

**THE Highbrows,  
A Modern Novel**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649204588

The highbrows, a modern novel by C. E. M. Joad

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**C. E. M. JOAD**

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A Modern Novel**



# The Highbrows

A Modern Novel *by* C. E. M. Joad



Jonathan Cape

Eleven Gower Street, London

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*Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner, Frome and London.*

PR  
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451-27-47

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## Foreword

**T**HIS book is dedicated to all those who will think it immature, which of course it is, and will deny that it is a novel, which equally of course it isn't. At the same time, it is a sufficiently near approximation to a *modern* novel to be pardonably mistaken for one.

It makes no pretence at plot ; the incidents are few and sketchy ; the characters are mere puppets for the writer to hang his polemical hat on ; while the conversation is perhaps hardly so brilliant as frequent.

There is no continuity, and no sequence of incident. Instead, we have moralizing essays, rhetorical exercises, and didactic discussions—sufficient to justify the suggestion that the author regards his novel as a sort of dust-bin into which to shoot his refuse ideas—and the cinematographic impressions of a young man who looks at the world, and relies upon the stores of reminiscence instead of upon the play of imagination when he comes to write his novel.

The young man is as modern as the novel : just too clever to qualify for the ecclesiastical or educational professions, he is not clever enough to make a novelist ; too artistic in temperament to be a successful man of the world, he lacks the creative faculty of the artist. He is an artist nevertheless in everything except output, which means that he is versatile, restless and



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ineffective, and, following the habit of his kind, seeks in tendencies and views of life the satisfaction he fails to find in life itself.

It may well be asked whether such a bundle of impressions were worth recording; it may also be asked why it should be assumed that, when recorded, they are worth reading?

The form of the modern novel has been the subject of much controversy: it has been vigorously assailed and as vigorously defended; but no critic, so far as I am aware, has thought to develop the form to its logical conclusion by writing a novel which is far more like a modern novel than any novel ought to be, and in so doing, to pass a commentary upon it more significant than the most searching of reviews.

It is not suggested that this course has necessarily been adopted in the pages which follow; but it is hoped that a presentation in a salient form of the more eccentric characteristics of the novel as it is to-day, will enable critics to estimate with more certainty than they appear to do at present, the significance of those developments in literary form which we are accustomed to regard as peculiarly modern.

C. E. M. J.

## Chapter 1 : *Dabbling in the Slums*

### § 1

ON the fifth evening of his first term, Pramp was sitting in his rooms wondering if it were possible to work in Oxford. Enter with enthusiasm and a rush a tall, fair-headed man, clean-limbed and pink-faced.

"You'll come to our Lads' Club, won't you?" he said.

"What's that?"

"Oh, a club the College runs for errand boys down in St. Clement's. That's a poor part of Oxford, you know. You'll get some literature about it in a day or two, and the annual meeting comes off next Sunday in the College Hall."

"But what do you do there?"

"Oh, just go down and talk to the boys and rag about with them. You needn't be any special good at entertaining or anything, you know; but it's quite easy, though you feel a bit awkward at first. If you are any good at boxing or gym or fretsaw it would be awfully useful, and we're hoping to do a play this term."

"I should like to help in that. I did a little acting at school." This was modest for Pramp, who had really created something of a furore in school plays, had always taken the leading parts and been offered a job by an Old Boy, who was present, in a third-rate

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provincial company, which had since gone bankrupt.

"Well, come down next Thursday night. We'll get some of the boys together who are likely to take part, and you can see what you can do with them. Some other freshers will be coming too. Be in the porch at 8 o'clock."

"All right," said Pramp, who had no intention of fulfilling his promise.

Before Thursday evening came, however, there was the annual meeting on Sunday. Oxford was just then convulsed in the throes of a great spasm of Social Reform. Reaction from the Newman spirit, plus a dash of the prevalent socialism, had moulded and directed it along the lines of heartiness and social intercourse with the masses. All the phenomena of Revivalism, except religion, which formed a sort of background to the whole, never obtruded but always vaguely immanent, might be observed. One must go down and live among the workers, study their lives at close quarters, and patronize no longer from a social pedestal. Social distinctions were to vanish for the slummer. He might tyrannize over his scout and enjoy the unearned income of the parasite, but during the actual period of slumming all classes were to be regarded alike as children of the God of good-fellowship. As a concrete expression of this spirit, great tentacles stretched out from the Alma Mater in the shape of Settlements which were to embrace the slums of London and imbue them with Christianity, lounge coats and the Oxford manner. Orgiastic orators came each term to Oxford pleading for men and money in the great task of renovating the poor. The earnest went slumming for at least a week in every vac., cultivated with conscious assiduity the friendship of