

All Oiks Now?

At Wimbledon, the ladies sit in pretty frocks under their parasols eating strawberries and drinking *Pimms* don't they? The gentlemen too are well-attired in blazers and do not fail to remove their panamas so that others might have a clear view of the tennis. Not any longer. They "Yerr!" and snarl and fist the air as they scream the name of the Scottish player. Tennis is the new football. I suppose it will soon be called *the people's Wimbledon*.

It's everywhere. Cricket was murdered long ago with the infestation of pyjamas, Twenty20 and a blast of amplified rock music at the end of every over; and a shorter but more orgiastic burst of noise whenever a boundary is scored. The abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place, by which I mean of course Lord's. Even here they have the excrescence called Mexican Wave, which is a sort of lemming-like exhilaration resembling the raised arms of the happy clappies at one of their Jiving for Jesus fests. There was more peace and tranquillity on the Western Front than now exists on the western terrace at Headingley. In the formerly toffs' game of Rugby Union, where the sons of gentlemen always roughed and tumbled, they now bite, scratch and gouge the eyes out of one another like so many of those Sunni gangsters to whom our dear Mr Hague would like to supply arms.

Everywhere. Even the Proms are no better than a pop concert. Zarathustra was right: "Life is a whirlpool of delight, but wheresoever the rabble drinketh, there the water is poisoned." Naturally, in these times of our distemper, to offer any criticism of the wholesale disfiguration of public life is to be called a f***** elitist—and much worse. The first and great commandment is this: Thou shalt be socially-inclusive that thy days be like unto those of the jobs in the land which the Lord thy God hath given thee.

Specifically, critics are dismissed as buttoned-up, repressed fogeys. Not so. It's just that extreme excitement and intense delight can—and always used to—find their own modes of expression, their own etiquette. One doesn't have to display all the symptoms of the berserker, the whirling dervish or the pathological maniac in order to show one's pleasure. Unfortunately manners and etiquette are only dirty words nowadays—things that belonged to the sad days before our great Modernisation into Cool Britannia. And manners and etiquette do not come naturally. They have to be taught. The Church of England used to take responsibility for teaching the nation its P's and Q's. But have you seen the sorts of circuses and pantomimes so many church services are these days?

Peter Mullen