed, however, perhaps even a herculean effort going forward to turn the public’s attitude against the pre-eminent dominating role of money and toward a greater emphasis on what Nabokov called “the high ideas and principles.” One thing is clear: the problems of the pollution of our culture demand from humanists their closest attention. The curse of the middlebrows, their money-dominated frame of reference and their imitative existence devoid of spirituality, can at least be alleviated if we secular humanists pay attention, and if we work hard to preserve and broadcast the real culture as widely and quickly as possible. •

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