ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	"ONLY CONNECT": THE COMING TOGETHER OF DISPARATE SOCIAL CLASSES IN LATE – NINETEENTH AND EARLY-TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITISH FICTION
	Stephen E. Severn, Doctor of Philosophy, 2004
Dissertation directed by:	William A. Cohen, Assistant Professor Department of English

My dissertation examines the frequent portrayal of substantive interactions between characters from widely separated socio-economic backgrounds in British fiction written between 1890 and 1925. I designate these scenes as moments of "inter-class connection," and through them, I argue that the rise of professional society and the burgeoning of commodity culture in the 1880's transformed the way that texts portray class relations. Works written after 1890 seek to ameliorate the cultural anxieties that accompany inter-class connection by erasing the individualized identity of one of the characters involved. Because it entails a removal of subjectivity, I label this practice "objectification." It represents a significant departure from Victorian fiction where texts

assimilate those same cultural anxieties through elaborate plot manipulations, such as the sudden revelation that a character thought to be from the lower classes actually possesses a hidden noble heritage. My study examines both the formal and thematic implications of this change. In most cases, objectification emerges as only a partially realized fictional practice that cannot be sustained over the course of an entire narrative, and when it does collapse, these works return to the example of their Victorian predecessors and resolve class interaction through plot machinations. Overwhelmingly, those reversions in formal practice mark works as rhetorically reactionary because they signal a staunch commitment to maintaining elements of low culture excluded from the insular domain of high culture.

The introduction delineates the basic criteria for inter-class connection and presents numerous examples of it in a wide variety of texts. It also examines the historical, social and economic factors that fostered the emergence of objectification as a narrative practice. Subsequent chapters provide a detailed analysis of specific cases of inter-class connection and their accompanying strategies of objectification found in the following turn-of-the-century texts: Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), and Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" (1922).

"ONLY CONNECT": THE COMING TOGETHER OF SOCIAL CLASSES IN
LATE-NINETEENTH AND EARLY-TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITISH FICTION

by

Stephen Edwin Severn

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Advisory Committee:

    Professor William Cohen. Chair
    Professor Jessica Berman
    Professor Elizabeth Loizeaux
    Professor Brian Richardson

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Susan Elizabeth Severn.

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INTRODUCTION

**"Only Connect…": The Coming Together of Social Classes in
Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century British Fiction**

<u>Overview</u>

At the outset of his review of Jesse Matz's book *Literary Impressionism and
Modernist Aesthetics*, Garrett Stewart asks "What thudding conjunction could be more
daunting and done to death than… Victorian Fiction and Capitalist Ideology?" (770).[1]
Despite its sarcastic tone, the question makes a very valid, if somewhat obvious, point –
the relationship between mid-nineteenth-century literature (with a special emphasis on
the novel form) and the growth of Britain's capitalist economy in the context of the
Industrial Revolution *is* a well-mined area of critical inquiry that has attracted a great deal
of interest among scholars over the past thirty years. Interestingly though, just the
opposite is true of the relationship between turn-of-the-century literature written roughly
thirty years later and the socio-economic forces that characterize the mature stages of
industrial capitalism. Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* aside, discussion of
that topic has remained sporadic at best, and it remains an area with much room for
critical investigation. My study wades into that breach by examining the frequent
portrayal of substantive interactions between characters from widely separated socio-
economic backgrounds in British fiction written between 1890 and 1925. I designate
these scenes as moments of "inter-class connection," and through them, I argue that the
influence of three large-scale socio-economic trends that took shape in the 1880's and
1890's – the burgeoning of commodity culture, the increased reliance on statistically
based decision-making processes and the rise of professional society – fundamentally

transformed the way that late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century texts portray class relations.

Works written after 1890 distinguish themselves by seeking to ameliorate the cultural anxieties associated with inter-class connection by manipulating, shifting or erasing the individuated identity of a character such that he or she approaches the status of non-subject, or what is essentially an object. For the purposes of this study, I designate this practice as "objectification," [2] and it represents the focal point of my analysis. By working to ameliorate the cultural anxieties that tend to accompany the depiction of mixing between rich and poor or high culture and low culture, objectification serves as a powerful narrative tool. When one or more of the characters involved in such an interaction is perceived primarily as an object, the separation between those binaries diminishes and they tend to collapse. Thus, objectification is ultimately little more than a fictional sleight-of-hand. It constitutes an attempt by the text to portray a character as some*thing* other than their essential identity, and like most illusions, it cannot be maintained indefinitely. Overwhelmingly, objectification serves only as a partially-realized fictional practice that is not sustained over the course of an entire narrative. When it does collapse, the works considered by this study assimilate the anxieties surrounding class interaction through plot manipulations such as dramatically and suddenly killing a character or otherwise banishing him or her from the narrative.

The importance of inter-class connection as a literary phenomenon and its value as a critical lens through which to view late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British fiction rests squarely on the formal and rhetorical implications of that shift from objectification to plot. It constitutes a reversion to the formal example of Victorian

fiction where elaborate plot manipulations, such as the sudden revelation that a character thought to be from the lower classes actually possesses a hidden noble heritage, serve as the dominant strategy for resolving class interaction. Those machinations are key components of the nineteenth-century realist novel's essential rhetorical practice: to create and sustain the ideal of middle-class dominance. When the turn-of-the-century works considered by this study turn away from objectification – as the majority do – and employ plot to settle their presentations of inter-class connection, they embrace the middle-class values of their Victorian predecessors. For some texts such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), that move appears to be a calculated one, undertaken to achieve a specific rhetorical goal. Other works, however, like George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891) and E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) appear driven by unconscious fears of lower-class advancement in the resolutions that they devise for class interaction.

Therefore, it is important to discern the ubiquitous presence of inter-class connection and understand its distinctive employment of objectification because they reveal the key role that class-based issues play in shaping the essential political and rhetorical stances of works written during this period. Along with that consideration, inter-class connection and objectification also reveal that those political and rhetorical stances become visible only when a text's formal response to the challenge of presenting class interaction is examined.

When understood solely through that brief introduction, the three concepts that shape this dissertation – "inter-class," "connection" and "objectification" – remain admittedly open-ended and flexible. Over the course of this chapter; however, each will

be analyzed in detail, and all three will become clear. But first, it is crucial to recognize that together they constitute a distinctive literary phenomenon that is both driven by and a reflection of three, historically specific socio-economic factors that shaped the understanding of individual identity, social interaction and social structures in turn-of-the-century Britain. Therefore, I begin my discussion of inter-class connection and its accompanying practice of objectification with a brief consideration of the aspects of the cultural environment that provided the backdrop for and impetus behind their emergence. These trends have all been examined in detail by other critics and researchers, and in-depth analysis of them lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. As such, I have limited my consideration to very basic and widely-accepted models of historical development.

The Cultural Context – Britain in the 1880's and 1890's

The arrival of commodity culture, as announced by the burgeoning of advertising that began in earnest in the 1880's and 1890's, stands as the first and most influential of the three socio-economic trends that gave rise to inter-class connection and objectification. As Rachel Bowlby notes in *Just Looking – Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*, "The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a radical shift in the concerns of industry: from production to selling and from the satisfaction of stable needs to the invention of new desires" (2). The transformation was both rapid and pervasive. Thomas Richards opens his exhaustive study *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* with the assertion that "In the short space of time between the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the First World War, the commodity became and has remained… the dead center of the modern world" (1). The "new desires" of which Bowlby speaks

were created and sustained through the agency of advertising, a now-common social institution that experienced its first period of tremendous growth in the 1880's and 1890's. Its arrival changed fundamentally the paradigm of individual interaction. Rae Harris Stoll notes that during the period covered by this study "personal relations between people took the form of objective relations between things," and as a result, "Mutual relations between people are mediated by things, i.e. abstractions or reifications. The inevitable result of this process is increasing depersonalization in the lives and social relationships of individuals" (22 – 23). As will become clear, those "abstractions" and "depersonalizations" are the key components of the theory of objectification that I am proffering. Moreover, the emergence of the commodity as a dominant cultural presence shaped both the character of individual desire and individual interaction, two aspects that comprise the foundation for the overall phenomenon of inter-class connection.

Certainly, the influence of commodity culture resonates throughout the majority of the texts considered by this study. The two-part strategy of objectification that dominates Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) is built largely around an examination of the extent to which names themselves, usually a fundamental component of individual identity can be commodified and made objects for sale. Similarly, the insistence on the transformative power of art that forms the basis for *Dorian Gray*'s objectification of the poor actress Sibyl Vane is itself a reaction against the encroachment of commodity culture. As Regenia Gagnier demonstrates in *Idylls of the Marketplace*, the very concept of aestheticism as it emerged in the 1890's "was grounded in the beginnings of modern spectacular and mass society and depended upon image and advertising" (8). Thirty years later, the local marketplace repeatedly serves as a backdrop

for moments of inter-class connection in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920). In one particularly memorable scene, Ursula Branwegen and Rupert Birkin share a brief but emotional moment of interaction with a poor couple as they haggle over the same antique chair.

The general subversion of individual identity and personal interaction that characterized the growth of commodity culture in turn-of-the-century Britain was reinforced by a dramatic increase in the employment of statistically based decision-making processes as means for addressing broad social issues during this period. Statistical analyses first came into widespread use in the early 1800's with the start of the Industrial Revolution, and their popularity grew steadily throughout the nineteenth century. Thanks in large part to the emergence of utilitarian philosophy, the Victorians became increasingly comfortable with understanding people as numbers and with using "objective" statistical analyses as a strategy for addressing social issues. In her study *Making A Social Body – British Cultural Formation, 1830 – 1864*, Mary Poovey examines this "historical epistemology" and argues that during the first half of the Victorian era a series of "abstractions" took place in which "concepts like that of 'population' took on some of the properties of material entities" (4). These abstractions, moreover, tended to "generate norms that are typically defined as such by numerical calculation" (9). The New Poor Law of 1834 and the numerous Parliamentary "Blue Book" studies which appeared during the course of the nineteenth century all constitute very tangible manifestations of the growing perception that individuals – and especially poor individuals – are little more than figures to be run through a mathematical formula.

Around the turn-of-the-century, however, such analyses rose to even greater public prominence thanks to exhaustive studies of the living conditions of the poor undertaken separately by Charles Booth, Sir Leo Chiozza Money and Seebohm Rowntree. The generally disturbing nature of their findings was then reinforced by statistical data collected on army volunteers between 1897 and 1901 which indicated that over one quarter of all recruits from the towns of Leeds, Sheffield and York were rejected on sight due to medical conditions. Those results fueled public concern that Britain would be unable to field a sufficiently powerful army to defend itself in future wars and forced the creation of the Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1904.[3] These studies garnered such national attention largely because they pushed even harder for discerning an objective reality than had their predecessors in the mid Victorian period. In *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880*, Harold Perkin notes that "What was new from the 1880s was determination to get at the statistical fact, to quantify the precise extent of poverty and causes" (31 – 32).[4] As a result, statistical analyses enjoyed an even greater measure of influence upon public opinion at the turn-of-the-century than they had during the mid-1800's (Stoll 31). These studies demonstrated the extent to which individuals can be abstracted and registered in objective, mathematically manipulatable terms.

Just as the analytical methods for characterizing social structures changed in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain, those very same structures also began to shift.[5] Throughout the mid-nineteenth century, the country had been dominated by the system of social class, in which a person's standing varies in close accordance with his or her wealth. As Merryn Williams and Raymond Williams suggest, class operates

"primarily through the indices of adult economic activity" (24 – 25). During the period

covered by this study, that social model reached its peak in Britain as class separation and

antagonism grew. Perkin notes that "Between 1880 and 1914 class society reached its

zenith… the major classes achieved their advanced capitalistic form… [and] became

more sharply differentiated from one another than ever before" (*The Rise of Professional

Society* 27).

To make matters even more complicated, the turn-of-the century also marked the

emergence of Britain's professional culture. In contrast to class-based society,

professional society is not so closely tied to the vagaries of the marketplace. It, too, took

shape largely in response to the movement of the country's industrial economy into its

mature stage of development as increasingly complex manufacturing, distribution and

marketing processes demanded expert knowledge across all aspects of production: "As

the economy became more sophisticated, the number of specialized tasks multiplied and

the jack-of-all trades was replaced by a whole series of experts – engineers, architects,

chemists, electrical engineers and the like" (Roebuck 41). Those specialists soon joined

ranks and formed the backbone of professional society. Since their inception, entrance

into the professions has been controlled through the mechanism of professional

qualification, wherein individuals must demonstrate significant expertise in their field,

usually through a lengthy apprenticeship period followed by a comprehensive

examination.

For the purposes of this study, that paradigm has two important effects. First, the

exclusivity of qualification creates in professionals an institutionalized sense of identity.

As a result, Britain's nascent professional culture sought increasingly in the late-

nineteenth century to define itself as separate from the class-based society that was tied more directly to flow of capitalist production. Perkin notes in *The Rise of Professional Society* that

> the professional class can only exist by persuading the rest of society to accept a distributive justice which recognizes and rewards expert service based on selection by merit and arduous training. Professional people, rightly or wrongly, see themselves as above the main economic battle, at once privileged observers and benevolent neutrals since, whichever side wins, they believe that their services will still be necessary and properly rewarded. (117)

That tension between social class and professionalism registers clearly within a number of turn-of-the-century works. Second, that sense of exclusivity also helps foster a conflation of an individual's identity with his or her occupation, a transformation that several turn-of-the-century texts exploit in their strategies of objectification. Now obviously, a connection between occupation and identity is discernible long before the late-nineteenth century, as the relatively commonplace occurrence of trade-centered family names like Smith, Miller, Baker and Carpenter attests. Professional society, however, fosters a different kind of linkage because that connection is a self-imposed act. Professional qualifications are objects (often literally in the form of diplomas, licenses and membership cards) of desire. Having successfully passed his or her medical examination board, Mr. or Ms. Smith becomes Doctor Smith, or often simply "Doctor." As subsequent analysis will demonstrate, that metonymic shift constitutes a form of objectification as I am defining the term.

Thus, the confluence of these three broad, socio-economic trends that either began or accelerated in the 1880's and continued through the early-twentieth century created a cultural climate in Britain that featured an ever-increasing fascination with and reliance upon objects as a means for promoting and mediating interaction between individuals, an increasing abstraction of individual identity in a number of contexts and struggles for dominance between competing social groups and differing social systems. In both the discussions of "inter-class," "connection" and "objectification" that follow in this introduction and the specific analyses of individual texts that comprise this study's subsequent chapters, the influence that these factors had upon turn-of-the-century fiction will become readily apparent. Together they helped shape inter-class connection and objectification into a coherent and readily identifiable literary practice. I begin consideration of the specific components of that phenomenon by focusing on the relative nature of my model for class interaction.

A New Theory of Relativity – Defining Socio-Economic Separation

This dissertation examines narrative contexts where gradients in economic and / or social positions appear between characters. Thus, although it is in some sense "about" social class in turn-of-the-century fiction, its true focus is actually on the "inter" component of inter-class connection because it explores class dynamics and the ways in which different social groups interact. I have chosen to steer away from the absolutist and definitional perspective found in studies such as Len Plat's *Aristocracies of Fiction: The Idea of Aristocracy in Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Literary Culture* and Stoll's "The Unthinkable Poor in Edwardian Writing" and instead approach class

from a relative perspective for two primary reasons, each of which will be considered at length. [6] First, working within a relativist framework circumvents many of the critical pitfalls inherent in class-focused discussions, and second, it is also more substantially intertwined with the production of narrative.

Defining any social class is never easy because each one features gradients, divisions and nuances that cause it to resist any attempts at broad characterization. This complexity presents a real critical challenge. In her study of the role of the novel in promulgating middle-class values in Victorian England entitled *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel,* Arlene Young recognizes the presence of just such a potential analytical quagmire:

> In arguing as I do, I am aware of falling prey to the… tendency to
>
> impute a quasi-self-conscious agency to something as abstract and diffuse
>
> as a literary genre or a social class.… In reality, the middle class, like
>
> society as a whole, has never been a monolith and has never acted with a
>
> unanimous will. It is notoriously fragmented, fissured on one plane by
>
> gradations of class and divided on an intersecting plane into interest
>
> groups that may or may not acknowledge class gradations; it could,
>
> indeed, be more accurately called a conglomerate, rather than a class. (3)

In late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain, the "fragments" and "fissures" that Young identifies in the Victorian middle-class became even more pronounced across all levels. Perkin notes that "What was still more striking was the segregation *within* each class… Each of these great divisions of society was further divided by lines of cleavage which were not merely horizontal, between different layers of wealth and prestige, but

also vertical" (62). Although he addresses specifically the lower end of the social spectrum, G. E. Mingay echoes Perkin's basic assertion: "Social divisions were not confined of course to the crude dichotomy between rich and poor. Within the ranks of manual workers there were clear distinctions of income and status among the unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled" (143). These divisions assume fictional form in *Tess* where the narrator reveals that along with agricultural laborers, Tess's village contains "an interesting and better informed class, ranking distinctly above the former… including the carpenter, the smith, the shoemaker, the huckster, together with nondescript workers other than farm-labourers, a set of people who owed a certain stability of aim and conduct" (277).

Given such complexity, it is insufficient to characterize individuals as either upper, middle or lower class solely on their level of income, although at least one prominent researcher at the time tried to do so. Sir Leo Chiozza Money's previously mentioned study from 1905 entitled *Riches and Money* defines the middle-classes as simply those who earn between £160[7] and £700 per year (qtd. in Perkin *The Rise of Professional Society* 78). But, as Perkin notes, that model overlooks the "shopkeepers, school teachers, clerks and white collar workers, [who] generally earned a good deal less than £160 per year but still stoutly claimed middle class status" (78). Several of the characters considered by this study, especially Edwin Reardon in *New Grub Street* and Leonard Bast in *Howards End*, come from the ranks of just such "petty bourgeoisie." In the mid-nineteenth century, this group constituted what Young describes as a "newly emerging and rapidly growing social group that presented an especially vexed problem in class relations" (3), a challenge that expanded even further in the late-nineteenth and

early-twentieth centuries as the growing number of professional workers drew their

membership primarily from that strata of society.   The two other famous turn-of-the-

century studies of living conditions among the lower classes in Britain that were also

touched upon earlier, Charles Booth's seventeen volume survey of the London poor that

was begun in 1886 and concluded in 1903 and Seebohm Rowntree's two-year study of

the York poor conducted from 1899 – 1900, both recognized that simply relying upon

income level as Money did to classify individuals and families was insufficient.

Although effective and revealing, the models that each of the men were forced to devise

are complicated and very specific to the living conditions of their subjects.[8] One hundred

years later, constructing broad-yet-accurate definitions of the lower, middle and upper

classes in turn-of-the-century England has not gotten any easier.

   To a large degree however, adopting a relativist perspective sidesteps that

difficulty because it requires only the presence of a gradient in socio-economic standing

to exist between individuals. To constitute an instance of inter-class connection, one

character must be only of a substantially low-*er* socio-economic standing than the

other(s), and generally speaking, such separation is easily distinguishable. For instance,

in Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" (1922) characters are presented in such

generic terms that they merit only the very basic designations of "upper class" or "lower

class."   Nonetheless, even though the classes themselves are not clearly drawn in the

story, the gradient between them is readily apparent, as is the text's interest in the social

and political implications of class dynamics. As an example of class relativism at work

in a more detailed context, consider Leonard Bast, the aforementioned clerk in *Howards

End*. After he has a chance encounter at the opera with Helen and Margaret Schlegel, a

pair of relatively wealthy, and intellectual sisters, Bast develops a tenuous relationship

with them, and they come to view him as their own personal social reclamation project.

Because Bast is the poorest man within novel and actually becomes destitute by the

conclusion of the narrative, he symbolizes the plight of the lower strata of society. The

narrator notes that "He [Bast] knew that he was poor, and would admit it" (41). Helen

also recognizes his economic position and tells Mr. Wilcox, her brother-in-law, that "He

[Bast] is very poor" (174). Yet, seen in another way, he is hardly poor at all. When

compared with any number of other characters considered by this study, like Scott, the

carter who is killed in "The Garden Party," Bast actually appears to be a very wealthy

man.   His situation becomes even more confused, however, since his social status

transcends his limited income level. The narrator notes that he "stood on the extreme

verge of gentility" (41) and represents what Stoll labels as "an early portrait of the new

white collar proletarian" (38). Using a relativistic perspective on social class opens up

characters like Bast to analysis and prevents limiting consideration to a specific group of

people as Stoll does. She begins her article with the assertion that the "very poor" are

essentially missing from Edwardian literature and then devotes the remainder of her study

to exploring the reasons for and the symbolic importance of this absence (23). Her

argument is extremely persuasive and particularly from a cultural studies perspective,

very useful.   But, it also misses the point that although the "very poor" may be absent

from the literature of this period, the "relatively poor" are found in abundance.

Those cases of relative poverty appear with such frequency precisely because

gradients in social class tend to produce narrative. D. A. Miller argues in *Narrative and

Its Discontents* that in order to become the subject of narrative, to become what he calls

"narratable," one must step outside of the boundaries of accepted behavior and enter into a state of "disequilibrium" (ix). The dangers inherent in defining class broadly lurk underneath Miller's formulation as well because by definition, "acceptable behavior" is a socially determined construct that may vary widely across a great number of contexts. Nonetheless, it *is* reasonable to make some basic generalizations about social classes and their expectations of conduct, as Young does when she counters her own reservations about speaking of the Victorian "middle class" as a coherent entity by asserting that

> They [the middle class] nevertheless share certain characteristics and goals
> which lead them to endorse certain common values, such as individualism,
> industry, domesticity and piety. It is through the influence of these values
> that are more or less shared by its members…. the middle class achieves
> moral dominance in Victorian culture. (3)

Her argument here rests upon Perkin's assertion in *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780 – 1880* that "whichever class manages to assert its own morality on the rest of the nation will become the ascendant class" (273). Over the course of the nineteenth century, the middle classes in Britain did just that, and as Perkin notes, by 1880, the insularity of social class had become a fundamental belief:

> One spent one's time always in company of one's equals, except of course
> when directing the labours of servants or workers or patronizing the city
> slum dwellers or the village poor. Segregation at every level and in every
> occupation and pastime was the hallmark of the middle class. (*The Rise of
> Professional Society* 83)

This dissertation rests upon the assumption that such stringent class separation constituted an essential organizing principle of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British culture. Therefore, generally speaking, individuals who step across socio-economic divides transgress societal expectations[9] and in doing so, become narratable.

The transgressive nature of these crossings is underscored by the fact that in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British narrative fiction, scenes of inter-class connection are generally accompanied by the presence of shame, a sensation that William Ian Miller defines in *The Anatomy of Disgust*, as the "failure to adhere to communal standards one is deeply committed to; it is the consequence of being understood to have not measured up" (34). For a specific fictional example of this dynamic, consider Gudrun Branwegen in *Women in Love*. The daughter of a relatively respectable and well-to-do family, she nonetheless finds herself pulled irresistibly to the excitement of the market square and the theater, even though she recognizes that her behavior is considered abnormal and places a great strain upon her parents: "She knew it was a vulgar thing to do; her father and mother could not bear it... but the nostalgia came over her, she must be among the people. Sometimes she sat among the louts in the cinema; rakish looking unattractive louts they were. Yet, she must be among them" (111). The reaction of Gudrun's parents stems from the fact that their daughter has violated the "communal standard" that demands respectable young women not frequent the "vulgar" world of the theater, especially when unaccompanied. Now, the tone of the passage clearly mocks the prudish response of the Branwegens, and the text does challenge such repressive cultural expectations. But at the same time, the very fact that it must acknowledge them testifies

to their reality. The crossing of class boundaries – the "inter" portion of "inter-class" –

usually constitutes a socially transgressive act.

That assertion is, however, only a general one and does not have universal

applicability. Class barriers were neither all encompassing, nor were they uniform in

turn-of-the-century Britain. For instance, in their studies of the history of domestic

service, both Pamela Horn and Frank E. Huggett suggest that moral standards in rural

areas regarding sexual encounters were somewhat less stringent than in urban centers, as

evidenced by the persistence of wife swapping, referred to locally as "bundling," as a

custom in Wales up through the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Huggett 121; Horn

155). Similarly, class interaction was clearly condoned in some contexts, as the

flourishing of prostitution in the nineteenth century attests.[10] In recognition of these

variations and inconsistencies and to avoid speaking of social transgression in

unreasonably general terms, whereever possible, this study provides specific historical

and cultural contexts for the inter-class connection being considered and establishes the

extent to which each case would have been seen as outside the boundaries of accepted

behavior.

<u>Of Human Bondage – The Meaning of Connection</u>

As a starting point for the second component of inter-class connection, consider

the following three examples of texts that use the term "connect" explicitly when

portraying the phenomenon. The first and perhaps most famous of these is the truncated

epigraph from *Howards End* that provides the title of this study: "Only connect…". The

phrase is actually part of a larger passage from within the novel itself. The narrator uses

it when describing how Margaret Schlegel plans to affect the building of a "rainbow bridge" within the soul of her husband, Mr. Wilcox: "Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height" (170). In its immediate narrative context, "Only connect" connotes a symbolic linkage, an attempt to create a balanced and healthy psyche by unifying the passion of the heart with the intellect of the mind. When considered from a broader perspective, however, it becomes clear that "Only connect…" primarily reflects the novel's preoccupation with the bringing together of members of differing social and economic backgrounds, as embodied in the sexual encounter that ultimately occurs between Bast and Helen Schlegel. Their union produces a child and also sets up the text's climax. Infuriated by the scandal, Charles Wilcox, Mr. Wilcox's arrogant son, attacks Bast, who is then killed when a book case comes crashing down upon him. As Lionel Trilling has noted, *Howards End* is a "story of the class war" (118), and Bast is the conflict's primary casualty.

Although other turn-of-the-century texts may not announce their interest in the coming together of classes as dramatically as Forster's does, "connection" nonetheless remains an explicit concern for many of them. In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), connection assumes a much more abstract character than in *Howards End*. While walking across Trafalgar Square toward Haymarket, Peter Walsh notices a young woman who immediately captures his imagination: "… he started after her to follow this woman, this excitement which seemed even with its back turned to shed on him a light which *connected* them" (53) [emphasis added]. The exact social standing of the woman is never revealed, and she is never aware of her admirer's presence. Although Walsh does believe

that there is a "dignity about her," he then qualifies that by noting "She was not worldly, like Clarissa; not rich like Clarissa" (*Ibid.*).   Because he feels such a strong, imaginary bond to the young lady, Walsh follows her through Picadilly, Regent Street, Oxford Street and Great Portland Street, only to find that she lives on "one of the little streets" in "one of those flat red houses with hanging flower-baskets of vague impropriety" (54). The geographic transition and description of the house demonstrate clearly that although she may not be poor, she is not of Walsh's class either, and as discussed previously, only that gradient in social standing is necessary to establish that this is a case of inter-class connection. Certainly, the incident reinforces the general theme of social connectivity that underscores the text.

In sharp contrast to the sense of fantasy that defines Walsh's experience, Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915) links connection to shame and antipathy. The novel revolves around Major Edward Ashburnham, a wealthy former Army officer, and his numerous sexual entanglements, the first of which involved his kissing "a servant girl in a railway train" (50).   In his description of the outcome of that "affair" and its effect upon Leonara Ashburnham, the major's wife, John Dowell, the novel's narrator, asserts

> He [Ashburnham] was completely cured of his philandering among the
>
> lower classes. And that seemed a real blessing to Leonora. It did not
>
> revolt her so much to be connected – it is a sort of connection – with
>
> people like Mrs. Maidan, instead of with a little kitchenmaid (61).

Looking back over these three examples, it becomes clear that connection finds application in a wide variety of contexts, some positive, some negative, some palpable, some imagined. Given that *The Oxford English Dictionary* cites twenty-one specific

usages of the word, such variation seems hardly surprising. This study does liberally

apply the term connection to a wide range of situations and does not limit itself to one

particular form of inter-class connection, such as a sexual liaison between a wealthy male

character and a poorer female character.[11] But even with that variability, all of the

examples examined here do share one fundamental characteristic. The *OED*'s primary

definition of connection asserts that the term represents a "joining together. " Thus, it

involves more than mere interaction; it entails a binding of people. To undergo

connection, subjects must go beyond merely crossing paths; they must experience

something that links them together. If that linkage does not emerge, connection has not

occurred.

Furthermore, this linkage may be divided into two general categories. The most

prevalent and easily identifiable cases of connection are those that occur in verifiable,

substantive ways, such as a "personal relation of intercourse, intimacy, common interest

or action ," a "sexual relation or … a *liaison*" or a "relationship by family ties, as

marriage…" (*OED*). Although many of these instances of connection are shrouded in

secrecy – indeed most *must* be shrouded in secrecy – they remain undeniable. They are

tangible and when uncovered become visible.   It is not possible to ascertain whether a

couple is husband and wife by merely looking at them, but marriages and family

connections produce documentation such as wills, licenses and birth certificates.

Similarly, sexual liaisons may produce children, blackmail or other lingering effects. In

all cases, however, substantive residues of the connection are produced. The above

examples from both *Howards End* and *The Good Soldier* fall into this category of

connection.

At the same time, however, connection can emerge within a more abstract, conceptual framework and may entail a "bond of interdependence, causality, logical sequence, coherence, or the like" (*OED*)   Here, connection may appear only in the effects that elements of high and low culture have upon each other, and no direct interaction between the two need occur. Described in such generic terms, this second category of connection is admittedly somewhat vague, but the case of Peter Walsh's fantasy serves as an effective qualifying example. At first glance, it might be tempting to dismiss his encounter as little more than a mere crossing of paths. But, this interlude constitutes inter-class connection because it represents a turgid, albeit short-lived, obsession. He literally changes the direction of his day in an attempt to remain close to the young woman and engages in a prolonged fantasy of pursuit. Despite the fact that she never notices Walsh, he declares that he discerns a "mockery in her eyes" and pronounces himself to be "romantic buccaneer" who is "careless of all these damned proprieties" (53).   That last statement further confirms the difference in social class that separates Walsh and the woman by acknowledging that if any tangible connection had occurred between them, it would have opposed the expectations of proper behavior in the social circles in which he moves. Even though it does not progress to a more substantive level and remains only unilateral and intangible, connection does occur here.

The vision of the lower classes as objects of fantasy and sources of compulsive desire that emerges clearly in Walsh's case and in the example of Gudrun Branwegen cited previously recurs in various guises throughout turn-of-the-century fiction.   In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White examine that same phenomenon as it appears throughout European culture and literature from the

sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. They theorize that the very mechanism by

which the upper classes constituted and defined themselves incorporated the lower

classes into their fantasy unconscious. In contrast to the usual assumption that binaries of

high / low and rich / poor represent distinct and opposing entities, they argue that

"cultural categories of high and low, social and aesthetic… are never entirely separable"

(2). High culture constantly attempts to control, repress and deny low culture at the

conscious level as a way to reinforce its own perceived status of superiority: "The

bourgeois subject continuously defined and re-defined itself through the exclusion of

what it marked out as 'low'…. Yet, that very act of exclusion was constitutive of its

identity" (191). Because high and low culture are actually interconnected at the level of

the unconscious and not separate, this continual rejection leads to the transformation of

low culture into a "primary eroticized constituent of its [high culture's] own fantasy life"

and produces a "psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being

rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level" (5). The numerous scenes of inter-

class connection in turn-of-the-century literature, then, stem partially from this

unconscious desire and are fictional manifestations of it. Although Stallybrass and White

discuss mid-Victorian society at length, they say very little specifically about the

Victorian novel and do not carry their investigation into the twentieth century. Their

model does, however, provide valuable insights for many of the works considered here

and reference is made to it throughout this study.[12] Focused as it is on an unconscious

cultural desire that developed over the course of several centuries, Stallybrass and

White's model implies that some degree of fascination with inter-class connection will be

found in the fiction of any time period. Yet, it is particularly apparent from 1890 to 1925. So, clearly, there are other factors at work here too.

The primary reason that texts turn to inter-class connection with such frequency is that it provides them with a convenient forum for suggesting new models for class interaction in a society whose old "rules" have clearly vanished but whose new ones have yet to be articulated. In doing so, these turn-of-the-century works echo the example set by their Victorian predecessors. Consider, for instance, the narrator's tirade over the condition of Jo in the "Toms All Alones" chapter of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*:

> What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house
> in town, the Mercury in powder and the whereabout of Jo the outlaw with
> the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the
> church-yard step? What connexion can there have been between many
> people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides
> of great gulfs, have nevertheless, been very curiously brought together!
> (167)

In *Bleak House*, as in many of the "Condition of England" novels of the 1840's and 1850's the coming together of social class is as a fictional manifestation of anxieties stemming from the rapid transformation of Britain's social hierarchy that occurred as the Industrial Revolution began to develop in earnest. As even a cursory survey of literary and cultural artifacts from the mid-1800's demonstrates, those changes fostered in the Victorians an acute interest in the myriad ways in which apparently different social classes find themselves linked to one another. Thomas Carlyle's plea for the typhus-infected, Irish widow in *Past and Present*; the voluminous reports on the composition and

character of the lower classes such as Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* and Parliament's famous "blue book" studies; Edwin Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*; treatises on prostitution by William Acton and others; the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860's; the rise of the detective novel and sensationalist fiction such as *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley's Secret* – all of these examples, in various ways, stem from a recognition of the inter-connectivity of social class. Although the 1860's and 1870's witnessed a lull in class-based tensions,[13] they returned in force by the 1880's as separation between classes reached its highest levels. Perkin notes that "Segregation was reinforced by growing class hostility.… there was in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and beyond a decided upswing in the tempo of class conflict" (36). To make matters worse, that stratification was complicated by the emergence of white-collar, lower-middle class workers as a major presence in British society. Roebuck describes this group as a "virtually new social class" (39) that is "difficult to fit… neatly into the established social structure" (40). Thus, as in Carlyle's and Dickens's age, England once again found itself at the turn-of-the-century confronted with rapidly changing cultural roles and having to re-imagine its social hierarchy.

Through its numerous scenes of inter-class connection, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century fiction registers these changes as well as the anxieties surrounding them. Early in *Howards End*, the narrator notes of Leonard Bast that "Had he lived some centuries ago… he would have had a definite status" (41 – 42). Unfortunately, as "the third generation, grandson to the shepherd or ploughboy whom civilization had sucked into the town," he now finds himself as merely another faceless member of the

burgeoning white-collar, lower-middle class (105). His plight is emblematic of numerous

characters who find themselves caught in new or vague social positions such as Angel

Clare in *Tess*, the Branwegen family in *Women in Love*, and Edwin Reardon in *New Grub

Street*.   In the tradition of Zola's "experimental novel," inter-class connection provides

an imaginary forum wherein such individuals may find a stable plane of social existence

or in some cases, have one thrust upon them.

The Object of the Game – Objectification Defined

Although both the presence of inter-class connection in turn-of-the-century texts

and its role as a fictional attempt to re-imagine and re-define class relations establish

important points of continuity with Victorian fiction, around 1890, the strategy used for

portraying these scenes begins to change. That shift centers around a series of related

fictional practices that I have grouped under the general title of "objectification."

Objectification represents a crucial component of this study, and I define it as any attempt

to manipulate, shift or erase the individuated identity of a character such that he or she

approaches the status of non-subject, or what is essentially an object.

$$\text{non-subject} \approx \text{object}$$

Objectification differs from characterization because it shifts identity to a place where it

cannot exist. Robert Burns famous assertion that "my luve's like a red, red rose" is

characterization since it employs a simile to establish comparison. If he had pushed to

metaphor and claimed "my luve *is* a red, red rose," returned to that assertion repeatedly in

order to affect a metonymic transformation wherein his "luve" substitutes for a rose, and

then used that shift as a tool for constructing narrative, he would have been pursuing a

strategy of objectification. Objectification frequently, but not always, involves reducing the identity of a character(s) to the physicality of tangible objects, a practice which further reinforces the rationale behind the term itself. Stoll's study of the poor's absence in turn-of-the-century fiction discerns the presence of that very trend: "In this new, more alienated society, groups of 'others' often assumed the qualities of inanimate objects" (25). Great care must be taken here, however, because I am not arguing that turn-of-the-century-fiction merely presents the lower classes as objects. Such a finding would not be surprising given that, as Stallybrass and White note, generally speaking the "most powerful socio-economic groups… gain the authority to designate what is to be taken as a high and low in the society" (4).   It would, however, be reductive and contrary to the textual evidence at hand. As chapter one's analysis of Alec d'Urberville in *Tess* and chapter four's analysis of Laura Sheridan in "The Garden Party" demonstrate, the transformation from subject to object can apply to members of the upper classes as well as those in the lower classes.

As will become clear, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century fiction uses objectification as a fictional sleight-of-hand. Pushing one or more of the characters involved in inter-class connection to the status of object works to collapse the socio-economic gradient separating them. Therefore, any interaction between them appears less of a violation of the general dictum of maintaining class separation.   From this general definition of objectification a wide range of specific applications emerge. They range in complexity from simply equating a character to a literal, physical object, as in "The Garden Party," to much more abstract, symbolic manipulations as in the transformation of the d'Urberville name that occurs in *Tess*. But, in order to help clarify

the concept from the outset, a discussion of several specific examples of objectification found in turn-of-the-century texts follows.

In *Women in Love*, a strategy of objectification is employed in conjunction with Gudrun Branwegen's sojourns to the town of Beldover. Despite her parents' frustration and concern over her actions, the clamor of the market place proves too great of an attraction: "She found herself, with the rest of the common women, drawn out on Friday evenings to the little market…. The sense of talk, buzzing, jarring, half-secret, the endless mining and political wrangling, vibrated in the air like discordant machinery…. They aroused a strange, nostalgic ache of desire…." (110 – 111). That "ache of desire" ultimately assumes a tangible form when she engages in an affair with one of the local inhabitants: "like any common lass, she found her 'boy,' It was an electrician" (*Ibid*.). Note how Gudrun's lover becomes objectified on multiple levels. The word boy can be read as a term of endearment. At the same time, however, placing boy in quotation marks establishes clearly that he is not a man, but also suggests that he only approximates the characteristics of a boy. Thus, the text pushes him into a liminal space – neither boy, nor man. He then gets reduced to the pronoun "it," the designation specifically reserved for description of non-human objects, and is finally referred to only by his occupation, "electrician". Each successive step serves to strip away further his identity until he is recognizable only by the work he does. He becomes a symbolic tool, something to be used by Gudrun simply for her pleasure. This sense of control and domination is further supported by the fact that she "found" him and not the other way around. Their interaction becomes depersonalized and therefore seems less subversive because it lacks

the characteristics of a relationship. It constitutes mere exploitation, a more easily rationalized dynamic for high / low intercourse.

In *Howards End*, Leonard Bast's relationship with the Schlegel sisters constitutes a single, recurring case of inter-class connection. The text uses the strategy of objectification that it associates with that interaction to develop its underlying rhetorical stance, but in doing so, it has to walk a fine line. Because Bast is the symbolic representation of Britain's lower classes, both his situation and his character must be dire enough to attract and maintain the attention and support of the Schlegel sisters who symbolize the country's wealthy, liberal intelligentsia. At the same time, however, he can appear neither truly desperate nor truly personalized since either one would make his subsequent liaison with Helen appear both incongruous and disturbing. As long as he retains the somewhat nebulous social status discussed previously and remains a relatively abstracted presence, their affair remains palatable.

To strike this balance, the novel begins by literally connecting Bast to an object and then moves to present him in progressively more abstract terms until he is understood as a concept instead of as an individual. The initial encounter between Bast and the Schlegels comes when Helen mistakenly grabs his umbrella at the opera and he must accompany Margaret home in order to retrieve it. Thus, he gains entrance to their house not as an intruder, but as someone in need of assistance. As Helen searches their hall, she exclaims "What about this umbrella?… No, it's all gone along the seams. It's an appalling umbrella. It must be mine" (38). But, of course, the umbrella is Bast's. Ashamed of its – and, by association, his own – dilapidated condition he immediately departs: "He took it from her, murmured a few words of thanks, and then fled…" (*Ibid.*).

Helen's reaction to the object foreshadows all of the complexities that emerge in the relationship that she and Margaret develop with the young clerk over the course of the novel.[14] To begin with, her diction is telling. If had she claimed that the umbrella was, say, "worn," this would indicate only its physical state. By labeling it as "appalling" however, she shifts the focus away from the object itself and instead highlights her reaction to it. As the *OED* notes, appalling means "Such as to overwhelm with consternation or dismay; dismaying, shocking," and certainly, Bast is greeted with some level of fear and disgust throughout the text. After he departs, Mrs. Munt, the Schlegels' aunt, expresses relief that he is gone because their "drawing room is full of very tempting little things" (38). Although Helen does make a nominal attempt to repudiate her aunt's claim, she is also quick to shut the door behind their visitor.

Of course, explicit statements of aversion and apprehension often conceal implicit feelings of attraction, and despite their reservations about Bast, the Schlegels are clearly drawn to him. This stems partially from the fact that as someone who exists completely outside of their own social sphere, he is a curiosity. Early in the text, the narrator notes that "To the Schlegels… he was an interesting creature" (112). Tellingly, this is not the only time that Bast is labeled a "creature." After he abruptly walks out of a meeting at the Schlegel home, Margaret implores Helen to "go after him – do anything – *anything* – to make the noodle understand" [emphasis original] and then apologizes to Mr. Wilcox that "He's a nice creature really" (131). Clearly, the term "creature" establishes him as a non-human, animal-like figure and calls to mind traditional upper class perceptions of the poor as dogs, pigs, etc. More importantly, it also suggests that he is an alien presence that is worthy of study and examination in a pseudo-Darwinian framework, a project that

the Schlegels undertake. Both aspects serve to further strip Bast of his individualized

identity as clerk who is barely clinging to the lowest levels of lower-middle-class

existence and constitute important steps in the process of objectification that takes place

as the novel develops.

Besides being a curiosity, Bast also elicits the sympathies of the Schlegels

because like his umbrella, he too is clearly "gone along the seems" and in need of

restoration.   Despite Margaret's claim that "charity… bores us," they nonetheless come

to see him as a reclamation project: "We want to show him how he may get upsides with

life" (133).   But in keeping with the strategy of objectification, they approach him not as

an individual, but as merely emblematic of his class.   At a dinner party for the

Dickensesque-sounding "Society for the Preservation of Places of Historic Interest or

Natural Beauty," Helen, Margaret and the other attendees speak of him with such fervor

and so frequently that his name actually becomes a metonymic substitute for "poor" in

the philosophic and economic discussions that ensue:

> … in this debate Mr. Bast also figured, appearing now as a bright spot in
>
> civilization, now as a dark spot, according to the temperament of the
>
> speaker….What right had "Mr. Bast" to profit? The National Gallery was
>
> good enough for the likes of him…. Something must be done for "Mr.
>
> Bast": his conditions must be improved without impairing his
>
> independence; he must have a free library, or free tennis-courts; his rent
>
> must be paid in such a way that he did not know it was being paid….
>
> (114 – 115)

Although Bast's name recurs throughout the passage, he is actually not there at all. His identity is effectively erased here because he now represents a vast social grouping. Unlike Jo in *Bleak House* who remains Jo, Bast comes to exist only when put into quotation marks – "Mr. Bast." That transformation is the heart of objectification.

Remember, though, that the novel is walking a fine line here, and even while the Schlegels appropriate Bast as an embodiment of "poor," both they and the narrative voice also cast him as an atypically intellectual and dedicated member of the lower classes. Immediately after he leaves the Schlegel house for the first time, the narrative follows him to his apartment where he peruses a chapter of Ruskin. It then labels him as "superior" to those around him because of his work ethic and desire to enrich his mind (44 – 46). Similarly, Margaret twice refers to him as having "familiarity with the outsides of books" (105, 133). Just as the narrator is very emphatic that "we are not concerned with very poor," Margaret's designation does make it clear that Bast is not one of the dirty, faceless masses since he is literate and has been nominally exposed to at least some aspects of "culture" (41). This way, his future union with Helen will not appear completely demeaning. At the same, time however, "outsides of books" also emphasizes his inability to grasp the subtleties and nuances of the words that rest between the covers. Lastly and most importantly, it furthers the text's strategy of objectification because it emphasizes the perception that Bast himself is simply an externality. He, too, exists only on the surface of things.

That process reaches its final, logical conclusion near the climax of the text when the narrator notes that "Leonard seemed not a man, but a cause" and the effacement of his identity becomes complete (283). The statement comes as his sexual encounter with

Helen has made her the object of scorn by the Wilcoxes. Poor, unemployed men with disastrous marriages obviously must be avoided by intelligent, rich, young women at all costs. One *should*, however, get involved with "causes," and they are certainly worth fighting for. In the end, Helen doesn't fight "for" Bast per se (indeed, her defiance of social norms actually leads to his death), but she and Margaret do stubbornly resist Mr. Wilcox's demand that they vacate Howards End because of her connection to him. Thanks to the strategy of objectification applied to Bast throughout the narrative, that challenge assumes a sympathetic air and a sense of righteousness that counters any sense of disquiet stemming from Helen's relationship with him. Leonard Bast plays a crucial role in resolving the social division that Forster's novel portrays because with Helen, he fathers the child who will eventually come to inherit Howards End. Nonetheless, his subjectivity is slowly undermined throughout the text until he exists as merely an idealized, abstract conception.

In a very different approach to objectification, characters in *New Grub Street* and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) exploit the conflation of occupation and individual identity that emerged as a hallmark of Britain's nascent professional culture in order to depict their scenes of inter-class connection. In Conrad's novel, characters are divided into two groups: the professional spies and law enforcement officials who are players in "the game" of espionage and those civilians who are on the outside of it, blissfully unaware of its presence. Instead of traditional first and last names, the text is dominated by fragments of identity like "Ossipon" or professional designations like "The Commissioner," "Inspector Heat" and "The Professor." Verloc, *the* secret agent, is named; however, this stems primarily from his running a squalid shop in order to cover

his secretive activities. To his fellow agents, he is known by the symbol Δ. For those who are in "the game," class distinctions become secondary. They move freely in a wide variety of social contexts from elegant dinner parties to the sordid confines of Verloc's store and do not concern themselves with defying cultural expectation. *New Grub Street* operates in a similar manner. Focused on the London publishing scene of the mid-1880's, it specifically speaks of "men of letters" and "literary men." These two-part titles approximate professional designations in their connection of identity and occupation. Moreover, as with professional designations, those characters who earn these titles are able to step outside of the practices and norms of class-based society to some degree. Amy Reardon, Edwin's wife, tells him that "It doesn't matter what one has been in the past. Especially a literary man; everyone expects to hear that he was once poor" (189). Likewise, Mrs. Yule, his mother-in-law notes that "people are always ready to allow literary men to do rather odd things – up to a certain point" (196). Chapter three examines how the novel exploits that sense of social freedom in its portrayal of several cross-class marriages undertaken by "literary men."

        Of all the components of my paradigm for inter-class connection, objectification demands the greatest critical attention because it stands as the only one that is truly a new literary development.   To discern the practice's distinctive quality, recognize first that all three of the socio-economic trends that produced it – commodity culture, statistical analyses and professional society – are themselves outgrowths of industrial capitalism. The fact that objectification ultimately traces its roots back to capitalism is hardly surprising, though. As the term "free market" suggests, capitalism by its very nature fosters an environment that tends to undermine the value of the individual subject

because it is based upon economic relationships that are, by definition, impersonal and negotiable, and those are the same qualities that objectification rests upon.

The Victorians were certainly cognizant of and addressed directly many of the characteristics of capitalism and industrialization that would eventually produce objectification. But, their response to those forces early in the Industrial Revolution was a mixture of denial and nostalgia. For instance in *Past and Present*, Carlyle extols the virtues of the "Feudal Baron" who "included it as a necessity to have men round him who in heart loved him; whose life he watched over with rigour yet with love… It was beautiful; it was human!" (246). He argues for the emergence of "Captains of Industry" who will aspire to "be a noble Master, among noble Workers" (243). John Thornton, the self-made industrialist in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854 – 1855), stands as the fictional embodiment of Carlyle's ideal. Having lost his fortune while trying to follow a traditional economic policy driven by constant pursuit of maximum profit, Thornton states his belief in the power of a new paradigm near the conclusion of the novel:

> My only wish is to have the opportunity of cultivating some intercourse
> with the hands beyond the mere 'cash nexus'….I have arrived at the
> conviction that no mere institutions, however wise, and however much
> thought may have been required to organise and arrange them, can attach
> to class as they should be attached, unless the working out of such
> institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual
> personal contact. (431 – 32)

As the examples of Carlyle and Gaskell demonstrate, the Victorians initially sought to stem the rising tide of capitalism and the impersonal profit motive of the marketplace by arguing for decision-making driven by personalized, humanist values. Such affirmation of the primacy of personalized interaction and individualized identity runs contrary to the assumption underlying objectification that subjectivity is a permeable and effacable construct.

George Eilot's *Adam Bede* demonstrates that even texts written as late as 1859 remain unwilling to undermine the privileged position of the inviolable subject and employ objectification as a fictional tool. They still promote a belief in what D.A. Miller describes as the "project" of the nineteenth-century novel: "to produce a stable, centered subject in a stable, centered world" (*The Novel and the Police* xi). Eliot's text centers around the scandalous union of Arthur Donnithore, a young squire, and Hetty Sorrel, a beautiful but poor girl. Relatively early in the novel, Donnithore is talking with Mr. Irwine, the local rector and his primary advisor, about Sorrel when he confides that "I went to look at that pretty butter-maker, Hetty Sorrel. She's a perfect Hebe, and if I were an artist, I would paint her" (102). His comment is very similar to the aesthetically-focused strategy of objectification that dominates *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a text written only thirty years later. Although Eliot's point of reference is Greek mythology and Wilde's is Shakespearean heroines, Donnithore's statement does undertake essentially the same transfer of individual identity into an aesthetic context that occurs with Sibyl Vane, the poor actress with whom Dorian becomes infatuated.

In Eliot's text however, Donnithore's statement does not serve as the starting point for a sustained program of objectification centered upon Sorrel. No further attempt

to connect subjectivity with the aesthetic is ever made again. Indeed, Mr. Irwine's response to Donnithore's confession lightly chastises the young man for even having tried to do so once: "…I have no objection to your contemplating Hetty in an artistic light, but I must not have you feeding her vanity, and filling her little noodle with the notion that she's a great beauty, attractive to fine gentleman, or you will spoil her for a poor man's wife" (102). The text alludes to objectification only to specifically reject it. Certainly, as an exercise in delusion, objectification runs contrary to the formal tenets of realism that Eliot proclaims later in the novel: "I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity" (178). More importantly, at the time of *Adam Bede*'s publication, the forces that helped make objectification possible by undermining the privileged position of the self were still in either their nascent or partially developed stages, and therefore, it was not yet recognized as an option for portraying inter-class connection.

Instead, in mid-nineteenth-century realist fiction, the tensions and anxieties surrounding the coming together of social classes are controlled primarily through overt manipulations of plot. The practice reflects the Victorians' fundamental belief in the ultimate ability of narrative to restore and preserve order by prescribing the unified subject's place within it. Adrian Poole speaks to this faith in *Gissing in Context*:

> Again, it is the confidence underlying the narrative that needs to be stressed; the confidence that, however disillusioning and frustrating is the discrepancy between the intuitive knowledge of the individual and the mysterious opacity of objective "reality," the *possibility* of reconciliation is permanently available or renewable. (9)

As the following examples demonstrate, the Victorians' strategy for resolving class interaction can manifest itself in a variety of ways, however, all of them entail the unfolding of a story line.

For instance, it may be revealed, as in Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*(1846) that a character thought to be lower-class actually possesses a secret, upper-class heritage, and therefore, cases of inter-class connection that previously were socially unacceptable become normative across lines of class. Similarly, plots may place characters in unique social roles or occupations that provide them with access to individuals of widely-separated socio-economic backgrounds. Margaret Hale, the heroine of *North and South*, exemplifies this strategy. As the daughter of a minister, she is a respectable member of the middle classes and is thus able to entertain John Thornton, the wealthy industrialist whom she ultimately marries. At the same time, the charitable aspects of her father's clergy-work mandate that she visit the poorest sections of the manufacturing town where their family lives, and while doing so, she develops a friendship with Higgins, one of Thornton's workers. Through Margaret, those two men come into direct contact with each other and form a bond that is crucial to the novel's overt critique of laissez-faire economics. That bond, however, would be difficult to imagine in any other context. Or, in yet another approach, those who step across divides of social class may find themselves banished from Britain for their transgression, the fate suffered by Arthur and Hetty in *Adam Bede*.[15] Beyond specific machinations of plot, the sheer volume of it in Victorian fiction often serves as a powerful tool for repressing, obscuring and diffusing culturally transgressive scenes of inter-class connection. In *The Novel and the Police*, D.A. Miller argues that "…both as a system of distribution and as a text, the Victorian

novel establishes a little bureaucracy of its own, generating an immense amount of paperwork and sending its readers and here there, backward and forward" (89). The tremendous amounts of text and over-abundance of interlocking plot lines associated with the classic Victorian three-volume novel can ameliorate and overwhelm unsettling events such as moments of inter-class connection until they are hardly visible at all. Although these strategies are all different, none of them equate to objectification. Even those that focus on individual identity, such as the revelation of Sibyl's noble pedigree, do not attempt to push that identity into a context where it simply cannot exist. Though implausible, a lost connection to the aristocracy *could* be found, while in contrast, Leonard Bast cannot cease to be a man and simply be a "cause."

Formal practice in fiction holds rhetorical and political implications of course. For the Victorian novel, it is widely recognized that its structure serves to both establish and support middle-class values. In the chapter entitled "Realism and Desire" in *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson argues that

> the novel plays a significant role in what can be called a properly
> bourgeois cultural revolution – that immense process of transformation
> whereby populations whose life habits were formed by other, now archaic,
> modes of production are effectively reprogrammed for life and work in the
> new world of market capitalism. (152)

Similarly, Young suggests that the novel is "the medium in which the dominant nineteenth-century bourgeois social values attitudes are formulated and expressed" (2). Ultimately, those values are rooted in notions of stability, normalcy and conformity of D.A. Miller's "stable, centered world." The plot-focused strategies discussed above all

create that environment either by banishing those elements that threaten it as in *Adam Bede*, or by merely willing them away through a unilateral redefinition of terms as in *Sybil*

By the end of the 1800's however, after fifty years of tremendous industrial and imperial growth, the faith in such expedient solutions had begun to erode. It was evident that John Thornton's wish for "cultivating some intercourse" was a fantasy; social interactions, especially those between employer and employee, were (and still are) centered around the "cash nexus." Correspondingly, the emergence of objectification in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century fiction as a method for portraying inter-class connection connotes a shift away from the philosophy that Miller sees underlying the Victorian novel. Given that objectification constitutes a transference or erasure of subjectivity, the works considered by this dissertation all take for granted that the "stable, centered subject" is no longer (if it ever really was) a possibility. That said, one does indeed encounter a wide range of attitudes toward that realization and all it implies. Some greet objectification with skepticism and dismay, others seem resigned to accept the forces that make it possible, while still others embrace it eagerly and employ it to achieve specific rhetorical and thematic goals. Nonetheless, despite such varying reactions, the practice itself appears with undeniable consistency whenever late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century fiction portrays class interaction.

By undertaking objectification, these texts do begin to step away from the formal practice of Victorian fiction, but it rarely serves as a fully realized fictional strategy. Most texts find themselves unable to sustain the obvious fiction that objectification rests upon, and therefore, it does not offer a complete narrative solution to the challenge of

portraying class-interaction.   When their strategies of objectification do break down, texts revert to plot machinations in order to resolve inter-class connection. These transitional moments are often very heavy-handed, and their construction reveals an underlying mistrust and antipathy toward members of the lower classes, particularly those who seek to rise above their social station through connection with a member of the middle or upper classes. Thus, both Sibyl Vane, the poor actress involved with Dorian Gray, and Harold Biffen, the poor "man of letters" in *New Grub Street* who is infatuated with the resolutely middle-class Amy Reardon, are summarily banished from the narratives of those novels by dramatic and unexpected acts of suicide. Likewise, Leonard Bast in *Howards End* finds himself symbolically crushed by knowledge as Charles Wilcox literally crashes a bookshelf down upon him. Even if the "stable, centered subject" is no longer a possibility for these works, such machinations indicate that they still cling to the hope for a "stable, centered world" free of class interlopers.   Of all the texts considered by this study, only Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party," a short story, manages to avoid such reactionary plot-interventions and not surprisingly, it clearly emerges as a voice critical of class structures. Ultimately, although the practice of objectification in turn-of-the-century fiction is itself a departure from the Victorian practice of resolving class interaction through the machinations of plot, overwhelmingly, it does not produce a corresponding shift in the rhetorical and political stances of these texts.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The preceding discussion provides an introduction to the components of inter-class connection and a consideration of its implications for late-nineteenth and early-

twentieth century literature. The chapters that follow build upon that starting point by providing detailed examinations of how the phenomenon manifests itself within specific texts. In my analyses, I do not confine myself to working within a single critical paradigm, but instead plunder liberally from several schools including New Historicism, Psychoanalysis and Textual Studies. Obviously, given that I am focusing upon issues of social class and capitalism, the shadow of Marx hangs over much of this work. Although I do draw heavily upon several Marxist theorists, particularly Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* and recognize the primary role that economic factors play in the development of literary practice, I am not rigorously Marxist in my interpretations. Regardless of the critical perspective that I employ, I ground all of my analyses in very detailed close readings of texts.

Chapter one focuses on the two cases of inter-class connection that dominate Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The novel is built around the interactions between Tess Durbeyfield, a poor cottage girl; Alec Stoke-d'Urberville, the rich country gentleman who rapes her; and Angel Clare, the privileged son of a local minister who marries and then abandons her. The novel undertakes a two-part strategy of objectification to assist in the portrayal of these relationships. One component of that strategy fixates on the bones and other embodied traces of Tess's ancestors that appear throughout the narrative, while the second component demonstrates the extent to which an individual's name can become an embodied commodity available for trade and exchange. Through the interaction between Tess and Alec, the novel symbolically portrays the struggle for dominance between the system of rank and the system of class that occurred in Britain during the nineteenth century. By undertaking a detailed textual

reading of the information provided by the novel regarding the creation of the original d'Urberville family line, I establish that their interaction also signifies the presence of a fundamental crisis of historical interpretation within the novel. Ultimately, *Tess* emerges as a work that expresses grave doubts about the possibility for developing productive and equitable class relationships in a post-Industrial Revolution society.

Through a detailed textual analysis of the differences between the serial and book versions of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, chapter two establishes that the novella exploits the transgressive nature of the relationship between Dorian Gray and Sibyl Vane, a "commonplace actress," as a means for masking its homoerotic subtext. To do so however, the text objectifies Vane by constructing her in utterly aesthetic terms. Ultimately, although the novella challenges Victorian homophobia, it embraces class stereotypes to do so. That trade-off limits substantially the extent to which *Dorian Gray* can be read as a socially transgressive text.

The third chapter re-interprets George Gissing's *New Grub Street* by deconstructing the objectification process inherent in terms like "man of letters" and "literary people" and connects them to the growth of professional society that began in Britain in the 1880's. My reading reveals that Gissing is not, as is commonly assumed, speaking for the lower classes in this text. Instead, *New Grub Street* continues the practice of excluding and containing those on the lowest levels of society that Jameson identifies in *The Political Unconscious* as a defining component of Gissing's early novels *Demos*, *The Nether World* and *Thrysa*.

Chapter four focuses on Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party," a short story dominated by scenes of inter-class connection. This is the only work for which

objectification is a fully realized strategy. Thanks to Mansfield's remarkably economical prose style and the fundamental restrictions of the short story form, narrative here plays little, if any, role in containing the series of inter-class connections that Laura, the main character, undertakes. Instead, the text pursues objectification in its most basic form by conflating Laura's subjectivity with series of embodied objects, most notably her garish hat. Although at first glance its truncated ending seems to mark this as a story which resists significant interpretation, in fact, it stands as a work that clearly attacks the very concept of class itself.

As a closing note to this introduction, I shall anticipate a potential criticism of the overall study by noting that I have intentionally created a "bookended" structure by selecting texts for detailed consideration from both ends of its time spectrum but none from its center. The novel versions of *Tess*, *Dorian Gray* and *New Grub Street* all first appeared in 1891, the very horizon of the period covered by this dissertation. Mansfield's story, on the other hand comes over thirty years later and of all the texts discussed here, it predates only *Mrs. Dalloway*. As noted previously, objectification is seldom a fully realized strategy. This is especially true of Hardy's, Wilde's and Gissing's texts, coming as they do during the very nascent stages of professionalism and advertising. Victorian-esque plot driven solutions to inter-class connection are very evident within their pages, and this provides for easy comparison with the preceding literary period. At the same time, they also provide a marked contrast to Mansfield's work, which has clearly absorbed and strategically exploits the socio-economic forces that served to make objectification a possibility. Hopefully, the extended discussions of texts from between those endpoints such *The Secret Agent* and *Howards End* that I have

provided here in the introduction will compensate for any sense that the center of this dissertation cannot hold and prevent it from falling apart.

NOTES

[1]   Stewart suggests that the answer to his question is found in the title of Matz's book.

[2]   Admittedly, the term "objectification" has the potential to cause confusion as it has already been applied in a number of critical contexts. Marx speaks of the "objectification of labour" in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* as the process by which the worker becomes estranged from his work (71 – 72). In their essay "The Affective Fallacy," William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley identify the "expressionist doctrine of objectification," which they define as "giving to emotion a solid and outside objectivity of its own" (1401). Hopefully, however, I have delineated my appropriation of the term with sufficient distinction that any confusion will be kept to a minimum.

[3]   The studies by Booth, Money and Rowntree, and the findings that led to the committee's creation are well-documented in a variety of sources relating to late-Victorian and Edwardian culture. For a general discussion, see especially Perkin *The Rise of Professional Society* 32 – 34, Mingay 156 – 161, and Roebuck 71 – 74.

[4]   In my study, I have drawn upon the work of several historians and cultural theorists in shaping my understanding of class relations in turn-of-the-century Britain. Perkin's studies, however, have been especially helpful and are cited frequently here because they are exhaustive and insightful, yet also easily accessible.

[5]   In addition to its other effects, the rise professionalization also helped further the growth of statistics touched on above. Statistical analyses tend to group individuals under broad designations, such as wage-level, age, gender, etc. The new professional societies provided a whole new set of classification categories for study, and their formalized record-keeping provided a wealth of statistical data.

[6]   This is in no way meant to downplay either the importance or quality of either Platt's or Stoll's scholarship. Both of their studies are insightful and provide a wealth of important information. Indeed with the obvious exception of their work, social class issues of all kinds in turn-of-the-century fiction have gone largely unexplored by critics. Platt argues clearly from the very outset of his study that "'aristocracy'

is a neglected dimension of late Victorian and early modern literature" (ix). His point is well-taken, and in fact, the absence of critical investigation that he notes at the higher end of the social spectrum stretches across all levels.

[7]   This lower figure of £160 was the income tax threshold for 1905.

[8]   Booth places the poor into a series of categories labeled A through E based upon both income and more subjective determinations of their quality of life. Rowntree's study takes into account nutritional and health concerns along with monetary questions.

[9]   Even today, the mixing of rich and poor or high and low tends to produce both cultural anxiety and a corresponding fascination, as recent scandals with figures such as Anna Nicole Smith, Hugh Grant and Eddie Murphy attest. Even Princess Diana's marriage to Prince Charles was greeted with a great deal of skepticism and surprise initially due to the simple fact that although wealthy, from the perspective of family lineage and formal social protocol she was not royal.

[10]   That said, the specific case of prostitution also stands as the exception which proves the rule of separation. Although the practice was clearly an institution in Britain, its cultural support was also tacit. Prostitution was a private matter that if made public could cause scandal. Indeed, outside of the two contexts that Perkin describes – charity work and the direction of servants and laborers – it would be difficult to locate a public forum for class interaction in turn-of-the-century England that did not run contrary to cultural expectation at some level.

[11]   Note that although all of the above examples actually make use of the word "connection," there also many texts which portray scenes of inter-class connection but do not speak specifically of "connection." The term's actual presence in the work itself is not a defining characteristic of the phenomenon.

[12]   Clearly, aspects of their argument are open to question, particularly its relentlessly Freudian character and its tendency to produce ambivalent readings of texts that characterize them as partially transgressive and partially affirming of normative social structures. I do not accept their framework completely without question or qualification, but a detailed critique of it lies outside the scope of this dissertation.

[13]   Perkin describes this period as the "relative quiescence of the mid-Victorian social peace" (101).

[14]   Note that Helen's clearly insensitive and self-absorbed remarks about the umbrella say as much about her as they do about Bast. Thus, just as it is clear that he needs to be raised up from his low state, it is also clear that Helen needs to be brought down in order that she may become more cognizant of and sensitive to the world around her. The shame and scorn which she experiences in the wake of her affair with him affect that transformation.

[15]   In his exceptionally insightful study of the influence that the colonial experience had upon British Literature in the nineteenth century entitled *Rule of Darkness*, Peter Brantlinger discusses the dual role played by the colonies in fiction. On one hand, they serve as a ready-made environment for casting off undesirable and/or subversive characters, as the case of Arthur Donnithore and Hetty Sorrel demonstrates. On the other hand, individuals returning from the colonies come bearing stories and foreign customs that provide ready-made sources for narrative. Magwitch in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* is a prime example of this effect.

"True d'Urberville to the Bone":
Names, History and Social Class in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

<u>Introduction And Overview</u>

My study of inter-class connection in turn-of-the-century British narrative fiction

begins with Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* because of the four texts analyzed

in detail by this dissertation, it expresses the greatest anxiety toward those social and

economic forces that fostered the emergence of objectification as a viable strategy for

portraying the coming together of disparate social classes. As a result, in its presentation

of inter-class connection, the novel employs not only objectification but also the formal

practices found in Victorian depictions of class interaction. Although Peter Widdowson

has lamented the fact that critics are forever attaching the label of "transitional" to

Hardy's work, in terms of the development of inter-class connection, *Tess* is just that

("Thomas Hardy: A Partial Portrait" 10). This transitional status makes it the logical

starting point for a general discussion of the phenomenon.

Structurally, the text is built around two separate instances of inter-class

connection, both of which involve its heroine and namesake, Tess Durbeyfield. A poor

cottager from the town of Marlott, she is perceived by most observers as a "fine and

picturesque country girl and no more" (8). The first cross-class interaction in the text

stems from the obsession that Tess's rich "cousin," Alec Stoke-d'Urberville develops for

her. That desire culminates in a sexual encounter between the two in the woods of The

Chase, which, in turn, produces a child. The novel's second cross-class relationship is

Tess's marriage to Angel Clare, the privileged son of a local minister. Those two

relationships qualify as cases of inter-class connection as I have defined the phenomenon

because broad socio-economic divides separate Tess from both Angel and Alec, her unions with both men are substantive – she marries Angel and she has a child with Alec – and those unions are also clearly non-normative: they challenge the cultural expectations of the communities in which they occur.

Because of this last aspect, their presentation provokes two forms of mediation and control by the novel. The fundamental model for inter-class connection that I have proffered calls for that mediation to come in the form of a strategy (or strategies) of objectification to help assuage anxieties that stem from the depiction of the crossing of class boundaries within the narrative. *Tess* clearly fits this paradigm. It employs the d'Urberville family name as "object" and objectifies it through two distinct processes. On one hand, the narrative fixates upon the residual, physical embodiments of the "original" d'Urberville familial heritage: the "wold silver spoon and wold graven seal" that John Durbeyfield possesses (2), the former estates of the d'Urberville knights, the paintings of d'Urberville ladies that hang in those buildings and, most especially, the bones of Tess's ancestors that now rest in vaults at Kingsbere. This focus upon tangible objects represents objectification in its most basic form, similar to the fixation upon Laura's hat in "The Garden Party" that will be explored in chapter four. Because of their physicality and enduring presence over time, these objects suggest a sense of permanence and tradition. Even though the text recognizes that such stability is ultimately more illusion than reality, it does at times display an unmistakable nostalgia and longing for the "extinct" d'Urbervilles and the age they represent. At the same time, the text also objectifies the d'Urberville name by demonstrating its potential as a commodity to be bought or sold in the context of economic exchange. Alec Stoke-d'Urberville, whose

father appropriated the d'Urberville name in an attempt to bestow legitimacy upon his family's newfound wealth, stands as the text's most obvious representation of this second form of objectification. Because of the inherent instability associated with the name's status as a commodity, the text clearly views it as a decadent form. Thus, *Tess* establishes a symbolic binary that pits the older, embodied form of the d'Urberville name against its newer, transient manifestation.

After a brief examination of the basic positions that Alec, Tess and Angel occupy within the Wessex socio-economic hierarchy, this chapter explores in depth the two objectification processes which produce that symbolic binary. Doing so reveals two crucial aspects of the text. First, even as they serve as a means for facilitating inter-class connection within the novel, the objectified forms of the d'Urberville name are also used to symbolically depict the shift away from a social hierarchy based upon relatively stable gradations of *rank* to one based upon more volatile differences of *class* that occurred throughout Britain during the nineteenth century. The d'Urbervilles represent the system of rank while the Stoke-d'Urbervilles represent the system of class. Second, through a close reading of the details which the text puts forth regarding the establishment of the d'Urberville line, this chapter demonstrates that the apparent distinction between the embodied, "authentic" d'Urbervilles and the transient, "sham," Stoke-d'Urbervilles is itself a mirage. In actuality, *all* forms of the name can be shown to have sprung from an act of economic exchange. All are relative and subject to negotiation. The vision of stability and permanence that Tess's ancestral family seems to provide does not exist. It is as fundamentally decadent a form as the Stoke-d'Urbervilles.

Thematically, this implosion signifies that *Tess* contains within its pages dramatic crises of cultural and historical interpretation. Socially, its mistrust of the greed and flux connoted by the Stoke-d'Urbervilles is apparent throughout. Against this rapidly ascending order, the stability implied by the system of rank would seem to provide an obvious and desirable buttress. By collapsing the d'Urberville / Stoke-d'Urberville binary, however, the novel begrudgingly concedes that such a vision is largely a romanticized fallacy. The narrator's description of the actions of Tess's ancestors make it clear that the power structures which supported the rank hierarchy were as destructive and inequitable as those of the class system. In the final analysis, *Tess* condemns both rank and class but, with one possible exception that will be discussed at the conclusion of the chapter, finds itself unable to argue in favor of any viable social alternative. Besides providing a context for conducting such cultural discourse, because they imply a clearly defined connection to the past, names can also serve as a means of accessing and interpreting history. In *Tess* however, that confidence is dramatically shaken. By consciously undermining the stability of the "legitimate" d'Urberville name, the text undermines its own potential for nostalgia and comes to perceive both past and present as mutable. It deconstructs but does not reconstruct. As such, it is left without a stable foundation for interpretation and judgment of history.

Considered on a structural level, the collapse of the d'Urberville binary has significant ramifications for both the basic paradigm of inter-class connection and for the development of *Tess*'s overall narrative because it constitutes a casting of doubt upon the very "object" that the text uses to facilitate its presentation of the coming together of disparate social classes. As discussed in the introduction, the clearly discernible rise of

objectification as a narrative strategy during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries stems from a variety of socio-economic factors. Of these, *Tess* registers most prominently the shift to commodity-based capitalism that began in Britain in the 1850's and then expanded dramatically in 1880's. First published in 1891, the novel appeared at a time when the nature of commodity culture was just beginning to take shape. Although the text obviously explores the practice of objectification, the collapsed binary surrounding the d'Urberville name indicates a clear mistrust of both the strategy itself and the trends that precipitated its rise.

Because of those anxieties, the novel's employment of objectification differs from the other works considered by this study. Overwhelmingly, in their presentation of inter-class connection, turn-of-the-century texts find themselves unable or unwilling to sustain objectification over the course of an entire narrative. When their strategies of objectification breakdown, they revert to the example of their Victorian predecessors and resolve inter-class connection through plot machinations such as the revelation of an unknown noble heritage or the banishment of a character(s) overseas. Moreover, those shifts away from objectification are generally abrupt and gratuitous events, such as the suicides of Sibyl Vane in *Dorian Gray* and Harold Biffen in *New Grub Street*. The resolutions that these texts construct emerge as narrative discontinuities that signify an embracing of the middle-class values of class separation and class integrity that the ninetieth century realistic novel strives to create and sustain.

Tess does follow the first part of that model since both of the novel's cases of inter-class connection are ultimately resolved through its plot when Tess murders Alec and is in turn executed for her crime. The novel lacks, however, a dramatic collapse in its

strategy of objectification. As will become clear, the strategy of objectification

associated with Tess and Alec is actually undermined from the very outset of the text and

is essentially collapsed from the start. Moreover, the text does not suddenly fall back on

the formal strategies of Victorian fiction, but instead employs them throughout in its

treatment of Angel. A strategy of objectification is never applied directly to him.

Instead, the text place him in a social role that affords him freedom of movement among

several levels of the Wessex cultural hierarchy and then further clouds his social stature

through consistently ambivalent characterization. This chapter examines that process and

establishes the manner in which it differs from a strategy of objectification. In an another

quintessentially Victorian practice, he is also temporarily banished to Brazil in an effort

to mitigate the radical nature of his stated (though not acted upon) beliefs regarding the

inequalities of the class system. Despite its use of these measures, *Tess* ultimately rejects

the formal and thematic example of mid-nineteenth-century fiction through the final fate

that it bestows upon Angel. The chapter concludes with discussion of how his survival

and union with Liza-Lu constitutes a call for a new social order to replace the class-based

system that the Victorian novel was designed to support.

By focusing on both the role of names within the text and questions of social

class, this chapter engages two areas of critical study that have already received a great

deal of interest among Hardy scholars and uses them as a springboard for establishing a

new context for understanding this work. Certainly, class-related issues have long been

the focus of critics such as Douglas Brown, Arnold Kettle, Merryn Williams and

Raymond Williams. Citing such scenes as the eviction of cottagers from Marlott (278 –

279) and Tess's struggles with the mechanized thresher (255 – 263), most of them have

read the text, however, from an essentially localized perspective and interpreted it as a commentary on the collapse of traditional Wessex culture. Thus, Dale Kramer notes that Hardy's "characterizing traits" are generally understood in terms of his "bond with agricultural life and processes" (7). By establishing that the novel symbolically attacks both the systems of rank and class, I expand the rhetorical focus of the text to a much broader, more nationalized level and demonstrate that its cultural anxieties stretch far beyond a nostalgic lamentation over the mechanization and modernization of the Wessex countryside. *Tess* stands as a novel that expresses grave concerns over the social structure of Britain as a whole, and its achievement in that context deserves recognition.

This chapter's overall focus upon names and titles also expands upon important work already done by Michael Ragussis in *Acts of Naming – The Family Plot in Fiction* and Tess O'Toole in *Genealogy and Fiction in Hardy – Family Lineage and Narrative Lines* on the importance of names and family history in *Tess*. Although extremely persuasive and insightful, both studies leave substantial room for further analysis because with the exception of some biographical support (drawn primarily in both cases from the "autobiographical" *The Life of Thomas Hardy*), neither critic seeks to step outside the context of fiction itself in constructing their analyses.[1] No attempt is made to place Hardy's fascination with names in the context of the social / political / cultural events of the late-nineteenth century such as the shift from rank to class. Thus, the following discussion of inter-class connection and the objectification of names within *Tess* brings together critics who have been perhaps too narrowly focused upon the text's cultural significance with those who have avoided it all together. That analysis begins with an examination of the basic socio-economic hierarchy established in *Tess* and consideration

of both how and why Angel and Alec step across the boundaries that define that structure

in their individual pursuits of Tess.

Life in a Wessex Town – The Novel's Essential Social Hierarchy

      Tess's three main characters – Tess, Angel and Alec – are initially defined by the

roles that their respective families fill within the Wessex social system. Speaking to this

practice as it specifically applies to Tess, Merryn Williams notes that "over and above her

qualities as a person, [she] is portrayed as a representative of her class" (90). Of the three

main characters, only Tess comes from the lowest levels of society, thanks to the

desultory economic status of the Durbeyfield family. Since his desire to work "could not

be relied on to coincide with the hours of requirement," John Durbeyfield, Tess's father,

does not pursue steady labor and instead engages in "haggling" out of his wagon to earn

money (24). By his own admission, this marks him as the "commonest feller in the

parish" (2). Because of the erratic nature of Durbeyfield's income, his propensity to

drink and his having six children to support, the interior of the cottage that Tess lives in

wallows in an "unspeakable dreariness" (11). After the death of their horse Prince, that

situation only becomes worse, and Tess's family prevails upon her to play the role of

"poor relation" and seek assistance from Alec's mother (24). Although the narrator later

reveals that the Durbeyfields actually belong to an "interesting and better informed class"

than the simple "agricultural laborers" who also reside in Marlott (277) and do not

actually occupy the lowest rung of the town's social ladder, this structure is hardly an

imposing one. Any gradations separating the Durbeyfields from their neighbors would be

invisible to all but the most discerning eye. Thus, when Angel's brother Felix observes

the May Day revelry in which Tess participates with the rest of the village women, he refers to the entire group as a "troop of country hoydens" (9). His failure to differentiate any of their class positions serves to establish both the superiority of his own social standing and the corresponding inferiority of Tess's. Although she does not begin the text amidst the most abject and destitute of classes, she nonetheless lives far below the standing of both Angel and Alec, a pair of individuals who clearly enjoy status and privilege.

Indeed, the very first description of Angel that the reader encounters labels him and his brothers as "three young men of a superior class" (8). The remark comes as the siblings observe the Marlott May Day procession, and it is clear that the three are differentiated from the local villagers both by their appearance and by their having the freedom to take a leisurely walking tour of the countryside. At this early stage of the text, Angel is an utterly unknown figure, but when he does reappear later in the narrative at Dairyman Crick's farm, he again distinguishes himself from the common workers who surround him. Everyone on the farm, including Dairyman Crick himself, refers to him as "sir," and he enjoys the luxury of private accommodations (87). Angel commands such consideration because he is "quite the gentleman born," owing to his father's position as the minister at Emminster (89). Though not wealthy, the family does have sufficient resources to support the education of three sons, and Reverend Clare is renowned as "the earnestest man in Wessex" (*Ibid*.)

Like Angel, Alec also stands above Tess and the other common members of the rural community. He dresses in the style of a fashionable young dandy – "a dandy cap, drab jacket, breeches of the same hue, white neckcloth, stuck-up collar and brown driving

gloves" – an ensemble which connotes significant wealth (37). Furthermore, like Angel

at Dairyman Crick's, Alec evokes deference from the farmers in the Trantridge area, as

when he lurks in the shadows of a local dance. Prior to his arrival, the fête has been

lingering on for hours without a hint of stopping, yet recognition of his presence by the

local inhabitants causes "a light pause, and a consideration of how time was flying…. the

Trantridge people began to collect themselves… and prepared to leave in a body" (50).

Alec commands such respect because his father has amassed a sizable fortune and his

name is known throughout the countryside. Indeed, long before he makes his first

appearance in the text, the townsfolk of Marlott who gather to drink at Tolliver's Inn

proclaim his mother a "great, rich lady" (17). As a member of a wealthy family, he

enjoys a life of complete freedom and leisure.

The social gradient that divides Tess from Alec and Angel produces in the two

men a compulsive desire to pursue her. Alec uses a combination of physical intimidation,

persistent badgering and lurking in the shadows to finally wear down Tess's resistance to

his attempts at physical intimacy. Even after their encounter, his lust for her does not

diminish, and when they meet by chance after her marriage, he pursues her doggedly

from Flintcomb Ash Farm, to Marlott and finally to Kingsbere. Angel, on the other hand,

takes a more honorable, though no less determined approach, to winning Tess. Despite

the fact that she repeatedly rejects his romantic overtones and steadfastly asserts that their

relationship cannot work, he refuses to take "no" for an answer and continues to seek her

hand in marriage. Although his persistence finally pays off, the results of their union are

disastrous. But, when Angel finally does come to understand the error of his actions, he

becomes bent upon re-establishing contact with his wife and tracks her down with a

dogged determination. Both men are relentless in their pursuit of Tess, and their desire goes far beyond what can be deemed simple attraction. They display the compulsive behavior that is an integral component of inter-class connection. On one level, given the extensive attention that the text pays to Tess's external beauty, especially her mouth and lips, the reactions that she provokes in Angel and Alec merely constitute normative heterosexual desire. She is a lovely young woman who catches the attention of two relatively normal young men. But in both cases, their attraction to her also goes far beyond that standard response and stems at least partly from the fact that she occupies a substantially lower social class than they do.

Tellingly, the text never mentions Alec in connection with a woman of his own class. Rather, his romantic / sexual exploits consist solely of his dalliances with the villagers surrounding his estate. The narrative alludes to this practice quite clearly on the night of his sexual encounter with Tess. As she walks home after the local dance, she suffers the jealous wrath of Car Darch, a local worker who is better known as "The Queen of Spades" and who had "lately been a favourite of d'Urberville's" (50). As the two square off, Alec seizes the opportunity to "rescue" Tess from the situation by throwing her onto the back of his horse. The ploy is so typical of the young man's behavior that Car's mother jokes knowingly as the two ride away "Out of the frying-pan into the fire" (53). Her instant recognition of what is about to occur affirms that a pattern of behavior has clearly been established. Women of lower social standing provide Alec with an easy target for domination and allow him to exercise the power and privilege associated with his family's wealth.

Angel also displays a natural attraction to members of the lower classes, but unlike Alec's affairs, his actions constitute symbolic acts of compensation and are not simply exertions of power. The novel establishes Angel's proclivity for defying social expectations from the very outset when it portrays him gleefully seizing the opportunity to dance with the villagers on the green in Marlott. The narrator also alludes to his having been "carried off his head" as a young man in an affair with a woman "much older than himself" (91). Thus, Angel clearly seeks the exotic and displays an attraction for those who are different than himself. This fact is only reinforced by his behavior toward Mercy Chant, who is the daughter of his father's friend Dr. Chant. Although his parents harbor a "quiet hope" that the two will marry, Angel rebukes their overtures on the matter, and he consciously avoids speaking with Mercy upon his first return to Emminster (128, 123). Faced with the possibility of entering into a union with someone of his own social standing, the fervor he displayed on Marlott green disappears, and he quickly becomes listless and uninterested. His passion, such as it is, instead finds its focus in Tess. In his mind, she represents vitality and fecundity. She is a "fresh and virginal daughter of Nature" and a "daughter of the soil" (95, 100). Obviously, "soil" does carry positive connotations of agriculture and fertility, and Angel naturally reverts to these aspects in his description of Tess. He tells his parents that he seeks a woman who "understands the duties of farm life as well as the farmer himself," and as a "cottager's daughter," she fills that role perfectly (128).

Besides such practical considerations, "soil" also makes one dirty and unclean. Although nominally undesirable, such a state does carries a certain allure, especially given Angel's nature, which is "more spiritual than animal" and "singularly free from

grossness" (151). Such pristine conditions, however, invariably become defiled, and as Angel watches Mercy Chant preparing to hold Bible class, his mind "flew to the impassioned, summer-steeped heathens in the Var Vale; their rosy faces court-patched with cow droppings," finally alighting on the "most impassioned of them all" – Tess (123). Thus, Mercy, the woman who is clearly a perfect match for him socially and whom he describes as "good and devout," evokes an overtly romanticized image of excrement on the face of the woman he seeks to marry (128). Obviously, the overall conception of Tess that Angel creates in his mind is an utterly subjective and utopian fallacy, but the nature of its construction sheds important light into his own behavior. Because Tess is a member of a lower, agrarian class, he sees her as representing those elements of physicality, sensuousness and vivacity that are missing in his own psyche, and that very sense of lacking helps drive his attraction for her.

Thus, both Alec and Angel want Tess not only because she is a beautiful woman but at least partially because she is a beautiful, *poor*, woman. But the question now becomes, do either or both of these desires and the cross-class relationships that stem from them constitute culturally transgressive acts? Do they fly in the face of dominant cultural expectations regarding acceptable interaction between members of disparate positions on the socio-economic hierarchy? The answer in both cases is yes. To reach this conclusion however, each relationship must be considered separately as both their circumstances and their presentation by the text are substantially different.

Because it is a public and verifiable bond, Tess's engagement and subsequent marriage to Angel engenders a great deal of commentary by the characters themselves within the novel, all of whom express palpable senses of shock and dismay at the union.

The intensity of these reactions is itself a clear testimony to the fact that by becoming

husband and wife, Angel and Tess have stepped outside of their expected social roles.

Shortly after Angel's reappearance in the novel at Talbothay's Dairy, Izz Huett, one of

Tess's fellow milkmaids, provides a jolt of reality regarding the young man's marriage

and business prospects after she and her companions have been jointly fantasizing about

becoming his wife: "But how silly all this is!…Of course he won't marry any one of us,

or Tess either – a gentleman's son, who's going to be a great landowner and farmer

abroad! More likely to ask us to come wi'en as farm hands at so much a year!" (107).

Her comments establish that Angel is separated both by social position – "a gentleman's

son" – and also by economic power because she recognizes his role as a potential

employer. Moreover, the fact that she proclaims their fantasies as "silly" and prefaces

her prediction with "of course" underscores the social force that those divisions carry.

Those within Angel's own family espouse essentially the same view. When he first

speaks of Tess to his parents, his mother is "startled" to hear that he is considering taking

a wife who "understands the duties of farm life as well as a farmer himself" and then asks

"Is she [Tess] of a family such as you would care to marry into – a lady in short?" (128).

Unfortunately for Tess, the answer to that question is no. Even Angel's father, Reverend

Clare, who is generally treated with a great deal of respect by the novel for his own non-

conformist religious views, as well as his tolerance of both Angel's decision to forego

college and his religious skepticism, writes a letter to his son stating that "a dairy woman

was the last daughter-in-law they could have expected" (165). Thus, in its presentation of

Tess and Angel's marriage, the text explicitly and repeatedly foregrounds the fact that it

confounds the social expectations of the Wessex community. Even though this

overdetermination amounts to a form of critique by the novel because it treats the narrow-mindedness and snobbishness that produces such reactions with unapologetic scorn, it does not remove the reality of those prejudices.

In sharp contrast to such a clearly drawn state of affairs, the nature of Tess's extended interaction with Alec is much harder to characterize. It is not a documented and public affair in the same way that her marriage to Angel is, and the wide-ranging chorus of voices who comment upon that union falls virtually silent here. As a result, the analytical focus must shift to details located within the narrative voice, consideration of relevant historical examples from the late-nineteenth century, and the numerous critical studies on Tess and her relationship with Alec that have appeared over the last thirty years. [2] Most of those analyses focus their attention upon the act of intercourse that takes place in The Chase, both in terms of how it determines and / or undermines Tess's feminine subjectivity and to what extent the incident itself should be read as one of rape or seduction.

The question of seigniorial privilege lurks within that last aspect, and it has particular relevance to the issue of inter-class connection at hand here because, certainly, it does become much harder to establish the interaction of Alec and Tess as transgressive if it merely constitutes an accepted and anticipated exploitation of a servant by her master. There are indications within the novel itself that this is the case. The knowing reaction of Car Darch's mother to Tess's "rescue" by Alec has already been touched upon. This is obviously not the first time that he has undertaken such a stratagem. But even long before that, a clear sense of misgiving enters the text when on the first night after Tess's departure for the Stoke-d'Urberville estate, her mother worries that "I was

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thinking that perhaps it would ha' been better if Tess had not have gone.… if 'twere the

doing again, I wouldn't let her go till I had found out whether the gentleman is really a

good-hearted young man and choice over her" (38). Unlike her daughter who is utterly

ignorant of such matters, Joan Durbeyfield is cognizant of the sexual liberties that

masters were known to take with servants. Surprisingly, none of the recent critical

studies of *Tess* addresses the question of seigniorial privilege as it applies to Alec and

Tess;[3] however, several historical studies of Victorian-era servants do consider the topic

in general at some length. Frank E. Huggett's *Life Below Stairs: Domestic Servants in

England from Victorian Times*, for instance, relates several specific examples of sexual

relations between masters and servants (118 – 123). Moreover, both Huggett and

Pamela Horn suggest that moral standards in rural areas regarding sexual encounters were

somewhat less stringent than in urban centers. Both point specifically to the persistence

in Wales up through the last quarter of the nineteenth century of the custom of wife

swapping, referred to locally as "bundling," as a testament to this general estimation

(Huggett 121; Horn 155). Although *Tess* contains no references to that practice, the rural

Wessex countryside is clearly a fecund environment, and the text portrays a series of

large-scale agricultural tasks such as threshing and milking that demand close interaction

between workers of both sexes. Similarly, the local dance that immediately precedes

Tess's encounter with Alec in the Chase is described in overtly orgiastic terms:

> … the movement grew more passionate.… the panting shapes spun
>
> onwards.
>
> They did not vary their partners if the inclination were to stick with
>
> previous ones. Changing partners simply meant that a satisfactory choice

had not as yet been arrived at by one or other of the pair, and by this time

every couple had been suitably matched. It was then that the ecstasy and

the dream began, and matter but an adventitious intrusion likely to hinder

you from spinning where you wanted to spin.

Suddenly there was a dull thump on the ground: a couple had

fallen, and lay in a mixed heap. The next couple, unable to check its

progress, came toppling over the obstacle. An inner cloud of dust rose

around the prostate figures amid the general one of the room, in which a

twitching entanglement of arms and legs was discernible. (49)

It would, of course, be foolish to suggest that the Wessex community is a libertine

environment free of moral censure, since after becoming pregnant by Alec, Tess finds

that "an immeasurable social chasm" separates her from the world around her (58).

Nonetheless, taken together, the insinuations within the text regarding Alec's past

involvement with other female servants, the generally sexual nature of the rural Wessex

environment and historical examples from late-nineteenth century Britain all suggest that

Alec's sexual intercourse with Tess – whether it be judged as rape or seduction – is

probably *not* in and of itself a transgressive act, but rather an expected exploitation of a

servant by a master.

Unfortunately, such a narrow context overlooks the fact that the relationship

between those two goes far beyond just the act of intercourse, and here is where most of

the recent critical work on *Tess* fails to address the social class issues that I seek to raise.

Their interaction also touches upon the possibility of Tess's marriage to Alec, and in

doing so, it begins to seriously challenge cultural expectations. Clearly, marriage is the

underlying motive behind Tess's parents' persistent plea that she accept the offer to tend

the fowls at the Stoke-d'Urberville estate: "He'll marry her… and make a lady of her, and

then she'll be what her forefathers was" (34). Although that vision is her mother's and

not Tess's, it does reflect the fantasies of many young, female servants in the Victorian

era, who Huggett claims "yearned for love and marriage… before they entered their first

situation, with the handsome son of a rich employer, though such false hopes usually led

only to their seduction" (117). Although cross class marriages between master and

servant occurred occasionally in the eighteenth century and were "commonplace" in

sensational literature, they were "much more exceptional in real life" (*Ibid*.). Indeed, the

text makes it clear that after their night together in The Chase, Alec makes absolutely no

overtures regarding marriage (64). That reticence eventually does change, and he goes to

great lengths – both literally and figuratively – to finally obtain Tess's consent to live

with him as his "wife" in Sanbourne. His fervor and his relentless pursuit pushes their

relationship outside the boundaries of normative behavior.

During its presentation of the initial encounter between Tess and Alec, the text

betrays its own recognition of this fact. After having learned of her family history and

taken her around the grounds of the Slopes, Alec announces his intention to provide her

with a light lunch: "Stoke-d'Urberville took her back to the lawn and into the tent, where

he left her, soon reappearing with a basket of light luncheon, which he put before her

himself. It was evidently the gentleman's wish not to be disturbed in this pleasant *tête-à-*

tête by the servantry" (30). Labeled a *tête-à-tête*, the incident clearly prefigures the

seduction / rape that will occur in the Chase. Alec "takes" Tess, a verb commonly used

in conjunction with sexual intercourse, particularly the "taking" of ones virginity. Note,

however, that a role reversal occurs here because Alec acts as servant and places the food before Tess. He does this in an effort to win her trust and pave the way for his subsequent exploitation of her. The text, however, uses the scene for an entirely different purpose. Careful examination reveals that this is the first and only time during the initial encounter between Alec and Tess that the narrator refers to him as "Stoke-d'Urberville." Thus, it makes a point of appending the clearest indicator of his family's own business-centered past. At all other times he is merely "d'Urberville." Because the relationship between Alec and Tess that emerges over the course of the novel does clearly defy cultural expectations, the novel works to ameliorate that tension from the very outset by placing Alec in the position of servant and then subtly, but clearly, reminding the reader that despite the apparent opulence of the Stoke-d'Urberville estate, his family is only one generation removed from far humbler origins. This example marks one of the first steps in the two-part strategy of objectification centered upon the d'Urberville and Stoke-d'Urberville names that serves as the novel's primary mechanism for portraying the interaction between Tess and Alec.

The Two-Part Strategy of Objectification

Tess adheres to the basic paradigm of inter-class connection that I put forth in the introduction in that it employs objectification to help ameliorate the potential trepidation associated with its depictions of the crossing of class boundaries. A pair of encounters, one between Angel and Tess and another between Alec and Tess, offer a convenient starting point for the detailed analysis of the novel's strategy of objectification that follows because they provide a concise overview of the basic approach found throughout

the narrative. Early in their courtship when Angel offers to tutor Tess in history, a subject which causes her tremendous anxiety due to the malevolent effects that have arisen from the discovery of her family's heritage, she expresses a great reluctance to become his student. Then, after worrying that he will think her stupid, she wonders if

> perhaps Mr. Clare, as a gentleman and a student of history, would respect her sufficiently… if he knew that those Purbeck marble and alabaster people in Kingsbere Church represented her own lineal forefathers: that she was no spurious d'Urberville compounded of money and ambition like those at Trantridge, but true d'Urberville to the bone. (100)

The passage presents a seemingly clear binary – Alec, the "spurious" and false d'Urberville, built from the transitory and ephemeral acquisition of capital against Tess, the embodied, legitimate d'Urberville who is "true… to the bone." Although they differ radically in their make-up, both elements connote forms of objectification. In Tess's case, her name has been yoked to a series of physical objects, a process which amounts to objectification in its most basic form, while Alec's example demonstrates how a name can become a commodity to be traded and exchanged within the context of a capitalist system.

That binary is given explicit voice again near the conclusion of the novel when Alec finally convinces Tess to accept his financial assistance and live with him as though she were his wife. Although she is driven by necessity and hardly acts out of free will, this "choice" occurs on top of the very d'Urberville vaults in Kingsbere Church that she alludes to in the preceding passage. During their exchange, Alec notes sarcastically that the scene constitutes a "family gathering" and then assures her "The little finger of this

sham d'Urberville can do more for you than the whole dynasty of the real underneath" (287). As before, the physicality of the d'Urberville bones marks them as "real," while the capital-based origins of the Alec's name casts him as a "sham." That binary persists throughout the novel and shapes the relationship between Tess and Alec.

In actuality, references in *Tess* to the buying and selling of names and titles as a means for establishing the validity of a family's pedigree are not limited to the Stoke-d'Urbervilles. They appear throughout the novel and demonstrate the extent to which names and titles can serve as mere objects to be fabricated, traded or amended at will. [4] In *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England – Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914*, Thomas Richards argues that between the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the First World War, the commodity emerged as "the one subject of mass culture, the centerpiece of everyday life, the focal point of all representation, the dead center of the modern world" (1). For Richards, a commodity is very much a "thing" in the tangible, physical sense – something that can be displayed and, therefore, marketed. *Tess* is clearly cognizant of the dramatic developments that Richards identifies; however, it operates in a much broader framework because the novel recognizes that names themselves can become commodities. Thus, when Angel learns the truth regarding Tess's familial heritage, he urges her to use the spelling of d'Urberville because "dozens of mushroom millionaires would jump at such a possession!" (148). His diction transforms d'Urberville into a mere "possession," something to be put on a shelf or traded, as Tess sees fit. In taking the name, she would be essentially marketing that object by putting it on display for the rest of the Wessex community to see. Angel's eagerness here belies his own narrow-minded, class-based prejudices. Like the "mushroom millionaires," he too very much desires to

be associated with the d'Urberville past. His comments represent an act of objectification as I have defined that term because traditionally a person's name is the preeminent signifier of his or her individual identity. Most everyone will go their entire lives without meeting someone else who carries the exact same arrangement of first, middle and last names and that combination serves as the primary means by which people differentiate themselves from the rest of the world. For an individual, it is the fundamental marker of subjectivity. Here, however, that sense of individualized identity is erased. Tess's name becomes merely an object available for exchange. Granted, the emphatic tone in Angel's voice testifies to the fact that because of its noble pedigree d'Urberville carries a value far beyond most family names, including his own, but even so, it is still just an item that can be bought or sold in a market context.

Once they have been recognized as objects available for trade, names and titles now become subject to the "fetishism of commodities," described by Marx in *Kapital* as a "very queer thing" abounding in "metaphysical subtleties" (319). They attain mobility and assume relative value. Early in the text, as Tess prepares to depart for her position as a worker at Trantridge, her father orders her to tell Alec that he will part with his own assumed title of "Sir John" for "no onreasonable figure" (36). Although he begins with an offer of one thousand pounds, he quickly talks himself down to twenty, a figure he declares to be the "lowest" because "Dammy family honour is family honour" (37).[5] Certainly, the exchange does serve to *characterize* Durbeyfield and highlights especially his foolish and weak nature. But, it also pushes beyond simple *characterization* because his pathetic attempt at self-negotiation winds up as self-negation. By seeking to trade the fundamental marker of his own subjectivity, his status as a differentiated, individualized

subject slips away and he now approaches the status of undifferentiated object. That

process does differ from the Marxist conception of objectification since Durbeyfield

actively seeks to undermine his own status as subject, instead of having that removal

imposed upon him. Nonetheless, the final outcome is the same. Although it occurs in

varying degrees and in differing contexts, that subversion of individualized identity is the

defining characteristic of all the strategies of objectification examined by this

dissertation.

Alec d'Urberville stands as the ultimate embodiment of that process in *Tess*

because his entire stature and identity rest upon an act of genealogical fabrication. Prior

to his first encounter with Tess, the narrator reveals that Simon Stoke, Alec's father,

performed a meticulous search of the British museum for a family name that "would not

too readily identify him with the smart tradesman of the past" and finally settled upon

d'Urberville because "it looked and sounded as well as any of them" (27). His efforts

here recall the work of Hatton, the lawyer in Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* who receives

large sums of money in order to construct genealogical pedigrees and has "made more

peers of the realm than our gracious sovereign" (289). Although the narrator omits the

specific financial details of Stokes's enterprise, he does note that the merchant "annexes"

the d'Urberville name much as one country would take unilateral possession of another.

The name becomes merely object to be used for practical gain. The act of

commodification that produces the Stoke-d'Urberville name carries forward into all

aspects of their existence. As mentioned previously, Tess herself recognizes early that

the family is "compounded of money and ambition" and nothing else   Read literally, her

statement implies that they are actually built from wealth. As with "Sir John's" attempt to

sell his title, it goes beyond a simple act of characterization via hyperbole because it pushes the fundamental component of their identity into a context where it cannot actually exist. Although one's character can contain ambition, a decidedly human trait, it cannot contain money, which is ultimately just an object. Nonetheless, the novel insists that this is the case. Upon seeing the seat of the Stoke-d'Urberville family for the first time, Tess observes that "Everything looked like money – like the last coin issued from the Mint" (27). Taking for granted that the statement is not meant to be taken literally, it underscores the extent to which Alec and his family are defined by the capital they have amassed. This basic form of objectification will appear again in chapter three's analysis of George Gissing's *New Grub Street*. Published the same year as *Tess*, that novel's examination of the London publishing scene focuses its attention not upon "novelists" or "authors," but rather upon "men of letters" and "literary people." These designations represent a subtle but undeniable reimagining of subjectivity because they imply that the individuals they define are comprised of the very language and text that they produce. In *Tess*, the Stoke-d'Urbervilles are so "compounded of money" that it comes to define their very existence.

Tess's simile – "Everything looked like money" – sets the stage for all that follows. Throughout the novel, Alec's relationship with her is constructed in overtly economic terms. In doing so, the text also constructs Alec himself because he has no presence distinct from Tess: he enters the narrative only as a series of impingements upon her own story, and the narrator never leaves her behind in order to follow his actions. When describing the environment Alec creates for Tess at his estate, the narrator notes "It was in the economy of this *régime* that Tess Durbeyfield had undertaken to fill a place"

(46). Providing Alec with a "régime" reiterates his dominant position and the social gap

between him and Tess. More importantly, the use of "economy" reminds the reader that

the young man's status emerges solely from his family's wealth. Throughout the text, he

uses that power as a means for getting leverage on Tess, such as when he finds her

destitute at Flintcomb Ash Farm and attempts unsuccessfully to lure her away: "… if she

had been free to accept the offer just made her of being the monied Alec's wife. It would

have lifted her completely out of subjection, not only of her present employer, but to a

whole world who seemed to despise her" (250). Here the potential relationship with Alec

is presented as merely a business deal, one that will settle her accounts and elevate her to

a higher status. Eventually, his efforts do succeed, primarily due to the destitute position

of her family. Tess agrees to live with him under the pretense of marriage in return for

his financial support of her mother and siblings. At this juncture, the "economy" of Alec

assumes explicit form. In the 1892 edition of the text, while relating to Angel what has

happened to her during his absence from Britain, Tess tells him that Alec "was very kind

to me and to all of us after father's death. He *bought me* [emphasis added]" (299 n. 1).

Doubtless, the slavery and prostitution overtones inherent in the statement proved too

delicate for Victorian sensibility because in all subsequent editions, the statement reads

"He was very kind to me and to all of us after father's death. He – " (299). But, even in

that truncated form, the narrative context makes it clear that Alec has purchased Tess's

affection.

     But, why does the text go to such great lengths to construct the interaction

between those two in explicitly economic terms? To answer that question, remember

first that in general, objectification is a functional strategy that assists the construction of

narrative. In this specific case, the connection between Alec and economic transactions reiterates his status as an objectified presence that is initially suggested by the commodified nature of the Stoke-d'Urberville name. Reaffirming his status as a "sham" d'Urberville, in turn, serves to shroud his position at the upper end of the Wessex social structure in a degree of uncertainty. The degree of transgression associated with any instance of inter-class connection follows the gradient between the members involved. The greater the separation between them, the more disturbing the event. Because Alec is a fraud, his crossing of class lines seems less transgressive since it becomes unclear where those lines that define him should be drawn.

In sharp contrast to that sense of transience and relativity, the "true" d'Urbervilles, because they are "extinct – as a county family," exist only through those physical traces that they have left behind, and their name becomes inseparable from those objects which represent it (2). The establishment of Tess's "hereditary link with the marble monuments and leaded skeletons at Kingsbere" (269) begins at the very outset of the novel when John Durbeyfield hears the details of his family heritage from Parson Tringham.   Although skeptical at first, he quickly accepts the news after remembering that he has a "wold silver spoon" and "wold graven seal" at his home (2). Previously, those items had little value or meaning for him, but once connected to the d'Urberville past, they are placed in an understandable context. At least in Durbeyfield's mind, their presence justifies his assumption of the title "Sir John," a step which he quickly undertakes. Likewise when Tess meets Alex for the first time, she turns to those same objects to establish her credibility: "we have several proofs that we are d'Urbervilles. Antiquarians hold we are: and – and – we have an old seal, marked with a ramping lion

on a shield, and a castle over him. And we have a very old silver spoon" (29). The stammering implied by the repetition of "and" indicates Tess realizes that merely citing the opinions of genealogists is not proof enough. So, she naturally falls back upon the physicality of the seal and spoon to provide more substantial authority for her claim. The strategy works because Alec recognizes that she has described his own crest. Thus, the name "d'Urberville" becomes defined by and has little meaning outside of it connection to these embodied objects.

But, that basic process goes far beyond just the spoon and seal. The text transforms the d'Urberville name into an objectified presence by insistently yoking it to a series of physical objects: d'Urberville bones, d'Urberville lands, d'Urberville mansions and d'Urberville portraits all cast a very long shadow over this novel. From the opening pages of the text when "Sir John" tells a young boy passing by that "There's not a man in the county o' South Wessex that's got grander and noble skilletons in his family than I" (4) and then shortly afterward sings drunkenly "I've-got-a-gr't-family-vault-at-Kingsbere – and-knighted-forefathers-in-lead-coffins" (7), physical manifestations of the d'Urberville name appear repeatedly. Tess laments the "bones of her ancestors" (80) and later discovers both the "d'Urberville window" and the "d'Urberville aisle," during her final visit to Kingsbere (286). Similarly, the old mansion where she and Angel stay after their marriage contains portraits of d'Urberville women which "once seen can never be forgotten" (170). Despite their grotesque nature, the paintings cannot be removed from the building because they are actually built into the walls. Like the skeletons in Kingsbere, these physical representations of the d'Urberville past have found a place of permanent rest. This process of linking name to object even goes so far as to intrude into

the realm of myth via the legend of the "d'Urberville Coach," which both Angel and Alec allude to on multiple occasions (130, 168, 279). Obviously, as a verbally transmitted legend, the "coach" exists only in the context of language and does not constitute a tangible, physical presence like the other examples. But, "coach" nonetheless connotes an object, whereas discussing, say, "the legend of the d'Urberville curse" would not. In *Genealogy and Fiction in Hardy*, O'Toole argues that because the d'Urberville history is "set in the past time of the novel rather than its present" it becomes available only "in narrative forms, not as lived experiences" (84). But, in reality this is not the case because the physical traces of the d'Urberville past which characters continually encounter give that history an embodied presence with which can they interact, as when Tess recoils in horror from the portraits of her ancestors. Ultimately, *Tess* is so insistent in this process of connection between the d'Urberville name and the objects which represent it that they are essentially conflated. D'Urberville comes to signify "thing" as much as family.

As with the commodification of Alec's name, the text derives a very tangible benefit from connecting her relentlessly to the physical embodiments of her family's past. The practice serves to suggest that, although economically disadvantaged, she can be seen as a displaced member of the upper classes. The fixation upon silver spoons and bones establishes that Tess is truly much more than simply the "fine and picturesque country girl" who "almost everybody" sees at first glance (8). Doing so works to mitigate the tension surrounding her moments of inter-class connection by essentially "raising" her up from the social class in which she begins, and this, in turn, at least partially collapses the social gradient which initially seems to separate her from Alec and Angel.

That effect is then further reinforced by the continual insistence from both the narrative voice and characters themselves that Tess possesses inherent qualities which elevate her above the other poor inhabitants of Wessex. These moments constitute cases of simple description, however, and not objectification because they focus upon ascribing decidedly human characteristics to her. For instance, an early conversation between Angel and his future bride leaves the young man convinced that although she is "but a milkmaid," she still has "just that touch of rarity about her" (97 – 98). Both Mr. and Mrs. Crick echo that same basic sentiment. Upon hearing news of the young couple's engagement, the dairyman tells Angel that "She's too good for a dairymaid – I said so the very first day I zid her" (155), while his wife recalls having thought Tess to be "so superior" upon first seeing her (159). By far the novel's most obvious strategy for asserting Tess's natural superiority however, lies in its repeated use of the word "fine" to describe her: in a field of women binding sheaves of corn felled by the reaper, Tess stands out as the "most flexuous and *finely* drawn figure of them all" (69); among the numerous young women at Talbothay's dairy who yearn for the affections of Angel, Tess is more "*finely* formed" than the rest; and as she struggles over whether or not to accept Angel's overtures of love, Tess must fall back on her own character which is "untrained" but also "instinctively *refined*" (142) (all emphases added). Given that the two most obvious antonyms for "fine" are "coarse" and "rough," words closely associated with the rustic background from which Tess springs, the text clearly seeks to present her as an individual who belongs elsewhere because of her physical and emotional superiority.[6]

The combined effect of these strategies of objectification and the affirmation of Tess's fundamental qualities is dramatic. In his famous study of Hardy, Irving Howe

suggests that *Tess* lacks much of what "we have come to know and expect" in nineteenth century novels, particularly the "interplay of character as registered through… the frictions of social class" (112). That absence of "friction" demonstrates that those strategies are successful at helping the narrative present its scenes of inter-class connection. Objectification collapses the social gradient between Tess and Alec by raising her from her lower class background and clouding his upper class stature.

Engaging the Struggle of Rank and Class

Along with their functional importance, all strategies of objectification, of course, carry symbolic implications as well, and in the case of *Tess*, these resonate on a historically specific level. The text uses the objectification of the d'Urberville and Stoke-d'Urberville names as a means to symbolically portray the social shift that had been taking place in Britain since the late-1700's as the country moved from an underlying cultural system based upon **rank** to one based upon **class**.[7] Broadly speaking, these terms represent opposing paradigms for the establishment of an individual's position and role within society. Rank suggests pre-determination and stability. As Jean Baudrillard argues in the essay "The Orders of Simulacra," in a system of rank, "one is assigned a place irrevocably, and so class mobility is non-existant" (84). Conversely, class implies potential and fluidity. Specific details located within the text and the strategies of objectification used in conjunction with the d'Urberville name demonstrate that the "true" d'Urbervilles represent the system of rank, while the "spurious" Stoke-d'Urbervilles represent the system of class, and therefore interactions between Tess and Alec symbolize the struggle between rank and class. Recognition of this connection

affirms the assertion made in the introduction that the frequent coming together of disparate social classes found in turn-of-the-century narrative fiction represents, in part, an attempt to reimagine and reestablish roles in England's social hierarchy that had been dramatically transformed by the rapid industrial, economic and colonial growth of the nineteenth century.

Founded on the fundamental and unchangeable realities of birth, rank connotes the relatively stable, hierarchical system that had dominated Britain since the Middle Ages. As Patricia Ingham asserts in her study *The Language of Gender and Class*, "The language of *rank* had for centuries offered an interpretation of society as inherently well-ordered and harmonious" (4). As figures of authority who gained and maintained prominence through their service to the crown, Tess's ancestors embody the characteristics of that system, and the association between the two is made explicit very early in the text. After hearing the news of their recently discovered heritage, Joan Durbeyfield tells her daughter that "volk of our own *rank* [emphasis added] will be down here in their carriages as soon as 'tis known" (13). That initial connection is then reinforced throughout the novel by the relentless linkage between the d'Urbervilles and physical objects. The spoon, the seal and the bones all suggest the apparent stability and permanence implied by rank. Although obviously subject to decay and transformation, they do survive for centuries, and still remain essentially clear representations of the position and power of the d'Urberville family.

Now granted, as Ingham correctly suggests, the vision of Britain as a "harmonious" state implied by the system of rank stands as merely one possible "interpretation" of many, and no doubt, those on the lower ends of the social ladder who

carried no rank would have described the hierarchy in vastly more skeptical terms. But nonetheless, the system connoted by the language of rank did indeed promote some degree of stability because it rested squarely upon the ownership of land. In his study *The Aristocracy in England 1660 – 1914*, J. V. Beckett states that for centuries, "land was the most important single passport to social and political consideration" (43). British society placed such a premium on the holding of property for the simple reason that it "represented not merely wealth, but stability and continuity, a fixed interest in the state which conferred the right to govern" (*Ibid.*). Thus, beyond its real value as simple property, land also assumed an important symbolic value in English culture because possession of it conveyed the impression of legitimacy so crucial to the system of rank that had reigned supreme for hundreds of years.

Land is clearly a defining feature of the d'Urberville family. At the very outset of the text, upon discovering the true nature of his lineage from Parson Tringham, John Durbeyfield immediately inquires as to the status of his "family mansions and estates." He is disappointed to find that those holdings are now gone and takes little comfort in the minister's assertion that his predecessors once had them "in abundance" (3). Over the course of the text, it becomes clear that Tringham is not exaggerating in his claim. Although the narrative does not actually traverse great geographical distances – Angel's trip to Brazil notwithstanding – whereever it ventures on the Wessex countryside, the shadow of an old d'Urberville mansion is always close at hand. This fixation upon land further establishes the d'Urberville name as a symbolic representation of the system of rank.

The d'Urbervilles and rank also share another key trait. By the time of *Tess*'s

publication in 1891, rank was, to borrow Parson Tringham's description of the

d'Urbervilles, "extinct." Its decline started during the first decades of the 1800's, when

with the start of the Industrial Revolution, the balance of power in Britain began to shift

from landed interests to those of capital and industrial production. As a result, rank

quickly faded and class achieved dominance in cultural discourse. Asa Briggs notes that

as early as 1824, the new term had "already established itself as a cultural label" (43) and

with it emerged a system of valuation fundamentally different from that of rank. As

Merryn Williams and Raymond Williams suggest, although both rank and class indicate

an individual's social position, class operates "primarily through the indices of adult

economic activity" (24 – 25). Unlike rank, a person's class varies in close accordance

with his or her wealth. Thus, in an economic environment marked by tremendous

industrial growth and development and corresponding failures and depression, class

connotes a fluidity, instability and relativity that contrasts starkly with its predecessor.

Through the commodification of their name, the Stoke-d'Urbervilles clearly

embody those characteristics. The narrative goes to great lengths to construct them as

emblematic of burgeoning middle-class wealth and the discourse of class that sprang

from it. They are literally "new money" since their fortune dates back only one

generation. Moreover, Simon Stoke's efforts to gain his family acceptance in the local

aristocracy recall those of many actual middle-class business men who pursued the same

goal:

> …the family founder seldom progressed very far, but time spent in this
>
> aristocratic purgatory could be usefully employed pursuing some more

active principles such as building a manor house, extending the property,

acquiring a coat of arms, intermarrying with the local elite and ensuring a

proper education for the next generation. (Beckett 92)

Beckett notes the building of a manor house as a key consideration and certainly nothing

embodies the Stoke-d'Urbervilles' status as symbolic representatives of the system of

class more than the Slopes, their family seat. Upon viewing it for the first time, Tess

recognizes clearly that "this is all new!" (27). Her statement resonates on two distinct

levels. On one hand, it refers to the fact the Stoke-d'Urbervilles are themselves new,

having only lived in Wessex for less than a generation. As a result, the buildings are of

"recent erection" and fitted "with every late appliance" (26 – 27).

More importantly, the estate itself reflects a fundamentally different design which

consciously rejects the incorporation of land, the feature so crucial to the system of rank.

Tess experiences surprise as she approaches the Slopes because it is not "a manorial

home in the ordinary sense, with fields and pastures and a grumbling farmer" (26).

Instead, the seat of the Stoke-d'Urberville family stands as a "a country-house built for

enjoyment pure and simple" that has "not an acre of troublesome land attached to it

beyond what was required for residential purposes" (*Ibid*.). In its use of "troublesome,"

the narrative is clearly being ironic. This text displays little sentimental longing for the

system of rank, and as Merryn Williams argues in *Hardy and Rural England*, "It is

evident that Hardy has no illusions either about the old aristocracy or about peasant life in

the Middle Ages" (172). That said, without question, the novel does clearly assert the

importance of a connection to land and the stability that such a bond brings, as

demonstrated by its depiction of the eviction of tenants from Marlott (277 – 278) and by

its discussion of the "three classes of villages" (223). In its very design, the Slopes

clearly rejects this principle and as such, it symbolizes corruption and decay. A direct

reflection of the family who built it, the estate is defined by wealth – "Everything looked

like money" – and reflects none of the time-honored agricultural traditions of the Wessex

countryside (27). Taken together, these characteristics mark the Stoke-d'Urbervilles as

symbols of the system of class which began its ascent over rank as the basis for British

culture at the start of the 1800's

Ultimately, the conflict between those two terms reached its final juncture around

the time of *Tess*'s initial publication. The political debate of the late 1860's surrounding

the passing of the Second Reform Bill fostered a renewed interest in rank and class, but

the binary began to erode as the concept of rank grew increasingly outdated and

untenable under the new economic system (Briggs 73). By the end of the nineteenth

century, economic changes in the 1870's and 1880's, coupled with what Briggs terms

"the disturbance of the mid-Victorian social balance," had pushed "The language of

'ranks', 'orders', and 'degrees', which had survived the industrial revolution… into

limbo" (*Ibid*.). England found itself caught in the midst of a cultural vacuum. Much like

its symbolic representation in *Tess*, the d'Urbervilles, who have decayed utterly to the

point that they exist only marginally as the impoverished Durbeyfields, rank, the

centuries-old model for understanding cultural structure and division was clearly eclipsed

by 1891. As Alec tells Tess in Kingsbere Chapel, "The old order changeth" (287).

Unfortunately, its successor, class, was as unstable and transient as its symbolic

representation the Stoke-d'Urbervilles because it was not built around clearly delineated

roles and positions. Having emerged in the midst of this anomie, *Tess* symbolically

examines this shift in British society through the two-part strategy of objectification that it uses to assist in its portrayal of inter-class connection. When the textual and historical origins of the d'Urberville / Stoke-d'Urberville binary are examined in detail in the next section, it will become clear that the novel greets that transformation with a fundamentally despondent attitude.

Collapsing the d'Urberville / Stoke-d'Urberville Binary

In this novel, the sense of flux implied by the system of class is not confined to Alec and the Stoke-d'Urberville family. It goes far deeper. The details provided by the narrative demonstrate that in fact the "true" d'Urbervilles are, just like the Stoke-d'Urbervilles, a constructed and commodified presence. They too are "compounded of money and ambition." The symbolic binary between rank and class, which the text goes to great lengths to imply, is actually an illusion because d'Urberville in both its forms – past and present – connotes transience and relativity. Through this collapse, *Tess* emerges as a novel that expresses grave doubts regarding both the possibility for meaningful historical interpretation and for the establishment of equitable and productive class structures and relations. This latter aspect is particularly troubling given the social and economic character of Great Britain in the 1890's. In his exhaustive work *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880*, Harold Perkin argues that "Between 1880 and 1914 class society reached its zenith" because "the major classes achieved their advanced capitalistic form" (27). *Tess* took shape during a period when the different levels of society "became more sharply differentiated from one another than ever before"

(*Ibid*.), and it suggests that those divisions cannot be rationalized in such a way that they may come to work together.

The nature of the "true" d'Urbervilles is established in the very opening scene of the text. It lurks quietly under the surface of the discussion that ensues between Parson Tringham and John Durbeyfield after the minister refers to Tess's father as "Sir John" (1). Having had his curiosity piqued by the strange greeting, Durbeyfield stops the minister in an effort to ascertain his meaning and in their subsequent conversation, the story of the d'Urberville past emerges. Michael Ragussis has suggested that *Tess* thus reverses the most characteristic plot of fiction by beginning the text with a discovery of a family name (137). But in fact, that's not quite true. To be precise, one must recognize that the novel actually begins with a "title found," not with a "name found" because the initial crisis that sets the entire scene in motion is Durbeyfield's perplexed reaction at hearing "Sir" – a title– used in conjunction with his first name. In terms of the symbolic composition of the text, that constitutes a key difference because the symbolic instability surrounding the d'Urbervilles stems entirely from the titles that they have usurped and used as foundations for power, not from their name itself. Indeed, Tringham's discussion gives no information about the actual origin of "d'Urberville." The name is not at issue, a fact that has somehow escaped critical attention. It is learned instead that the d'Urbervilles were a family of knights initially rewarded for their service during the Norman Conquest. This got them land – "Branches of your family held manors over all this part of England"; preeminence – "your forefather Brian was summoned to Westminster to attend the great council there"; and wealth – "In the reign of King John one of them was rich enough to give a manor to the Knights Hospitallers" (2). Such

impressive facts seem to establish the credibility of the d'Urberville pedigree and mark them as clearly-drawn, noble symbols of Britain's glorious past.

An important piece is missing, however. For all of the power that they acquired, the d'Urbervilles, as a "knightly family," lacked claim to a hereditary title that would perpetually provide them with the official legitimacy that they needed (2). The conclusion of Tringham's narrative touches upon this difficulty. He tells Durbeyfield that "there have been generations of Sir Johns among you and, and if knighthood were hereditary like a baronetcy – as it practically was in old times, when men were knighted to father and son – you would be Sir John now" (*Ibid*.). Although nominally the statement is focused on Durbeyfield himself and seems to explain why he has been denied the power that his ancestors once possessed, its real interest lies in the implication that it makes regarding how the d'Urbervilles kept their power for as long as they did. Even to those who have no background in heraldry and genealogy, the parson's argument appears confusing at best since it relies upon a conjecturing "if" statement supported by the use of "practically." And when put into a proper historical and genealogical context, that tangle only grows more pronounced.

Tringham's statement links the d'Urberville family to two very specific aspects of the British nobility system – the knight and the baronet. These titles are related, but also fundamentally different.   Knighthood is by far the older of the two designations and traces its roots back far into the Middle Ages. The first formalized order of knights in Britain, the Order of the Garter, dates to 1348, but as G.L. Pine notes in *The Story of Titles*, "obviously there were many knights before that time" (116). The bestowal of knighthood was (and still is) the sole prerogative of the Crown. Knighthood is granted –

in theory – in recognition of service and *is not* an hereditary honor. Certainly at times in

British history, members of the landed elite anticipated being knighted simply because of

their position, as when James I "expected all gentry worth 40 pounds to present

themselves for knighthood" (Beckett 48). But, the speculative point that the parson

begins with, "if knighthood were hereditary like a baronetcy," is a moot one because

making knighthood hereditary would sacrifice the very principles that it is based upon. It

also puts the cart before the horse because the title of baronet came long after knighthood

and was essentially derived from it. Created by James I in 1611, a baronetcy amounts to

little more than "an hereditary knighthood" in terms of the power, honor and prestige that

it signifies (Pine, *The Story of the Peerage* 63). Thus, Tringham's lament is equivalent to

someone wondering why a parent does not look more like his or her children, instead of

the other way around. Obviously, such fine points would be missed by readers unfamiliar

with the British title system, but they would be common knowledge to anyone with even

a basic knowledge of genealogy. Given Hardy's own interest in the subject, which has

been well-documented,[8] it must be assumed that he would have appreciated the literal and

symbolic ramifications implicit in the parson's narrative.

Through that exchange, *Tess* begins to question the accessibility of history itself.

Immediately after the two men part ways, Durbeyfield tells the young boy whom he

passes next, "Sir John D'Urberville – that's who I am… that is if knights were baronets –

which they be" (4). Through the removal of "practically," Tringham's original subjective

speculation – itself a questionable statement – now becomes an utterly erroneous

assertion. The transformation occurs in large part due to Durbeyfield's ignorant, foolish

nature, yet it also demonstrates Hardy's suggestion that history is a construction,

particularly verbal history. As O'Toole notes, in Hardy's work there is clearly a "fictive quality of so-called 'old families'" (7). In the Wessex countryside where legends, stories, superstitions and other easily modified oral forms play such a fundamental role in the cultural fabric, the possibility for gaining any clear insight into the past becomes remote.

Then again, the d'Urberville name does seem to offer a possible solution to this dilemma. The narrative's relentless connection of it to physical objects suggests that it can serve as a readily accessible instrument for historical interpretation because physical objects carry a credibility not found in purely verbalized forms. As a general example of this belief, note that when Dairyman Crick tells the story of William Dewy, a local man who supposedly escaped from a charging bull by playing music for the animal, he finishes the improbable tale by asserting that "I can tell you to a foot where he's a lying in Mellstock churchyard at this very moment" (87). Crick evokes the physicality of Dewy's remains to ascribe legitimacy to his otherwise unbelievable narrative. Similarly, items such as the d'Urberville estates and mansions, the d'Urberville aisle and window and the graven family seal all constitute easy and apparently well-defined gateways into the past. Thus, because Tess assumes Alec to be an original d'Urberville, when she first meets him, she expects him to have an "aged and dignified face, the sublimation of all the d'Urberville lineaments, furrowed with intricate memories representing in hieroglyphic the century's of her family's and England's history" (28). In Tess's mind, Alec's visage is supposed to provide a road map for history, and she arrives at the Slopes with an inherent faith in the integrity of the d'Urberville family name.

Unfortunately, when Tringham's original statements concerning the d'Urberville line are analyzed even further, it becomes clear that the novel carefully and completely

undermines the confidence that Tess evinces because the apparent divide between the d'Urbervilles and the Stoke-d'Urbervilles does not, in fact, exist at all. Tringham's narrative links the d'Urberville name to the title of baronet and implies that the d'Urberville "knights" maintained their power by knighting themselves from "father to son." Literally speaking, this means that they were essentially pseudo-baronets because only the Crown can confer knighthood and only baronetcies transfer from generation to generation. Symbolically, therefore, the family represents a simulation of something which is itself a decadent form. Knighthood is bestowed upon an individual in recognition of personal service, chiefly in battle. In theory, since knighthood is not hereditary, it represents a benchmark of quality because each prospective knight must establish his qualifications. A baronetcy can boast of no such standard because the title passes merely through the accident of birth, and therefore symbolically, a true baronet connotes decadence when compared with knighthood. The d'Urbervilles "knights" then are *doubly illusory* because they only approximate a baronetcy. Obviously, such uncertainty undermines the images of stability and permanence which the text elsewhere associates so closely with the family name.

And, if one delves even further into the historical details surrounding the title of baronet, that vision collapses completely. Much like the Stoke-d'Urbervilles themselves, baronetcies emerged as a direct result of capital acquisition because James I created the order simply to raise money for the royal coffers and help ease his financial difficulties (Pine *The Story of the Peerage* 63; *The Story of Titles* 115 – 116). It is in essence an early instance of the practice of selling honors and titles that expanded dramatically in the 1880's and 1890's. Thus, Tess's father is mistaken when he proposes that she and Angel

should use d'Urberville after their marriage because it is "uncorrupted" (202). In actuality, textual evidence demonstrates clearly that *all* forms of d'Urberville, both the new Stoke-d'Urberville names and the titles that Tess's family codified and propagated their power under are unstable, illusory and ultimately trace their roots to the exchange of capital.

This collapse marks *Tess* as a text at odds with itself. Throughout, the novel insists upon the existence of a clearly defined symbolic binary that pits Tess, who is d'Urberville "to the bone," against Alec, who is but a "spurious" creation. The piece of information which subverts that binary, however, is present from its very outset. Therefore, in reality, the duality is illusory at best. The situation is in essence the reverse of John Dowell's bitter rhetorical question in *The Good Soldier* regarding the consequences of learning the real nature of his marriage to Florence: "If for nine years I have possessed a goodly apple that is rotten at the core and discover its rottenness only in nine years and six months less four days, isn't it true that for nine years I possessed a goodly apple?" (14). In *Tess*, that "rottenness" is evident from the very beginning because the text provides a clear clue to its existence through the details located in Tringham's discussion. Despite this, the novel appears to quickly overlook that fact because for the remainder of the narrative, it insists upon the validity of the d'Urberville / Stoke-d'Urberville binary as though that pairing was actually a "goodly apple."

Given the novel's complex rhetorical perspective, such willful self-deception is understandable. Throughout, the text clearly views the system of class that Alec represents as decadent. Against the ascent of this new social conception, the "d'Urberville lineaments" which connote "centuries of… England's history" do offer a

seemingly ready-made countervalence (28). But, Hardy was too much of a realist to romanticize those institutions that had embodied the system of rank, and the novel wastes no time in declaring its skeptical view of them. When Tess is overlooked by Angel on Marlott Green in favor of another, nameless partner, the narrator laments: "Pedigree, ancestral skeletons, monumental record, the d'Urberville lineaments, did not help Tess in her life's battle as yet, even to the extent of attracting her to a dancing-partner over the heads of the commonest peasantry. So much for Norman blood unaided by Victorian lucre" (9). Of course, when that "help" does finally come, the results are disastrous. But even as Tess is being raped in the woods by Alec, the narrator wryly observes that "Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time" (57). This is the first time that the text appends the family name d'Urberville directly to Tess. In doing so, it does highlight her connection to the d'Urberville history, but it also transforms her into someone that she is not. Tess Durbeyfield exists; Tess d'Urberville is merely a constructed identity. Thus, this passage in no way suggests that Tess deserves the violation thrust upon her because of the sins of her forefathers. It does, however, constitute a condemnation of the violence and privilege associated with the system of rank that the d'Urberville family represents.

Moreover, Hardy was also prescient enough to understand that, even if the institutions of rank had been ideal, which they clearly were not, their time was past anyway. Merryn Williams suggests that "In the last resort, Hardy had no slogans, only values" (199), and the construction of the d'Urberville name and the family history that it represents certainly attests to this fact. By presenting it as a deeply flawed symbol that is

ultimately far-removed from its implied solidity, the novel criticizes the inherent faults

and inequities of the system of rank and demonstrates that the "interpretation of society

as inherently well-ordered and harmonious" which it suggests is a fiction, albeit an

alluring one (Ingham 4). Thus, although the assertion of the d'Urberville / Stoke-

d'Urberville binary throughout *Tess* does suggest a certain nostalgia, the text is also both

radical enough and realistic enough to consciously undermine that stance by building the

d'Urbervilles upon obviously false pretenses. Note however that this, the novel's

sharpest social critique, must operate on the quiet – and ultimately subjective – level of

the symbol. The novel does not broadcast it loudly and directly through overt

pronouncements by the narrative voice, but instead, buries it within the specific and

relatively obscure historical details of knighthoods and baronetcies where it can easily be

overlooked.

Read in a different context, once the "true" d'Urberville name is understood as

little more than a simulacrum of an already-decadent form, it becomes clear that *Tess*

presents a fundamentally despondent view of history itself. Seen in one way, names

represent history. One need look no further than any course in Edwardian, Elizabethan or

Victorian literature to see this aspect at work. At the same time, names also serve as

strategies for interpreting history, an aspect that punctuates an early scene of Hardy's own

Far From The Madding Crowd. Newly-arrived in town after having been hired to be

Bathsheba Everdene's shepherd, Gabriel Oak enters the local malthouse for the first time

and silence immediately grips the room as the assembled villagers examine the stranger

with quiet circumspection. But, after he states his name, the maltster expostulates:

"'That's never Gable Oak's grandson over at Norcombe - never!' he said, as a formula

expressive of surprise, which nobody was supposed for a moment to take literally" (59).

During the ensuing discussion, it is learned that the Maltster's children were well

acquainted with Gabriel's father, and the shepherd himself remembers having seen the old

man's son long ago. Thus, through the Oak family name, a narrative of the past is

established. Moreover, the fact that Gabriel is so quickly accepted into the small

community that initially greeted his arrival with mistrust and reservation indicates the

implicit faith placed upon such a history.

  In this text, d'Urberville symbolizes the past, while Stoke-d'Urberville symbolizes

the present. But at their core, both are debased. As demonstrated by its repeated

depiction of the collapse of various elements of traditional Wessex culture, the novel

clearly perceives the present as volatile and transient. It highlights the fact that in a wide

range of contexts, standards for judgment and valuation are changing. Because speed and

efficiency have replaced quality as the key variables in evaluation of labor processes, the

older farmers at Flintcomb-Ash who watch the motorized threshing machine can only

yearn for the "past days" prior to mechanization when "everything… was effected by

hand-labor, which to their thinking, though slow, produced better results" (256).

Families like the Stoke-d'Urbervilles now gain power through the abstract, negotiable

exchange of capital as opposed to the physicality of land. Because of this, despite having

spent several generations in Marlott, the Durbeyfields are already but a "fading memory"

when Angel visits their old cottage only a few months after their departure (294).

  Even though the novel clearly recognizes that those objects which symbolize the

d'Urberville name are not immune to change and decay, they do appear to offer some

buttress against such a rapid effacement of the past. When Tess actually visits the

d'Urberville tombs in Kingsbere Chapel, she is dismayed to find "their carvings being defaced and broken; their brasses torn from the matrices, the rivet-holes remaining like martins in a sand-cliff" (287). The dominant image of the scene is clearly one of rot. At the same time, however, the text is also careful to point out that the dates on the tombs cover "several centuries" and despite their state of disrepair, they endure still. The sense of stability and permanence that this conveys would seem to suggest that the past can serve as an obvious countervalence to the chaos of the present. But in reality, the d'Urberville name symbolizes commodification, negotiation and flux, much like Stoke-d'Urberville does. Therefore, the text perceives the past to be as unknowable and illusory as the present, and at the symbolic level, *Tess* clearly questions the potential for establishing any stable, objective framework for conducting historical judgment. In doing so, it displays the "ache of modernism" that Tess herself feels (98). Certainly, the fact that both she and Alec are destroyed by the end of the novel only underscores this fundamental anomie. As the most visible manifestations of the d'Urberville and Stoke-d'Urberville names, they symbolize history itself, and symbolically, their deaths signal the collapse of both "past and present" and "rank and class."

If left without further comment, such disintegration would suggest that *Tess* stands as a fundamentally nihilistic work. This is not utterly the case, however, because my reading until this point has largely overlooked a major component of the novel – Angel Clare. As the final section of this chapter will demonstrate, his character may offer the possibility of a solution to the crisis suggested by Tess and Alec. Unfortunately, such resolution is tenuous at best, and ultimately, this remains a text that discerns far more problems than it can find answers for.

A Return to the Past – *Tess*'s Non-Objectifying Methods of Controlling Inter-Class Connection

Along with the thematic and rhetorical implications that it carries for issues of history and class, the collapse of the d'Urberville / Stoke-d'Urberville binary also suggests that the text harbors doubts regarding both the strategy of objectification itself and the complex economic, epistemological and cultural changes which that process signifies. This suspicion is confirmed by the fact that in addition to its two-part strategy of objectification surrounding the d'Urberville name, the novel also relies heavily upon non-objectifying methods for accommodating its presentation of the coming together of disparate social classes. Most of these methods are focused upon Angel Clare. To some degree the portrayal of his relationship to Tess within the narrative is aided by the objectification of the d'Urberville name because that process serves to establish Tess as a displaced member of the aristocracy, thereby lowering the social gradient between them. Because Angel has no direct connection to the d'Urberville name, however, neither of the strategies of objectification surrounding it that serve to cloud the social standing of both Alec and Tess can be applied to him. Instead, the text employs many of the same tactics of simple characterization and plot manipulation favored by narratives from the mid-nineteenth century. The final section of this chapter examines in depth several of those non-objectifying methods that the novel associates with Angel in order to more clearly establish their difference from the strategies of objectification that dominate the majority of this dissertation's analysis.

To begin with, the narrative carefully places Angel in a unique social role that allows him access to individuals of widely-separated socio-economic backgrounds. Just like Margaret Hale in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, he is the child of a prominent, non-conformist minister. Indeed, the first objective piece of information regarding his background that the text provides focuses on that fact. The discussion of Angel that erupts in the sleeping quarters during Tess's first night at Talbothay's focuses on his father's status as the "earnestest man in Wessex" (89). That role mandates charity work and interaction with the poor. Although *Tess* does not exploit that aspect directly in the way that Gaskell's novel does through the connection that Margaret establishes between the wealthy industrialist John Thornton and the poor worker Higgins, it does highlight its presence during two scenes that take place in Emminster. In the first, Angel is dismayed to find that a black pudding that he has brought from Talbothay's Dairy has been given to a man who is out of work due to attacks of delirium (126). Later, when Angel's brothers and Mercy Chant find Tess's work boots hidden in a hedge, they determine to "carry them home for some poor person" (236). Thus, although the dairymaids at Talbothay's see Angel as "quite the gentleman born," it is also implied that his time there is probably not the first he has spent among the lower classes.

The social liberty afforded by Angel's family background is reinforced by the repeated depiction of him as a nebulous physical and intellectual presence, one who resists easy classification. Kramer correctly argues that "uncertainty in Angel is something that the narrator comes back to again and again" (44). But, that process of characterization does not qualify as objectification as I have defined the term because the novel does not attempt to strip Angel of his essential subjectivity or transform him into an

object. Consider, for instance, the moment of his first appearance in the novel. As he and his three brothers watch the May Day dance, the narrator proclaims them "young men of a superior class" and proceeds to pigeonhole his two siblings based solely upon their dress. Felix, the eldest, sports the garb of a "regulation curate," while Cuthbert, the second, is a "normal undergraduate," and at no time over the course of the novel do either of them work to resist such simple classifications (8). Angel's appearance, on the other hand, "would hardly have been have been sufficient to characterize him; there was an uncribbed and uncabined aspect in his attire" (*Ibid.*). Hardy's diction here is deliberately obscure. Indeed, for both uncribbed and uncabined, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites only this very passage as an example of their usage. No other cases are offered. Nonetheless, their definitions are fairly straightforward. Uncribbed means only not "confined within narrow space or limits," while uncabined means only not "cramped or hampered in action or thought." The text's description of Angel's appearance casts him as someone who does not fit neatly into predefined roles and who naturally challenges expectations, a vision reinforced by his desire to join the local women on the green and by his siblings' horror – "suppose we should be seen!" – at the suggestion. After his initial appearance in that early scene, Angel disappears from the narrative until Tess arrives at Talbothay's Dairy almost a third of the way through the novel, and although he has matured considerably by this point, the sense of indeterminacy surrounding his character remains: "He wore the ordinary white pinner and leather leggings of a dairy-farmer when milking, and his boots were clogged with the mulch of the yard; but this was all his local livery. Beneath it was something educated, reserved, subtle, sad, differing" (87). His dress suggests that he is a common milker, but his demeanor indicates that he is

much more. That contrast makes it impossible to judge his social position: "Without the milking-gear nobody could have guessed what he was" (88).   The simple fact of Angel's external appearance indicates that he does not conform neatly to a simple social classification. He is a "nebulous, preoccupied, vague" character (89).

None of these descriptions, however, suggest that he represents an embodiment of England's mythic past like Tess, nor is he built solely from and defined by the acquisition of capital like Alec. Therefore, the characterization of Angel does not qualify as objectification. It does, however, much like the commodification of Alec's subjectivity, work to suggest that Angel's position within the Wessex cultural hierarchy is not precisely definable. Both men are clearly not members of the lower classes. Yet, where they stand within the more privileged levels of society cannot be determined for sure, and this helps to mitigate class-based tensions stemming from their interactions with Tess.

For Angel, however, such characterization is not sufficient to control the instability that he brings to the text, and as a result, he is temporarily banished from the narrative midway through the novel when he undertakes a journey to Brazil and returns as a radically changed man.[9] In addition to the fact that he doggedly pursues his desire for Tess despite the fact that it challenges the expectations which both his family and those in the community have regarding the proper interaction of individuals from diverse social classes, Angel also stands as a threatening presence because he embraces a radical, egalitarian rhetoric singularly out of step with the conservative nature of his religious upbringing. With his stated aversion to "material distinctions of rank and wealth" and his supposed "considerable indifference to social forms" (91), he stands as the novel's most outspoken voice for social change. He assures Tess that "I do hate the aristocratic

principle of blood before everything" (148) and later, he claims "Distinction does not consist in the facile use of a contemptible set of conventions" (153). Sadly, however, talk is cheap and when put to the test, Angel's radical views crumble quickly. He envisions using the knowledge of Tess's familial history as leverage for obtaining his parents' favor for their marriage (165) and despite his own sexual affair, he finds himself unable to forgive her rape by Alec (178 – 179). Angel proves to be what Howe calls a "timid convert to modernist thought who possesses neither the firmness of the old nor the boldness of the new" (122). Indeed, because he initially seems to set such an enlightened moral standard in his behavior toward Tess, his hypocritical rejection of her makes him an even more despicable character than Alec, whom the reader recognizes as clearly diabolical from the outset. Angel's betrayal serves to utterly undermine the credibility of his attacks on the iniquity of social distinction. In dismissing him, the reader dismisses his ideals as well.

That said, there is ample textual evidence to suggest that ultimately Angel's rhetoric should not be dismissed but rather embraced. Although belated, his attempt to save Tess from Alec is a redemptive act. Moreover, of the novel's three main characters, only he survives the conclusion of the narrative. Lastly, and most importantly, one must also recognize the relationship between Hardy himself and the young skeptic. Kramer argues that Angel is the character whose "conscious mental grasp of things most closely approaches that of the narrator (and author)" (45). Their connection, however, may go even deeper than that. In a post-publication interview from 1892, reprinted for the first time in the Norton critical edition of *Tess*, Hardy justifies focusing his novels on "simple country people" with the following argument:

> If you live among these people, you will find after a time that variety takes the place of monotony. The people begin to differentiate themselves as in a chemical process. They become beings of many minds, infinite in difference: some happy, many serene, a few depressed, one here and there bright even to genius; some stupid; others wanton; others austere, some mutely Miltonic, some potentially Cromwellian…. (389)

Compare that to the following discussion of the transformation that Angel undergoes once he decides to take his meals with the common farmers at Dairyman Crick's table:

> But with living on there, day after day, the acute sojourner [Angel] became conscious of a new aspect to the spectacle. Without any objective change whatever, variety had taken the place of monotonousness. His host and his host's household… began to differentiate themselves as in a chemical process… beings of many minds, beings infinite in difference, some happy, many serene, a few depressed, one here and there bright even to genius, some stupid others wanton, some mutely Miltonic, some potentially Cromwellian. (93).

Although the connection between the two quotations is unmistakable, it would be foolish to assert that Angel simply serves as a direct mouthpiece for Hardy in the novel. Hardy's reputation as a capricious interview subject was widely known, and he may not have been conveying an accurate picture of his own beliefs. That said, it is also equally impossible to suggest that Angel does not speak for Hardy at all. Clearly, at least some portion of his radical rhetoric must represent *Tess*'s own essential rhetorical perspective.

To alleviate the instability caused by Angel's cross-class desire and to create a context for the acceptance of his militant ideals, the novel reverts to a familiar plot device of mid-nineteenth century fiction. It banishes Angel to a colonial environment. In his study *Rule of Darkness*, Peter Brantlinger argues that the colonies exerted a tremendous influence upon Victorian literature because they served as a ready source of narrative. When they return from overseas, characters like Magwitch in *Great Expectations* bring exotic stories and they also introduce conflict into texts. Conversely, the colonies also serve as a ready-made point of banishment for characters who are threatening or undesirable, such as Frederick Hale in *North and South*, who has for lived years in Spain after taking part in a mutiny on a naval ship.

Both of these aspects are clearly at work in *Tess*. The conviction of Angel's post-Brazil actions do serve to drive him from the intellectual no-man's land suggested by Howe because by attempting to rescue Tess from Alec, he enacts those principles to which he had previously only given voice. This transformation can occur, however, only after he returns to England marked as an "other" who now stands outside of the basic Wessex social hierarchy. Physically, upon his return, Angel is unrecognizable. As his parents watch him arrive in Emminster, the narrator notes that "They saw alight therefrom a form which they affected to recognize, but would actually have passed by in the street without identifying" (288). Mrs. Clare's lament "O it is not Angel – not my son – the Angel who went away" refers primarily to his emaciated state but in fact, the transformation goes far beyond a simple question of weight loss (290). When he finally finds Tess living in the seaside town of Sanbourne, he goes to her hotel room and holds his arms out to her in an attempt at reconciliation, but the gesture proves futile: "Mere

yellow skeleton that he was now, he felt the contrast between them and thought his appearance distasteful to her" (298).[10] Much like The Monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Angel's skin is now yellow, a color which signifies him as an alien and disturbing presence. Even those closest to him express shock at his looks. His transgressive, class-focused politics are now tempered with the understanding that he has been transfigured in a foreign context and is no longer "truly" British.[11] For Hardy's audience, this transformation serves to mollify anxieties created by Angel's overtly oppositional stance.   Since he now is so obviously marked as "other," his views are easily dismissable. As with it depiction of his "vague, nebulous" character, the text's portrayal of him as a "yellow skeleton" does not, however, qualify as objectification because although perhaps somewhat extreme, it is still a literal depiction. While overseas, he contracts a life-threatening disease and returns jaundiced and emaciated. Both Angel's political beliefs and his cross-class desire for Tess do produce a controlling reaction by the text. But, unlike its strategy for portraying the relationship of Tess and Alec, that response is not grounded in objectification but instead finds its outlet in simple characterization and plot manipulation, the formal practices that characterize the Victorian strategy for portraying inter-class connection.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Interestingly however, Angel also provides the mechanism by which *Tess* rejects the ultimate rhetorical goal of those Victorian formal practices – the establishment of a stable class-based social order rooted in the ideal of domestic tranquillity and the institution of marriage.   As Adrian Poole notes in *Gissing in Context*, the pursuit of

marriage and all that it symbolizes constitutes the single greatest driving force for

Victorian fiction:

> The familiar rhythm of the [Victorian] narrative… is of the progressive
> qualification and refining of the initial inordinate desire of the individual
> through repeated, progressively significant confrontations with the
> restrictive social forms.… towards the climactic penetration to a hidden,
> secret 'reality' – a reality that is characteristically at the same time a
> personal experience and relationship and also a social commitment,
> namely, marriage. The centrality of the notion of marriage to any analysis
> of the assumptions underlying the Victorian novel cannot be over-
> estimated. (8)

Angel's attempted flight from Sanbourne with Tess mocks the ideal of the domestic

sphere as the two hide in the mansion Bramshurt Court and experience their only true

moments of husband and wife as fugitives from the law.

Their escape is, of course, doomed, and of the three main characters, only Angel

remains alive at the conclusion of the narrative. His survival represents the novel's final

commentary on Britain's social order. The destruction of Alec and Tess constitutes a

rejection of the systems of class and rank that each one symbolizes. Angel, however,

embodies neither rank, nor class, but instead suggests elements of both models. In

keeping with the basic philosophy of rank, he does enjoy privilege simply because he is

the son of a prominent local minister. Izz Huett tells Tess that he plans to marry "A

young lady of his own rank" (116). That said, Angel's family possesses neither power,

nor land, nor title, all of which are key components of that system, and his fundamentally

nebulous character embodies the essential nature of class. Thus, upon his first appearance in the text, the narrator notes that he comes from a "superior class" (8) and then later asserts that at Talbothay's Dairy the young man is "at present out of his class" (98). He is, finally, an amalgamation of both rank and class. In the final scene of the novel, he walks away from Tess's execution hand-in-hand with her sister Liza-Lu. When read in conjunction with Tess's plea to Alec at Bramshurt Court to marry Liza-Lu after her own death, that action implies a future union between the two. Now, as a d'Urberville, Liza-Lu evokes the system of rank with all its inherent inadequacies and injustices, just as her sister does. Yet, Tess is careful to point out to Angel that "She has all the best of me without the bad of me" (311). By allowing Angel to the reach the conclusion of the narrative with his initial radical rhetoric now supported by concrete action and then pairing him with Liza-Lu, *Tess* tentatively establishes the couple as an idealized blueprint for a new social structure that does not rest solely upon the acquisition of capital that defines the system of social class. Thus, the novel enacts its final irony by following the nineteenth-century tradition of closing on the promise of marriage in order to create a relationship that symbolically signals a subversion of the class-based social structure that depiction of marriage in the Victorian novel works to uphold.

Obviously, that analysis rests on symbolic interpretations and vague hints by the narrative. The little optimism that it holds certainly does not eradicate the tremendous despondency that the deaths of Tess and Alec signify. Moreover, in reading the conclusion of *Tess* as I do, I recognize that I am contradicting Hardy's own "official" opinions on the matter. In his preface to the fifth edition of the text, he states emphatically that a novel is "an impression, not an argument" (xi). Taking him at his

word, at least for the moment, it is clearly reasonable to read *Tess* as a realistic "impression" of the late-nineteenth century world from which it emerged. It displays an acute appreciation for the cultural shifts taking place in Britain in the late-1800's, both on the national and local levels, while in a more personalized framework, the cultural landscape depicted in the novel clearly reflects Hardy's own socially uncertain background. By acknowledging that "The temptation to read Hardy's fiction biographically is very powerful," Tess O'Toole implicitly warns against analyzing the author's work in the context of the events shaping his own life (91). But nonetheless, many of his own experiences do resonate throughout the pages of the novel. In "Hardy and Social Class," Merryn and Raymond Williams note that the author came from a "relatively independent and intermediate class" marked by "confusions and precarious complexities," and they argue that the "treatment of class in his fiction follows… from this precise position" (27). Ironically, the very diction of the Williams's point suggests Hardy's own difficult position: his "precise" standing in society is one defined by uncertainty and complexity.

Thus, *Tess* does indeed provide an "impression" of a society in flux, caught between the systems of rank and class. But, to account for its distinct presentation of inter-class connection by simply reading the text as a realistic portrait would be a naïve approach that would fail to recognize the novel's complexity and audacity. It constitutes a rhetorical exercise that critiques as sharply anything in Dickens' or Gaskell's catalog the social inequity which was the cornerstone of both the class and rank systems. Despite the seeming clarity of his argument in the preface, Hardy's claim ultimately stands as an oxymoron. All "impressions," because of their inherently subjective nature, also

constitute "arguments." The two go hand-in-hand. Even if *Tess* was "intended to be neither didactic nor aggressive" – an unlikely event – it clearly makes an "argument" (x). Indeed, it makes a series of them, and to see this, look no further than very title page of the text with its defiant, unapologetic assertion that Tess is a "pure woman." In its portrayal of the coming together of social classes, *Tess* does more than merely reflect the world surrounding its author. Through the interactions between Tess and Alec, it condemns the two social systems that had dominated Britain for centuries, and with the implied union of Angel and Liza-Lu that closes the text, it also asserts a vision, albeit a tentative and incomplete one, of the nation's future.

In doing so, *Tess* fulfills one of the basic goals of inter-class connection because the emergence of that phenomenon as a defining feature of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British fiction represents an attempt to re-imagine and re-establish social roles in a culture that had changed rapidly as a result of such factors as industrialization, colonization and economic growth. In the tradition of Emile Zola's "Le Roman expérimental," these texts place members of disparate social classes in contact with each other as a means for suggesting a new order that will support – or perhaps contain – them. As this dissertation moves forward and other texts are considered, it will become clear that in terms of its method for presenting inter-class connection, Hardy's novel stands apart for the simple reason that it does not fully embrace objectification as a strategy for supporting the development of its narrative. Those subsequent chapters will also show, however, *Tess* questions stereotypes and prejudices regarding class identities and class structures to a far greater extent than either *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or *New Grub Street* do; only "The Garden Party" is as critical of social class. *Tess* achieves this

oppositional stance despite its reticence regarding objectification and its willingness to exploit Victorian formal practices in its presentation of inter-class connection, a clear tribute to Hardy's skill as a writer, his sense of irony and the deep despondency that underscores the novel.

NOTES

[1]   Ragussis takes for his subject matter "those acts in fiction that have as their object a name" and argues that "such acts are the means and ends of the characters in fiction and as such lay bare a novel's deepest levels of plot" (3). Reaching back as far as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, he works on a much broader canvas than O'Toole. Despite the wide range of texts that he studies, *Tess* stands out markedly from all of the others because, he argues, it constitutes a "crucial rupture in the novelistic tradition" (135) that does not allow "the recuperation of naming under the sponsorship of fiction" (16). For her part, O'Toole draws a great deal from Ragussis's work, but she does not merely focus upon a single Hardy text as he does and instead examines the entire range of the author's narrative output, as well as some of his poetry. She concludes that genealogy represents a "privileged theme in Hardy's fictional production" (13). Her study brilliantly explores the ways in which family histories drive narratives and also the ways in which family histories themselves become / are both narratives and fictions.

[2]   See especially "Tess: The Making of a Pure Woman" by Mary Jacobus, *Thomas Hardy's Women and Men: The Defeat of Nature* by Anne Z. Mickelson, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* by Rosemarie Morgan, "'Men's Words' and Hardy's Women" by Adrian Poole, "Tess and the Subject of Sexual Violence: Reading, Rape, Seduction" by Ellen Rooney, and "History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*" by Kaja Silverman.

[3]   Ellen Rooney, for instance, addresses the question of rape in "Tess and the Subject of Sexual Violence: Reading, Rape, Seduction." She uses Catharine A. Mackinnon's argument that although the law makes a seemingly sharp distinction between rape and seduction, in practice that difference is often unclear because of radically different perceptions by the parties involved, as the starting point for her own argument regarding what she views as an essential contradiction in *Tess*. She sees the novel trying to

support two antithetical claims: "Tess is pure because she …[has] been raped against her will *and* Tess is pure because she remains 'unsmirched,' despite her seduction" (464). Her reading is both perceptive and well-argued, yet it never touches upon issues of class difference and how they can shape perceptions of the sexual encounter between Alec and Tess.

[4]   Read in an historically specific context, the presence of these examples clearly alludes to the public concern over the buying and selling of names and titles that was beginning to gain momentum in England at the time of *Tess*'s initial publication. Such purchasing had occurred in Britain for nearly 200 hundred years, and in his study *The Aristocracy in England 1660 – 1914*, J.W. Beckett reports that Joseph Addison had "commented scathingly on the practice" as early as 1714 (94). But, general public dissatisfaction did not appear until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Up until that point, land had long been the primary criterion for the distribution of honors, which were generally the prerogative of the Crown. By the 1880's however, the infusion of new wealth into Britain from colonial interests and industrial production, coupled with the growing power of the office of the Prime Minister and Parliament at the expense of the Monarch, began to dramatically change the system of royal recognition.   As David Carradine notes in *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, "New forms of wealth and new people in power demanded (and received) status and recognition and profoundly affected the whole ethos of public life" (298). The development of the party system put patronage in the hands of the Prime Minister and preference was no longer tied to the possession of land. Instead, it was given increasingly in recognition of public service, to what L. G. Pine refers to as "good party men" (*The Story of the Peerage* 251).

Certainly at first glance, such democratization would seem to constitute a positive development, but as early as the 1880's, it resulted in the emergence of a "black market" which dealt in the awarding of titles simply for financial support: "some of those who had accumulated vast new fortunes acquired their titles as they acquired their houses: they paid for them" (Carradine 298). Public dissatisfaction over the practice came to a head with the Maundy Gregory scandal of 1918 which forced the passage of the Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act in 1925, but rumblings were already in the air as early as the 1890's.

[5]   Note that here Durbeyfield is not actually offering up the d'Urberville name, which Alec already has control of, but rather the title of "Sir." Symbolically, the difference between those two items is actually quite substantial and will be examined in detail later in this analysis. But functionally, they are

essentially the same because both serve to identify Durbeyfield specifically. Indeed, after discovering his connection to the d'Urberville past, he comes to refer himself primarily as "Sir John."

[6]   Although never explicitly stated, the novel clearly implies that these advantages stem at least in part from Tess's familial connection to the upper classes. This practice situates the novel within a tradition in British fiction that stretches from Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* back to Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and beyond in which displaced members of the upper classes can be discerned by their "naturally" superior physical and intellectual qualities.

[7]   Asa Briggs sparked the first debate over the fundamental difference between the terms class and rank in his essay "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth Century England," wherein he argues that prior to the "rise of modern industry" in the late-18th and early 19th centuries, authors concerned with society "spoke of 'ranks,' 'orders' and 'degrees'", while they reserved the term class for "a number of people banded together for educational purposes" (43). Although, as Patricia Ingham has noted, his basic model is perhaps too simplistic, the study nonetheless remains an important starting point for anyone interested in this issue.

[8]   See, for instance, Tess O'Toole's *Genealogy and Fiction in Hardy* 1 – 2.

[9]   The discussion of Angel's experiences overseas appears at the end of the sixth "phase" of *Tess*. This section bears the title "The Convert" and given that it opens with Alec's temporary transformation to an evangelical preacher, the label serves primarily as a bitterly ironic reference to his false repentance. But clearly, Angel is a "convert" too and a genuine one at that. He returns from Brazil having drastically altered his opinion of Tess, and he remains committed to his new vision of her for the remainder of the novel.

[10]   The narrative twice refers to Angel as a "skeleton" after his return from Brazil. The first instance comes several pages earlier when he enters his parent's home: "You could see the skeleton behind the man, and almost the ghost behind the skeleton" (290).

[11]   Note that not only does Angel venture overseas, a dangerous act by any standards, he travels to a particularly corruptive colonial environment because Brazil was a Roman Catholic country which stood conspicuously outside the British Empire. Indeed, the novel goes out of its way to call attention to this fact. When Angel announces his intention to emigrate to Brazil, his mother responds with mortification: "Why

they are all Roman Catholics there, surely!" (205). Granted, her reductive use of "all" establishes Mrs.

Clare as conventional and narrow-minded and makes her an easy target for light, ironic mocking by the

text, but her statement also does foreground the alien nature of the environment which her son is about to

enter.

CHAPTER TWO

**The Aesthetic, The Homoerotic, Class Interaction and Textuality In
Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray***

Introduction & Overview

Having begun amidst the humble village life of Hardy's Wessex, my examination

of inter-class connection now shifts its focus to the effete, upper-class environs of Oscar

Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. First published serially in *Lippincott's*

Monthly Magazine in July of 1890 and then reissued in a substantially-revised bound

version by Ward, Lock and Company in April of 1891,[1] the story centers on the exploits

of Dorian Gray, a wealthy young man whose wish for eternal youth is mysteriously

granted. Although it features elements of the supernatural and many of its depictions of

upper and lower class society are caricatures, this text nonetheless emerges as a

participant in the phenomenon of inter-class connection because it portrays substantive

interactions between members of disparate social classes. The vast majority of those

cases center around Dorian, a man who pays little heed to social boundaries and

repeatedly trades his sumptuous surroundings for the thrill of London's seediest sections.

Among his numerous exploits, the novel details explicitly a late-night journey to the

docks in search of opium and two affairs with lower-class women. It also hints at sexual

relationships with disgraced, upper-class men. Thus, Jody Price's assertion that "Wilde

crossed class barriers; he refused to be contained" applies equally well to Dorian (9).

Although there are many instances of inter-class connection within the text, the

most important is the first, Dorian's short-lived infatuation with a poor actress named

Sibyl Vane. This chapter considers the novel's treatment of Sibyl in great detail because

she serves as the novel's primary tool for accommodating the presence of the homoerotic

triangle that emerges between Dorian, his defacto advisor Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward, the artist who paints the infamous picture that provides Dorian with everlasting beauty. It uses the proposed marriage between Dorian and Sibyl to foster homoerotic desire between the three men and then exploits the class-based anxieties surrounding their engagement as a shield for that same desire.

That process, however, creates a tension within the text: the class-based components of Sibyl's identity must appear threatening, but not so threatening that she cannot exist within the narrative. To achieve this balance, the novel follows the general paradigm for inter-class connection that I have proffered by undertaking a clearly-defined, two-component strategy of objectification. This text distinguishes itself from all of the others considered by this study by constructing subjectivity in completely aesthetic terms. It attempts to transform Sibyl from a common actress into an object of art. That process occurs through language that casts her as a religious icon and through discussions that relentlessly conflate her with the Shakespearean heroines she portrays. Even though *Dorian Gray* actually predates *Tess* by a full year,[2] it appears second in this study because it embraces the possibilities inherent in that transference. The doubt and anxiety embodied in Hardy's self-consciously undermined strategy of objectification are nowhere to be found here. Despite such acceptance, objectification still cannot be sustained over the entire text. Once it does break down, Sibyl is summarily dispatched from the text, afterwhich Basil, Dorian and Lord Henry are never seen together again. Thus, *Dorian Gray* also adheres to the other primary component of my general paradigm for inter-class connection: in lieu of objectification, turn-of-the-century texts follow the general pattern of Victorian fiction by resolving class interaction through plot machinations.

By focusing on class-based issues, this chapter's analysis touches on an aspect of Wilde's work that has been essentially ignored by recent critics.[3] Thanks to famously provocative statements such as "no artist has ethical sympathies" he has long been seen as the embodiment of "art for art sake" aestheticism. Even today, as Price has noted, many readers still remain reluctant to modify the vision of Wilde as *über*aesthete and recognize the social and political commitment in his works (6). In his extremely useful study of Wilde scholarship during the 1990's entitled *Oscar Wilde: Recent Research*, Ian Small indicates that this perception is changing somewhat, due primarily to studies focused on three broad categories: "the 'gay' Wilde, the 'Irish' Wilde, and 'Wilde and Consumerism'" (3). This chapter seeks to further shake Wilde free from the aesthetic yoke which has bound him by inserting class-based issues into that general critical discussion.

Of course, care must be taken when reading *Dorian Gray* as an exercise in social commentary because this is clearly not realist fiction. Dorian's very existence – and therefore the text itself – rests upon the fanciful wish that grants him eternal youth and transfers his sins to Basil's portrait. More importantly, many of the social tableaus that Wilde constructs in the novel, particularly the upper-class dinner parties that Dorian attends and the domestic life of the Vanes, appear so stereotypical that they verge on the parodic. That said, even though Wilde is clearly making no attempt to present a nuanced and more-or-less accurate reflection of turn-of-the-century British culture in the same way that authors like Hardy, Gissing and Woolf do, *Dorian Gray* remains very much a social text, albeit one that operates within a different genre than all of the others examined here.

Having said all of that, the central role that inter-class connection plays in the structuring of *Dorian Gray* and the development of its rhetorical agenda is most evident only when the two versions of the text are compared with one another. I, therefore, begin my analysis with a consideration of the factors that motivated Wilde to amend the novel. Despite the fact that Donald Lawler has proven otherwise in his study *An Inquiry Into Oscar Wilde's Revisions to <u>The Picture of Dorian Gray</u>*, most readers and critics have long assumed that concerns over censorship drove Wilde to make the changes that he did. I draw upon aspects of Lawler's work and several other critics to establish that actually a multiplicity of reasons drove Wilde's revisions. They did not stem from a single factor. It is clear, however, that although the emendations removed the most overt homoeroticism from text and obscured much of what remained, the novel version actually features a more fully realized and pervasive homoerotic presence. To ascertain the textual mechanism by which that expansion occurs, in the second portion of the chapter, I undertake a detailed comparison of the large-scale plot changes that Wilde made for the 1891 version, the overwhelming majority of which were additions.[4] In doing so, an unmistakable pattern quickly emerges: all of the changes connect back to the figure of Sibyl, all address issues of inter-class connection, and all employ class-based anxieties centered around the figure of James Vane, Sibyl's brother, to help shield the presence of homoerotic elements. Together, those aspects confirm both the functional importance of Sibyl to the development of the text as a whole and the extent to which the homoerotic is immersed in the discourse of social class.

Such textually-focused analysis constitutes an aspect of *Dorian Gray* scholarship that has been woefully lacking for quite some time. Over thirty years ago, Lawler

recognized this need and argued that "… there must be even more attention given to primary scholarship of a bibliographical and textual nature" ("The Manuscript of *Dorian Gray*" 125). With Norton's publication in 1988 of Lawler's critical edition of *Dorian Gray* that contains both versions of the text, the *Lippincott's* version is now easily accessible and comparing the two is quite simple. Despite this development, very little specific textual analysis of the novel has appeared over the past fifteen years. The only book-length study of the two versions is Lawler's previously mentioned work *An Inquiry Into Oscar Wilde's Revisions of <u>The Picture of Dorian Gray</u>*. Although extremely valuable from an informational perspective, it is ultimately too narrowly focused on chronicling specific textual changes and attempting to discern the rationale behind them to provide useful, thematically focused criticism. This chapter's examination of Sibyl's role in the revisions takes initial steps toward filling the gap in textual studies, but much work remains to be done.

The second half of this chapter builds off the class-based textual findings of the first half and establishes the central role that Sibyl plays as a facilitator of homoerotic desire within *Dorian Gray* by placing the work into the context of my general model of inter-class connection. This text contributes to the overall understanding of that phenomenon in two primary ways. First, by shifting Sibyl's identity completely to the realm of the aesthetic, it suggests a new context for the practice of objectification. That transference confirms my assertion that objectification emerged in as a general practice in turn-of-the-century fiction thanks in large part to the growth of advertising spectacle and the growth of commodity culture in the 1880's and 1890's since recent studies have shown that the aesthetic movement itself constituted a reaction against those same two

factors.[5] Second, *Dorian Gray* confirms the central role that a text's resolution of class

interaction plays in shaping its rhetorical stance. As noted above, the novel does adhere

to my basic model for inter-class connection by reverting to plot machination when the

strategy of objectification focused on Sibyl collapses. Her suicide follows immediately

after her deliberately horrible performance as Juliet confirms her status as merely a "third

rate actress with a pretty face" (70).   Her demise is obviously calculated to win approval

from those middle-class audiences that would otherwise recoil from the novel's

homoerotic subtext.

Overall, my analysis of inter-class connection in *Dorian Gray* as it relates to the

textual history of the work reveals that great care must be taken when using terms like

"subversive" and "condemning" as Price does to describe the novel because its

oppositional stance comes with a definite price.[6] Any study which seeks to establish the

text as a transgressive work that champions the role of a marginalized group must also

recognize that the novel itself is a marginalizing force in terms of social class.   My

reading directly opposes Regenia Gagnier's argument in *Idylls of the Marketplace* that

Dorian Gray embodies "how decadence in British literature should be understood"

because of its "distance from and rejection of middle-class life" (65).   Now, the middle-

classes are indeed physically excluded from the text since the action within it oscillates

between the decidedly upper-class world of Dorian, Lord Henry and Basil and the squalor

and poverty of the London docks and the Vane's East End lodgings with no middle

ground to speak of.   But, that group does remain a clear, if tacit, presence because the

treatment of Sibyl and James Vane exploits their stereotypical class-based prejudices.

Given the long-held perception of the author as a social dissident who embraced a

deliberately provocative dandy persona, it may be difficult to imagine him as soliciting middle-class approval. Yet, even Wilde himself famously suggested that *Dorian Gray* has a "moral" that is "all too apparent." Although he located that moral in the final fate of Dorian himself, the pattern of development in the text's presentation of and resolution to class interaction suggests that its underlying message is actually a warning against transgression of social boundaries by members of the lower classes. But, by thus consciously manipulating stereotypes of class, Wilde proved able to challenge stereotypes of sexuality.

Revising *Dorian Gray* – Underlying Causes and Misconceptions

As mentioned above, neither Wilde's revising process for *Dorian Gray*, nor the revisions themselves have ever received adequate critical attention, even with the publication of the Norton edition in 1988. This avoidance probably stems from a combination of factors. To begin with, since the emendations entailed the removal of a great deal of explicitly homoerotic material, it has been widely accepted that they were simply made in response to fears of public outcry and censorship stemming from Wilde's three trials. Presumably, critics have assumed that little more needed to be said on the matter. As will become clear, however, that view is incorrect. Such misunderstanding is bolstered by the fact that scholars have little historical information regarding Wilde's composition and revising of the novel. As Lawler notes in *An Inquiry*, "Very little is known about the actual composition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (9). Moreover, even if the author had commented extensively on his writing process, any insights given on the matter would be suspect at best, since like Lord Henry, he was often a "willful

paradox." When the available factual information is examined in conjunction with the text itself, however, several sources of motivation for Wilde do become clear, and at least one other can be excluded.

The revisions to *Dorian Gray* stem from four primary factors: Wilde hoped they would convince his publishers, Ward, Lock and Company, to produce a hard-cover edition of the novel; he sought to improve the text as a literary work; Wilde's resistance to the detection of homoerotic content in his work produced a program of self-censorship that excised much of the overt homoeroticism from the text; and he sought to expand the homoerotic elements within the book by fostering and then resolving anxieties surrounding class-interaction. The first of those elements, Wilde's financial considerations regarding the text, is a straightforward affair that Lawler has already discussed at length (*An Inquiry* 83), and it will not be revisited here. Before addressing the other three, however, note that an obvious potential reason for the revisions is conspicuously absent. Although many have assumed that Wilde made the changes solely as a defense against the charges of indecency that were leveled at him, this cannot be the case. As Lawler has proven, Wilde began revising the text in preparation for the novel, long before the *Lippincott's* version, the version eventually used by the prosecution at trial, ever appeared in print (*Ibid*. 2 – 3). Thus, Lawler argues quite correctly that the revisions were not made "as has commonly been supposed… in self-defense following the criticisms of the *Lippincott's* version" (*Ibid*. 2).   For her part, Isobel Murray echoes much of his essential argument when discussing specifically the development of Basil Hallward over the two versions: "… it is too easy to dismiss the changes Wilde made in his character as severely practical, made for reasons of safety and to remove overt

suggestions of homosexuality from the book. Of course, this may well have played a part

in Wilde's complex motivation…. But, I think it is clear that the changes made are more

far-reaching than this" (228).

Those "far-reaching" issues of which Murray speaks are questions of literary and

artistic merit. They represent the second factor driving Wilde's revisions to *Dorian*

Gray, and their importance must not be overlooked. Putting aside momentarily the socio-

political implications of Wilde's emendations, there is no doubt that when considered

from a purely literary perspective – if such a thing exists – in changing the novel, Wilde

vastly improved it. The book version has more engaging and suspenseful action, the

relationships between the characters, especially Dorian and Lord Henry, are more fully

developed, the temporal progression is more believable, and there is a far greater sense of

the extent of Dorian's depravity, which make his final demise much more poignant. To

locate Wilde's motivation for revising the text solely in questions of homoeroticism or

catering to public taste would deny him the credit he clearly deserves as a literary

craftsman. As Murray notes, "… Wilde was aware of and corrected many structural

defects in the early version, and that he did this with immense care, ingenuity and

patience" (226). Indeed, in Lawler's view, aesthetic considerations are of paramount

importance to understanding the changes to the novel: "… it is possible to classify all the

important revisions made by Wilde as inspired by an artistic purpose – to make over the

implicit moral of the story so as to produce an aesthetic effect rather than a didactic one"

(4). Recent critical discussions of *Dorian Gray* have largely overlooked the literary /

artistic elements of the text in favor of those aspects directly related to sexuality and

censorship. This stands as an unfortunate development because clearly, Wilde revised

the novel, in part, to strengthen it as a literary work.

That said, it would be equally misguided to suggest that concerns over

homoeroticism played no role in the revising process, and here is where Lawler's

fundamental argument in *An Inquiry* breaks down. Taking Wilde's early revision date as

his ultimate justification, he attempts to read all of the changes, including the drastic

reworking of Basil's overt attraction to Dorian, as primarily literary in nature:

> We know that Wilde had been seriously at work from the first suppressing
>
> the book's original overt homosexuality. In most cases the offensive
>
> passages shown above in the notes were cut because of their mawkish and
>
> sentimental writing as much for their affront to contemporary moral
>
> standards. The purging of this element from the book, therefore, was not
>
> initially in response to the outrage of the press; and it was begun for
>
> artistic reasons (65)

As noted before, the timetable provided by the textual evidence at hand proves that the

revisions to the text could not initially have come as a result of public pressure. But, it is

also impossible to attribute all of the revisions to Wilde's concern over "mawkish and

sentimental writings." Simply too much has been cut away for that to be the case.

It remains, therefore, to find other motivating factors. A recent study by William

Cohen of Wilde's resistance to those readings of his works that detected the presence of

homosexual elements within them suggests the possibility of a program of self-

censorship. Lawler's argument rests upon an implicit assumption that Wilde would only

purge the homoerotic elements in *Dorian Gray* in response to external influence. He

does not consider the possibility that Wilde would do so for purely internal reasons. In
Sex Scandal however, Cohen's analysis reveals "protohomophobic retractions in Wilde's
work [including *The Picture of Dorian Gray*]" and suggests that "If Wilde is to be
celebrated as the founder of a gay male literary canon, it is crucial not to overlook the
finally pessimistic representation of evidently gay figures… in his work" (212).
Although Cohen does not see Wilde as being anti-gay,[7] his study does reveal the presence
of a fundamental ambivalence toward the homoerotic within Wilde's writings. Although
the extent of that attitude's influence upon the final version of *Dorian Gray* must remain
entirely speculative, it certainly provides a compellingly logical reason for the scaling
back of Basil's most demonstrative displays of affection for Dorian.

Although all of the preceding reasons clearly played roles in the development of
Dorian Gray, further analysis is still required because none of them can adequately
account for the dramatic macro-level expansions that the text underwent. To discern the
fourth major factor driving the revisions to the novel, note first that despite the excisions
to Basil's language and the ambivalence within Wilde himself that those deletions may
signify, the homoerotic presence in the book version of *Dorian Gray* is actually
strengthened overall. Important aspects of it are developed more fully, and a space has
been carved out where it could reside relatively secure from a hostile Victorian public.[8]
Fittingly, it is Basil, the subject of the greatest censorship in the serial version, who
provides the key to discerning this process. In the opening scene of the text, he tells Lord
Henry that "I have grown to love secrecy.… The commonest thing is delightful if only
one hides it" (9). Thanks to Wilde's additions to the text, the homoerotic is indeed
hidden more carefully in the 1891 edition, but it is also shown operating in a wider social

context.   As both Murray and Lawler have noted, the additional scenes at the Vanes' home, the docks, Selby Royal and Lord Henry's Aunt Agatha's provide a more complete and balanced picture of British society, even though the middle-classes still remain conspicuously absent (Murray 224; Lawler *An Inquiry* 85).   Similarly, as will be shown, the relationship between Lord Henry and Dorian is contextualized to a much greater extent and given a sense of life. Along with this aspect, in the *Lippincott's* version, Lord Henry's character plays a far more detached and Mephistopholean role, while in the novel version that becomes mixed with innuendo and hints of attraction. Even the extensive deletions to Basil's language may have produced a positive effect. Gagnier suggests that the changes make Basil "more pathetically enthralled with Dorian," but as a direct result, "Members of the homosexual community could read *Dorian Gray* sympathetically, for characters like Hallward were a staple of their literature" (*Idylls* 61). As a forum for presenting a homoerotic triangle that challenges the heteronormativity of late-Victorian culture, the novel version does indeed constitute, as Price suggests, "a strengthening of Wilde's transgressive aesthetic" (76). As the next section's examination of the specific expansions to the narrative demonstrates, however, that "strengthening" rests squarely on the shoulders of Sibyl's relationship with Dorian and the class-based anxieties that attend it.

Wilde's Burgeoning Text – Social Class and the Growth of *Dorian Gray*

In the novel version of *Dorian Gray*, the first added scene that a reader encounters comes in chapter three, and it entails the visit that Lord Henry pays to his uncle, Lord Fernor, in an attempt to gain further information about Dorian. The old man reveals that

Dorian's mother, Maragret Devereux, created an immense social scandal by "running away with a penniless young fellow, a mere nobody." Unable to handle the shame associated with the affair, Lord Kelso, Dorian's grandfather, paid a man to engage Dorian's father in a duel and kill him. Despite efforts to cover up the act, rumor of these machinations caused further controversy and left Kelso a social outcast. His daughter never spoke to him again, and she died a year later (31).[9] By including the encounter, Wilde provides a crucial insight into Dorian's character lacking from the *Lippincott's* version since the scene reveals that his affair with Sibyl is a reenactment of his parents' behavior.   Thus, although Basil and Lord Henry express surprise when they receive word of his involvement with the young actress, the relationship should actually be expected to some degree as Dorian is merely following the example set for him. Such repetition, in turn, underscores the compulsive allure of lower class culture that the novel portrays and exploits throughout its pages.

In its focus on class-based anxiety, this scene establishes a rhetorical and thematic pattern that then recurs throughout all of the other large-scale additions that Wilde made to the text. Indeed, when the changes made for the 1891 book edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are examined carefully, three basic points become clear:

1)	All of the additions to the 1891 edition foreground cases of inter-class connection.

2)	Those cases of inter-class connection are always strategically located to help mollify elements of homoerotic desire within the text.

3)	All of the additions to the 1891 edition can be traced back, either directly or indirectly, to Sibyl Vane.

Together, these three assertions reveal the fourth primary factor driving Wilde's revisions to the novel: he sought to expand the homoerotic elements within the book by fostering and then resolving anxieties surrounding class-interaction. To provide specific support for the three assertions I have made above, a detailed textual analysis of each of Wilde's six additional chapters follows.[10] The little textual scholarship on *Dorian Gray* that does exist to date ignores overwhelmingly these expansions to the narrative.[11] But, given that the additions constitute the bulk of the large-scale changes to the novel version, they mandate careful attention.

Chapter Three:

Chapter three serves to establish the initial connection between homoerotic desire and social class that underscores the book version of *Dorian Gray*. Because it is the only added chapter which comes prior to Sibyl's first appearance in the text, her character does not directly affect the narrative here. This would seem to contradict the third assertion made above; however, symbolic suggestions of her presence can still be easily detected within this section. Lord Henry's visit to his uncle, which dominates the first half of this chapter, has already been discussed above and will not be revisited. Instead, my analysis focuses upon the remainder of the chapter in which Lord Henry attends a luncheon at his Aunt Agatha's residence.

Within the banter focused upon general issues of social reform that ensues around the dinner table between the hostess, Lord Henry, Mr. Erskine and Sir Thomas, reference is clearly made to the specific details of Sibyl's situation. Sir Thomas's argument that "the East End is a very important problem" not only alludes to the site of her performances, it also establishes that area as the locale of crisis (36). Clearly, for the

narrative of *Dorian Gray*, the East End does indeed become a "very important problem" because essentially all of the narrative conflicts within the text have their roots in Dorian's affair with the young actress. Moreover, after Sibyl's death, many of his illicit activities, particularly the vice of opium, will draw him back to the docks. Lord Henry's cynical reply that the "problem" of the East End is "the problem of slavery" then makes the connection to Sibyl explicit because of her financial bond to Mr. Isaacs (*Ibid*.). Ultimately, these subtle allusions serve to establish Sibyl as a presence in the chapter, at least symbolically, and foreshadow her impending encounter with Dorian.

This anticipation is crucial because it signifies the text's first attempt to employ anxieties surrounding questions of social class as shield for the portrayal of homoerotic desire. Sibyl herself will eventually fill that role from chapter four onward through the consternation that news of her engagement to Dorian produces. Here, however, it emerges in the banter between the various guests. Even as discussion at the dinner table fixates upon social issues, the underlying tension within the scene emerges between Dorian and Lord Henry. Conscious that the "eyes of Dorian Gray were fixed upon him" Lord Henry uses the young man's gaze as fuel for a "brilliant, fantastic, irresponsible" discourse that "charmed his listeners out of themselves" (38). He builds his argument around the derisive assertion that "the nineteenth century has gone bankrupt on an over expenditure of sympathy" (37). Through Lord Henry's voice, Wilde clearly launches a vehement attack on insincere and misguided Victorian philanthropy. That contentious stance helps mollify the immediate effect which the discussion has upon Dorian. He finds himself captivated and pleads with Lord Henry as he is about to leave that "I must come with you" (39). The very opening scene of the text suggests that Lord Henry holds

a compulsive influence over Dorian, but the nature and extent of that power is not

adequately explored.   By adding this scene, Wilde develops the attraction between the

two further, and this constitutes a marked improvement over the serial version of the text

where the connection between the them seems out of context and without basis. As,

Murray correctly notes "There is no sense of development in Dorian's relationship with

Lord Henry [in the *Lippincott's* version], it is merely asserted" (224). That discontinuity

occurs because the serial version jumps from the conclusion of the initial meeting

between the two men (chapter two in both editions) to Dorian's announcement of his love

for Sibyl (chapter three in the serial edition and chapter four in the 1891 edition).

Although the details of the two men's experiences together are not – indeed cannot be –

revealed, the book version at least shows the reader that they have had contact and have

developed a relationship beyond their initial introduction.   That development occurs,

however, under the cover provided by a discussion regarding class relations, and the

social anxieties that underscore the debate clearly work to shift attention away from Lord

Henry's manipulation of Dorian's burgeoning attraction to him.

Chapter Five:

Without question, this chapter has the greatest influence upon *The Picture of

Dorian Gray*, both from a thematic and from a narrative perspective, of any that Wilde

added to the 1891 edition because it introduces the character of James Vane, Sibyl's

brother. Although he serves to expand the range of the text by bringing it to

environments wholly absent from the serial version, he has no effect upon the final

outcome of the narrative. With the exception of some relatively minor wording changes,

both the serial version and the book version conclude in exactly the same manner.

Therefore, since James does not affect resolution at the end of the text, it follows that Wilde added him to affect resolution within it. His crudely drawn, stereotyped character emerges as the primary locus for anxiety in the mid-section of the narrative, thereby mitigating the distress created by Dorian's own transgressive, fundamentally homoerotic, behavior. Initially, he shares that role with Sibyl and then assumes it completely once she commits suicide.

The first indication of the disturbance that James and Sibyl produce can be found in the chapter's strategic positioning within the overall narrative of the text. Consider the following schematic of the novel's chapter structures. (Note: Chapter three in the 1890 edition corresponds to chapter four in the 1891 edition because of the addition of the chapter which follows Lord Henry to Lord Fernon's and then to Lady Agatha's.)

1890 *Lippincott's* Serial Edition

<u>Chapter Three</u>:	Concludes with Lord Henry receiving word of Dorian's engagement to Sibyl via telegram.
<u>Chapter Four</u>:	Opens with Lord Henry personally informing Basil of Dorian's engagement to Sibyl.

1891 Book Edition

<u>Chapter Four</u>:	Concludes with Lord Henry receiving word of Dorian's engagement to Sibyl via telegram.
<u>Chapter Five</u>:	Opens with Sibyl and Mrs. Vane discussing Dorian. James Vane enters. The two siblings go to Hyde Park. Concludes with James preparing to leave for Australia.
<u>Chapter Six</u>:	Opens with Lord Henry personally informing Basil of Dorian's engagement to Sibyl.

In the book version, the Vanes now literally and figuratively come between the three men. This serves to disturb the resolutely homosocial and upper class environment that dominates the opening scenes of the original text. In that version, Sibyl does not physically enter the narrative until she performs before the three men as Juliet, and her only real voice comes in her final encounter with Dorian backstage. Her brother, obviously, does not enter at all. As will be discussed at length in the second half of the chapter, Sibyl's engagement ultimately acts as a catalyst for desire in the triangle of Basil, Dorian, and Henry. By joining the plot in the midst of that revelation, James serves as an anticipatory cover for the homoerotic attraction that the engagement promotes.

Although crucial to the thematics of *Dorian Gray*, the incorporation of James in chapter five presents a distinct challenge to the novel because it requires presentation of the Vane family in a personalized context. Subsequent discussion will establish that the text undertakes a strategy of objectification with Sibyl that casts her as an utterly externalized figure who lacks interiority. Depicting her in the relatively intimate setting of a private, domestic space threatens to undermine that process, and therefore, the novel must strike a careful balance. Although both the narrative voice and Sibyl's own discourse do provide details of her life in this chapter that are conspicuously absent from the *Lippincott's* edition, their presentation borders on the fanciful and allegorical. During the discussion between the mother and daughter which opens the chapter, the narrator speaks of the young girl possessing the "joy of the caged bird" and being "free in her prison of passion" (51 - 52). She finds her herself trapped in that paradox of logic because of the influence that "Memory" and "Wisdom" have upon her reasoning (52).

The personification signified by the deliberate capitalization serves to mock her naive

thought process. She becomes a wanderer embarked on a perverse Bunyan-esque

journey, and her actions do nothing to contradict the narrative voice's judgment. She

does not even know the name of the man to whom she considers herself engaged and

instead insists upon referring to him as "Prince Charming."   Ultimately, even though

specific aspects of the young actress's private life are revealed here and she occupies a

greater physical presence in the novel, the ironic tone of the narrative voice and the

ridiculous nature of her own reactions actually serve to further the process of

objectification that dominates the first half of the text.   She remains a one-dimensional

character devoid of recognizable interiority.

Essentially the same statement applies to the figure of James Vane constructed in

chapter five. This is not a character sketch, but a caricature. He emerges as an

embodiment of upper-class preconceptions of working class characteristics. To begin

with, he is physically oafish: "He was thick-set of figure, and his hands and feet were

large, and somewhat clumsy in movement" (52). His grotesque nature is made even more

apparent when placed next to Sibyl. Immediately after his introduction, the narrator

notes that "He was not so finely bred as his sister. One would have hardly guessed the

close relationship between them" (53). Later, when they go walking in Hyde Park

together, the dichotomy is foregrounded again: "The passers-by glanced in wonder at the

sullen, heavy youth, who in coarse, ill-fitting clothes, was in the company of such a

graceful, refined looking girl. He was like a common gardener walking with a rose" (55).

Once again, the text is forced to strike a careful balance. Obviously for simple plot

purposes, the two must share a connection of birth. Moreover, for Sibyl to effectively

perform her role as a facilitator of homoerotic desire within the novel, a clear discrepancy in class must exist between her and Dorian. At the same time, the narrative cannot afford to suggest that he could be attracted to someone who displays the same relentlessly lower-class characteristics that James does. Sibyl must be low, but not too low. Therefore, the novel works to establish a clear distance between the two siblings.

To accompany James's rough appearance, the text provides him with an animalistic character, which is clearly constructed to exploit middle- and upper-class fears of lower-class attitudes. James the demonstrates anger and resentment of his social station that Fredric Jameson labels as *ressentiment* in *The Political Unconscious*. Initially, he displays such a distaste for what his mother labels the "society" of London that he claims he will relish never seeing the city again after he departs for Australia (53). This animosity grows markedly when he thinks of Dorian's relationship to Sibyl: "He [Dorian] was a gentleman, and he hated him for that, hated him through some curious race-instinct for which he could not account" (55). The suggestion that James possesses an innate sense of animosity, a "race instinct," implies that class antagonism is both fundamental and uncontrollable. The young man's anger goes beyond a simple protectiveness of his sister. Instead, he feels a "fierce, murderous hatred" of Dorian and threatens to kill him not once, but twice (58 ; 57, 59). The narrative voice constructs him as every gentleman's nightmare: the beastly, resentful worker, perpetually muddling about, eager to do him harm. Unlike Sibyl who is an object of desire, James is a source of antagonism. Philip K. Cohen describes him as an "angel of wrath" (125). The text, however, promotes those anxieties. Indeed, it never applies a strategy of objectification to James because his moments of inter-class connection with Dorian must seem as

disturbing and threatening as possible. Much like the class-based discussion at the dinner table in chapter three, he serves as a shield. He enters the text between Lord Henry's rumination over Dorian in chapter four that "It was a beautiful thing to watch him. With his beautiful face, and his beautiful soul…" (49) and Basil's expression of dismay in chapter six at the impending marriage of the young man whom he adores. The class-focused antipathies that James is clearly designed to provoke overwhelm the homoerotic undertones that punctuate both Lord Henry's and Basil's discourse.

As a final point, it is important to note that chapter five repeats a trend begun in chapter three when it is learned that the Vane children, much like Dorian, are the products of a scandalous union that reached across dividing lines of social class. Unfortunately for the Vanes, because their father, not their mother, was wealthy, they did not enjoy the benefits of an upper-class upbringing as Dorian did. Having been hinted at early in the chapter during the conversation between Sibyl and Mrs. Vane, their background is confirmed when James confronts his mother about it prior to his departure (52, 59). Just like the information revealed in chapter three regarding Dorian's heritage, these details have no direct effect upon the progression of the text's overreaching narrative. Yet, Wilde was careful to include both sequences in the expanded edition. Clearly, they further establish Sibyl's lower class world as a simultaneously alluring and corrupting environment. The danger inherent in Dorian's desire to experience that world overshadows the desire homoerotic desire implicit in his relationships with Lord Henry and Basil.

Chapters Fifteen - Eighteen

This is the final added section of the 1891 edition that the reader encounters. Despite the fact that, chronologically, by the time narrative opens she has been dead for 18 years, Sibyl remains the driving force behind it because the action in these chapters revolves around James' ill-fated attempts to avenge her suicide. His death at the end of chapter eighteen completes the caricature of him constructed in chapter five. Like Sibyl's own death which will be considered at length later in the chapter, his fate is calculated to appease the middle-class desire for the maintenance of class separation and integrity. Not surprisingly, it occurs at a point where the novel's homoerotic undertones have been essentially diffused. No longer needed to provide cover for those elements, he is dispatched in a manner specifically designed to appease the middle-class audience most threatening to the text's essential thematics.

This section of the novel characterizes James as an animal on multiple levels. To begin with, he hunts Dorian with the violence and tenacity of a natural predator. Every time that James appears, he is literally hiding and lying in wait for his target. First, he accosts Dorian from a "dim archway" and thrusts him against the wall with a "brutal hand round his throat" (146). Later, he causes Dorian to faint when he peers through the window at Selby. Finally, he is accidentally killed while preparing to shoot Dorian from a thicket. Clearly, his relentless actions embody the narrator's warning in chapter five that James' hatred for Dorian stems from a fundamental "race instinct" that is based upon difference in social class. Even though James has embarked upon a quest for revenge, which would suggest that he acts out of a sense of family loyalty, the narrator's "instinct" comment comes prior to Sibyl's death. Clearly, in the eyes of the text, his fundamental

drive is an unstoppable urge to do harm to those of higher social standing. Dorian has merely provided James with an excuse to focus that energy specifically upon him.

At the same time, although James may be determined, he also displays an animal's lack of sophistication and perception because not only do all three of his attempts to kill Dorian fail, they ultimately lead to his own demise. His most notable blunder comes in chapter sixteen. After having his enemy literally in the palm of his hands, James lets Dorian go because he is tricked by his perpetually young countenance (147). The symbolic implications of the mistake are clear. Placed in the position of interpreter, James finds himself befuddled by art. Dorian's eternal youth stems from his wish to exchange places with Basil's portrait: "If it were I who were always to be young, and the picture that was to grow old!… I would give my soul for that!" (26). His face itself, therefore, becomes his crowning aesthetic achievement. Or, as Lord Henry tells him later, "I am so glad that you have never done anything, never carved a statue, or painted a picture, or produced anything outside of yourself! Your life has been your art" (165). When he is confronted with this "work of art," James is clearly unable to penetrate its abstraction. The encounter recalls an earlier discussion between Dorian and Basil regarding Sibyl's effect upon her audiences: "They weep and laugh as she wills them to do. She makes them as responsive as a violin" (66). Both cases tacitly suggest that the members of the lower classes are unable to independently form coherent interpretations of aesthetic experience, and they stand as further manifestations of the text's stereotypical manipulation of class identity.

That manipulation culminates in James' death in chapter eighteen, wherein the hunter becomes the hunted. Disgruntled with the lack of luck while out shooting at

Dorian's estate, Sir Geoffrey, an impetuous young lord, prepares to kill a rabbit. Finding himself "strangely charmed" by the animal's "grace of movement," Dorian attempts to prevent the shooting and undertakes his first selfless act since his affair with Sibyl. Unfortunately, his efforts are in vain because Sir Geoffrey kills both the hare and James, who has been lurking in the thicket waiting for a chance to strike. Thus, a single shot eliminates the only individual who could have made Dorian answer for his crimes. He is now a "free" man.

More importantly, Sir Geoffrey's marksmanship serves to symbolically reestablish the social order that James has been threatening since he first entered the text. When considered in terms of *Dorian Gray*'s rhetorical focus and its efforts to portray homoerotic desire, the importance of that shot cannot be overestimated. Jameson's reading in *The Political Unconscious* of George Gissing's early novel *Demos* provides a valuable touchstone for discussion of the rhetorical ramifications that stem from James' death. In Gissing's work, Jameson discerns an unmistakable "brutality and gratuitousness" in the fate constructed for Richard, the main character. After marrying a woman of a higher class, not only does Richard suffer defeat, he is methodically crushed in a process that marks the novel as "a virtual object lesson in snobbery, setting out systematically to show how irredeemable a working class character is, and how unsuitable for the social and cultural conditions of a different class situation" (198). Obviously in *Dorian Gray*, James is not trying to rise above his class position in the manner that Richard is. Yet, he is still trying to penetrate the upper class world, and the "plot twist" that Wilde creates with Sir Geoffrey's shot in order to protect that environment text enacts the same "brutality and gratuitousness." Portrayed as an animal,

James receives an animal's fate. He is summarily executed by a member of the upper classes for the threat he poses to the social structure. Although the shooting of James is so obviously constructed that it borders on the farcical, it is in fact utterly in keeping with the dismissive and degrading attitude toward him that the text demonstrates throughout.

Given that James appears only in the revised version of *Dorian Gray*, that stance must be seen as a calculated one.   The construction and eventual destruction of James constitutes a consciously pragmatic undertaking, one designed to placate a middle-class audience. Although no critics have focused specifically on the class-aspects of the text's revisions, at least two have acknowledged the author's cognizance of and willingness to cater to his readership. Michael Gillespie, for instance, suggests that "The publishing history of *Dorian Gray* in fact reveals… a disturbing readiness to emend his work to whatever degree necessary to accommodate the printing business's conceptions of public taste" (12).   Gillespie locates that "readiness" in author's ego, what he describes as Wilde's "open dependence on public taste and approval" (9). Although such concerns may have played a part, the structure of *Dorian Gray* and its rhetorical focus give greater credence to Price's explanation. She argues that "Wilde had to bow to public opinion to an extent in order to be heard at all" (84). In order to create a text that would challenge Victorian conceptions of sexuality, he had to craft one that would initially foster their fears of class transgression and then substantiate their fantasies of class separation and supremacy. Casting James as a crude, violent beast bent upon the destruction of Dorian accomplishes the first part of that process and having him shot while he hides in the bushes fulfills the second portion.

Without question, James' death reestablishes the dividing line of social class within the novel. After Sir Geoffrey kills him, the text never again ventures outside the spatial boundaries of the upper class world that Dorian inhabits, nor are any instances of inter-class connection narrated directly. In chapter nineteen, Lord Henry and Dorian do briefly discuss Dorian's affair with a young farm girl named Hetty, but that episode is related only through the lens of Dorian's memory, and even then, she – like Sibyl – is presented in purely aesthetic terms. With the shooting of James, the poor are kept safely at bay – except of course for those servants whose presence is required – and the novel is now free to progress to its conclusion, safe within the non-transgressive confines of upper class London society.

As a final testament to the connection between social class and the homoerotic in *Dorian Gray*, note that James' expulsion from the narrative coincides with the evaporation of homoerotic desire. He disappears in chapter eighteen because he is simply no longer needed. The triangle between Dorian, Lord Henry and Basil has been shattered. Basil, obviously, is dead, and the tone of the relationship between Dorian and Lord Henry has grown distant. Besides the scenes in this section which focus directly upon Dorian's connection with James, Wilde also added depictions of two upper-class social gatherings, both of which feature Lord Henry and Dorian. Although Lord Henry remains the "Prince of paradox" with his willfully contradictory amoralising, Dorian no longer finds himself captivated with the decadent philosophizing. Haunted by the murder of Basil and later by his fear of James, he is languid and resigned: "'I wish it were *fin du globe*,' said Dorian, with a sigh. 'Life is a great disappointment'" (138). The lack of connection between the two men is demonstrated most clearly when Lord Henry assures

his friend that "it is not in you, Dorian, to commit murder" (162). Unknowing as he now is, Lord Henry can no longer fulfill the role of Mephistopholean guide and tempter. He has become, as Price notes, "as unimportant in Dorian's story as Basil had [been] before" (93). Lord Henry's misjudgment comes in the middle of chapter nineteen, nearly at the conclusion of the text, but the beginning of the shift in their relationship can be clearly traced as early as chapter fifteen.

The dynamic that does occur between the two men in this section is actually primarily focused upon revealing Dorian's affair with the Duchess of Monmouth. Like James, she is a new addition to the 1891 edition, and she represents a match for Dorian that is resolutely normative across both gender and class lines. For his part, Lord Henry is cognizant of the displacement she has created. At the conclusion of the same conversation wherein he misjudges Dorian's capability for committing murder, he chides "Perhaps you are tired of Gladys? I thought you would be. Her clever tongue gets on one's nerves" (166). Ultimately, the relationship between the duchess and Dorian does not last, but it serves to essentially complete the suppression of the homoerotic element in the text. With that gone, James is no longer required as a locus for anxiety within the narrative. Therefore, he is summarily dispatched at the end of chapter eighteen in a manner that clearly punishes him for his attempt to subvert the established social hierarchy, even as it reaffirms the presence of that order. Once Dorian discovers the identity of James' corpse at the conclusion of chapter, the gap between the two published versions essentially closes. They end in almost exactly the same manner, and for the purposes of this chapter's analysis, there is no difference between them. In both cases, Dorian's "withered, wrinkled" body winds up "Lying on the floor… with a knife in his

heart" (170, 281). His journey to that point in the 1891 edition follows a very different path than in its predecessor, however.

Ultimately, the driving force behind those changes is Sibyl, and she represents the lynch pin in the relationship between class-interaction and homoerotic desire. Because she is a consistent presence in both versions of the text, discussion thus far has largely avoided her. The last half of the chapter, however, focuses upon the young actress and demonstrates how through her, *Dorian Gray* participates in the general phenomenon of inter-class connection. In particular, it demonstrates how class-interaction can serve as a catalyst for and not just a shield of homoerotic attraction. That argument begins with discussion of how the text builds unconscious desire through the aesthetic, the homoerotic and aspects of low culture.

The Aesthetic, The Homoerotic and The Lower-Class: Creating Desire

Dorian Gray establishes the connection between those three elements in its very first scene. The book opens in Basil's exquisite studio, the locale of artistic creation and a miniature aesthetic sanctuary where sight, sound and smell are all satiated. Entrance from the front is controlled by Parker, the painter's butler, while the rear is surrounded by a garden, laden with sensual stimuli. The "heavy scent of the lilac, or the most delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn" wafts into the room, along with the "sullen murmur of bees" (5). Lord Henry lounges on the corner of a "divan of Persian saddlebags" and catches the "gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum" (7). Stretched across the "huge window" of the room, "long tussore silk curtains" serve to hide the "dusty gilt horns of the straggling woodbine" which run through the garden

outside (*Ibid*.).   Although those objects all command the reader's attention, the one

which dominates the scene is a painting: "In the centre of the room, clamped to an

upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal

beauty" (*Ibid*.). That young man is, of course, Dorian and the painting is the namesake

of the book.   Although the scene features many effeminate aspects, it is a resolutely

homosocial environment and utterly devoid of female presence. Expecting to be painted

by Basil, Dorian joins the two men shortly afterward and quickly comes under the spell

of Lord Henry, whose conversation awakens in him a "mad curiosity" and "wild desire

to know everything about life" (42).   Thus raised, Dorian's new consciousness directs

itself to the primary elements within the room, the most obvious of these being the men

around him and the aesthetic objects which dominate the studio. Throughout the text,

Dorian pursues both with great fervor.

　　　Along with those two, however, a third element hovers in the background of the

scene, and it also quickly captures Dorian's imagination. The narrator closes the initial

description of Basil's studio by carefully noting that "The dim roar of London was like

the Bourdon note of a distant organ" (7). Thus, the affluent world is not entirely self-

contained. The crude environment of the city, what Dorian will later call "this grey,

monstrous London of ours with its… sordid sinners and its splendid sins," lurks in the

distance, relentlessly encroaching upon the refinement of the studio (42). For Dorian,

that presence becomes a siren's song, and over the course of the novel he finds himself

compulsively drawn to step outside of his upper-class existence and experience firsthand

elements of lower-class culture. The narrator speaks of a "little ill-famed tavern near the

Docks" (100) and "dreadful places near Blue Gate Fields" (109), an addiction to opium,

the ruined reputations of numerous young men, and an affair with a young farm girl named Hetty. In terms of the text's development and its rhetorical structure however, the most important instance of inter-class connection is Dorian's first, the abortive affair that he undertakes with Sibyl. In her character, the three primary desires reflected in the opening scene coalesce. The text transforms her into an aesthetic object and exploits her as a means for facilitating its portrayal of homoerotic content. By interrupting the triangle of Basil, Dorian and Lord Henry, she stimulates homoerotic desire, the social anxiety surrounding her impending cross-class marriage with Dorian then works to cover that desire and like James' shooting, her death is an overt appeasement of the middle-class desire for class integrity and stability.

To understand Sibyl's functional role within *Dorian Gray*, recognize first that she is a nexus of desire. All three of the primary components that comprise her identity in the text – her gender, her occupation and her socio-economic standing – constitute sources of attraction, and each are used by the novel. As a woman, she provides an obvious countervalence to the overwhelming maleness of the first three chapters of the text. Indeed, after having been immersed in Basil's thinly veiled pleas for Dorian's affection and Lord Henry's attempts to manipulate his character, to hear Dorian speak lovingly in chapter four of Sibyl's "little flower-like face, a small Greek head with plaited coils of dark-brown hair, eyes that were violet wells of passion, lips that were like the petals of a rose" comes as something of a shock (44). Whether Wilde included such clichéd, maudlin language in an effort to mock or placate the sentimentality of his audience is unclear. It is certain, however, that Sibyl's presence in the text provides Dorian with the

opportunity to openly pursue a romantic relationship that from the perspective of gender, conforms to the societal expectations of late-nineteenth century Britain.

At the same time however, her occupation and social standing combine to produce a compulsive desire that marks her as a threatening force. Her very presence in the text is a direct result of the corrupting banter that Lord Henry spews to Dorian at their first meeting. Laboring under a "passion for sensation," Dorian finds himself lost in a "labyrinth of grim streets and black grassless squares," where he eventually stumbles onto the "absurd little theater" in which Sibyl performs (42). Although his description of the setting and of the "hideous Jew" with "greasy ringlets" and a "vile cigar" who presides over it connote a sense of extreme revulsion, he attends a performance, but later has no memory of the driving force behind his decision: "To the present day, I can't make out why I did so" (43). His inability to articulate his motivation suggests the presence of an unconscious attraction that emerges only as a uncontrollable, inexplicable response. As discussed in the introduction to this study, the coming together of social class in turn-of-the-century fiction is repeatedly portrayed as a compulsive event, and *Dorian Gray* is no different.

Unable to stop himself from entering the theater, Dorian quickly finds himself obsessed with the young actress and eager to pursue a relationship contrary to the prevailing social expectations of the time. Even though most scholars agree that the Victorian era witnessed a growth in the respectability of the theater and a corresponding rise in the social position of its members, the overwhelming majority of people who worked in the theater remained lower-class and living in poverty.[12] Sibyl's own situation as depicted within the text reflects that reality and is far removed from the world of fame

and respectability enjoyed by the very limited number of actors and actress who did manage to achieve success and transcend the limits of their social class. Although Tracy Davis acknowledges in *Victorian Actresses as Working Women* that some male members of the aristocracy did view the theater as a "viable marriage market in which to shop," she also asserts that such unions were far from common and were greeted with disfavor: "[it would be] misleading to assert that class prejudice against such marriages gradually dissolved [during the latter portion of the 19th century]" (76). Textual evidence within the novel supports her view. After first hearing of Dorian's engagement, Basil exclaims, "think of Dorian's birth, and position and wealth. It would be absurd for him to marry so much beneath him" (60). Likewise, after Sibyl's death, Lord Henry assures Dorian that the "social mistake" in marrying her would have been "abject." (79). In the novel version of *Dorian Gray*, that sense of dread is enhanced by the inclusion of the scenes in chapters three and five that reveal Dorian and Sibyl's familial backgrounds. Both characters owe their existence from cross-class unions that were clearly "social mistakes."

Despite the social objections to Sibyl that are so readily apparent to Lord Henry and Basil, Dorian initially remains steadfast in his devotion to her. Lord Henry suggests that the behavior reflects a passion "remote from sense" (50). The text, however, makes it clear that Dorian's dedication stems from more than simple romantic lust and its consequences go far beyond simply his potential ostracization from society. Prior to Sibyl's final performance as Juliet, Dorian tells his two companions that "When she acts you will forget everything. These common, rough people, with their coarse faces and brutal gestures, become quite different when she is on the stage.… She spiritualizes them and one feels that they are of the same flesh and blood as one's self" (66). In this case,

to "forget everything" means specifically to forget the socio-economic division that separates him from Sibyl and gives rise to the sense of dread surrounding his planned marriage that both Lord Henry and Basil express. Note, however, that Dorian's reaction does not stem from sexual desire, but rather takes root in her acting. To Wilde, the actor is a creative artist. In "The Critic As Artist," he argues that "The actor is a critic of the drama. He shows the poet's work under new conditions, and by a method special to himself" (1033). Sibyl, therefore, emerges as a combination of the two primary desires that overwhelm him in the opening scene – the aesthetic and the lower classes – and this accounts for her power over him.

At the same time, it also marks her as a subversive presence because of the sense of shared identity with the "common rough people" that she evokes. That reaction actually reflects her own status because as an actress, she is a visible representation of the melding of the social hierarchy. Although lower class, she serves as the vehicle for access to a revered work of high culture – Shakespearean drama.[13] As will be discussed in the next section's examination of the strategy of objectification focused on Sibyl, the novel must work to downplay the class element of her identity. If left unchecked it would establish her as too disturbing a presence. Certainly, Lord Henry is appalled by the suggestion of commonality that her acting elicits from Dorian: "The same flesh and blood as one's self! Oh, I hope not!" (*Ibid.*). Given his love of sensational statements and provocative behavior, the prudishness of his response seems decidedly out of character, until one realizes that Wilde added it specifically for the 1891 novel edition. Much like the construction of James as a menacing lower-class figure, Lord Henry's disgusted reaction makes explicit the threat that Sibyl's presence on stage poses.

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Negotiating The Homoerotic Triangle

The text constructs Sibyl as a visible manifestation of Dorian's compulsive attraction for lower class culture so that she can serve at the focal point for accommodating the homoerotic triangle he shares with Lord Henry and Basil. She plays two very important roles in this process. To begin with, she serves as a catalyst for desire by disrupting Dorian's relations with each of the other men. After Dorian first tells Lord Henry of his obsession with the actress, his companion laments "That is the reason…that you never dine with me now" (47). Although Dorian counters the accusation by claiming "we either lunch or sup together every day," he then immediately declines an invitation to dinner because Sibyl is playing Imogen in *Cymbeline* that night (*Ibid.*). In keeping with his position of extreme ironic aloofness, Lord Henry refuses to succumb to the emotion of jealousy, yet Dorian's new relationship does produce a clear effect upon him:

> As he left the room, Lord Henry's heavy eyelids drooped, and he
> began to think. Certainly few people had ever interested him so much as
> Dorian Gray, and yet the lad's mad adoration of some one else caused him
> not the slightest pang of annoyance or jealousy. He was pleased by it. It
> made him a more interesting study (48).

Shortly after this passage, the narrator describes Lord Henry's belief that "Human life – that appeared to him the one thing worth investigating" (49), and he later tells Basil "If a personality fascinates me, whatever mode of expression that personality selects is delightful to me" (61). Playing the role of detached observer is the closest he comes to

being truly excited about anything. Dorian's affair with Sibyl, therefore, stimulates what passes for desire in Lord Henry simply because it makes Dorian "more interesting." Certainly, it sways him enough to accompany Dorian to see Sibyl perform, a trip he would most certainly not have taken under any other circumstances.

Fittingly, that journey provides the context for Basil's separation from Dorian. As the three men depart for the theater to watch the play, Lord Henry claims that there is insufficient room in his brougham and forces Basil to ride behind him and Dorian in a separate hansom (65). Given that broughams typically could accommodate four passengers, the incident marks a thinly-veiled ploy by Lord Henry to monopolize Dorian's attention. Predictably, Basil takes the snub hard: "A strange sense of loss came over him. He felt that Dorian Gray would never again be to him all that he had been in the past. Life had come between them.…" (65). Obviously, both Lord Henry and Sibyl play significant parts in the "life" that has sprung up between Basil and Dorian. Structural symmetry within the text, however, privileges her role. Basil's lamentation closes out a chapter that opens with him learning of Dorian's engagement, and thus the action is bookended by a relationship that is normative across gender lines.

The expected marriage between Sibyl and Dorian is, of course, not normative across class lines. In Basil's despair over Lord Henry's commandeering of Dorian, he alludes to this: "He could not bear this marriage, and yet it seemed to him to be better than many other things that might have happened" (65). That statement underscores the second primary role that Sibyl plays in accommodating the novel's homoerotic material. By foregrounding a relationship that challenges expectations of class, the text can obscure one that challenges expectations of gender. Those "other things" that Basil

alludes to are not, indeed cannot, be specifically delineated because they suggest an intimate relationship between Lord Henry and Dorian. That dynamic would have been even more threatening to Wilde's late-Victorian audience than a marriage that so clearly transgresses well-established boundaries of social class.

The process of class anxiety obscuring homoerotic anxiety occurs most dramatically in a series of three parallel voyeuristic experiences undertaken by Dorian, Sibyl and Lord Henry. The first of these occurs after a luncheon when Lord Henry tells Dorian that "All I want now is to look at life. You may come look at it with me, if you care to." (39). The invitation closes out chapter three, and not surprisingly, neither Dorian's presumed assent nor the details of their sojourn are ever narrated or alluded to again by the novel. Dorian, however, echoes Lord Henry's words early in chapter four when he speaks of the desire that continually drives him to the seediest sections of London: "You filled me with a wild desire to know everything about life… something seemed to throb in my veins. As I lounged in the Park… I used to look at everyone who passed by me and wonder, with a mad curiosity, what sort of lives they led" (42). Even though those solitary forays are also not narrated directly and come instead from Dorian's own recollections, their results are readily apparent in his affair with Sibyl. The parallels between Lord Henry and Dorian's statements establish Dorian's relationship with Sibyl as a symbolic representation for his relationship with Lord Henry, even as the class implications inherent in Sibyl's character shroud that connection. Those class overtones are then reinforced in chapter five when Sibyl and James act out a startlingly similar scene. Like Dorian, they venture to Hyde Park and "sit down and watch the smart people go by" (57). Because the novel's strategy of objectification denies Sibyl interiority, the

urges that overcame Dorian in the previous example are not felt by her but are instead transferred to the landscape that surrounds her: "The tulip-beds across the road flamed like throbbing rings of fire. A white dust, tremulous cloud of orris-root, it seemed, hung in the panting air" (*Ibid*.). Like the two before, this sojourn also centers around desire stemming from the allure of the gaze, and the careful use of "throb" connects it explicitly to Dorian's statement. As discussed, James represents an embodiment of the perceived threat from the lower classes, and the scene ends with him vowing repeatedly and loudly to kill Dorian if he ever harms his sister. James's presence in the final of three obviously-parallel scenes completes a chain of transference that begins with truncated implications of a homoerotic bond and ends with threats of violence by the poor against the rich.

Sibyl serves as the focal point of that process because she acts as the gateway for all of the elements of lower class culture that enter the novel. It is crucial to recognize, however, that in its presentation of her character, *Dorian Gray* must walk a tightrope. To act as a successful shield and thereby sustain the homoerotic element in the text, Sibyl herself must appear as a destabilizing force. But the same time, even as she is emerging as a threatening presence, she must also remain active within the text. Sibyl must be disruptive enough to cover the three men, but not so disruptive as to be immediately expelled from the novel. In order to establish this equilibrium, the text makes use of the tool that defines the presentation of inter-class connection in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British fiction – objectification.

Turning Life Into Art – The Objectification of Sibyl

Sibyl is objectified in *Dorian Gray* through depictions of her as a religious icon and by characters continually insisting that she exists only as the Shakespearean heroines

that she portrays on stage.[14] Both of those processes seek to transform her from the lower class actress that she actually is into an object worthy of Dorian's mad devotion. As with the discourse of commodification in *Tess* that was discussed in chapter one, the text's machinations here differ from characterization because Sibyl becomes depersonalized and abstract to the point that she exists as "surface and symbol" (to borrow a phrase from Wilde's preface) and utterly lacks any interiority. Thus, she approaches the status of object because her individual identity is completely stripped away. In formal logical terms, the operation equates to the following formulation:

$$\text{NOT Subject} \approx \text{Object}$$

Interestingly, although *Dorian Gray* is as a novella fascinated with physical objects, many of rare quality and exquisite composition, the strategy of objectification avoids making use of them. The text does not link Sibyl inextricably with tangible items, such as *Howards End* does with Leonard Bast and the umbrella and *Tess* does with the Durbeyfields and the d'Urberville bones and artifacts. Instead, in keeping with the narrator's assertion that "mere words" give "plastic form to formless things" both strategies of objectification operate through the agency of dialogue between characters (21). This use of speech to fabricate identity reflects Wilde's fundamental understanding of subjectivity, for as Gagnier notes in "Wilde and the Victorians," "… Wilde saw that the 'self' was not inevitably indubitable, rational and progressive, but was socially constructed. It was created through language…" (20).

The discussions that surround Sibyl shape an impossibly idealized conception of her, far-removed from her actual station in life and that vision has dramatic consequences for the novel as a whole. Indeed, Lord Henry realizes after her suicide that it is Dorian's

portrayal of the actress as "all the heroines of romance" which "holds the key to everything" that happens in connection to her (81). Both the construction of Sibyl as religious icon and the construction of her as Shakespearean heroine establish her as a figure who can evoke worshipful reactions in those who see her. Such stature reinforces her status as object because it foregrounds externality. Sibyl's influence upon others is evident, but nothing is learned about her. These processes do not indicate who she *is*, but rather what she *does*.

Moreover, although I have noted that my overall argument in this chapter contradicts Gagnier's argument in *Idylls of the Marketplace* regarding *Dorian Gray*'s status the prototypical decadent work due to its rejection of and separation from middle-class culture, these two linguistic strategies do reinforce her assertion. The iconographic vision of Sibyl that Dorian creates through his discussions of her presages his own secret conversion to Roman Catholicism that is revealed in chapter eleven. Both of those elements would certainly have seemed alien to the majority of English middle-class readers since they would have been primarily familiar with the teachings and practices of the official Anglican church and other Protestant sects. Similarly, although the works of Shakespeare were respectable from a middle-class perspective, the drama was certainly less geared to middle-class taste than either novels or poetry.

The linguistic connection between Sibyl and religion that appears in chapters four through nine of focuses on the communal aspects of religion that imply control of large groups of people. Dorian initiates this process when he proclaims to Lord Henry that "Sibyl Vane is sacred" (45). Mary Douglas notes in *Purity and Danger* that "sacred things… are to be protected from defilement" (7). But, such protection can only occur if

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everyone acknowledges the "sacred" nature of the object in question and works together to prevent it from becoming unclean. Therefore, Dorian's statement establishes the public nature of her character. After her death, Dorian again casts her in the role of icon when he tells Basil that "There is something of the martyr about her" (86). Given Dorian's fascination with the young actress, such effusions would seem unremarkable, except that he is hardly the only character to engage in the practice. With an obvious jibe at his friend's devotion, Lord Henry refers to Sibyl as his "divinity," while Basil agrees with Dorian that she has the power to "spiritualize one's age" and "give a soul to those who have lived without one" (66). Even Sibyl herself employs the linguistic paradigm of religion. While speaking with her brother, she declares that Mr. Isaacs has "preached me as dogma; tonight he will announce me as a revelation" (56). Here again, as with the concept of sacred, dogma connotes a recognizable code of religious doctrine that all followers must adhere to. Thus, Dorian exclaims "My God, Harry, how I worship her!" (47). Her power of command, however, extends far beyond merely controlling his infatuated gaze. On stage, she can make the audience "weep and laugh as she wills them to do" (66). Discourse within the text surrounding Sibyl repeatedly focuses on the externalized manifestations of religious practice, as opposed to the more personalized context of meditation and in doing so, it constructs her as icon.

Although these examples demonstrate Sibyl's ability to produce adoring reactions in others, none of them reveal anything about her as an individual. Indeed, Dorian locates the source of her power to affect transformation in the audience specifically within her "acting," not her own character. Only the fact that she is portraying someone / something other than herself allows her to make them "as responsive as a violin" (*Ibid.*).

Her existence becomes entirely symbolic. Although her exteriority is affirmed, she exists without any discernible interiority. This is the hallmark of objectification. It is essentially the antithesis of characterization.

Of course, religious figures are not the only ones who can become subjects of worship within a culture because celebrity of any kind breeds its own form of devotion. The text recognizes this and exploits Sibyl's occupation as an actress to further strip away her subjectivity. Characters, including herself, relentlessly conflate her with the Shakespearean heroines she portrays to the point that she effectively ceases to exist.[15] That process is most visible in those discussions of Sibyl which relate her to pairs of the roles that she portrays.[16] Dorian's initial description of her to Lord Henry is the first example of this linguistic pattern. He asserts that "One evening she is Rosalind and the next evening she is Imogen" (44).   Later in the same conversation, he reverts to the same basic strategy when trying to settle upon a date that the two can go and see her perform: "Tonight she is Imogen... and tomorrow night she will be Juliet" (47). After Sibyl's death, Lord Henry recalls how Dorian spoke of her as "Desdemona one night, and Ophelia the other" (81). It would be easy to dismiss these examples as merely a shared practice between the two men, except that Sibyl herself engages in it. She essentially repeats Dorian's own words when speaking to him after her final performance as Juliet: "It was only in the theater that I lived. I thought that it was all true. I was Rosalind one night and Portia the other" (69). Given that Sibyl has no access to the conversations between Lord Henry and Dorian, her embracing of the same grammatical structure suggests that it constitutes the general understanding of her basic position. Everyone sees her in just that way.

Even when characters are not using the two-part linguistic pattern described above, multiplicity is established in some way. For example, Lord Henry suggests that Dorian view Sibyl's suicide as a "scene from Webster, or Ford or Cyril Tourner" (82). Similarly, earlier in the text, Dorian tells Basil that "I have had the arms of Rosalind around me, and kissed Juliet on the mouth" (62). He then goes further and tells Lord Henry that "I left her in the forest of Arden, I shall find her in an orchard in Verona" (63). Note that Dorian's fixation extends far beyond the simple romantic idealization of a young man who has fallen in love for the first time. By crossing from metaphor, where "Sibyl Vane is *like* Rosalind" to "Sibyl Vane *is* Rosalind," the line between imagination and reality ceases to exist. By becoming "all the great heroines in the world in one," she becomes "more than an individual," and "more than an individual" is an overt rejection of individuality itself (47).

Especially in those cases where characters speak of her being "*Character X* one night and *Character Y* the next," these pairings of Sibyl with other roles suggest both a temporality and a progression, a movement from one persona to the next. With each successive representation of Sibyl her essential identity fades farther away.[17] Because of this process, Kerry Powell argues that "Dorian can locate no single, fixed identity behind this revolving wheel of selves" (187). But in fact, the effect is even more pronounced than that: the "whirl of selves" is no self at all. After hearing Dorian speak of Sibyl as Juliet and Imogen, Lord Henry asks the obvious question: "When is she Sibyl Vane?" (49). The answer is simple: "Never" (*Ibid*.). Her being is transferred completely to the realm of the aesthetic, or as Dorian will later tell her personally, "Without your art you are nothing" (70).   That transformation is the heart of objectification. The novel goes to

such lengths to facilitate it because in that form she is a presence worthy of the attention and devotion of a young member of the upper classes. Immediately before breaking with her, Dorian confesses: "You used to stir my imagination… you were marvellous… you had genius and intellect… you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art" (70). Objectification makes her seem like much more than just the "third-rate actress with a pretty face" that she is. It cannot, of course, actually change the fundamental reality of Sibyl's socio-economic position, but as I have argued from the outset of this dissertation, objectification is really a fictional slight-of-hand. It tries to shield or diffuse the anxieties that could stem from the crossing of class boundaries by either raising up or bringing down at least one of the participants. But, it can never eradicate those concerns entirely.

The strategy of objectification in *Dorian Gray* eventually falls apart when Sibyl rejects having the process thrust upon her. That collapse leads to her destruction, which, much like her brother's killing, is clearly constructed to earn approval from a middle-class audience. Having discerned the "hollowness, the sham, the silliness of the empty pageant in which I had always played, " and realized that "the words I had to speak were unreal, were not my words, were not what I wanted to say," Sibyl seeks to establish a discernible identity of her own (69 – 70). Unfortunately, in the context of Wilde's aesthetic philosophy, this places her in an untenable position. In "The Critic as Artist," he argues that "When a great actor plays Shakespeare… his own individuality becomes a vital part of the interpretation" (1034). Thus, Sibyl is trapped. As a result of the sustained program of objectification that dominates the first half of the text, she has no individuality to base her interpretations upon. She desires to establish a sense of her own

identity, but to do so, she can only resort to a deliberately stale portrayal of Juliet: "…she spoke the words as though they conveyed no meaning to her.…she was absolutely self-contained. It was simply bad art. She was a complete failure" (68). The "hissing" that erupts from the crowd, the "almost empty benches" that greet the last act and the disgusted reactions of Dorian, Basil and Lord Henry all affirm that the myth which had supported the idealized conception of Sibyl has been shattered. It is clear that she is not Imogen, nor is she Juliet, nor is she Rosalind, nor is she Portia. She is merely Sibyl Vane, the "third-rate actress with a pretty face" (70). But that isn't really anything at all. As Dorian maliciously declares after the show, "Without your art you are nothing" (70). As usual, Lord Henry's view of the situation is more eloquent, but he reaches essentially the same conclusion: "The girl never really lived.… The moment she touched actual life, she marred it, and it marred her, and so she passed away" (82). Thanks to the text's objectification of her character, both men are correct in their judgments. The veneer has been stripped away, but there is no wood underneath.

In my general paradigm for inter-class connection, I have argued that once a text's strategy of objectification has collapsed, it has no recourse except to revert to the nineteenth century practice of resolving class interaction through plot manipulation. That transition, moreover, finds the text embracing the same essential values of class separation that the form of the Victorian novel was designed to support. Sibyl's death clearly embodies this practice. Dorian cannot be allowed to worship Sibyl Vane when she is merely Sibyl Vane. Therefore, after her desultory performance and a brief encounter with Dorian, she is summarily banished from the text when she takes her own life later that night. Speaking to this point, Gagnier argues that "Sibyl Vane embodied

Wilde's ideal – until she thought to give it all up for a part in a middle-class marriage. For that Wilde killed her" (*Idylls* 99). Although Sibyl's death does have its roots in class politics, Gagnier's reasoning is misplaced. She sees Wilde as continually working to distance himself from the bourgeois influence of middle-class culture. But, the text's construction of Sibyl's demise is so astonishingly rapid and gratuitous that it clearly represents a heavy-handed attempt to curry favor with the middle-class audience that would be decidedly hostile to the novel's homoerotic subtext. Her destruction serves as warning against other lower class individuals who would attempt to create a sense of self and reach far above their social stations. Recognize that Sibyl is not merely removed from the narrative. She suffers the most ignoble and shameful of deaths – a suicide. What's more, the act is not even narrated directly, but instead comes when Lord Henry gives Dorian news of it based upon accounts that he has read in the morning paper (78). Sibyl departs the novel in the same way that she entered – as the subject of gossip. Once she is gone, Basil, Dorian and Lord Henry are never seen together at the same time again, the final and perhaps greatest testament to the key role she plays in facilitating their desire.

Conclusion

Speaking of the editorial process that the *Lippincott's* version of *Dorian Gray* underwent in preparation for publication of the book version, Lawler notes in *An Inquiry* that "Wilde seems to have initiated most of his own revisions. The editorial changes in the manuscript follow the author's own practice, with few exceptions" (65). Interestingly though, the hands-off approach taken by Koulson Kernahan, the editor for Ward, Lock

and Company, was not followed as readily by *Lippincott's* editor, J. Marshall Stoddart. In the manuscript that Wilde submitted for the serial version, Stoddart lined out the following passage that would have come amidst chapter nine's (chapter eleven in the novel version) discussion of the scandalous life that Dorian pursues after Sibyl's death: "It was said that even the sinful creatures who prowl the streets at night cursed him as he passed by, seeing in him a corruption greater than their own and knowing but too well the horror of his real life" (252 n. 6). Apparently, Stoddart felt that situating Dorian below even the most noxious elements of lower class culture would have proven too disturbing for the magazine's readership. In retrospect, if the passage had been left in, perhaps it would have deflected some of the furor regarding Basil's overt affection for Dorian. Even though Wilde did not revise the serial edition in direct response to such outcries, the differences between the two versions of the text suggest that he came to a similar realization.

By examining *Dorian Gray* through the lens of inter-class connection, it becomes clear that by building the 1891 version of the novel around Sibyl Vane, more clearly exploiting the cultural anxieties that lurk in her relationship with Dorian and adding in the disruptive figure of James Vane, Wilde expanded and solidified the homoerotic presence within the book. As a participant in the general phenomenon of inter-class connection, this text stands an important step forward in its development, thanks to the ease and completeness with which it aestheticizes Sibyl's individual identity. Even so, *Dorian Gray* also demonstrates that objectification does not offer a complete solution to the challenges of depicting inter-class connection because when Sibyl resists the attempt to portray her as a work of art, the strategy of objectification collapses. The next chapter's

analysis of inter-class connection in George Gissing's *New Grub Street* will consider a similar circumstance as several of its characters reject the objectifying titles of "literary men" and "men of letters." For Gissing's text, that breakdown signals a rhetorical crisis. In Wilde's novella however, the thematic implications of the plot-based resolution to class interaction that it presents play a key role in its creation of a context for the depiction of homoerotic desire. Ultimately, inter-class connection serves to reinforce *Dorian Gray*'s statusas a culturally transgressive text in terms of sexuality, even as it establishes its willingness to embrace reactionary politics in terms of social class.

NOTES

[1]   To help clarify discussion, unless specifically stated otherwise, all mention of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, especially with regard to chapter numbers, refers to the 1891 book edition. In essence, it has been chosen as the "copy text." No doubt, that term may trouble some readers, but given the focus of this chapter, it stands as a reasonable designation. Since the mid-1980's, thanks largely to the work of Jerome McGann and others, the field of textual criticism has undergone a revolution in thought, and concepts like "copy text" and "final intentions," once staples of textual scholars, are now looked upon with great skepticism. Indeed, in the editorial notes for the 1988 Norton critical edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Donald Lawler argues that "the traditional ideal of a copy text violates the developmental history of the work" (xii). The analysis in this chapter, however, compares the macro-level changes in the narrative that occurred between the two editions. When considered on such a broad scale, the 1891 edition constitutes the copy text that represents Wilde's "final intentions" because he deliberately expanded *The Picture of Dorian Gray* extensively for the 1891 edition, and as Lawler's textual annotations make clear, none of the major changes in plot / narrative that he introduced were rejected by his editors.

[2]   In terms of their initial conceptions, *Tess* actually predates *Dorian Gray*. In *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study*, Richard Purdy reports that Hardy began work on *Tess* "as early as the autumn of 1888" (365), while in "Oscar Wilde's First Manuscript of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" Donald L. Lawler

claims that "As far as anyone knows, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was begun sometime in 1889" (127).

Dorian Gray was the first to appear publicly, however. *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* published the serial

version in July of 1890. The serial version of *Tess* did not emerge until one year later in the 4 July 1891

edition of *Graphic*.

3   On one hand, the avoidance of the class question by critics of *Dorian Gray* is not surprising and in

part, reflects the general trend away from discussions of social class in critical theory over the past few

decades. As Scott Wilson argues in *Cultural Materialism – Theory and Practice*, relatively new analytical

approaches such as feminism, postcolonialism, queer theory and gender studies may be grouped under the

heading of "post-Marxist" because each practice "no longer privileges class in its politics of difference"

(viii). All of these schools have sought to "challenge a number of Marxist certainties" and foster

"metonymic shifts away from class" to other areas of critical inquiry (ix). As noted earlier, widespread

recognition of the cultural components of Wilde's work is a relatively recent phenomenon. When class-

focused criticism was at its height, he was still understood in primarily aesthetic terms. Ironically, the

vision of a "social Wilde" has been shaped largely through the efforts of queer theory, and thus, Wilde

criticism has played a key role in furthering the "metonymic shifts" away from the Marxist paradigms

which Wilson identifies. The very act of reimagining Wilde as a "social author," a process which one

would expect to foster a discussion of his views on social class, has actually helped to undermine the

primacy of class-based criticism, thereby also reducing the exigence for such analyses of his work.

4   Wilde's only major deletion is the scaling back of Mrs. Leaf's (Dorian's housekeeper) presence at

the start of chapter ten.

5   See especially Regenia Gagnier's *Idyll's of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian

Public* and Jonathan Freedman's *Professions of Taste Henry James, British Aestheticism and Commodity

Culture*.

6   Some critics have already begun to question the extent to which Wilde's work can be seen as

challenging the prevalent cultural practices of his day. In "Picturing Dorian Gray," Michael Gillespie

warns that "if one proposes to allow notions of Wilde as social dissident, one must also take into account

his need for public approval and his apparent willingness to modify creative endeavors to ensure that

approval" (9). For his part, Wilson does not doubt Wilde's fundamentally oppositional politics, but he does

challenge Jonathan Dollimore's argument that the writer presents a "transgressive aesthetic" and instead asserts that "when Wilde or Gide were being critical of their society they were not being transgressive, they were being critical" (229). This chapter furthers such re-reevaluations of Wilde but focuses specifically upon the question of social class within *The Picture of Dorian Gray* instead of simply approaching his work from a more general perspective.

[7]   Cohen situates the author's resistance in a complex, reciprocal relationship between his private self and public art: "we need to beware of letting anachronism distort our apprehension of his aims. Wilde's aversion to an unequivocal affirmation of homoeroticism has less to do with an intentional negativism about sex than with his positive program for literature" (213).

[8]   As evidence of this last point, note that Edward Carson, the Marquess of Queensberry's counsel, specifically used the serial version of *Dorian Gray* as the basis for the charges of indecency against Wilde. The novel version was never subject to such charges, and indeed, Wilde tried unsuccessfully to have it used in court.

[9]   At first glance, the novel's presentation of this information seems to differ markedly from its description of Dorian's involvement with Hetty and Sibyl because Lord Fernon relates the tale directly. He employs no strategy of objectification, and he makes no attempt to aestheticize the actions of the participants. Nonetheless, his narrative is not a neutral event that can appear without specific accommodation by the text. Fernon finishes the story by proclaiming "What on earth induced her [Margaret Devereux] to behave as she did, I never could understand" (32). His incredulous reaction reiterates the social unacceptability of the events, and in doing so, condemns them. At the same time, it also places responsibility completely on Dorian's mother. He follows this with the assertion that she and "All the women of that family" were "romantic" (*Ibid.*). Thus, the affair is attributed to a stereotyped belief in feminine irrationality. For his part, Lord Henry downplays the scandalous nature of the relationship by reimagining it as a "strange, almost modern romance" (33). Together, their reactions serve to mollify any possible narrative disruption created by the existence of inter-class connection.

[10]   Although the serial edition has thirteen chapters while the book edition has twenty, Wilde essentially added only six new ones. He took the final chapter of the serial edition, divided it in two sections and made some minor additions and corrections. These two chapters became chapters nineteen

and twenty in the 1891 version. They do not, however, constitute expansions to the narrative, and as such, they are not considered here.

[11]   Lawler's study does touch upon the addition of James Vane but only in general terms, and he limits his discussion of chapter five's portrayal of the Vanes to the following comment: "The Vane family at home is an unsentimental portrait of a low-class melodramatic theatrical clan at the base of the social pyramid" (85). His observation is correct as far as it goes, but Lawler makes no attempt to consider either the symbolic significance or narrative implications of the portrayal.

[12]   For critical studies which espouse the traditional understanding that acting rose as a respectable profession during the 1800's, see especially Michael Baker's *The Rise of the Victorian Actor* and Anthony Jenkins's *The Making of Victorian Drama*.   Some critics, however, have also challenged this long-held view. With an obvious allusion to the title of Michael Baker's book, Tracy Davis declares early in *Actresses as Working Women* that her text "does not accept… the myth of the rise of the Victorian actor" (xiii). She rejects Baker because she feels his study is based on "information about the most successful performers," while "the circumstances of the majority… are almost entirely left out of the equation" (4). Further discussion of such critical dissension is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

        For our purposes, it is important to note only that despite their differences, both Baker and Davis acknowledge that some actors and actresses in the Victorian period did become quite popular and made large fortunes. In 1883, Henry Irving became the first actor to be offered knighthood. Wilde himself dedicated his sonnet "Phèdre" to the actress Sarah Bernhardt, and Powell reports that he "threw lilies at…[her] feet" upon her first arrival in Britain (182). The success of those few did provide actors with a somewhat nebulous social position, and as Davis notes, among actresses there existed "a vast range of incomes and grades of 'respectability' arising out of social background" (77). Baker echoes this position when he notes that by 1890, "despite all its advances, the status of acting as an occupation still largely depended upon the individual actor" (160). Even by 1900, few actors could command large salaries and most remained "far from wealthy" (Baker 30). Most actors found themselves facing a "low working-class wage, social ostracism, and the constant threat of unemployment" (Davis xiii).

[13]   Previous studies have recognized the instability surrounding Victorian actresses, but most have focused on issues of gender. Davis, for instance, argues that because their occupation in the theater

removed them from the domestic sphere usually reserved for women and provided them with a public presence and voice that would have been denied them otherwise, they emerged as "symbols of women's self-sufficiency and independence, but as such they were doubly threatening" (69). In *Dorian Gray*, however, Because Sibyl must act as a counterbalance to the presence of homoerotic desire, her gender role is not highlighted as a source of instability.

[14]   In actuality, the text also tentatively explores a third strategy of objectification, a connection between Sibyl and slavery, but does not develop it fully. This strategy finds its roots in her debt to Mr. Isaacs, the theater owner, and works to present her as a commodity to be exchanged in the context of a market economy. The connection between Sibyl and slavery is first alluded to tangentially by Lord Henry before she has even entered the text when he quips at a dinner party that the "problem" of the East End, the locale of the theater where she performs, is "the problem of slavery" (36). That seemingly ironic musing then takes concrete form as Dorian recognizes that to obtain Sibyl as a partner in marriage, he will first have to "get her out of the Jew's hands" by paying the balance that she owes (47). Instead of liberating her however, such a transaction would, of course, merely transfer control to a new master. For his part, Sibyl's brother recognizes this quite clearly and warns her that Dorian "wants to enslave you" (57). Although the text does not pursue this particular paradigm further, it does establish the starting point for a clear pattern of discourse. Casting Sibyl in the role of slave serves to both degrade and, more importantly, dehumanize her. That stripping of subjectivity is the hallmark of objectification.

[15]   Granted, to some degree, there is always a tendency to connect an actress with her role, and in the late-19th century London world where Sibyl performs, this phenomenon would have been especially pronounced, given the fact that "Victorian audiences often found it difficult to distinguish between illusion and reality on the stage" (Baker 103). Here, however, the practice is so foregrounded and its form so regular that it is clearly a fundamental component of the narrative, not merely a reflection of general cultural practice.

[16]   Essentially the same strategy of objectification reappears later in the novel when Lord Henry and Basil discuss his involvement with a lower-class girl named Hetty. Even in a brief scene that is presented only through the lens of Dorian's memory, she is not spoken of as simply Hetty. Instead, she becomes Perdita, Florizel and Ophelia. The text's aestheticizing her in this manner even though she has no

discernible connection to those roles underscores the challenge that scenes of inter-class connection present to narrative. They cannot be presented without some overt attempt to mediate the gap that separates the characters involved.

[17]   It also gives voice to a typical Victorian conception of actors and actresses. Powell argues that the question of "could actresses be said to posses an authentic self of their own amidst the whirl of identities that they assumed on stage?" lies "just below the surface" of Victorian discussions on the topic (182).

CHAPTER THREE

The Literary Man & The Man of Letters –
Professional Culture and Social Class in Gissing's *New Grub Street*

Introduction and Overview

The third component of my analysis of inter-class connection in turn-of-the-century British literature examines George Gissing's *New Grub Street*. Like both *Tess* and *Dorian Gray*, it first appeared in book form in 1891, and like *Dorian Gray*, it is also very much a novel of London. Aside from those points however, it differs substantially from the two works already considered. Focused on the rapidly expanding, increasingly mechanized publishing industry of the mid-1880's and populated with characters and incidents that are drawn from Gissing's own experiences as a struggling writer, *New Grub Street* sets out to determine what role the author should play in the then-new world of mass media. Through a consistent usage of the terms "man of letters" and "literary man" that differs from the standard linguistic practices of late-nineteenth century England, the novel attempts to imagine a literary world that can operate outside the cultural expectations of the middle-classes and their dominant value system. To create that separation, it endows the literary world with characteristics that approximate those of the professional culture that was beginning its rise to prominence in Britain during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In doing so, *New Grub Street* embodies the experimental quality that Frederic Jameson identifies in *The Political Unconscious* as a defining characteristic of Gissing's later fiction:

> In Gissing's maturity the novel comes to be considered as something like a
> laboratory space, where given characters can be submitted to experiments
> in a controlled environment in which the modification of variables is

systematically tested, and in which – unlike the novelistic experiments

foreseen by Zola – a given experiment in question can be replayed in

accordance with the variables to be tested. (196 – 197)

In the case of *New Grub Street* however, the ultimate focus of its fictional experiment is

actually not the literary world. As John Peck notes in "*New Grub Street*: Some

Suggestions for an Approach Through Form," when the novel's "formal dimension" is

examined closely, it "begins to seem something other than an 'astute and probing analysis

of the 'business' of literature….'" (12).[1] In this chapter, I consider the formal aspects

that Peck references in conjunction with the basic model for inter-class connection that I

have proffered to establish that the interrogation of the intersection between literature,

culture and economy in Gissing's most famous novel is eventually overwhelmed by the

same deeply-ingrained fear of advancement by the lowest orders of the social hierarchy

that Jameson traces in the author's earlier works *Demos* (1886), *Thyrza* (1887), and *The

Nether World* (1889). *New Grub Street*'s final anxiety is the crossing of class boundaries

and not, as has generally been assumed, the sacrifice of artistic integrity to the vulgar

tastes of an ever-growing readership.

A structurally complex work with several overlapping plot lines, the novel centers

primarily upon Edwin Reardon and Jasper Milvain,[2] two young men of letters struggling

to establish themselves in the London literary world. As the text opens, Edwin, a

moderately successful writer of lower-class origins, has recently married Amy Yule, the

daughter of an upper-middle class family. Meanwhile, Jasper, a writer from a middle

class backrgound who has yet to make any name for himself, quickly becomes involved

with Marian Yule, a cousin of Amy's and daughter of Alfred Yule, a longtime editor and

writer who married a lower class woman when very young and has been estranged from the rest of his family ever since. Over the course of the narrative, two other important literary men are introduced: Harold Biffen, a poor writer of real genius who harbors a secret desire for Amy Reardon that he eventually acts upon and Whelpdale, a writer from an upper-class background who starts a journal entitled *Chit-Chat* that proudly features no article over two inches long.[3]

New Grub Street adheres to my fundamental paradigm for inter-class connection by portraying substantive interactions between individuals of widely-separated socio-economic standing and accompanying those scenes with a clearly defined strategy of objectification that assists in their depiction. Although the text either makes reference to or depicts directly moments of inter-class connection in virtually every chapter,[4] three specific cases are central to the novel's underlying hostility toward the lower classes: the marriage between Amy and Edwin Reardon; the marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Yule; and Harold's infatuation with Amy. As will become clear, the class-based anxieties that finally consume the novel's experiment with the literary world emerge in the plot manipulations that resolve those three cross-class interactions.

Before those narrative interventions take place, however, *New Grub Street* does conform to the second major component of my model for inter-class connection by accompanying its portrayals of class interaction with a clearly-defined strategy of objectification. That strategy centers around the two-part titles "literary man" and "man of letters" that serve as the foundational component of the novel's attempt to construct a quasi-professional literary world. By explicitly tying subjectivity (man) to occupation (letters / literary), those titles approximate professional designations such as "Doctor

Smith" or "Professor Jones."   The text reinforces that understanding of those terms by foregrounding their presence when characters initially enter the narrative and when they reach landmark events in their personal development. As discussed in the introduction, the connection between occupation and identity inherent in professional designations approaches the manipulation of individual identity that I have defined as objectification. The process begun by the two part title "man of letters" and "literary man" is then taken to completion by a third, hidden signifier that lies buried within them. The text systematically works to link subjectivity to the automation of industrial production such that the literary man becomes the "machine man."

Instead of attempting to collapse the socio-economic gradient between characters as both *Tess* and *Dorian Gray* do, *New Grub Street* uses objectification to push characters outside of the dominant class-based cultural hierarchy and provide them with a social status that is not predominantly dependent upon their wealth.   It establishes the literary world as an environment where those cultural expectations that inter-class connection would otherwise challenge do not apply. Mrs. Edmund Yule, who is both Amy's mother and the embodiment of upper-middle class propriety and snobbery, sums up the strategy neatly when she assures her daughter that "people are always willing to allow literary men to do rather odd things – up to a certain point" (196). Given that the narrator generally treats Mrs. Yule with thinly-veiled scorn, the content of any of her statements must be greeted with definite skepticism. But in this case, the narrative itself does support her assertion because throughout the book, there are indeed many "literary men" who are plainly seen doing "rather odd things," most of which entail becoming involved with individuals of a social stratum different than their own.[5]

As Mrs. Yule's final caveat suggests however, that freedom has a limit. Although her statement does not specify what the boundary might be, the fates suffered by Alfred Yule's family, Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen indicate that it entails maintaining the integrity of upper-middle-class culture by keeping out those elements of the lower classes that seek to enter in. After an examination of the process by which *New Grub Street* constructs the quasi-professional literary world and then transforms the literary man into the machine man, this chapter considers how each of its three primary cases of inter-class connection overstep the social latitude afforded men of letters: Alfred Yule brings a lower class woman into his family's upper-middle-class world; Edwin blurs the line between the literary and the non-literary world by marrying Amy and then tries to take her back to a lower class existence when he renounces his status as a man of letters; Harold attempts to enter into the upper-middle classes through his desire for Amy, but he does so after having abandoned his status as a literary man. Thus, although each transgression is different, they all constitute attempts to violate the sanctity of the non-literary, upper-middle-class world exemplified by Mrs. Edmund Yule. Moreover, in all three cases, those involved not only meet with failure, they are summarily expelled from the narrative. Harold and Edwin wind up dead and Alfred Yule's family is banished from London to the obscurity of a provincial town. The latent anxiety regarding the advancement of the lower classes that Jameson detects in Gissing's early works emerges in *New Grub Street* through the consistently gratuitous manner by which it resolves inter-class connection.

Such a class-focused reading of the novel fills a tremendous void in Gissing scholarship. Because it stands as a work where essentially all of the admirable characters

like Harold, Edwin and Marian are summarily disposed of, while reprehensible ones like

Jasper triumph, *New Grub Street* has long frustrated critics who have struggled to discern

its rhetorical position. Simon James notes in the aptly-title "Experiments in Realism:

How To Read a George Gissing Novel" that the "difficulty in assigning the author's own

ideological perspective is a central and important methodological difficulty in reading

Gissing" (15). This situation is further complicated by the fact that despite Jameson's

revelation of Gissing's fundamental hostility toward the lower classes, the long-held

image of him as an activist, working-class writer persists.   John Goode's estimation of

the author in *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction* typifies this view:

> nobody else could give such an immediate report on working-class
>
> London in the eighteen eighties when the populace was beginning to erupt
>
> in the West End once again, and the armies of the unskilled were
>
> beginning to organize; nobody else to register so graphically the economic
>
> oppression of the literary producer at the beginning of the epoch of the
>
> mass media… (13).

Because of that lingering conception and the fact that on its surface, *New Grub Street* is

utterly focused on writers and publication, critics have failed to recognize that social class

is the dominant anxiety for this text. It shapes the novel's development and overwhelms

its consideration of literary questions. When the seemingly chaotic conclusion of the text

is read through the lens of inter-class connection, a simple, yet undeniable logic

immediately appears. Those members of the literary world who are originally from the

lower classes or have established ties to them are cast out or killed, while those members

of the literary world who are from the upper or middle classes receive material reward

and are reabsorbed into middle-class culture. To some degree, that resolution is ironized, but not completely so. Although it earnestly admires the literary aspirations of men like Harold and Edwin, the text still sacrifices them to the class-based prejudices that it cannot escape.

Beyond its value in understanding the novel itself, focusing on the specific manifestation of inter-class connection in *New Grub Street* contributes to an understanding of the overall phenomenon in two primary ways. First, the text demonstrates that a strategy of objectification can apply to a collection of people instead of just individuals, as is the case in both *Tess* and *Dorian Gray*. By manipulating the identity of a group that is defined by occupation, *New Grub Street* stands as an embodiment of the epistemological trend that Mary Poovey identifies in *Making a Social Body* as a salient feature of British culture from the 1830's onward, wherein individual status increasingly becomes the subject of mathematical abstractions organized primarily by job type. As discussed in the introduction, that practice is one of the large-scale socio economic factors that promotes the development of objectification over time. *New Grub Street* stands as an important step in that emergence because just as *Dorian Gray* opens up the realm of the aesthetic as a context for the manipulation of subjectivity, Gissing's novel opens up the workplace. The influence of that discovery is felt keenly in a text like Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* wherein professional status becomes the dominant form of identity and serves as a powerful tool for navigating and / or sidestepping the hierarchy of social class.

Secondly, despite its extensive strategy of objectification, *New Grub Street* does confirm my basic assertion that overwhelmingly, turn-of-the-century texts must

ultimately abandon their strategies of objectification and return to the Victorian model of resolving cases of inter-class connection through plot manipulations. Moreover, through those reversions, these works embrace the same middle-class values that the formal structure of the realistic Victorian novel was designed to support and propagate. Thus, the latent fear of class mobility that comes to dominate the thematic focus of *New Grub Street* emerges most clearly in the deaths of Edwin and Harold and the banishment of Alfred Yule's family, events that serve to either end (Harold and Edwin) or remove (the Yules) the three most important cases of inter-class connection found within the text. Those prejudices take hold, however, only in response to the cultural challenge posed to the system of social class by the literary man. My analysis of inter-class connection in *New Grub Street* begins, therefore, with a detailed analysis of the process by which the text constructs the quasi-professional literary world that he inhabits.

Building the Literary World

The connection between professional culture and writing that plays such a central role in *New Grub Stret* emerges at the very outset of the text in a disagreement between Jasper Jasper's mother and his sister Maud. As the Milvain family gathers around the breakfast table, Mrs. Milvain rebuffs her daughter's accusation that Jasper is enjoying a life of idleness by claiming that he is "studying his profession," to which Maud replies "Pray call it trade; he prefers it" (6). Despite her assertion that Jasper would rather be associated with the more mundane and less formalized concept of a tradesman, it becomes clear over the course of the narrative that both he and the text as a whole imagine the practice of writing as a quasi-professional enterprise. Indeed, *New Grub*

Street spends a great deal of effort experimenting with the possibility of a literary world

that evinces the characteristics of professional culture and exists outside the constraints

and machinations of class-focused society.

Before proceeding with a discussion of that process however, a brief review of the

general character of professional society is in order. As discussed in the introduction to

this study, the professionally-focused component of British culture was defined by three

interwoven concepts: qualification, identity and separation. It first took shape in the last

quarter of the nineteenth century, thanks largely to the movement of the country's

industrial economy into its mature stage of development. Increasingly complex

manufacturing, distribution and marketing processes demanded expert knowledge across

all aspects of production: "As the economy became more sophisticated, the number of

specialized tasks multiplied and the jack-of-all trades was replaced by a whole series of

experts – engineers, architects, chemists, electrical engineers and the like" (Roebuck 41).

Those specialists soon joined ranks and formed the backbone of professional society.

Since their inception, entrance into the professions has been controlled through the

mechanism of professional qualification, wherein individuals must demonstrate

significant expertise in their field, usually through a lengthy apprenticeship period

followed by a comprehensive examination. That exclusivity fosters in professionals an

institutionalized sense of identity. As a result, Britain's nascent professional culture

sought increasingly in the late-nineteenth century to define itself as separate from the

class-based society that was tied more directly to flow of capitalist production. Harold

Perkin notes in *The Rise of Professional Society* that

the professional class can only exist by persuading the rest of society to

accept a distributive justice which recognizes and rewards expert service

based on selection by merit and arduous training. Professional people,

rightly or wrongly, see themselves as above the main economic battle, at

once privileged observers and benevolent neutrals since, whichever side

wins, they believe that their services will still be necessary and properly

rewarded. (117)

Certainly, the large-scale economic developments that gave rise to professional society

produced similar effects on the London publishing world of the 1880's that *New Grub

Street* chronicles. Thanks to a number of factors including rising literacy rates due to

mandatory public education, increased leisure time, greater disposable income, and more

intense marketing, the last two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed both a

dramatic rise in the number of publications in Britain and a rapid expansion of their

readership base.[6] Not surprisingly, this period also marked the emergence of writers and

journalists as a discernible classification of worker. The British census of 1881 lists

3,400 individuals engaged as "authors, editors and journalists," and in the 1891 census,

the figure has risen to almost 6,000 (qtd. in Gross 199). With the number of writers

growing, the Society of British Authors was formed in 1884 in an effort to protect

copyright interests. In *Just Looking – Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*

Rachel Bowlby points to this particular development as a clear indication that by the mid-

1880's, "'men of letters' ceased in the main to be gentlemanly dilettantes, and formed a

new class of professional writers" (90). Now obviously, since no portion of the

publishing industry developed qualification exams or required apprenticeships, it would

be incorrect to suggest that it produced professionals in the strictest sense of the term.

Nonetheless, as Janet Roebuck points out, the growth of professionalization was motivated not only by "feelings of specialty and responsibility" but also by a "desire to control and restrict the supply of their particular skill" (41). The founding of the Society of British Authors reflects that same basic goal and attests to the increasingly-professional nature of the publishing industry in late-nineteenth century England, a change which registers strongly within *New Grub Street*.

The primary mechanism that the novel employs to cast the literary world as a quasi-professional culture is found in the very specific diction that it employs when describing those who are involved in the London publishing world. To date, however, critics have failed to recognize this crucial aspect of the work. Jerome Buckely, for instance, suggests in "A World of Literature: Gissing's *New Grub Street*" that the text "concerns itself with the artist, the medium and the aesthetic act; it is essentially a novel about novelists and the writing of novels" (232). Although his vocabulary is sufficient to describe the basic focus of the book and suggest starting points for critical discussion, it fails to register what *New Grub Street* makes clear again and again: This is not "a novel about novelists" but rather a novel about the "literary man" and the "man of letters." The text overhwelmingly uses those two terms to identify those individuals who are on the inside of the literary world and in those designations, the three concepts that define professional society – identity, qualification, and separation – coalesce.

To the contemporary reader, the titles "literary man" and "man of letters" no doubt sound both clumsy and dated, but in 1891, they were used regularly. Their presence in the text does not, however, mark it as merely a novel "of its time." Indeed, careful consideration of the evidence at hand indicates clearly that *New Grub Street*

actually stands *in opposition* to "its time." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a "man of letters" is a "man of learning, a scholar; now usually, a man of the literary profession," while a "literary man" is one "engaged in literature as a profession, occupied in writing books." Although these definitions do differ somewhat, *New Grub Street* makes no distinction between the two terms and uses "man of letters" and "literary man" interchangeably in the novel. Meanings and usages of terms are, of course, dynamic and change over both time and space. In the introduction to *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, John Gross confirms the *OED* gloss of "men of letters" by suggesting that the term initially applied to scholars and then "authors in general." But, an important shift soon occurred. By the time of *New Grub Street*'s publication, "man of letters" had a much more narrow application and signified only "a writer of the second rank, a critic, someone who aimed higher than journalism but made no pretense of being primarily an artist" (xiii). That clarification is crucial because it clearly does not correspond to the criteria used by *New Grub Street* for describing a character as a "man of letters," or a "literary man."

Even though the novel consistently works to portray a clear dichotomy between the aspirations and creative processes of "artists" like Edwin and Harold and "tradesmen" like Jasper and Whelpdale it does not distinguish them in this context. They are all "literary men." When Jasper describes Ralph Warbury, who does not possess "any quality which distinguishes his work from that of twenty struggling writers one could name" and who has established himself only by getting "his name mentioned in print six times a week before he had written a dozen articles," he designates him as a "successful all-around man of letters" (21). Likewise, when the narrator relates Harold's feelings of

awe for Edwin, he is given the same title: "That a struggling man of letters should have been able to marry, and *such* a wife, was miraculous in Biffen's eyes" (118). Thus, these titles constitute objective designations. They connote only that an individual produces text, an objective determination. They say nothing about the relative artistic merit of that output, a purely subjective valuation. Because artist and hack alike are all united under the labels of "literary man" and "man of letters," *New Grub Street* challenges the expectations of its time.

Recognition of that overt deviation from the normative linguistic practice of the late-nineteenth century is crucial to understanding this text. It demonstrates clearly that despite the fact that many of the characters and incidents reflect actual personalities and events, the novel cannot be read as a merely a thinly-veiled, realistic portrait of the London literary world of the 1880's, as many critics have traditionally assumed. P.J. Keating, for instance, proclaims that "First and foremost it [*New Grub Street*] is a sociological document; a sociological document of genius written in the form of a novel" (*George Gissing: New Grub Street* 1). Instead, its depiction of the publishing industry constitutes one of Gissing's fictional experiments. It stands as an attempt to discern how that environment *should* be and is not simply a rendering of how it *is*.

The rhetorical nature of that vision is further confirmed by the text's careful placement of "man of letters" and "literary man." By prominently and consistently featuring those two designations whenever characters are introduced to the reader or to each other for the first time, the text casts them as powerful markers of identity that carry an exclusivity akin to professional titles such as "doctor." First impressions are both lasting and revealing ones, and the use of these terms at moments of introduction cements

their connection to the identity of a character. Jasper, for instance, punctuates the

opening scene of the text by proclaiming himself the "literary man of 1882" (4).

Although such an assessment may seem overly self-congratulatory, the narrative voice

confirms it later when recalling the circumstances surrounding his initial introduction to

Edwin. There, a bond quickly emerges between the two men when Edwin recognizes

that his future friend is "also a man of letters" (50). Other examples of similar

designations are easily found. For instance, Jasper provides the initial insight into

Marian's situation when he describes her to his mother and sister as "A good example of

the modern literary girl" (10). And, the first significant information regarding her father,

Alfred, comes soon thereafter when Miss Harrow, his brother John's housekeeper,

reveals that he is "so connected with literary people" (11).[7] Note that both those within

the London publishing world and those on the outside of it consistently employ the terms

"literary man" and "man of letters" instead of "writer" or "novelist." This continuity

demonstrates the extent to which they are recognized as primary markers of identity.

More importantly, it also establishes that, like professional titles, they are self-applied

and sought-after designations, otherwise those within the literary world would not

embrace them with the fervor and consistency that they do. Such eagerness implies that

the literary man will not experience alienation from his labor in the same manner as a

generic worker who is forced into the production process. As will become clear,

however, that is not the case.

Moreover, it is important to note that the linguistic structures of the terms

themselves also approach a professional designation in a way that neither "author" nor

"writer" can. Calling a character a "novelist" merely establishes what he *does*. Labeling

him a "literary man" or a "man of letters" on the other hand, goes beyond that and establishes who he *is* because those terms explicitly link subjectivity – a character's status as "man" – to language and the written word.   That conflation of identity and occupation is a hallmark of professional culture, as embodied in the transition from "Mr. Smith" or "Ms. Smith" to "Dr. Smith." Now granted, to earn the title of "man of letters," one need not pass anything as demanding as the Bar or the medical review board; one need only produce text. But once Jasper, Edwin and Alfred do so, each one is no longer just a "man"; each one becomes a "literary man."

Fittingly, Edwin, provides the greatest single example of that transformation. His stature as a "man of letters" dominates discussion of the two key turning points in his life. After his father's death, he moves to London, bent upon pursuing a single-minded goal: "To become a literary man, of course" (44). The statement stands alone, a single sentence surrounded by long, flowing paragraphs. Its nakedness on the page establishes that the transition it signifies is a dramatic and pervasive one. If Edwin had sought only to become a "writer" or a "novelist" such an aspiration would entail merely honing his verbal and writing skills. The declaration of "literary man," however, connotes the desire for a more fundamental transformation. As he departs for the city, a male of nearly twenty years who has lost both of his parents and is responsible for supporting himself, Edwin has clearly moved from "boy" to "man." The push to become a "literary man," then, signals the next step in this process of evolution, and with it, the concept of being simply a "man" is left behind. Sadly, after the failure of his last novel and the dissolution of his marriage, Edwin's progression is then reversed. After it recounts his decision to abandon writing and work only at earning money as a "harmless clerk" in order to

support his absent wife and child, the narrative voice proclaims: "Let the man of letters

be forgotten" (211). Of course, because of the very fact that becoming a "literary man"

signifies such a dramatic shift in being, simply walking away from it is not possible. By

turning his back on being a "man of letters," Edwin cannot progress to a new stage of

life, but rather must plunge "Back to obscurity!" (209). Both of these transitory

moments in Edwin's life are rendered with excessive gravity, and a reverence is attached

to them not unlike the honor paid to attainment of professional qualification.

As these examples suggest, *New Grub Street*'s particular appropriation of "man of

letters" and "literary man" establishes a rigid and clearly discernible binary within the

novel between those who produce text – in a wide variety of forms – and those who do

not. That linguistic separation becomes an embodied presence through the Reading

Room of the British museum, the physical center of the literary world. Closed to non-

literary people, it is a restricted environment that serves as the literal and symbolic point

of entry for literary people. In its discussion of Edwin's earliest days in London, the

narrative voice relates at length the steps he must undertake in order to gain a "reader's

ticket" for the museum, a process that echoes strongly the qualification and examination

process so central to professional culture:

> he desired to procure a reader's ticket for the British Museum. Now
>
> this was not such a simple matter as you may suppose; it was necessary to
>
> obtain the signature of some respectable householder, and Reardon was
>
> acquainted with no such person. His landlady was a decent woman
>
> enough, and a payer of rates and taxes, but it would look odd, to say the
>
> least of it, to present oneself in Great Russell Street armed with this

person's recommendation. (45)

Despite being a house holder and paying her taxes, his landlady, clearly not a literary woman, does not hold the credentials that he requires. As with professional qualification, he needs the support and approval of someone already "in the club." Thus, Edwin must write to a novelist whom he has never met before but with whose books he has "some sympathy" and beg for his assistance. His subsequent visit to the man's home – he is never named in the text – proves to be a symbolic moment of indoctrination to the literary world: "Reardon went home with his brain in a whirl. He had had his first glimpse of what was meant by literary success" (46). After a brief discussion, his sponsor recommends to him that he try writing novels, and despite initially balking at the suggestion, he reconsiders – appropriately enough while working in the Reading Room – and begins down his own road to "literary success."   That can only come, however, after gaining access to the Museum. Obviously in terms of the actual work involved, obtaining a reader's ticket is far less demanding than, say, earning a medical license. Nonetheless, the processes are symbolically equivalent because the Reading Room serves as a barrier to many would-be applicants.

That exclusivity reinforces further the sense of identity connoted by the terms "literary man" and "man of letters." As several critics have noted, all of the members of the literary world either spend time in the Reading Room or have done so in the past (Peck 10 – 11; Bowlby 98 – 100). Goode describes it as "exactly the workplace of the capitalized literary producer" (120).   The narrow confines breed a sense of recognition and identity among its inhabitants, and as a result, a familiarity exists between them. For instance, upon encountering Marian and Alfred Yule while on holiday at his mother's,

Jasper recognizes the pair as fellow "dwellers in the valley of the shadow of books" because even though he has never actually met them, he has seen them previously at the museum (10). Later, when telling Amy of the same encounter, he notes "I knew her by sight quite well – had seen her at the Reading Room" (55). These acquaintances also serve as conduits for the dissemination of information in the text. John Peck describes it as an "umbrella to a whole network of human problems" (10). As a result, news travels fast in the literary world, as when Alfred Yule gets word that he is being considered to replace his hated rival Fadge as editor of *The Study* after Mr. Quarmby passes the information to Marian during her daily toils in the Reading Room. The various discussion circles that appear throughout the narrative, such as Alfred Yule's group of disciples and the periodic gatherings of Edwin, Harold, Whelpdale and Jasper, are all dominated by gossip of other literary men. Taken together these factors work to provide the reader with a clear understanding that an unseen, yet very real and very exclusive, quasi-professional literary world exists outside of its physical center in the British Museum Reading Room.

The Machine Man

That sense of separation becomes even more pronounced when the terms used to delineate the boundaries of the literary world are deconstructed because both "literary man" and "man of letters" contain within them a third, buried, signifier that links subjectivity to industrial production. In *New Grub Street*, the "literary man" is also a "machine man." Clearly, that transformation constitutes a strategy of objectification as I have defined it. In keeping with the fundamental model for inter-class connection that I

have proffered, it assists with the text's portrayal of interactions between lower-class

characters and middle-class characters by further differentiating those in the literary

world and strengthening Mrs. Edmund Yule's assertion that "people are always willing to

allow literary men to do rather odd things – up to a certain point" (196). At the same

time, the creation of the machine man highlights Gissing's own ambivalent feelings

regarding the increased professionalization of literature that ultimately combine with his

latent class anxieties to collapse the literary world.

Like the connection between literature and professionalization, the linkage

between subjectivity and mechanization also appears at the very outset of *New Grub

Street* when Jasper suggests that Edwin isn't the "kind of man to keep up literary

production as a paying business" (2). Indeed, Bowlby is correct in her assessment that

"The relatively mechanical and monetary ordering of literature – in its values, its

producers, its publication and consumption - is assumed or invoked throughout *New

Grub Street*" (102).   Jasper's estimation of Edwin's capability alludes to the fact that

every writer is essentially a self-contained business operation. Each one is responsible

for both the manufacture of his or her own products – articles, reviews, novels, etc. – and

the marketing, distribution and selling of these goods to their consumers – the editors

who either accept or reject them. Edwin's market is admittedly a narrow one. His works

appeal only to a "small section of refined readers" (48). Despite this, his failure as a

"literary man" is not ultimately a question of selling, but actually rests upon his inability

to produce material in sufficient quantities. For his part, Jasper does at times face a

similar challenge, as when mid-way through the novel, he struggles with an article being

written for a magazine: "The subject out of which he was *manufacturing* 'copy' had its

difficulties, and was not altogether congenial to him [emphasis added]" (247). When

presented with such adversity, he responds by simply continuing to struggle with the

material at hand. By pursuing a dogged writing schedule that serves "to keep me at it like

a steam engine," he manages to avoid the pitfall that claims Edwin (341). In both

examples, the language used explicitly invokes the machinery which is only implied in

Jasper's previously-cited discussion of the "production of literature."

More importantly, his simile connects self to machine and in doing so, invokes

the automatic nature of mechanical production. This linkage not only serves to further

reinforce the division between "literary people" and the rest of the world, it also casts

them in the role of automatons who are driven to and consumed by the repetition of

literary production. That vision is especially apparent in the meticulous chronicling of

the work schedules that both Jasper and Edwin undertake. Much like the intricate

production scheduling that must be done in factories to ensure the presence of raw

materials and the optimal employment of resources, the long-term plan for Edwin's

follow-up to *On Neutral Ground* is broken down into clear detail:

> there came a day when Edwin Reardon found himself regularly at
>
> work once more ticking off his stipulated quantum of manuscript each
>
> four-and-twenty hours. He wrote a very small hand; sixty written slips
>
> of the kind of paper he habitually used would represent… a passable
>
> three-hundred page volume. On average he could write four such slips
>
> a day; so here we have fifteen days for the volume, and forty five days
>
> for the completed book. (96)

The narrator's use of the familiar "we" casts the information in the form of a lesson and highlights the act of calculation that closes the passage. The planning of literary work is not limited to such a long-term, macro-level time frame, however. Both Edwin's and Jasper's daily schedules are broken down carefully as well. Of the two, Edwin's is by far the more restrictive:

> The ordering of his day was thus. At nine, after breakfast, he sat
>
> down to his desk, and worked till one. Then came dinner, followed by a
>
> walk. As a rule he could not allow Amy to walk with him, for he had to
>
> think over the remainder of the day's toil, and companionship would have
>
> been fatal. At a bout half-past three he again seated himself, and wrote
>
> until half-past six, when he had a meal. Numberless were the experiments
>
> he had tried for the day's division. The slightest interruption of the order
>
> for the time being put him out of gear…. (98 – 99)

This inflexibility plays a major role in Edwin's ultimate failure as a literary man. Even the most meticulous of plans cannot account for every possibility, and therefore, the ability to adapt to changing conditions becomes a key to success. Because Edwin either cannot or will not – depending upon one's reaction to his character – do this, he frequently finds himself "out of gear," much like a broken machine. Although Jasper pursues a similarly detailed schedule, he proves more able to react to the demands of the world around him:

> I got up at 7:30, and whilst I breakfasted I read through a volume I had
>
> to review. By 10:30 the review was written… . Well, from 10:30 to 11:00
>
> I smoked a cigar and reflected, feeling that the day wasn't badly begun. At

eleven I was ready to write my Saturday *causerie* for the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*; it took me till close upon one o'clock… At one, I rushed out to a dirty little eating house in Hampstead Row. Was back again by a quarter to two, having in the meantime sketched a paper for *The West End*. Pipe in mouth, I sat down to leisurely artistic work – by five the paper was done; the other half remains for tomorrow. From five to half-past I read four newspapers and two magazines, and from half-past to quarter to six I jotted down several ideas that had come to me whilst reading. At six I was once again in the dirty eating house, satisfying a ferocious hunger. Home once more at 6:45, and for two hours wrote steadily at a long affair I have in hand for *The Current*. (146)

In her analysis of the above passage, Bowlby proclaims that "Jasper is his own machine" (109). Both the precision of his time keeping and the voluminous output of his labor are remarkable. Yet, he does confess to Maud, his sister, that "this isn't a specimen day…. Tomorrow I shall very likely do nothing but finish my *West End* article" (147). He is not bound to such a static routine as Edwin, and that adaptability allows him to produce where Edwin does not. Ultimately though, the detailed, calculated work schedules of both "men of letters" indicate that they are also "men of machines."

That implicit connection becomes explicit in *New Grub Street* through the figure of Marian Yule, and her situation is indicative of a far-reaching gender bias in the text. Recall that she is introduced into the novel through Jasper's designation of her as a "literary girl." Marian does not even earn the title of "literary woman." Nonetheless, she is part of the literary world and spends virtually her entire day in the Reading Room

of the British Museum doing research and drafting articles. Her circumstances, however, are distinctly different from the literary men with whom she interacts. Instead of working directly for herself, she works for her father. Although some of the men of letters may later regret the move, all of them have sought at some point to gain that quasi-professional title. Marian has not. Instead, her place in the literary world has been thrust upon her, and at no point does the text ever move to question this state of affairs. It merely accepts Marian's marginalized position in the literary world as a given condition and remains blissfully unaware of its own substantial gender biases.

Not surprisingly, Marian's situation leads to alienation from the writing she produces. When greeted with the possibility of receiving an inheritance after her uncle's death, she ponders the potential for abandoning her literary work: "Perhaps there was no more need for her to labour upon this 'article' she was manufacturing" (238). By again embracing "manufacturing" in its description of her "creative" process and speaking of the labour involved it in, the text establishes that, fundamentally, writing constitutes work. It is not primarily an act of inspiration, nor is it an act of pleasure. Unfortunately for Marian, in keeping with a common practice in Gissing's fiction,[8] the legacy falls through, and she is forced to continue working to support her family through the remainder of the novel. Earlier in the text, before she has learned of the will, she imagines a different possibility for escape from the British Museum when she stumbles across an advertisement for a "Literary Machine": "…had it been invented at last, some automaton to supply the place of such poor creatures as herself to turn out books and articles?" (85). Marian seeks replacement in the production process. As with the will, those hopes are also quickly dashed when she realizes that the "Literary Machine" is only

"one for holding volumes conveniently" not for the actual creation of literature. (*Ibid*.).

Although she does hold out hope that "surely before long some Edison would make the

true automaton," she nonetheless realizes that escape from her situation is not possible at

that moment, and therefore, "she must, she must force herself to think of the task in hand.

A machine has no business to refuse its duty" (85 – 86). The last statement is particularly

important because the potential ambiguity inherent in Jasper's simile "keep me at it *like* a

steam engine" [emphasis added] has disappeared. Here, Marian *is* machine. Moreover,

this transformation is driven from within, not from without: "Marian was at work as usual

in the Reading Room. She did her best during the hours spent here, to convert herself into

the literary machine which it was her hope would some day be invented for construction

in a less sensitive material than human tissue" (382). Here, she consciously pushes

herself to assume the automated, mechanical form to which both Jasper and Edwin

unconsciously adhere. Subjectivity is intertwined with the automated physicality of

manufacture.

This process embodies the "radical and intimate coupling of bodies and

machines" that Mark Seltzer identifies as a salient characteristic of turn-of-the-century

literature and culture in *Bodies and Machines* (13). Although he does examine examples

from George Eilot, Seltzer's work focuses overwhelmingly on American literature and

culture. Nonetheless, *New Grub Street* suggests many of his basic assertions apply to

British narrative fiction as well because here the "literary man" is also the "machine

man." That transformation develops further the professional character of the literary

world. As all of the above examples indicate, the mechanization of the writing process is

tied directly to economic gain. It stems from a need to meet the demands of an

expanding market. This driving force constitutes yet another parallel with the professional societies which, as discussed earlier, were formed in large part to gain economic leverage for their members.

Although the creation of the machine man and the construction of the pseudo-professional literary world are both central to *New Grub Street*'s portrayal of inter-class connection, ambivalence clearly surrounds those processes. Marian, for instance, denounces writing as the "hateful profession that so poisons men's minds" (234). Likewise, she and Edwin are both consumed by literary production and left alienated from their work.   Although the collapse of the literary world that occurs in the conclusion of the novel primarily constitutes an attempt to allay the class-based anxieties that its plot creates, it also stems partially from Gissing's doubts regarding the changing role of the author and the quality of literary output. Determining the extent to which those anxieties hold sway over the development of the text is, however, difficult at best, primarily because the author's views changed markedly over time. In what remains the most thorough and persuasive argument on the subject, Adrian Poole detects in *Gissing in Context* three primary phases in the author's development: "The first… offers the image of public moralist and reformer; the second, the writer as heroic exile and martyr to the cause of free, independent vision; the third, the writer as member of a literary fraternity, still marginal to the general culture but still assured of some sort of public status" (118). The pseduo-professional literary world of *New Grub Street* clashes markedly with the early understanding of the author as independent moralist, yet it fits well with the concept of a literary fraternity. Not surprisingly, Poole suggests that the second period of

Gissing's development reaches its height in the writing of *New Grub Street* and the

emergence of the third occurs immediately thereafter (134).

Along the same lines, the novel's depiction of the mechanization of the literature

does not map neatly onto the author's own experiences. Given that many critics see

Edwin as an autobiographical sketch of Gissing himself, [9] it is tempting to read his

consumption by the demands of literary production as a scathing critical commentary of

the state of the publishing industry in the 1880's, as Poole does when he asserts that "The

central indictment of the contemporary literary world made by Gissing, is that it has

achieved a total industrialisation of writing" (142). Then again, although Edwin and

Marian are crushed by the literary machine, Jasper thrives under it, and there is evidence

to suggest that aspects of Gissing's own career actually parallel his development more

closely than they do Edwin's. In "Gissing and Hogarth," John Sloan contends that

> I do not want to suggest that we identify Gissing with the morbid, rather
>
> feeble Reardon…. The impression is of a resilient rather than a despondent
>
> young man, working hard to become a successful author… The pattern of
>
> Gissing's career in the 1890's, particularly after the success of *New Grub*
>
> *Street,* was one that combined high-mindedness and literary integrity with
>
> increasing attention to the marketing of his work. (256)

Although Jasper clearly lacks "high-mindedness and "literary integrity," he evinces all of

the other characteristics that Sloan describes. Such affinity coupled with Gissing's

ultimate desire for a "literary fraternity" make it impossible to assume that he would have

viewed the changes in the literary world depicted in *New Grub Street* as uniformly

negative. Therefore, its collapse at the conclusion of the text must stem from other

considerations, and the remainder of this chapter's analysis establishes that the forces which ultimately shape the development of the novel are anxieties surrounding the stability of middle-class culture.

Shifting The Cultural Paradigm

Those anxieties emerge because the quasi-professional world depicted in *New Grub Street* challenges the class-based society that the Edmund Yule family embodies by complicating the standards upon which social standing is defined. As chapter one's analysis of *Tess* demonstrates, in the system of social class, one's position in the cultural hierarchy is determined primarily by wealth. The literary world changes that model because the prestige and exclusivity associated with being a literary man, especially a successful one, provides a status all its own. Desirous of that distinction and the power that accompanies it, the middle-class world depicted in *New Grub Street* seeks interaction with men of letters, regardless of their income level. Such solicitation stands as a modification to the general social dictum that Perkin identifies as a cornerstone of middle class culture:

> One spent one's time always in company of one's equals, except of course when directing the labours of servants or workers or patronizing the city slum dwellers or the village poor. Segregation at every level and in every occupation and pastime was the hallmark of the middle class (*The Rise of Professional Society* 83).

In *New Grub Street*, the reactions and attitudes of characters like Mrs. Edmund Yule and Mrs. Carter indicate that men of letters are not seen as social "equals." Yet, interaction with them is still possible because although uniformly poor, they are not seen as members

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of the lower classes. Before going further however, note that this perception raises an obvious objection to my own analysis: If literary men operate outside the class system, how can their interaction with middle-class culture be deemed inter-*class* connection? As will become clear, Alfred, Edwin and Harold all ultimately become bound to the class system and when this happens, the relationships that they establish fit the criteria I have established for inter-class connection.

Edwin provides clearest example of middle-class acceptance of the poor literary man. He comes from a lower class background. His father is described as a man who after having "followed many different pursuits and in none had done much more than earn a livelihood" finally settled on a career as a photographer (43). Because his mother was "superior" to her husband in both "breeding and education" and commanded a relatively small dowry, Edwin received a "far better acquaintance with the ancient classics than most lads who have been expressly prepared for a university" at an "excellent local school" (44). Even so, prior to his departure for London to pursue his dream of becoming a literary man, he works as a real estate clerk, a white collar position which is at best the lowest rung of middle class ladder, not unlike the one occupied by Leonard Bast in *Howards End*.   After first arriving in London, Edwin lives a Spartan, solitary existence for four years: "…he lived with painful economy. The strangest life of almost absolute loneliness" (44). Having "suffered much from cold and hunger" (46), he essentially loses connection to the social world around him: "He was a recluse in the midst of millions and viewed with dread the necessity of having to go forth to fight for daily food" (*Ibid.*). That situation changes somewhat when he earns £25 from the publication of his second book and an inheritance from his grandfather. Even so, he

remains relatively poor, budgeting as he does only £80 per year for living expenses. In

his 1885 study *Wages and Earning of the Working Classes*, Levi Leone reports that the

average income of a lower middle class family in 1881 was £110 (qtd. in Altick 306).

Obviously, Edwin provides only for his own needs, but still he earns substantially less

than that.

Although his first two novels do not improve his economic position by fostering a

dramatic influx of capital, they do raise his social standing. In particular, they help him

develop a friendship with Mr. Carter, the man for whom he works upon his arrival in

London: "When Reardon began to publish books, the high-spirited Mr. Carter looked

upon him with something of awe, and when the literary man ceased to be a clerk, there

was nothing to prevent association on equal terms between him and his former employer"

(48). Earning the title of "literary man" is, therefore, something of a passport between

social classes and allows Edwin to be on "equal terms" with Carter, even though

financially a tremendous gap still exists between them. For the development of the

overall narrative, that elevation is crucial because Carter facilitates the first meeting

between Edwin and Amy during a chance encounter at the Grosvenor Gallery. Thanks to

the modest success of Edwin's third novel, *On Neutral Ground*, the Yules, who are

acquainted with Carter, are excited to meet his literary friend:

> Reardon found himself in a position of which the novelty was
>
> embarrassing, but scarcely disagreeable. Here were five people grouped
>
> around him, all of whom regarded him unaffectedly as a man of
>
> importance, for though, strictly speaking, he had no "fame" at all, these
>
> persons had kept up with progress of his small repute, and were all

> distinctly glad to number among their acquaintances an unmistakable
>
> author… (49 – 50)

At the time, thanks to payment from his novel and several essays Edwin has just returned from a trip to Greece and Italy and is wearing a newly tailored set of clothes. Nonetheless, without this "fame," he would be merely a relatively poor man with whom the Yules would have no interaction. Painfully reputation-conscious, they present and perceive themselves to be eminently respectable members of the upper middle class who take great – if undeserved – pride in their station. As a man of letters, Edwin is seen as both a gateway to the culture that the middle-classes notoriously lacked and a passport to further social progression. His pursuit of Amy is therefore initially looked upon with eager anticipation:

> Amy soon assured herself that he would have a reputation far other than
>
> that of the average successful storyteller. The best people would regard
>
> him; he would be welcomed in the penetralia of culture… If that really
>
> were the case, all was well; for Mrs. Yule could appreciate social and
>
> intellectual differences. (193)

Edwin's example demonstrates that middle class culture clearly finds a great deal to desire in the literary world, even to the point that they will partially overlook long-held class-based prejudices.

New Grub Street's construction of the literary world as a quasi-professional body and the complication of the social landscape that results from it does register the emergence of white-collar professional society in Britain that was first taking shape in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and would eventually overwhelm the middle class

system that the Edmund Yules embody. As Roebuck notes, by the mid-twentieth century, "the business- and capital-owning Victorian middle class would shrink to form only a tiny percentage of the population" (41). But, to return to my initial argument regarding the text, it constitutes an overt rhetorical exercise, not simply a realistic snapshot of late-nineteenth century British culture. With that perspective in mind, note that Jameson's warning regarding *The Nether World* applies equally well here.

> [*The Nether World* is] best read not for its documentary information on the conditions of Victorian slum life, but as testimony about the narrative paradigms that organize middle-class fantasies about those slums and about "solutions" that might resolve, manage or repress the evident class anxieties aroused by the existence of an industrial working class and an urban lumpenproletariat. (186)

In *New Grub Street*, the apparent documentary focuses on the publishing industry instead of the Victorian slums, yet its narrative structure still clearly constitutes a fanciful attempt to keep the lower classes at bay. As the following section demonstrates, that fantasy emerges in the resolution that the text creates for the cases of inter-class connection involving Alfred, Edwin and Harold. Their examples reveal that the attraction that the literary world holds for the middle classes is ultimately overshadowed by the threat it poses to their impermeability. By the conclusion of *New Grub Street*, only one social paradigm remains in place. The quasi-professional literary world is dismantled and middle-class society reigns supreme.

Moving Up From Below – The Repression of Mrs. Alfred Yule

Alfred Yule's marriage represents a threat to the dominant middle-class value system because he has reached below his own social level to marry someone who is resolutely lower class in ways that a poor literary man like Harold is not. The narrator notes that Mrs. Yule was a "young girl of no beauty… but amiable disposition" who worked in a chandler's shop near the garret where Alfred lived during his early years in the literary world (73). So clearly, she comes from a humble background. But, from a strictly economic standpoint, her family's situation is certainly no worse than Harold's who is "always in dire poverty, and lived in the oddest places" (115). Mrs. Yule lacks, however, the intellect and aesthetic temperament that differentiates Harold from the "fellows in privation" that he lives among (402). Cognizant of the intellectual and social gulf separating her from Alfred, Mrs. Yule "endeavored to learn from" her husband but without success (74). Even years later, readily apparent indications of the gap between them remain:

> Mrs. Yule's speech was seldom ungrammatical, and her intonation
> was not flagrantly vulgar, but the accent of the London poor, which brands
> as with hereditary baseness, still clung to her words, rendering futile such
> propriety of phrase as she owed to years of association with educated
> people. In the same degree did her bearing fall short of that which
> distinguishes a lady. The London work-girl is rarely capable of raising
> herself, or being raised, to a place in life above that to which she was born,
> she cannot learn how to stand and sit and move like a woman bred of
> refinement, any more than she can fashion her tongue to graceful speech.

(67)

Given that the tone of the narrative voice here is essentially without irony, such a viewpoint amounts to little more than a restatement of the traditional Victorian, middle-class presumption that class is irreducible. Unlike both Harold and Edwin, Mrs. Yule possesses no qualities that can move her outside of her class standing, nor can she acquire any, regardless of how hard she may work toward that goal.

At the time that he marries her, Alfred is an aspiring literary man who lives apart from the middle-class culture of his own family. But, he is still connected to that world, and his wife stands as an element that must be excluded from it at all costs. As a result, Mrs. Edmund Yule eagerly ceases all interaction with Alfred's family after her husband's death:

> At that time Edmund Yule was still living; he had overcome his prejudices, and there was intercourse between his household and that of the literary man. Intimacy it could not be called, for Mrs. Edmund (who was the daughter of a law-stationer) had much difficulty in behaving to Mrs. Alfred with a show of suavity…. It was the death of Amy's father that brought these relations to an end; left to the control of her own affairs Mrs. Edmund was not long in giving offence to Mrs. Alfred, and so to Alfred himself…. from that day the two families kept apart. (75)

The estrangement that the Alfred Yules undergo is not limited to rejection by the other branches of the Yule family; it carries over into all aspects of their lives. They live in a "poor house in an obscure quarter" (76) and have essentially cut themselves off from the social world around them because of Alfred's embarrassment over his wife's past:

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"Alfred was always ashamed of her before strangers; he could not conceal his feelings, either from her or from other people who had reason for observing her" (80). Although he produces enough literary work to support his family, "there was no disguising from himself that his life had been a failure" (76). As his embittered ranting to Marian demonstrates, Alfred uses that social isolation as a convenient scapegoat for a life of unmet expectations:

> Look at Fadge. He married a woman of good social position she brought him friends and influence.… he was able to give dinners; he and his wife went into society – everybody knew him and talked of him. How has it been with me? I live here like an animal in its hole, and go blinking about if by chance I find myself among the people with whom I ought naturally to associate. If I had been able to come into direct contact with Rackett and other men of that kind, to dine with them, and have them dine with me, to belong to a club, and so on, I shouldn't be what I am at my age.
>
> (83 – 84)

Marian recognizes that there is but a "portion of truth" in his lamentation. Better social connections would doubtless have helped Alfred, but ultimately his lack of success stems from the fact that he is but a "journeyman" writer whose work's defining characteristic is "sincerity," not intrigue, ingenuity, passion, or excitement (76). The Yules' isolation does have a very real effect, however, upon Marian herself. As the novel points out repeatedly, she has essentially no friends or social connections and more importantly, until Jasper stumbles into her life, no prospects for marriage. Indeed, her utter lack of potential suitors increases her interest in Jasper, despite his obvious and numerous faults.

To its credit, although it ultimately does succumb to its underlying class biases, *New Grub Street* stands as a complex text rife with nuance and ambivalence, as its portrayal of Mrs. Yule attests. Her domestic situation is on full display for the reader, and because of this, her utter dedication and tender support for Marian (as well as Alfred) show through. This, coupled with the fact that Alfred's failings clearly stem mostly from his own shortcomings as a literary man and not her own background, marks her as perhaps the most sympathetic figure in the text. Yet, she remains utterly obscured from essentially every other character in the novel besides Alfred and Marian. Even in her own home, she is confined to the domestic spaces of the house and is rarely seen in the context of Alfred's library. Such positioning effectively casts her in the role of servant and attempts to return her to her "proper place." Indeed, the text gives explicit voice to that process when it discusses her relationship with Marian: "she looked and spoke affectionately, but not with a mother's freedom; one might have taken her for a trusted servant waiting upon her mistress" (67). Ultimately, even limiting her to the dining room and living room of an "obscure house in an obscure quarter" cannot compensate for the social transgression that her marriage represents, and as a result, by the conclusion of the novel, their entire family is banished to the "provincial town" where Marian finds work in a library. Thus, the treatment of Mrs. Yule repeats the same warning that Jameson traces in the sentimental and melodramatic ideologemes that shape Gissing's earlier novel *The Nether World*: "Both of these ideologemes, then, drive home the same ultimate message to the lower classes: stay in your place!" (189)

When Two Worlds Collide – Amy and Edwin Reardon

As the defacto hero of *New Grub Street*, Edwin Reardon has been the subject of much critical debate. Discussions surrounding his character have focused overwhelmingly on questions pertaining to the changing nature of literary production, the ability for an "artist" to survive in an increasingly vulgar world of mass media, and as mentioned earlier, the extent to which he represents (or does not) an autobiographical sketch of Gissing himself. Invariably in these debates, his abandonment of Amy and eventual death are traced back to and read as a commentary upon the literary machine that is the New Grub Street. Little, if any, attention has been paid, however, to the social class aspects that surround his character. Such avoidance amounts to a major critical oversight because when considered within the general pattern of class interaction that occurs throughout *New Grub Street*, Edwin's death is not primarily an indictment of the publishing industry, but rather yet another manifestation of the deep-seeded fear of lower class mobility that underscores the text. Like Mrs. Alfred Yule, he too is a threat to middle-class hegemony, albeit in a fundamentally different way, and like Mrs. Alfred Yule, the text punishes him for that. She suffers banishment; he suffers death. Edwin's cultural transgression is essentially the converse of Alfred's: he attempts to drag Amy, a member of the middle classes, down into a lower class existence.

As discussed previously, Edwin is relatively poor, yet he does possess a nominal amount of fame and status as a literary man that attracts Amy to him and initially makes him acceptable to her mother. The Reardon's marriage, however, blurs the dividing line between the literary and non-literary worlds, and that confluence places great stress upon their relationship. It is most evident in the physicality of the apartment that they occupy.

As Goode has shrewdly observed, the fact that they live on the top floor of their building stands as an "index of poverty," yet that locale is also "the conventional garret of the writer" (111). Because of their financial difficulties, the front room of their apartment, which would normally be used for entertaining visitors, is forced to serve as Edwin's work area. Thus, a space that would typically be a conspicuous symbol of the domestic, non-literary world is overrun by the literary world. As a result, Amy finds it "awkward to receive any but the most intimate friends when Edwin sat at his desk" and avoids essentially all social interaction (107). Despite this, Mrs. Edith Carter does impose herself upon the couple in the middle of the workday, and her reaction to the environment that she encounters is telling: "On Edwin's desk were lying slips of blank paper. Edith, approaching on tip-toe with what was partly make-believe, partly-genuine awe, looked at the literary apparatus…" (109). Even though her expression is somewhat forced, a sense of strangeness clearly emerges. As a resolutely, non-literary person, she recognizes that she has wandered into an alien environment.

At the same time, however, Edwin's literary world also doubles as the family's study, and not surprisingly, the conversation between Edith and Amy quickly turns to social issues. Specifically, Edith seeks to learn why Amy has not visited her. Amy's reply gets at the heart of the central dilemma facing the Reardons: "… one must either belong to society or not. Married people can't accept an occasional invitation from friends and never do their social duty in return. We have decided to withdraw altogether…. I shall see no one except my relatives" (110). Unlike, say, Harold, who is completely isolated in his poor apartment or Marian, who toils alone in the British Museum, the Reardons cannot cut themselves off from the non-literary world so easily,

as Edith's impromptu visit indicates. Standing with one foot in the drawing room and one foot in the Reading Room, the Reardons cannot be contextualized as belonging sufficiently to either place.

Eventually, the integrity of the dividing line between the literary and non-literary world is reestablished when Edwin renounces his status as a literary man and is immediately separated from Amy. As their income dwindles with Edwin's diminishing literary production, he argues that their family should move to a more modest apartment, and instead of writing, he should get a job that pays a steady wage. He tells his wife that "we are poor people and must live in a poor way" (184). Amy rebukes his plan with a direct, yet illustrative, assertion: "I am not the wife of a clerk" (185). Clearly, there is a disconnection here. He speaks of wealth; she speaks of status. Amy understands that money itself is, in a sense, not an issue. After all, despite having "but a small income" (50) and engaging in "a perpetual effort to conceal the squalid background of what was meant for the eyes of her friends and neighbors" (190), her mother is an eminently respectable member of the upper-middle class. But, by stepping out of the literary world and taking a position with a regular salary, Amy recognizes that Edwin will catapult them to lower-class status. She warns her husband that "to fall from the position you now have, and to take weekly wages – you surely can't know how people of my world would react to that" (189). Just as the text shows no interest in granting Mrs. Alfred Yule access to the middle-class world that her husband came from, it also shows no interest in allowing a member of the middle-classes to be dragged into the lower classes by a former member of the literary world. Thus, as soon as the narrator proclaims "Let the man of

letters be forgotten," the two are immediately separated. Amy returns to the protection of

her mother's drawing room and Edwin plunges "back to obscurity."

Thus begins the quick decline that ultimately culminates in his death. Peck notes

that "We are never allowed to lose sight of Reardon's egotism, his selfishness, his

readiness to blame others for his failures" (8), and these shortcomings are never more

apparent than during his painful separation from Amy. He appears simultaneously

defiant, superior, embittered, despondent, condescending and pathetic. In a particularly

striking scene, the narrator describes Edwin's sojourns through the streets of London:

> In his present state of mind he cared nothing how disreputable he looked
>
> to passers-by. These seedy habiliments were the token of his degradation,
>
> and at times he regarded them (happening to see himself in a shop mirror)
>
> with pleasurable contempt. The same spirit often led him for a meal to the
>
> poorest of eating-houses, places where he rubbed elbows with ragged
>
> creatures who had somehow obtained the price of a cup of coffee and a
>
> slice of bread and butter. He liked to contrast himself with these comrades
>
> in misfortune. 'This is the rate at which the world esteems me; I am worth
>
> no better provision than this.' Or else, instead of emphasizing the contrast,
>
> he defiantly took a place among the miserables of the nether world, and
>
> nursed hatred of all who were well-to-do. (277)

Because of the utter disconnection from the world around him that Edwin experiences,

Buckley suggests that he emerges as an "unclassed literary hero, aloof from the grades of

society, fallen from a bourgeois economic status and disassociated in any case from

philistine tastes and prejudices, living among the poor, yet not of them" (233). From

Edwin's own perspective that estimation is a correct one. His keen intellect and cultivated aesthetic taste separate him from the lower class people that surround him. His difficulties, however, stem from the fact that from the middle-class perspective, which in the final analysis emerges as the fundamental ideology of the text itself, by renouncing his title of "literary man" he has been *classed* and not "unclassed" as Buckley claims. No longer protected by the strategy of objectification offered by the title literary man, he reverts to the status of being a poor, weekly wage earner. In the drawing room of Mrs. Edmund Yule, those qualities are the hallmark of lower class existence, and they trump all the superior aspects of Edwin's character.

Note that after Edwin renounces his status as a man of letters, he and Amy become two separate story lines that reunite only long enough for him to die. Thus, *New Grub Street* repeats the general trend that I have discerned in those turn-of-the-century texts that participate in inter-class connection: When their strategies of objectification break down, they resolve inter-class connection through overt plot machinations, and in doing so, these works embrace both the formal example of the Victorian novel and the middle-class values that those texts sought to create and propagate. Simon James suggests that Gissing resists "the structure of forms inherited from English fiction as 'insincere'. These forms are present in his fiction, but with the conventions in so distorted a shape as to demonstrate a virtually parodic relationship" (17). Edwin's removal to the nether regions of London certainly echoes the practice in mid-Victorian fiction of banishing to the colonies those who challenge the established social order.

Now without question, such a reading must be qualified to some extent. As with its depiction of Mrs. Alfred Yule, there is clearly a sense of irony and injustice in the fate

that Edwin suffers, and at the outset of Chapter Thirty-One, the text offers a particularly moving tribute to his and Harold's characters:

> From the familiar point of view these men were worthless, view them in possible relation to a humane order of society and they are admirable citizens.… These two were richly endowed with the kindly and imaginative virtues; if fate threw them amid incongruous circumstances, is their endowment of less value? You scorn their passivity; but it was their nature and merit to be passive. Gifted with independent means, each of them would have taken quite a different aspect in your eyes. The sum of their faults was their inability to earn money, but, indeed, that inability does not call for unmingled disdain. (348)

Despite such obvious and sincere admiration, the fate that the text visits upon Edwin cannot be overlooked. James, however, attempts to do this by arguing that "it cannot be… the plot that creates and establishes the values the author wishes to promote. Gissing's model of *Bildung* always contains a structural gap between potential and fulfillment, the former suggested by the discourse and in the characters' own aspirations, the latter denied by the plot" (13).   Unfortunately, that position is simply untenable. For the plot to have no direct influence on establishing the "values that the author wishes to promote," its treatment of Edwin would have to be utterly ironic, and this is clearly not the case. His continual attempts to disconnect from the humanity that surrounds him are not emblematic of a sensitive artistic temperament but are, rather, symptomatic of his essentially selfish and egotistical nature. Edwin is what Goode calls "a self-willed failure to some extent" (134). The temptation to view him as the victim of a destructive system,

to read him as the heroic "artist" struggling mightily against but finally succumbing to the insatiable and vulgar demands of the burgeoning publishing industry must be avoided at all costs. Instead, Edwin's destruction is carefully crafted to resolve the inter-class connection between him and Amy and reestablish and reaffirm the dominance and integrity of middle-class culture.

Reaching Above Your Station – The Demise of Harold Biffen

Even more so than Edwin's fate, the demise that Harold suffers because of his infatuation with Amy demonstrates clearly the dominant role that latent class-based anxieties play in shaping *New Grub Street*. As a literary man, Harold represents an ideal – industrious, perceptive, connected to the world around him, yet possessing staunch and clearly defined values. Goode labels him "a writer of real integrity" (137). Despite these qualities, the text still sacrifices him because of the threat to middle-class stability that he represents. Throughout the novel, he acts as a potential conduit for the bringing forth of those elements from the lowest rungs of the socio-economic hierarchy that the middle classes want to maintain excluded from their midst. At the conclusion of the text, when he himself tries to step out of his position in the literary world and into Mrs. Edmund Yule's drawing room, he goes too far and pays for the presumption with his life.

Despite the fact that his writing brings him little financial reward and he dies essentially unknown, Harold must be deemed a success as a literary man for the simple reason that he produces text at a rate and of a kind that meets his own goals. He works furiously on his masterpiece of literary realism *Mr. Bailey, Grocer* and is pleased with its final outcome:

> … he had laboured over it for many months, patiently affectionately,

scrupulously. Each sentence was as good as he could make it, harmon-

ious to the ear, with words of precious meaning skillfully set. Before

sitting down to a chapter he planned it minutely in his mind; then he

wrote a rough draft of it; then he elaborated the thing phrase by phrase.

(349)

Although the novel ultimately achieves no commercial success whatsoever, this does not

matter to him: "The work must be significant, that was all he cared for" (*Ibid.*). Indeed,

Harold cares so much for it that he risks his life running into a burning building to save

the manuscript. Near the conclusion of the text, while contemplating suicide, he muses

over the book: "The work was done – the best he was capable of – and this satisfied him"

(401). Thus, although Harold works "very slowly," he does work, and he does produce.

Because his novel enjoys desultory sales, it would be tempting to label him as a failure,

but in fact, as a literary man, he must be judged a success.

Harold is driven by a sincere, humanist interest in the lives of others. Peck notes

that whenever he "arrives he immediately makes contact with the person without pausing

to reflect on his surroundings" (10). Ultimately, this single-minded concern pays

dividends for him. Because he has substantial contact with the numerous men in "poor

position" whom he tutors, Harold has "extraordinary stories… from his large experience

in this sphere" that he can incorporate easily into his writing (114 – 115). Indeed, *Mr.*

Bailey grows solely from his interaction with a local shopkeeper: "I have dealt with him

for a long time, and as he's a talkative fellow I've come to know about him and his

history" (171). Even when functioning as a solitary observer, he still focuses on people,

not objects, and seeks to become as immersed in their situation as possible. During a visit

to the Reardons' apartment early in the novel, he tells Edwin of a scene he has just

passed:

> I don't know any writer who has treated ordinary vulgar life with fidelity
> and seriousness…. As I came along by Regent's Park half an hour ago a
> man and a girl were walking close in front of me, love-making; I passed
> them slowly and heard a good deal of their talk – it was part of the
> situation that they should pay no heed to a stranger's proximity. Now,
> such a love-scene as that has absolutely never been written down… (115)

Note that he spends no time describing the park itself or other aspects of the

surroundings. Indeed given his character, it is likely he took no notice of them. Instead,

his concern is to learn as much about the couple as possible.

Ultimately, both Harold's utterly sincere commitment to his aesthetic vision,

which unlike Edwin's "artistic integrity" does not become a means for rationalizing his

self-absorption and undue sense of intellectual superiority, and his humanistic concern for

the world around him, mark him as gleefully out of step with the new literary world that

Jasper embodies, and the text admires him for that. Although as Edwin's example

suggests, *New Grub Street* harbors no sorrow that the fetishization of the isolated,

intellectual "artist" was being swept away by the proliferation of a mass media and an

expanding reading public, Gissing himself did regret "the impossibility of art providing a

locus of stable or sacred value in the modern world of ephemeral, mass- produced art

without 'aura'…" (Bowlby 14). Certainly, *New Grub Street* recognizes the importance of

literature that exists above the level of hackneyed writing designed merely to appease the

"vulgar" readers. Because of its radical realism *Mr. Bailey, Grocer* possesses the "sacred

value" that Bowlby identifies, and its complete commercial failure constitutes a clear indictment of the inability of the burgeoning masses of readers to discern a work of true artistic merit.

The promise of Harold's literary experiment is finally sacrificed, however, because of the role that he plays as a facilitator of inter-class connection. His primary source of income comes from giving lessons to poor men seeking to advance their station in life by vaulting into the ranks of professional occupations:

> The teaching by which he partly lived was of a kind quite unknown to the respectable tutorial world. In these days of examinations, numbers of men in a poor position – clerks chiefly – conceive a hope that by 'passing' this, that, or the other formal test they may open for themselves a new career. Not a few such persons nourish preposterous ambitions; there are warehouse clerks privately preparing (without any means or prospect of them) for a call to the Bar… (115)

The dismissive tone of the narrative voice, which is not ironic in this context, coupled with its repeated insistence on the impossibility of actual advancement suggests a latent concern that the barrier which these exams represent may not be utterly impenetrable, especially if those of "poor position" are provided with extra assistance from men like Harold. That threatening social presence is compounded by the fact that many of the stories that he uses as starting points for his fiction come directly from his lower class students. His stated goal for his fiction is to "reproduce" the experience of "low-class life… verbatim, without one single impertinent suggestion or any point of view save that of honest reporting" (115). In that discussion, he takes great care to distinguish himself

from Dickens, whom he feels portrays such scenes as "ludicrous" and from other writers who attempt to "idealize" them. He seeks to shed light on a whole under-class of society which has been hitherto inaccessible save as farce or fantasy. Here, Harold actually echoes the feelings of Gissing himself. Speaking of the author's general preference for Thackeray over Dickens, Poole notes in *Gissing in Context* that "He [Gissing] felt that Thackeray was prepared to challenge many of the comfortable assurances behind which Dickens was too quick to hide, particularly in the presentation of working-class life" (113). Ironically, Gissing's criticism of Dickens applies equally well to his own work. Buckley correctly recognizes that "Gissing does indeed present sharp impressions of mean streets and dreary lodgings, but only as they contain the lives of his defeated protagonists. He shows no interest in the tribulations of the unaesthetic London poor… he has no concern with social reform or political protest" (223). The author's class-based prejudices prevent *New Grub Street* from delivering an unsentimental and complete vision of lower-class life.

Clearly, Harold, like Edwin, constitutes a "defeated protagonist" and his destruction begins when he ceases to operate as a literary man. Although he does not transform himself in the sudden and dramatic fashion that his friend does with the proclamation "Let the man of letters be forgotten," Harold does quietly leave the literary world behind when, after Edwin's death, he manages to find a publisher for *Mr. Bailey*, but stops his literary production, the defining characteristic of the literary man. To highlight the reality of his diminishing presence in the literary world, the text presents him in an increasingly social context. As his scarcely-hidden desire for Amy takes flight, he becomes "the slave of his inflamed imagination" (400). These feelings lead him to

call upon Mrs. Edmund Yule's home, where, surprisingly, Amy greets him with an "exclamation of frank pleasure" (399), and even her image-obsessed mother is "all graciousness" towards him (400). That meeting goes well because Harold appears under the guise, nominally, of a literary man. He uses the impending publication of his book as the pretense of his call. As such, he is allowed to step into the upper-middle class social world of the Yule's drawing-room. Unfortunately, that visit only fuels his desire for Amy further, and although it is clear that a union between them is simply not possible, the text does not allow him to arrive at this conclusion through quiet contemplation.

Instead, it drives home the magnitude of the gulf that separates them in an awkward and humiliating final visit to the Edmund Yule's. When Harold enters Mrs. Yule's drawing room for the second time he has no new article or book to recommend him. Lacking the status of a literary man, he appears as merely a member of the lower classes and is therefore unwelcome. Immediately cognizant of having been received with "less cordiality than before" and made to feel ashamed of his "comparative shabbiness," he quickly leaves (401). Several days after having thus been taught his lesson, Harold walks at a "steady, purposeful pace" to Putney Hill and commits suicide (403). His demise replicates the same basic fictional pattern found in Edwin's example. Once Harold's status as a literary man has been abandoned, the text's strategy of objectification can no longer mediate interactions between him and Amy. As a result, he is cast out of the novel.

That expulsion is not, however, a rhetorically neutral event. Instead, the treatment of Harold over the final pages of *New Grub Street* repeats the "brutality and gratuitousness" that Jameson discerns in the fate visited upon Richard, the main character

in Gissing's earlier novel *Demos*. In that text, after marrying a woman of a higher class,

not only does Richard suffer defeat, he is methodically crushed in a process that marks

the novel as "a virtual object lesson in snobbery, setting out systematically to show how

irredeemable a working class character is, and how unsuitable for the social and cultural

conditions of a different class situation" (198).   Because of the role that he plays in

facilitating lower class mobility and because of his futile attempt to gain access into the

middle-class world of the Yules while no longer a man of letters, Harold is not only

eliminated from the narrative, he is humiliated and then discredited as well. Much like

Sibyl Vane in *Dorian Gray*, it is not enough for him to simply die. He must suffer the

most ignoble of deaths by taking his own life. Moreover, given that suicide is an

inherently selfish act while Harold is an utterly selfless character, the utter incongruity of

his action is particularly striking. Yet, the fact that the narrative is prepared to employ

such a clumsy plot manipulation only underscores further the powerful hold that class-

based anxieties hold over *New Grub Street*.

Unjust Rewards – The Success of the Middle-Class Literary Man

In sharp contrast to the ignominious fates suffered by Edwin, Alfred Yule's

family and Harold, two members of the literary world, Jasper and Whelpdale, do achieve

success, and their good fortune provides the final, undeniable proof of the text's latent

class anxieties. Thanks to the popularity of his vapid paper *Chit-Chat*, Whelpdale finds

both his bank account and influence growing. Along with that prosperity, he also enters

into an apparently idyllic marriage with Dora Melvin, Jasper's sister. Similarly, Jasper is

awarded the editorship of *The Current*, the position long-coveted by Alfred Yule, and

marries Amy. Indeed, the text's final scene features Jasper relaxing in a "dreamy bliss" while commanding his new wife to play songs on their piano.

Without question, that ending has perplexed both reader and critic alike since it appears to reward those who are either undeserving or worthy of punishment. Whelpdale seems to have lucked into tremendous success without any discernible talent. Lewis D. Moore writes of him "If there is a complete center of mediocrity in the literary world, Whelpdale triumphantly occupies it." (10). Clearly, Jasper has worked very hard to achieve his position. Yet, his methods are unscrupulous and self-serving and particularly in his remorseless manipulation of Marian, he stands as a deplorable character. So, why then do both men ultimately triumph? M.A. Makinen recognizes that the answer to that question is a relatively simple one: "Jasper and Amy are supremely successful because the accept the values of the society they live in and they close the book prosperous and happy…. society has the citizens it deserves" (9). As will become clear, although the idea of society "deserving" Jasper may seem like an ironic commentary on the culture itself, in fact it is not.

Indeed, the majority of Gissing's critics have overestimated the ironic nature of the text and have tried to look beyond the final resolution of the narrative when discerning the text's underlying thematics. Consider, for instance Poole's reading of the conclusion in *Gissing in Context*. Although published in 1975, it remains to this day one of the most influential and widely-recognized studies of the author ever written, and my own argument owes a great deal to its critical insights. That said, it proffers a reading of the novel that simply does not correspond to the text itself: "This final scene, so neat, so glib, is not the one demanded by the novel's internal logic. Gissing's deep, humane

identification with those who are left outside, requires that the final scene should belong to Marian, and her lonely, loveless vigil in the provincial library" (155). This estimation represents wishful critical thinking. If the internal logic of the text truly "required" Marian to have the last scene of the text, she would. But, she does not. Poole missteps here because like so many scholars, he seeks a "redemptive reading" of the text that will establish the presence of a "humane identification" that has somehow emerged in critical discourse as a given characteristic of Gissing. As with the novel's construction of Edwin as a deeply flawed character, if its conclusion were utterly ironic and sought to merely denounce Jasper, then he would be a one-dimensional villain, complete with the Mephistophelean mustache that Alec d'Urberville sports in *Tess*. Yet, he is not a caricature, and there are moments when he displays a very real sensitivity and depth. Upon hearing of Harold's suicide for instance, he credits the deceased with possessing a "good deal of native delicacy" (406), and later refers to him and Reardon as "two of my companions fallen in battle" (409). Both statements are given with uncharacteristic feeling. As Goode notes "…it is crucial to our understanding of the novel that we shouldn't just think of Jasper as an appalling cynic" because ultimately "his rationality effectively becomes the novel's reality." (116 – 117). When the assumption of Gissing's "humane identification" is cast aside and the conclusion to *New Grub Street* is read in the context of Jameson's revelation in *The Political Unconscious* of an unrelenting opposition in the author's early fiction to upward mobility of lower classes, the absolute logic of both the final scene and the overall conclusion come into sharp focus.[10]

That coherence rests upon the simple fact that both Jasper and Whelpdale come from upper or middle class backgrounds. Upon Whelpdale's first introduction in the text,

the narrator notes that despite the financial difficulties he faces as a struggling literary man, he has the "breeding… of a gentleman, and it was only of late years that he had fallen into the hungry region of New Grub Street" (221). Similarly, *New Grub Street* opens in the refined domesticity of Mrs. Jasper's home in the country. The widow of a veterinary surgeon, she receives a sizeable annuity of £250. The burden of supporting Jasper's fledgling literary career, coupled with the fact that the payment is not transferable upon her death eventually do place Jasper and his sisters in economic straits. But, his initial background is resolutely middle-class.

Thus, a very simple pattern emerges in the fates suffered by the five primary men of letters. All those who have connections to or are originally from the lower classes – Alfred Yule's family, Edwin and Harold – are dead or driven from London, while those literary men who come from the middle and upper classes – Jasper and Whelpdale – are absorbed into the domestic ideal of middle-class culture. *New Grub Street* ultimately re-establishes the dominance of the middle-class world of Mrs. Edmund Yule by dismantling the literary world that it initially works so hard to establish. Those men of letters who are deemed unworthy of joining the middle classes or who are seen as a threat to middle-class hegemony are dismissed, while those men of letters who began amidst its ranks are reassimilated into its them. In Peck's estimation, *New Grub Street* "turns away from the moral realism of mid-Victorian fiction, to explore a more frightening, more impersonal world, which can only be properly conveyed by a reliance on symbols" (13). Without question, symbolism does play a crucial role in this text, but to discern its essential rhetorical perspective one must recognize that it actually embraces the "moral

realism of mid-Victorian fiction" by concluding on a scene of middle-class domestic tranquility singularly free of any culturally threatening elements.

Conclusion

New Grub Street further establishes inter-class connection as a key component of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British literature and confirms its importance as a critical paradigm through which to view texts from this period. Through its manipulation of the terms literary man and man of letters, Gissing's most famous novel anticipates the changes in subjectivity that would eventually come to define Britain's professional society in the twentieth century and attempts to imagine an alternative to the then-dominant class-based social structure. That project finally crumbles, however, under the weight of the residual Victorian class prejudices that characterize the author's earlier novels. Although Poole suggests that in Gissing's fiction "we can see the fragments of earlier Victorian assumptions, ideals and aspirations in an advanced state of erosion" (7), in *New Grub Street*, they are alive and well, and like many turn-of-the-century texts, they emerge in those formal practices it relies upon to bring resolution to its scenes of inter-class connection.

NOTES

[1] In his remark, Peck is responding to P.J. Keating's of estimation of *New Grub Street* in *George Gissing: New Grub Street* 1.

[2] Because of its overlapping plots and characters and its rather archaic naming conventions, *New Grub Street* can prove very challenging to both critics and readers from the perspective of telling individuals apart. Throughout the text, three of its main characters, Edwin Reardon, Jasper Melvin and

Harold Biffen are referred to almost exclusively by their last names, even when they are in contact with someone in their own family who also shares that same name. Thus, it will, for instance, speak of Edwin Reardon as simply "Reardon," but his wife will be "Amy." Obviously, this constitutes a sexist practice; however, essentially all critical discourse surrounding the novel adheres to the example it sets. In my own analysis, I use first names to avoid confusion. As a last point, the first names of Mrs. Alfred Yule and Mrs. Edmund Yule are never revealed by the novel. Thus, I have resorted to those titles when speaking of them. For the sake of brevity, if it is clear from the context which woman is being discussed, she is referred to merely as "Mrs. Yule."

[3]   *Chit-Chat* is widely recognized as an allusion to the periodical *Tid-Bits* that was started in 1881

[4]   The start of chapter eight for instance discusses the backgrounds of the members of Alfred Yule's small literary circle, all of whom have married "unpresentable wives" and whose domestic situations seem lifted directly from a post-Dickensian nightmare. Perhaps the most amusing of the group is Mr. Gorbutt, a poet who publishes every year at his own expense a book of verse merely to "keep alive rancour in his wife" (81). Each one of these relationships constitutes a case of inter-class connection.

[5]   The use of Mrs. Yule as essentially a mouthpiece for the text is not as surprising as it may seem at first glance. As someone who insists upon living in a house where the "rent absurdly exceeded the due proportion of her income…" and who must engage in "a perpetual effort to conceal the squalid background of what was meant for the eyes of her friends and neighbors," she is certainly an authority on social expectations and middle-class prejudices (191). And these are the very forces which produce the cultural expectations that the novel, in turn, must overcome in order to present scenes of inter-class connection.

[6]   For analysis of the development of Britain's readership during the nineteenth century, Richard D. Altick's *The English Common Reader* remains an immensely valuable resource, even almost fifty years after its initial publication. Chapter 13 and 15 are especially relevant to the discussion at hand. For information on the producers of literature, Gross's *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* does contain valuable biographical information, particularly on rather obscure figures. Rachel Bowlby's *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*, presents much of the same information as those two studies, but does so in a more theoretical context that directly addresses the impact that these historical developments had upon fictional texts.

[7]   Obviously, in those last two examples "literary man" has been changed to "literary girl" and "literary people" in order to meet the gender needs of the context. Although these two terms do not reappear in the text, they adhere to the basic, two-part structure of "literary man."

[8]   Simon James notes in "How to Read a George Gissing Novel" that "Wills and legacies occur in nearly every novel… but do not reward protagonists, satisfyingly closing their narrative, but often propel them into still greater instability" (18).

[9]   The question of whether or not Reardon is an autobiographical sketch of Gissing is an especially popular one among Gissing scholars. For two critics who detect a close connection between the two, see Leavis 193 and Buckley 229. For an opposing position other than the quotation from Sloan given below, see Goode 135.

[10]   To be fair, Poole's study of Gissing appeared before *The Political Unconscious*. Yet, even twenty years after Jameson's re-evaluation of the author, the vision of Gissing as a writer with strong working-class ties and sympathies predominates critical discourse.

CHAPTER FOUR

Class Interaction and the Unified Voice of
Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party"

<u>Introduction and Overview</u>

Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Garden Party" opens with the assertion "And after all the weather was ideal" (282). Although truncated, the statement's gentle tone suggests a scene of exquisite perfection and seeks to establish a tranquil veneer for the subsequent narrative. That attempt, however, quickly fails. Despite the narrator's claim of ideality, very little within "The Garden Party" reflects harmonious existence. Instead, it is a story obsessed with questions of power, authority and hierarchy that extend across many different borders.   First published in February 1922, the narrative focuses on the wealthy Sheridan family as they prepare for an afternoon fête, the very existence of which comes to be threatened by the death of Scott, a poor laborer who lives nearby. As issues arise during arrangements for the party, the individual Sheridans come into contact and conflict with members of their own family and the workers around them. Throughout the story, however, the narrative voice focuses its attention primarily on Laura Sheridan, the "artistic" daughter who is first seen trying to resolve where workmen should place a marquee and then unsuccessfully lobbies for cancellation of the party because of Scott's death. Later, she is sent by her mother to deliver food to the dead man's family and in the story's climax, she confronts his body. Laura's dealings with the workmen, the servants and especially her visit to the corpse all constitute clear cases of inter-class connection as I have defined the term because she finds herself linked in various ways to individuals of a substantially lower socio-economic standing, and her reactions to these situations clearly defy the expectations of her family.

In keeping with the basic model for inter-class connection, those moments all occur in conjunction with a clearly defined strategy of objectification that assists in their portrayal. Of all the texts considered by this dissertation, "The Garden Party" relies most heavily upon objectification to control and resolve the presentation of class interaction and most fully incorporates the practice into the structure of the text itself. That sophistication makes it a logical choice to close out this study. The strategy itself consists of two parts. The first stage finds Laura repeatedly connected with the spectacle of eating, while the second stage intertwines her identity with the garish hat that she wears at the party and again when she sojourns to the Scotts' home. Note that in both cases, this text explores objectification in the most literal sense: individuals are reduced to actual objects. Although simplistic, the two-part strategy is clearly effective, as "The Garden Party" never resorts to plot machinations to resolve its scenes of inter-class connection.[1] The reactionary thematic and rhetorical effects that such reversions produce were considered at length in my discussions of *Dorian Gray* and *New Grub Street*. By avoiding those limitations,"The Garden Party" emerges as a text that delivers sharp criticism of the upper class lifestyle.

Structurally, Mansfield's story demonstrates a unique complexity because the development of its objectification strategy corresponds directly to its basic temporal structure. The story consists of three distinct, but unequal, temporal segments: the preparations that take place before the party; the party itself; and Laura's experience after the party while visiting Scott's house. The actual party, the middle section, marks the point where the transition between the two distinct stages of objectification occurs. The fact that objectification is such a fully integrated component of "The Garden Party"

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supports my fundamental assertion that objectification emerged as a general fictional

practice in the period between 1890 and 1925 in response to an ongoing series of cultural,

economic and scientific developments. Some of those concerns, such as the growth of

large-scale industrialization, first took shape as early as the late-eighteenth century and

were well-established by 1890, while others, such as the burgeoning of commodity

culture and advertising, did not appear until much later but continued to grow in

prominence through the turn-of-the-century. "The Garden Party" was published later

than all of the texts considered here save one, [2] and therefore, the influence of all those

factors had more completely permeated the social context from which it sprang.

    Mansfield's story uses Laura's interactions with members of the lower classes to

question social roles, and it presents what Anders Iversen calls a "serious discussion of

the relations between two social classes (the author sympathizing with the underdog)"

(6). Care must be taken here, however, because "The Garden Party" cannot be read as a

nuanced and detailed reflection of specific social class issues in early-1920's England. It

is, rather, what one might call a fable of social class. Unlike *Howards End* for instance,

where the Schlegels emerge as representatives of liberal intelligentsia and the Wilcoxes

reflect newer industrial wealth, specific details regarding the Sheridans' background are

limited. They emerge as a prominent, wealthy family who clearly dominates the local

social and geographic landscapes, but beyond that, little can be said of them. Similarly,

although elements of the story are clearly drawn from Mansfield's own experiences,

critics agree that the Sheridans are not just fictional versions of her own family, the

Beauchamps.[3] At the other end of the social spectrum, the text also makes little, if any,

differentiation between members of the lower classes. Although it is learned that Scott is

a carter, the majority of the lower class characters that Laura encounters are presented in very generic terms, an overly simplistic approach out of step with the cultural climate of turn-of-the-century England. G. E. Mingay notes in *The Transformation of Britain 1830 – 1939* that "Social divisions were not confined… to the crude dichotomy between rich and poor. Within the ranks of the manual workers there were clear distinctions of income and status among the unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled" (143). The distinctions of which he speaks are, however, not in evidence here. As with *Dorian Gray*'s employment of supernatural elements and fondness for social caricature, however, "The Garden Party"'s refusal to locate itself within a specific and detailed historical context does not diminish its obvious commitment to serious examination of class-based issues.

In the quote from Iversen given above, his relegation of the story's rhetorical stance to a parenthetical remark is a telling reflection of the general critical conundrum surrounding "The Garden Party." The story concludes in mid-sentence – much as it begins – when Laura returns from her visit to the Scotts' and begins to mouth the words "isn't life – " but then finds herself unable to speak further (297). Thus, the reader is denied access to what presumably would be an authoritative pronouncement regarding the outcome of the day's events. As a result, conclusive critical judgment has long eluded this narrative and to date, no analysis has credibly established "The Garden Party" as a unified and rationalized text.[4] The majority of Mansfield's critics have argued that the story's attitude regarding the class dynamics that it portrays is ambiguous and unresolveable, and few have been willing to acknowledge the sympathies to which Iversen quietly alludes. Warren S. Walker began the debate surrounding the story in a 1957 essay entitled "The Unresolved Conflict in 'The Garden Party'," in which he asserts

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that the narrative "often leaves readers with a feeling of dissatisfaction, a vague sense that the story somehow does not realize its potential" (354). He sees the narrative addressing two major crises: that of Laura's coming into adulthood through confrontation with death and a "clash of basic social attitudes represented by Laura and her mother," a crisis that ultimately plays out as a question of social class (355). Walker feels that the story adequately addresses the existential conflict but leaves the social one unresolved: "no hint of any answer to this dilemma is to be found in the conclusion" (357). Almost forty years later, critics such as Nicholas L. Nownes still echo Walker's basic complaint: "'The Garden Party,' opening by arresting the reader's eye in midpassage, and closing, literally, with a question mark, defies traditions of an ordered, unified text. As the story unfolds, themes are introduced, developed to one degree or another, then abandoned essentially unresolved" (50). Thus, he feels the reader is ultimately "unable to pin down conclusively narrative meaning" (*Ibid*. 51).

The sense of frustration in these arguments is certainly understandable. "The Garden Party" *is* a tremendously elusive, understated text, and Mansfield herself worried about the openness of the ending (Magalaner 118). Ironically, because Nownes is absolutely correct in his assertion that the story defies the traditions of an "ordered, unified text," the fact that ending by itself provides "no hint of any answer" seems hardly surprising. As is typical of her short fiction, Mansfield steadfastly refuses to neatly tie things up with a simple conclusion. Therefore, this narrative requires the adoption of a rigorous critical paradigm that explicates the text as a whole and goes beyond trying to reach understanding by focusing on just the conclusion or a single aspect of the story, as many of Mansfield's critics have done.[5] My analysis of "Garden Party" takes a unified

approach and considers the story's manipulation of subject-object relationships in conjunction with its temporal and spatial structures and its underlying linguistic patterns. Doing so reveals that not only is this a resolvable text, it stands as a story that goes beyond merely discussing class relations and launches a clear critique of upper-class arrogance and values.

To achieve such resolution however, one must first recognize that one of the key tensions within "The Garden Party" is the dialogic conflict that emerges between the narrative voice and Laura. Both the narrator and those characters who are members of the upper class employ the same basic speech patterns. They establish and preserve power by employing a linguistic strategy that dominates others through insinuation and implication. Although at times it does satirize and ironize the members of the Sheridan family, the narrative voice in "The Garden Party" is effectively the voice of the upper classes. Laura, on the other hand, through her sympathetic behavior toward members of the lower classes, presents a challenge to the social hierarchy. Moreover, the description of her past experience included in the preparations for the party indicates clearly that she possesses a repressed, unconscious desire for experiencing elements of low culture. It would be incorrect to read the conflict between the narrator and Laura as a simple symbolic conflict between rich and poor because ultimately, she is a member of the upper class. Despite her obvious humanity and sympathy, she remains what Adam J. Sorkin calls "the privileged daughter of her monied class" (441 – 442). Nonetheless, their conflict is still, symbolically, a social one, and it stands as the crucial element in the text's exploration of class issues. When all of the elements that make up "The Garden Party" are examined together, it becomes clear that the text privileges Laura's actions

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over the pronouncements of the narrative voice, and in doing so, it rejects the insular, upper class world of the Sheridan family and advocates Laura's fundamentally humanistic social perspective.

As proof of that premise, the following analysis begins by examining Mansfield's manipulation of temporality and objects during the preparations for the fête. Symbolically, this section represents the influence of the past as the narrative assumes the character of the dream state. Through her eating Laura becomes relegated to the role of a child, and this, in turn, helps mollify the implicit tension that emerges during the moments of inter-class connection that she experiences. Eating also establishes Laura as a primarily internalized figure. The process of internalization suggests repression and denial, both of which breed desire, and all of three of these emerge in the first section. Then, in the last two sections of the story – the party itself and Laura's trip to the Scotts' – a reverse effect emerges. Temporality slows and moves from the chaos of the dream state to the creeping pace of a monotonous present, a progression reinforced by movement away from the Edenic setting of the garden party to the Hades-like shadow world of the Scott's lane. Much like Sibyl Vane in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Laura becomes an utterly externalized figure through the spectacle of her hat and her own internalized identity disappears. It returns, however, at the climax of the text when she apologizes for the impropriety of her hat and in doing so, symbolically apologizes for her own upper class existence.

Underscoring the contrast between the sections of "The Garden Party," the text's linguistic structure remains constant throughout, and it provides the means for resolving the apparent fissure in the story. The chapter's analysis concludes with a detailed look at

the voices of the narrator and the characters and considers how they establish and perpetuate the class conflict that permeates the text. Understood in this way, Laura's silence at the conclusion becomes an act of rejection, a refusal to embrace the speech patterns that have dominated her life within the Sheridan household. Along with her apology before Scott's body, her self-censorship confirms the story's attack on a social structure based on privilege and separation.

Food, Plans and a Return to the Past – The Opening Portion of the Text

The first section of "The Garden Party" stretches from the opening paragraph to Laurie's compliment of Laura's hat upon his return from work (292), and it serves primarily to introduce Laura's character and establish the crisis of Scott's death that ultimately produces the climax of the story. As Hubert Zapf correctly notes, it "structurally prepares the way and defines the conditions for the existential experience of the second part" (53). From the very outset, the narrative voice undertakes a distinct strategy for characterizing Laura that remains consistent throughout the entire story. It never provides a specific description of her and is never explicitly critical or demeaning to her. Instead, it consistently works to implicitly undermine her credibility through insinuation and association. As will be discussed at length in the final portion of this analysis, this strategy of implicit characterization anticipates the rhetorical strategy that emerges in the speech patterns of "The Garden Party"'s upper-class characters and helps establish the narrative voice of the story as the mouthpiece for the privileged world of the Sheridans.

To see a specific example of the narrator's unstated-yet-unmistakable approach,

consider Laura's introduction to the story. Essentially, she enters the text by default

when she becomes responsible for the placement of a marquee because no one else is

available for the task. Thus, to borrow a phrase from the sporting world, she is a fourth-

string player at best. Although Mrs. Sheridan is initially approached to make the decision

about where to put the piece, she demurs, claiming "I am determined to leave everything

to you children this year" (282). Ultimately, this assertion proves false because the

mother remains very much involved in the rest of the preparations and is clearly the

authority figure within the family. But, she does step aside in this case. Two other

siblings, Meg and Jose, are deemed unfit for the job due to their lack of proper dress.

Still drying her hair, Meg sits drinking coffee, wearing a "green turban," while Jose, "the

butterfly," sports only a "silk petticoat and a kimono jacket" (*Ibid.*). Therefore, the task

falls to "the artistic one," and after a commission from one of her family members,

presumably her mother, "Away Laura flew" (*Ibid.*). The assertion that she is the "artistic

one" does imply that she has a more fully developed aesthetic facility, but it also carries a

connotation of lacking focus and being unable to undertake logical decision-making. The

fact that Laura is "chosen" for the task out of necessity foregrounds the more negative

implications of the epithet. Note that in keeping with the narrator's strategy of implied

characterization, Laura's status as the "artistic one" appears in a line of dialogue and does

not come directly from the narrative voice. The paragraph that introduces her concludes

with the statement "she loved having to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so

much better than anybody else" (283). These remarks do not assign any specific

characteristics to her, nor do they pass any explicit judgment upon her. The narrator does

not say "Laura was a controlling and arrogant young lady."   But clearly, that is the

implication of the statement.[6]

        Although not present at the moment of Laura's initial appearance, the cornerstone

of the narrator's strategy for depicting her without explicit pronouncements quickly

appears.   The narrative voices links her closely to a series of objects – food in the first

section and her hat in the second section – and the symbolic implications of those objects

then come to dominate her own identity.   The image of Laura thus invoked then assists

the text in its portrayal of her moments of inter-class connection.   This process of

connecting subject to physical object is not unlike the linkage that occurs between Tess

and those remnants of her d'Urberville heritage that dot the Wessex landscape in *Tess of

the d'Urbervilles*.   Here, however, thanks to Mansfield's distinctive impressionistic style

that eschews traditional description and extensive detail, it is more readily discernible and

plays a more prominent role.

        The connection between Laura and food that dominates the first section of

"Garden Party" serves primarily to establish her as a child despite her obvious age.[7]   In

previous chapters, I have argued that objectification differentiates itself from

characterization because objectification shifts individual identity into a context where it

cannot actually exist, i.e. Sibyl Vane cannot actually be Portia, Edwin Reardon cannot

actually become a literary machine, etc. Here, the vision of Laura-as-child that emerges

from the spectacle of her eating does not constitute such a dramatic shift as those

mentioned above since she presumably went through adolescence. Nonetheless, this shift

does constitute a form of objectification because Laura is no longer a child and cannot

revert to that state and also because the physicality of the food plays such a central role in shaping her identity.

Laura is seen eating twice in the opening section of "The Garden Party" and both cases occur as she interacts with members of the lower class. The second of the two scenes will be considered first because it is relatively brief and beyond reinforcing the vision of Laura-as-child, it has little impact on the text overall. Shortly before the party, Laura and Jose each "steal" a cream puff under the watchful eye of the family cook. The pastries are an obviously childish food, a sugary treat. As the confections are delivered into the kitchen, the narrator notes that "Laura and Jose were far too grown up to really care about such things" (288). Despite their pretense of being too mature, their attention is clearly roused, and after Jose compliments the appearance of the cream puffs, the cook suggests that the sisters each have one. She further entices them with the assurance "Yer ma won't know" (289). The last point overcomes their reservations about the impropriety of "fancy cream puffs so soon after breakfast," and soon they are "licking their fingers with that absorbed inward look that only comes from whipped cream" (*Ibid*.). Thus, the narrator creates an implied spectacle of Laura eating with her fingers and being covered in confectioner's sugar, an embodiment of childlike behavior. Moreover, she feels an adolescent thrill at being able to naughtily defy the authority of her mother by eating in a non-traditional context.

That very same sentiment accompanies Laura's first instance of eating when she consumes a piece of bread-and-butter as she deals with the workmen who have come to place the marquee. The narrator suggests that "It's so delicious to have an excuse for eating out of doors" (282). As evidence of the food's importance to the text overall, note

that the object is the very first detail that the narrative voice provides about Laura. Despite flying away on her errand, she continues "holding her bread-and-butter" (282). Carried away by a youthful enthusiasm, she does not even take the time to put her breakfast down before running off. Bread-and-butter holds unmistakable connotations of childishness. As a food source, it epitomizes simplicity. A minimum of preparation is needed; anyone, especially a child, can make it. Laura has not even bothered to run off with something as complex as a sandwich. Also, its sweetness makes it attractive to the immature palate. If the narrator had introduced Laura while she was engaged in consuming something like a cup of coffee and a slice of melon, it would have been evident that the reader should see her as a woman of maturity and taste. But, the bread-and-butter marks her initially as a little girl. Note however, that she is not marked explicitly because the narrator does not simply describe her as childish. Instead, her association with the food forces that judgment.

After its initial appearance in Laura's hand, the bread-and-butter quickly becomes a source of fascination for the narrative. Just prior to meeting the workmen, she wishes that "she had not got the bread-and-butter, but there was nowhere to put it, and she couldn't possibly throw it away" (283). Later, as she prepares to leave the men, "Just to prove how happy she was… Laura took a big bite of her bread-and-butter" (284). Overall, the scene offers a bare minimum of physical details. For instance, only three of the workmen are described at all, and of these, one is just "pale" with a "haggard look in his dark eyes," while another is merely a "little fat chap." Yet, the bread-and-butter appears three times over two pages. The text fixates upon it because twice during the interaction between Laura and the workmen, the individuals involved step outside of their

expected social roles and the bread-and-butter provides a convenient vehicle for downplaying those two affronts to general social practice.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, this dissertation examines only those scenes of inter-class connection which hold the potential for producing what D.A. Miller labels in *Narrative and Its Discontents* as a state of narrative "disequilibrium." The initial context for Laura's meeting with the workers would not seem to fulfill this requirement because unlike her sisters, she is properly dressed for the occasion, and it is accepted that she may interact with members of a significantly lower social class when they are fulfilling their normative role as laborers. As a direct representative of their employer and as a member of a higher social class, Laura should give direction to the men, and it should be adhered to. The encounter does not, however, go according to plan, and she quickly finds herself stripped of the power that should be hers during the exchange. Despite her apprehensions that marquee will hide the karakas trees, the "tall fellow" chooses its location (284). That usurping, however, does not cause disjuncture within the text precisely because Laura's ethos has been undermined by the discussion of the bread-and-butter that immediately precedes the confrontation. Her relationship to that object shows her to be childish, not truly worthy of the task at hand. As evidenced by the fact that she wishes she did not have the bread-and-butter, Laura herself realizes that the food diminishes her authority. The workers look "impressive." She does not. She attempts to compensate by "copy(ing) her mother's voice" and appearing "severe" without success, a failure anticipated by her holding the bread-and-butter.

This subversion is further reinforced when Laura engages in a moment of identification and fantasy with the men after watching the "tall fellow" pick and smell some lavender:

> When Laura saw that gesture she forgot all about the karakas in her wonder at him caring for things like that – caring for the smell of lavender. How many men that she knew would have done such a thing? Oh, how extraordinarily nice workmen were, she thought. Why couldn't she have workmen for friends rather than the silly boys she danced with and who came to supper on Sunday night? She would get on much better with men like these. (284)

Because Laura derides the members of her own class, Walker points to this incident as the beginning in the "clash of basic social attitudes" that he identifies as one of the two major crises within the text (355). Her surprise at seeing the "tall fellow" pick the lavender is as much a condemnation of her own social world as a compliment to his sensitivity. Laura does not ask "How many *workmen* that she knew" would stop to enjoy a flower. Instead, her question refers simply to "men." Although the epithet contains no explicit qualification, given that Laura presumably knows no workers, "men" clearly implies members of an upper class status comparable to her own. Her disgust is taken even further when it becomes clear that her world does not feature "men" at all, but is populated only with "boys." Instead of displaying a superior, sophisticated character, they are merely "silly" and seem to have a leech-like quality about them with their regular attendance at Sunday suppers. Laura gets so carried away by her perceived

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fraternity with the men that the narrator notes "she despised stupid conventions" and "absurd class distinctions" (284).

Throughout this study, I have asserted that the substance of the anxieties, concerns and attitudes regarding social class found in these turn-of-the-century texts differs little from those expressed by Victorian fiction of the mid-1800's. To further demonstrate this point, compare Laura's fantasy of identification described above with the pronouncements of Lord Egremont, the hero of Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*, the "Condition of England" novel that gave birth to the term "The Two Nations." In *Sybil*, Egremont enjoys a series of meetings with Gerard, the Chartist leader, and Sybil, his daughter, in a rustic cottage where he discusses with them the problems of industrialization in England. After those experiences, the nobleman wistfully laments "are these then THE PEOPLE? If so, thought Egremont, would that I lived more among them! Compared with their converse, the tattle of our salons has in it something humiliating" (169). Just as Laura is struck by the "tall fellow" taking time to smell lavender, an act which undermines her preconception of workers being as bereft of aesthetic sensibility, so to Egremont develops a fascination for Gerard because he "glanced like a master of philosophy at the loftiest principles of political science" and displays an intelligence that the nobleman assumes is beyond the range of a common man. The desire for greater connection with members of a lower social class, as well as a sense of shame for and a repudiation of those in higher social classes is clearly displayed in both instances. An obvious difference between the two texts does emerge because the narrative voice in "The Garden Party" ironizes Laura's fantasy whereas the narrative voice in *Sybil* does not treat Egremont with such light scorn. As will become

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clear however, "The Garden Party" ultimately privileges Laura's action's over the dismissive tone of the narrative voice, which in turn suggests an implicit sanctioning of the desires that she expresses.

Although radical in its substance, Laura's desire for inter-class connection hardly raises an eyebrow thanks the ironic tenor of the narrator and its fixation on the bread-and-butter. She is not a leftist revolutionary calling for a violent end to bourgeoisie dominance, but a teenage girl engaged in political meditations that Nownes labels as "adolescent, an unthreatening flirtation with vaguely radical ideas finally as affected as her mother's mannerisms" (52). Even to the most socially-minded, Laura's position must seem ridiculous, primarily because it is so naive. Her enjoyment of the encounter with the workmen overlooks the very basic fact that she is engaged in a pleasurable diversion while they are toiling for their own "bread-and-butter." To Ben Satterfield, this error marks her as being "Self-absorbed and narcissistic, she takes the superficial at face value because both she and her perceptions lack depth" (67). Such a judgment is excessive and unfair, but without question, the reader fails to take Laura's assertions about social class seriously because of the narrative's strategy of objectification.

Laura chooses to punctuate her realization that "she despised stupid conventions" by taking a "big bite of her bread-and-butter," and in doing so, comes to feel "just like a work-girl" (284). Obviously, the label of "work-girl" serves to further infantalize her. At the start of the episode, Laura recognizes the bread-and-butter as subverting the difference between herself and the workmen that she would like to have maintained. So, in that context, she wishes that she could conceal the food, although she cannot. Here, however, she intentionally calls attention to the object with an overly demonstrative act,

taking a "big" bite.   From her perspective, this represents a rejection of her previous

antipathy and serves to eliminate the social barrier that separates her own identity from

those of the workers.   The tension which marked their meeting at first – most of which

resided in Laura's own mind – has been erased. From the reader's perspective, her biting

the bread has the exact same effect – easing of tensions – but for a completely different

reason. As discussed previously, the bread-and-butter carries a wealth of symbolic

connotations that point to adolescence and immaturity. The ridiculous spectacle of Laura

proudly eating in front of the men mollifies any disruption caused by her suggestion that

social conventions should be despised because her opinion cannot be taken seriously. To

Laura, her eating of the bread-and-butter symbolizes a moment of personal development

and growth, while the reader sees the act as confirming her possession of those

characteristics implied by the object itself.

But even as that process is occurring, a fissure in the text begins to emerge

because overall "The Garden Party" does evince a rhetorical stance closely aligned with

Laura's fantasy, even though it refuses to make that pronouncement overtly.   Over the

course of the story, the credibility of the narrator's ironic tone is undermined and the way

that it attempts to portray Laura is ultimately not the way that the reader comes to see her.

Sorkin notes that "If early detached by… the gentle comedy of Laura's ingenuous

problems of propriety and deportment in relation to workers and cream puffs, the reader

nevertheless remains committed and indeed grows in emotional closeness to her

throughout the day" (444). That growth occurs because Laura evinces a humane

character that is decidedly absent from the other members of the Sheridan family. That

depth of feeling shines forth most clearly in the sense of shame that she feels regarding

her own privileged background when she encounters members of lower social classes. Although Sorkin suggests that the marquee scene produces detachment in the reader, it actually marks the initial indication that both the tone of the narrative voice and its presentation of events stand in opposition to the substance of the events themselves. The shame that Laura experiences over the course of her interaction with the workers forces this judgment.

Those feelings first appear when she repudiates the idea of placing the marquee on the tennis court because it will hide the band. At this point, one of the workers who has previously remained silent asks tellingly "H'm going to have a band, are you?" (283). Note that he does not ask "Are you going to have a band?" The inverted sentence structure indicates clearly that his "question" is actually a rhetorical comment which proclaims the ostentatiousness of hiring musicians to play at the party. It also serves to establish the wealthy stature of the Sheridan family in direct contrast to the laborers, a gulf made even deeper by the fact that the worker is "pale" and carries a "haggard look in his eyes" (284). William Ian Miller notes that shame is "your response to others' disapproval," and this is indeed Laura's reaction (34). Although she does not make an overt apology for the band, she does acknowledge his mockery by attempting to placate him with the assurance that it's "Only a very small band" (284). She then wonders "Perhaps he wouldn't mind so much if the band was quite small" (*Ibid*.) As with her reaction to the "tall fellow" picking lavender, her belief that the worker would differentiate between sizes of bands is at best naïve and at worst, the embodiment of arrogance.

But, given her own family background, the fact that Laura even considers the worker's position at all is remarkable because the Sheridans as a whole demonstrate neither the desire nor the ability to empathize with individuals below them. They fix their attention only upon their social equals, and as Iversen argues, "*Sympathy* and *tact*, as the words occur and recur in Mrs. Sheridan's and Jose's vocabulary, only apply to people of their own class" (11). Thus, later in the story when Laura suggests to Jose that the party be stopped because of Scott's death, her sister's reaction is incredulous: "Stop the garden party?… don't be so absurd…. Nobody expects us to" (290). Her mother's reaction is essentially the same: "People like that don't expect sacrifices from us" (291). The two women do not reject the demands of those from the lower classes; they fail to even recognize that any such demands might exist. They would have likely responded to the question about the band by scolding the man and telling him to mind his own business. Laughable though it may be in some ways, Laura's attempt to soothe the worker's feelings at least acknowledges that he possesses them and that they have worth. Despite the narrator's attempts to ironically dismiss it, her clumsy display of humanism does work to develop sympathy with the reader. In his discussion of shame, Miller also argues that ultimately, the emotion "marks a failure to adhere to communal standards one is deeply committed to; it is the consequence of being understood to have not measured up" (34). This aspect complicates Laura's reaction to the worker even further. She enters the scene so worried that she will not "measure up" to her mother's standards for directing laborers that she tries unsuccessfully to assume her demeanor. Her mother's criterion would mandate a feeling of extreme pride at being able to afford to pay a band to play at a garden-party. Laura's sense of shame, therefore, suggests that she has

recognized a new set of standards for moral behavior that differ fundamentally from those of her upbringing.

Clearly, Laura emerges as a sympathetic figure for the very reason that her behavior toward members of the lower classes differentiates her from the members of her family. But, what accounts for her unique perspective? The answer to this question is at least partially revealed near the end of the story's first section. During her conversation with Jose about the need to cancel the party because of Scott's death and immediately before she goes to see her mother with the same request, the narrator relates that in the past Laura has forayed beyond the confines of her rarefied world and attempted to experience life in the adjoining, lower class community.

> When the Sheridans were little, they were forbidden to set foot there because of the revolting language and of what they might catch. But, since they were grown up, Laura and Laurie on their prowls sometimes walked through. It was disgusting and it was sordid. They came out with a shudder. But still one must go everywhere; one must see everything. So through they went. (290)

Laura's actions clearly demonstrate a compulsive desire for contact with the impoverished world of Scott's lane. When the narrator's description and her own words are analyzed within the context of the model of bourgeois identity formation put forth by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, it becomes evident that Laura is driven on her excursions by an unconscious identification with low culture, and this, in turn, accounts for her unique sympathy for the workers with whom she interacts.

Stallybrass and White suggest that the process of bourgeois identity formation

consists of two parts. It begins with the exclusion of those elements which are deemed

"low," that is, those which are dirty and undesirable (191).   Not surprisingly, the

narrator's description indicates that the physical boundaries of Laura's social sphere are

clearly defined: "... the little cottages were in a lane to themselves at the very bottom of

steep rise that led up to the house. A broad road ran between" (290). The construction of

the Sheridans' identity is built around, indeed it cannot exist without, the presence of the

"broad road' which serves as the boundary between both the literal and symbolic low and

high. But, as Stallybrass and White also note, the "very act of exclusion was constituent

of its [the bourgeois subject's] own identity" (191). This process is demonstrated by the

narrator's description of the road because the definition of the boundaries of the upper

class world creates a simultaneous expansion in the overall spatial boundaries of the text.

Prior to this point, all of the action has taken place within the confines of the Sheridan's

estate. Her, however, the audience gets its first look, albeit indirectly through the lens of

memory, at the world that lies outside of those walls. Now, the Sheridans must be

understood in the context of how they are situated in relation to their poor "nearly

neighbors." Laura's own language also affirms the effect that Stallybrass and White

describe. When trying to convince Jose that the gala must be stopped, she argues "we

can't possibly have a garden-party with a man dead just outside the front-gate" (290).

Laura attempts to establish the proper course of action for her family to take, an act

which ultimately amounts to an exercise in self-definition. Her argument requires the

establishment of Scott's physical proximity, but to do this Laura must appropriate the

gate, the very instrument used for keeping people like Scott out of her home.   The

marker of exclusion becomes the means of definition.

These examples mark the addition of an entirely new dimension for the text.

With the establishment of a spatial hierarchy, topography now also defines social class,

whereas it had been previously been determined primarily by occupation. For example,

when Laura meets the workers regarding the marquee, she recognizes them as members

of the lower class by the simple fact that they are workmen and their manner of dress and

their speech further confirms their position. Here, however, by definition, those who live

at the bottom of the hill are poor, and those who live at the top are wealthy.

Borders, however, by their very nature, quickly emerge as contested places where

divisions that seem clear-cut suddenly become fluid, and the second portion of

Stallybrass and White's model reflects this complication. The initial act of exclusion

produces an "identity-in-difference" wherein "low" culture becomes high culture's

"fantasy relation, its negative symbiosis" which is repressed to the level of the

unconscious and the symbolic (5 – 6, 191 – 193). Given the substantial physical and

social barriers which stand in her way, Laura's repeated forays down the road reflect a

deeply ingrained attraction for the poor community.[8]   Laura emerges from the lane with

a "shudder" from having experienced the "disgusting and sordid" sights. The narrator's

justification of Laura's action suggests the source of her desire: "one must go

everywhere; one must see everything. So through they went" (291). The statement

implies that the upper class world where Laura has been raised is lacking in some crucial

way. Otherwise, one would not need to leave it in order to see "everything." Such

absence subverts interpretations such as Iversen's that see the Sheridan estate as

symbolizing an Edenic paradise (8), and gives credence to Zapf's assertion that it amounts to an "imperfect, ostentatious, pseudo paradise" where nature is subjugated and flowers are commanded to bloom at the perfect time (50). The Sheridan's home is also a world of decay, just in a different form. The houses at the bottom of the hill are "far too near" not because they are different, but because they are too close to being the same.

This identity is the attraction that brings Laura back on her "prowls." The verb evokes images of stealth and criminal activity. Her visits are not mere walks, journeys or saunterings. Despite the fact that Laura uses the forays as a means of defining her adult status, she would rather not be seen undertaking them and is ashamed of the experience. Although it is ultimately Mrs. Sheridan who insists that her daughter go to the Scotts, no doubt, Laura is afraid of what her parents would say if they knew of her adventures. She recognizes that she has stepped outside of the established cultural norms of the Sheridan family by going down the lane. And yet, she goes. Her experiences clearly constitute cases of inter-class connection, and they are accompanied by a major shift in the temporal frame of the story, for the description of them stands as the only time that the narrator directly describes a moment of past experience. At all other times, when the past does occasionally intrude the story, it does so only tangentially, as when Laura responds to the arrival of the cream puffs with the off-hand remark "Don't they carry one back to all one's parties" (288).

Before considering why this specific change occurs, however, a broader examination of the temporal structure of the entire first portion of the story is required. Throughout the preparations for the party, time appears as a kinetic and erratic presence. In his analysis of the relationship between temporality and spatiality in "The Garden

Party," Zapf notes that "morning's events are not related in the sense of a coherent, temporal process but of an irregular succession of moments in time passing by as if in high speed.… The action here is characterized by hectic movement, sudden changes of scene, place and character" (47). In a compellingly presented argument, he suggests that this technique produces an effect reminiscent of time-lapse photography. The abrupt shifts and chaotic pace that he identifies, however, also evoke visions of the dream state, an interpretation more consistent with the thematic content of the opening portion of the text. Dreams force the dreamer to revisit past experiences, particularly those of childhood, and as discussed previously, the narrative voice repeatedly depicts Laura as childlike through the spectacle of her eating. Literally, the consumption of food is an internalizing process, a taking-in of food. Dreams are symbolic representations of the unconscious portions of the mind and are built from experiences that have also been internalized. Eventually, Laura will be transformed into a purely externalized figure when she receives her hat, an event which marks the transition to the party itself and a corresponding shift in the depiction of temporality. Here however, the narrative voice employs the backdrop of the symbolic dream state to construct an internal characterization of Laura, both who she is now and how she became that person. Thus, the complex structural interconnectivity of Mansfield's text becomes apparent because the temporal form of the narrative is used to reflect and develop its own thematic content.

With the description of Laura's past journeys down the Scotts' lane, the implied dream state becomes real as the reader confronts a scene whose subject matter, "cabbage stalks, sick hens and tomato cans," defines a waking nightmare. Since this critique of the Sheridan's world – the suggestion that its own identity is reflected in those decaying

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things – appears only in the context of a dream, its implications become uncertain, subject to interpretation. Pushing Laura's journeys into the past also allows them to be dismissed as juvenile folly. At the same time, however, the use of the dream state evokes unavoidable connections with repressed desire because as Freud argues, all dreams, even nightmares, constitute wish fulfillment (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 588). Thus, the manner of the passage's description serves to highlight its own sub-text. The story's temporary withdrawal into the past works to simultaneously obscure and foreground the transgressive implications of Laura's compulsive attraction for low culture. It is engulfed by the temporal structure of the overall narrative.

So Much For So Little – The Party Itself

Shortly after that flashback, a series of major concurrent shifts occurs as "The Garden Party" enters its second major section. The most obvious change comes at the level of plot. The anticipation created in the first part of the text is released as the actual party gets underway and the family's preparations come to fruition. Unlike the first section which is a primarily internalized world built around scenes of eating and the discussion of Laura's past, the second section emerges as an overtly externalized reality dominated by superficiality and appearance. Moreover, the depiction of temporality moves away from the chaos of the dream state and more closely follows the orderly expectations of realist fiction.

These shifts culminate in the transformation of Laura herself. The depth of feeling which has previously characterized her and pushed her out of step with her family now disappears. The young girl of the past is left behind as a "mature" Laura becomes the centerpiece of the afternoon gala. Critics such as Satterfield who read "The Garden

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Party" as a story of Laura's initiation into the Sheridan's social world and see it as a text which does not offer a firm critique of fundamental assumptions about social class base their arguments largely on her actions in this second section of the story. Without question, Laura appears shallow and selfish here, as evidenced by the fact that the dialogic tension between her and the narrative voice reaches its lowest ebb during the party. But, she does eventually deny her family's externalized world in an attempt to define herself in more humanistic and substantial terms. Thus, the party constitutes her introduction to the Sheridan's social world, but not her initiation into it.

The second section of the story lays the groundwork for Laura's eventual rejection of her privileged background by introducing the hat that will come to dominate her identity at the party and later at the Scotts' home. The object itself first appears in the text immediately after Laura approaches her mother and attempts to convince her that the party should be stopped. But of course, the party, like any show, must go on. And so it does. During their conversation, Mrs. Sheridan rebukes Laura for the silliness of her suggestion, but then gives her the new hat that she herself had been trying on because "It's made for you. It's much too young for me" (291). The scene repeats Laura's first appearance in the text because in both cases Mrs. Sheridan passes on to her daughter something initially meant for her (authority in the first case, in this case the hat) and does so under the pretext of giving way to youth. Such parallel structuring reinforces the tremendous degree of interconnection within the story as a whole.

The gift marks the start of the narrator's conflation of Laura's identity with that of the object. Eventually, the two become one: "the first thing she saw was this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed with gold daisies, and a long black velvet

ribbon. Never before had she imagined she could look like that" (292). The use of third person serves to dramatize the extent of the transformation. Instead of seeing herself in the mirror, Laura beholds "this charming girl." At least on the outside, she has become a new person, thanks entirely to her new hat. The various comments on her appearance from the guests and her family reaffirm her judgment. They all express a mixture of admiration and surprise at her new look. : "My word, Laura; you do look stunning" (292). To appropriate D.A. Miller's terminology, the hat has thrown her into a state of "disequilibrium" because she is now no longer merely "the artistic one"; she has become an object of desire: "Laura, you look quite Spanish. I've never seen you look so striking" (293). Laura earns attention, and indeed becomes the center of it, because of the hat. The reactions of the other characters to Laura's new appearance are, of course, superficial and based solely upon an article of clothing. But, the text goes even further and suggests that the hat has a more fundamental effect upon her. While admiring herself in the mirror, Laura quickly loses sight of the death of Scott, which up until that moment had been dominating her thoughts: "Just for a moment she had another glimpse of that poor woman and those little children, and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in a newspaper" (292). The vision returns to her momentarily and she resolves to speak with Laurie, her brother, about it. But, as soon as he compliments her "absolutely topping" hat, she forgets to tell him.

With the banishment of Scott from the internalized world of her thoughts, Laura becomes a purely externalized figure, a transformation that echoes the shift of Sibyl Vane's identity into the realm of the aesthetic in *Dorian Gray*. Like Sibyl, Laura is now all "surface and symbol." But, she is not just any symbol. The hat clearly signifies a

crown, a connection reinforced by the fact that Mrs. Sheridan actually places it on Laura's head. Magalaner reads that act as a "coronation" by which the mother is "symbolically transferring to Laura the Sheridan heritage of snobbery, restricted social views, narrowness of vision" (116 – 117).   For Walker, the hat represents the "spell of society," and Laura "does not escape its influence throughout the ritual of the party" (256). As a crown, the hat connotes more than just upper-class privilege and snobbishness, it also connotes power and authority because in Britain, the term serves as a metonymic substitution for royal governance, much as "The White House" substitutes for the executive branch of the government in the United States. Note also that Laura itself is derived from "laurel," the classic Greek victory crown.[9] Therefore, her very name furthers conflation of her identity with the object, even as it reinforces its symbolic resonance.

Not only does Laurie's compliment of Laura's hat mark the culmination of her transformation, it also signals the start of the garden party itself.   Despite the story's title, the actual gala where Laura displays her newfound confidence is virtually non-existent, and a single paragraph suffices for the description of the event. The narrator notes that there is a band dressed in green and that people stroll around the gardens greeting each other. Beyond that however, little is revealed. Instead, the majority of the brief of time that the narrative does spend with the fête is dominated by a series of unattributed statements, presumably from guests, about Laura's hat and how it becomes her. Indeed, in a very real sense, Laura's hat is the party. Zapf suggests that "the party becomes an insignificant episode…. It gains no real importance or substance in itself" (46). Although his basic argument about the manner in which temporality and spatiality work

to create meaning within the text is exceptional, in this case he is off base. The party is largely an absent episode, but it is hardly "insignificant" one. It is here that the externalized Laura takes center stage. The insecure, absent-minded girl who liked finding excuses for eating outside and who engaged in naive but charming attempts at sympathetic identification with other individuals very different from herself has been replaced by someone who exudes confidence and control because of her new appearance. The awkward young lady who worried that she would not be able to command respect from the workmen with a piece of bread and butter in her hands now assuredly works the crowd asking "Have you had tea? Won't you have an ice?" (293).

The start of the gala marks a transition that includes more than just a shift in action and characterization. The depiction of temporality changes as well. The actual party and Laura's visit to Scott's house occupy essentially the same amount of narratable time as the preparations for the party, and yet they occupy a far smaller amount of space within the text. In the 1991 Knopf edition of the story used for this analysis, the first part comprises approximately eleven pages, the second part comprises approximately two-thirds of a page, and the final part comprises approximately four pages. Clearly, when judged solely in terms of the quantity of text, the preparations for the fête dominate all else and the party itself, the namesake of the story, is virtually non-existent.[10] The effect of this is as Zapf notes, "the impression of time being drawn out or slowed down in comparison with the first phase" (46). The compression and irregularity of the dream state that characterized the opening of the story are left behind, and the reader is transported into a more controlled narrative that more closely adheres to the expectations of traditional realist fiction.

After The Party – Laura's Descent Into Hell

With the gala complete, "The Garden Party" enters its third and final stage when Laura ventures down the road to visit Scott's body. That journey produces yet another temporal shift in the text, as well as its first spatial transformation (the narrative of Laura's trips there in the past notwithstanding). The narrative pace slows to a crawl, reflecting Laura's trepidation at her impending encounter. The poor neighborhood serves as a symbolic mirror for the Sheridan estate and confirms the identity-in-difference hinted at in the description of Laura's previous forays there. The narrative of her return begins by reestablishing the geographical boundaries that separate the two families: "Now the broad road was crossed. The lane began, smoky and dark." (294). Just as with Laura's appropriation of the gate in her plea to cancel the party, the focus on the physical barrier which divides the social environments confirms their proximity even as it attempts to assert their distinction.

That connection is further reflected in the fact that both communities are engaged in social activities. The sunlit world of the Sheridans' garden, however, has now been replaced by a nightmarish scene: "A dark knot of people stood outside. Beside the gate an old, old woman with a crutch sat in a chair watching" (295). An old woman presides over this gathering, just as Mrs. Sheridan presided over her daughters' party. Indeed, although the two events may seem to be diametrically opposed in their focus, one being a jovial afternoon fête and the other being a viewing, they are both ultimately celebratory gatherings. The point of viewing the dead man is, after all, not only to provide support for the family and to grieve but also presumably, to remember and praise the accomplishments of his life. Plus, as Mingay notes, funerals held a perverse significance

among poor families in Britain: "A funeral, indeed, provided one of the few opportunities in her life for a poor woman to hold open house, provide hospitality and impress the neighbors" (164). Remember also that Scott was a carter, and so, by bringing food to his house, Laura essentially mimics his trade. The world that she moves into, then, is a perverse fun house mirror where everything is exactly the opposite of the world she knows, and yet, also exactly the same.

Since topography directly reflects social class in "The Garden Party," the shift in spatiality that occurs as Laura visits Scott's house also signals the beginning of another moment of inter-class connection. Unlike her previous interaction with the workmen regarding the marquee, however, this one takes place outside the controlled setting of her family's estate, with its impeccably kept gardens, it collection of servants and its façade of perfection. From the moment she enters this potentially unstable environment, the narrative voice focuses its attention not on her, but on her hat.[11] As she did at the gala, Laura again commands the center of attention at this gathering: "The group parted. It was as though she was expected" (295). But, the dream world of her party is now a nightmare: "And the big hat with the velvet streamer – if only it was another hat! Were the people looking at her? They must be" (*Ibid*.). Her old insecurities return and she becomes "terribly nervous." This detail, which the narrator uncharacteristically provides as a piece of simple description, is immediately followed, however, by another reference to the hat. Before Laura speaks with the old woman, she flings the streamer behind her. Thus, the object is made to seem as the source of tension and instability: Laura's presence at the house, the manifestation of Mrs. Sheridan's perverse and arrogant understanding of charity, is not ridiculous, only the hat is.

Nonetheless, the shock of the experience begins to jar Laura back into the self-reflexive mindset that fostered her concern for the Scotts in the first place, and it forces her to examine the implications of her own behavior. The elation she felt at being noticed during her parent's party is replaced by an unmistakable sense of shame: "Oh, to be away from this!… To be away from those staring eyes, or to be covered up in anything, one of those women's shawls even" (295). Her reaction here repeats and furthers the guilt she felt when the workman questioned her about the band. In the previous case, her behavior contained an implicit rejection of the communal standards, particularly her mother's, under which she had been raised. Here, that rejection attains material form as she desires to obscure the very object which, within the confines of her own social class, marks her as superior and worthy of admiration. Moreover, she is willing to appropriate the dress of the lower class women surrounding her to do it.

This initial rejection anticipates the climatic moment in "The Garden Party" which occurs immediately afterward as Laura enters the house and approaches Scott's body. This is the final instance of inter-class connection within the text, and its focal point is Laura's apology for her hat. The act itself is not voluntary. Laura feels compelled to address the corpse: "she couldn't go out of the room without saying something to him" (296). The repressed desire for the experience of low culture that carried her and Laurie down the lane pulls her toward the dead body. Her statement is unequivocal. She pleads "Forgive my hat" (*Ibid*.). This is the first time that she uses a possessive pronoun to describe the object. It is no longer "the" hat. It is now "my" hat. She embraces the object and accepts it, specifically to renounce it. On the literal level, she is only apologizing for a poor choice of accouterments. But, because of the

conflation of Laura with her hat, it also constitutes an apology for both her own actions

and all that the hat symbolizes: snobbishness, elitism, privilege, power and authority.

The text avoids overt didacticism by having her apologize indirectly for those things and

employs the hat as the receptacle of her remorse.

Overall, the scene seems to spring fully formed from a mid-Victorian melodrama.

Confronted with the grim reality of death, the young, rich woman suddenly recognizes

beauty in a place where before she saw only poverty: "What did garden-parties and

baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were

laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had to come to the lane" (296).

Thus enlightened, she renounces the luxury and spiritual emptiness that defines her own

social milieu and seeks forgiveness from her poor "nearly" neighbor. The difference, of

course, stems from the fact that unlike, say, a Gaskell novel, the narrative tone here is

ironized and exploits the decidedly ridiculous nature of the spectacle. But even so, as

Davis notes, Laura's plea marks her as "more mature than her mother and Jose ever can

be" (65). The dialogic tension is at its greatest level because, as with Laura's fantasy of

identification during the marquee incident, the narrative voice cannot wholly undermine

the genuine sympathy of the act itself.

The Language of Denial And Upper-Class Control – Unifying a Fractured Text

Although at that moment Laura's apology appears definitive, its sincerity is

immediately called into question by her sudden retreat into silence while talking with

Laurie as she leaves the lane. It is this act that has frustrated critics the most and sparked

the continuing debate over "The Garden Party." Nownes, for example, argues that

"Neither Laura nor the narrator ever establish an ordered series of events that might conclusively support reading "The Garden Party" as an account of Laura's ever increasing wariness of class distinctions" (53). If one looks only to the events in the text as he does, then the story does seem horribly disjointed. Indeed, my own analysis in this chapter has focused on establishing the fractured nature of "The Garden Party," particularly how its strategy for objectification and its depiction of temporality create two "halves" which oppose each other in their presentation.

Underneath that division however, the linguistic structures that the characters and the narrative voice employ clearly provide a unifying element for the text. When those structures are examined closely, an unmistakable connection between language and social class emerges. Both the narrator and the Sheridans represent the voices of the upper class, and they employ linguistic structures which rest fundamentally upon denial and negativity. They establish a hierarchy of expectation which limits choice and prevents challenge. Affirmation and assertion are scarce; denial and repression are the rule. Not only does the distinctive tenor of the Sheridans' language signify their superior social position, it simultaneously works to preserve that power. In contrast, members of the lower classes espouse affirmation and take action, and in doing so, they directly threaten the upper class environment which borders them and in which they work. In this context, Laura's lapse into silence at the conclusion of the text is not an ambiguous act. She stops in mid-sentence to avoid reverting to the upper-class linguistic paradigm that her family embraces. That self-censorship constitutes another demonstrative rejection of her own privileged existence, reinforces her apology before Scott's body and confirms the story's socially activist rhetoric. Contrary to Satterfield's assertion, Laura's silence does not

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stem from her inability to understand the experience she has just undergone (70). Nor, as Nownes suggests, does it reflect the incomprehensibility of the situation itself (56 – 57). Instead, Laura "couldn't explain" because she can no longer employ the language which characterizes the Sheridan world and propagates its power. Her silence constitutes a rejection of form and does not reflect an inability to engage content.

Careful examination of the conversations between the various members of the Sheridan family during the preparations for the party demonstrates clearly the fundamental rhetorical strategy used by the upper classes. The early portion of the story is dominated by a series of questions that nominally seek to ascertain the opinion of another individual: "Oh, I do love parties, don't you?" (285); "Isn't it a perfect morning?" (285); "Bank them up, just inside the door, on both sides of the porch... Don't you agree?" (286); "Now, if we put this chesterfield against the wall and move everything out of the room except the chairs, don't you think?" (286); "Aren't I in good voice mummy?" (287); "It looks like mice. It can't be mice, can it?" (288); "Don't they carry one back to all one's parties?" (288); "If some one had died there normally... we should still be having our party shouldn't we?" (291); "...can't the band have something to drink?" (293). All of those questions pertain either directly, or indirectly to the process of setting up the gala. The preparations involve a series of choices about the placement of materials, the choice of foods, the proper forms of dress to wear, etc.. The party is a communal event and in theory, the family is working together to make sure that it runs smoothly. Nonetheless, the decisions that are reached on those issues represent symbolic exertions of power. Each time one of the family members transforms their suggestion into action, their own power is affirmed.

From the examples above, it is clear that all of the Sheridans employ a linguistic

paradigm designed to produce the outcome that they desire. None of those solicitations

are open-ended and unqualified. For instance, Meg does not ask "What kind of voice am

in?" Instead, a specific option is put forth, "Aren't I in good voice?" From a formal

linguistic standpoint, the majority of the examples constitute "tag questions" which are

formed when a question such as "Don't you think?" is "tagged" on to the end of a

statement. Their effect is, as Robin Lakoff argues in *Talking Power*, to "strongly

presuppose one answer" (267). Implicit in the question "Don't you think?" is the

assumption that either the speaker's audience does think that way, or if they do not, at

least they will be unwilling to give voice to a dissenting opinion for fear of having

transgressed a social expectation. It is "less a true question than a declarative statement

plus a suggestion of camaraderie" (Lakoff 268). The Sheridans' language creates a

façade of open dialogue by giving the appearance of soliciting opinion and presenting

choice. In reality, however, it serves to obtain assent by eliminating the possibility for

challenge. The structure of the language forces characters into agreement because there

simply is no other option.

This strategy is not limited to members of the upper class in "The Garden Party";

the narrative voice operates in essentially the same manner and features a careful, yet

thorough, aversion to affirmation.   As G. Brown and G. Yule suggest in *Discourse*

Analysis, "What the speaker or writer puts first will influence the interpretation of

everything that follows," and this is especially true here (133). The very first words of

the story undermine the narrator's ethos because they leave the audience with a sense of

having had information withheld from them. Opening with the coordinating conjunction

"And" foregrounds the absence of a preceding independent clause. The reader is immediately conscious of having been excluded from a possibly important piece of information Granted, the essential argument of the first sentence, "the weather was ideal," is direct and affirming. In Sorkin's view, it thrusts the reader "in the middle of a feeling, a relieved satisfied expectation that the first requirement for an exceptional day has been fulfilled" (439). But, such a reading overlooks the crucial inclusion of "after all," which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "notwithstanding." Although, the weather may be perfect, this has occurred in spite of some other, presumably, negative event, to which the reader is denied access.

The remainder of the first paragraph only deepens the mistrust of the narrator, who displays an over reliance upon definition through negation by twice resorting to the phrase "could not." The first instance occurs in response to the initial claim of the weather's ideality: "They could not have had a more perfect day for a garden-party if they had ordered it" (282). Just as the Sheridan's speech pattern rests upon presenting a façade of choice when none exists, this would seem to be a forceful testament to the overall quality of the weather, but from a strictly logical perspective, it actually affirms nothing specific about the day itself. Likewise, later in the paragraph, the narrator asserts "you could not help feeling they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people" (*Ibid.*). This foreshadows the Sheridan's rhetoric of inescapability where consensus occurs only because options have been removed.   This aversion to affirmation suggests a fundamental insecurity which is confirmed at the conclusion of the paragraph. The narrator proclaims that "Hundreds, yes, literally hundreds" of roses had bloomed the previous night (*Ibid.*). The emphatic inclusion of "literally" and repetition of "hundreds"

represents a plea for credulity and indicates that the narrator does not expect to be believed. This same fear of rejection is what prevents the Sheridans from soliciting opinions in an open-ended manner. Indeed, all of the fundamental linguistic strategies that characterize members of the upper class in "The Garden Party" are reflected in the narrative voice from the very outset of the text. Therefore, even though without question the narrator does ironize the members of the Sheridan family, it is clearly an extension of the elements of high culture found in the text.

The examples cited above all represent interaction between members of the upper class. The moments of inter-class connection within the text also foreground the importance of language as a means for establishing power. In these cases however, that power rests primarily upon impediment rather than manipulation.   For instance, Mrs. Sheridan commands Jose to "pacify" the cook because she is "terrified of her this morning" (288). The linguistic paradigm employed by the members of the upper class in "The Garden Party" rests firmly upon the influence of expectation, a social force which emerges when all parties operate under the same set of guidelines. It indicates a shared identity. The members of the lower classes who appear in the story do not share that identity, and therefore, they are perceived as a potentially transgressive presence which must be opposed directly, instead of with implicit coercion.

Laura's initial encounter with the workmen regarding the marquee provides a clear example of this strategy. As she approaches the men, she attempts to look "severe and even a little bit short-sighted" (283). Severity implies denial. To say yes to a request, one needn't be "severe." Note that Laura's actions with the workers represent an attempt to mimic her mother, even down to copying her voice. No doubt having learned

by example, she instinctively recognizes that she must transform herself and put on a new face to deal with the men. This indicates the extent to which that behavior constitutes standard practice for her family. In keeping with the environment of her upbringing where language is employed to ensure that outcomes are pre-determined and any action which would run contrary to expectation is stifled, she enters the situation expecting to reject any demands they might make and prevent them from acting unexpectedly.

As the mouth-piece of the upper classes, the narrative voice also embraces this strategy of denial when portraying moments of inter-class connection in the text. Consider especially the description of the poor neighborhood that Laura visits: "…they were far too near. They were the greatest possible eyesore, and they had no right to be in that neighborhood at all. They were little mean dwellings painted a chocolate brown" (290). The repeated use of the simple subject / verb combination "they were" has a twofold effect. Like the physical boundaries that surround the Sheridan estate, it serves as a line of demarcation for the upper class environment. Obviously, "they" implies "not us" and this serves to provide distance. More importantly, those sentences follow immediately after the description of the "broad road" that divides Laura's family from the Scotts, and they serve notice that the expansion in the spatial boundaries of the text has been accompanied by a change in basic language patterns. The narrative voice that asserted the quality of the weather in evasive fashion by claiming "They could not have had a more perfect day… if they had ordered it" now becomes direct and assertive (282). The narrator attempts to gain symbolic control of the lower class community by describing it with the most simplistic structure and in the most reductive terms.

That effort, however, is ultimately unsuccessful because as soon the basic subject / verb pattern is abandoned, a chaotic scene emerges with "Washerwomen… and sweeps and a cobbler, and a man whose housefront was studded all over with minute bird-cages" (290). Reflecting the diversity and irregularity of the Scotts' lane, the mid-section of the paragraph features a variety of patterns, ranging from the utterly simplistic subject / verb sentence to an adjective phrase that lacks a predicate. Order is only restored when the focus returns to Laura and Laurie at the conclusion of the paragraph. The narrator again embraces a simple, declarative, repetitious style: "…one must go everywhere; one must see everything. So through they went" (282). The erection of another symbolic linguistic wall serves to contain the disorder in the mid-section of the paragraph and heralds a spatial shift back into the Sheridan's upper-class world where insinuation and manipulation, not direct opposition, are the strategies of choice.

The scenes of inter-class connection in the text also serve to demonstrate the fundamental differences between the linguistic paradigms of the two classes, as the marquee incident witnesses. Laura's plea to keep the karakas visible is phrased in the traditional Sheridan manner: "Must they be hidden by a marquee?" The response of the workers is simple, authoritative and utterly ignores the answer implied within the question itself: "They must." The discrepancy between their employment of language returns at the end of the scene when Laura hears one of the workers ask "Are you right there, matey?" (284). The phrase catches her attention because of the camaraderie implied by the phrase "matey," but also because its structure is fundamentally different from the questions to which she is accustomed. It seeks an honest answer and is not composed to overtly dictate one outcome over another.

The impression made by that question is not lost upon Laura. Later in the text, a similar exchange occurs when she defies expectation and challenges the authority of her mother. After the party as the family begins to discuss the death of Scott, Mrs. Sheridan decides that a token gesture of goodwill toward the family is needed: "Let's make up a basket…. it will be the greatest treat for the children. Don't you agree?" (293). Clearly, she anticipates assent from her children, as indicated by the inclusion of the typical tag question. As such, Laura's response comes as a shock. She asks simply "do you really think it's a good idea?" (294). Although not utterly unbiased, the question's direct form is clearly more neutral than the Sheridan's normal linguistic structures because it does not overtly preclude any particular answer. Just as the workman's question attracted Laura's attention, this one serves to set her apart from the family: "she seemed to be different from them all" (*Ibid*.). Not surprisingly, it also raises her mother's ire: "What's the matter with you to-day?" (*Ibid*.). The displeasure in these responses obviously stems in large part from the content of Laura's question, but it also reflects upon the distinctive form that she employs. Here, Laura first begins to defy the tradition in which she was raised.

That fissure becomes a complete break at the conclusion of "The Garden Party" as Laura's behavior and her language counter directly the paradigm under which she has operated for the majority of the text. To begin with, she undertakes the simple act of dictating her own physical movement for the first time. Prior to the ending, her coming and going is controlled completely by others. Mrs. Sheridan sends her to meet the workmen for the marquee, to the kitchen with flags for the sandwiches and to visit the Scott family with the basket. During her conference with the workmen, she is called

away by the ringing of the phone. Upon her arrival at the Scotts', the widow's sister leads

her into the house and then to see the body, despite Laura's reservations. Even her

approach to the corpse is presented as a matter of compulsion: "she couldn't go out of the

room without saying something to him" (296).   In all of these cases, Laura is purely

reactive, being subject to the command of others. Her apology before the corpse marks a

crucial turning point. Having symbolically rejected her own past and the decaying world

of the Sheridans, she assumes control over herself and leaves on her own terms: "And

this time she didn't wait for Em's sister. She found her way out of the door, down the

path past all of those dark people" (296).   Even though throughout the narrative Laura's

unconscious attraction to the lower-class world of the Scotts has lurked beneath the

surface of the text, she cannot remain there permanently, and it would be naïve of the

story to present this as a possibility. Thus, she departs from the lane.

This act, however, places Laura in an undefined space. Although she has left

Scotts' impoverished community behind, her ability to return to the Sheridans' is very

much in question. Ultimately, however, it becomes clear that she rejects her upper-class

background as well. While transiting between the two environments, Laura is met by

Laurie, who serves as the embodiment of the behavioral paradigm that she has operated

under and chafed against. Like her movements throughout the text, his arrival has been

dictated by Mrs. Sheridan: "Mother was getting anxious" (296). Set in contrast to him,

her behavior now emerges as markedly different, and he is clearly not prepared for the

reaction that he encounters. Laura's display of emotion defies his expectation of

acceptable behavior, and he attempts to counter it in classic Sheridan fashion with a tag

question posed in the negative: "you're not crying, are you?" (297). Faced with the

reality that Laura is crying and having realized that his order "Don't cry" will have little

effect, he again tries to re-establish normalcy by suggesting to Laura the one option that

will allow for such a spectacle. He does not ask her an open-ended question such as

"How was it?" Instead, his question "Was it awful?" implicitly pushes toward an

affirmative answer, and this is clearly the answer he seeks (297). If the scene at the

Scotts' really was "awful," then this would justify her emotional outburst.

Laura's response to Laurie obviously opposes his expectation on every level.

Much like the workmen's simple, affirmative assertion that the karakas must be hidden

by the marquee, Laura declares "It was simply marvellous" (297). Both the content and

the form of the statement run counter to the linguistic model under which Laurie

operates. Laura then attempts to contextualize her assertion further with her existential

statement regarding the nature of life. But in doing so, she begins to revert to her old

habits. Instead of saying simply "Life is…", she forms her pronouncement as a negative

rhetorical question: "Isn't life" (*Ibid*.). If completed, the question would have been

constructed to presuppose agreement and would have embraced the fundamental

rhetorical strategy of the Sheridan family. Obviously, Laura does not finish her assertion.

As a justification for the act, the narrator says only "what life was she couldn't explain"

(297). To date, critics have read "couldn't" as meaning that Laura, for whatever reason,

does not know *what* to say. This implies the crisis is one of content, meaning either she

cannot understand the situation that she has just faced, or the situation itself is

incomprehensible. But, when the conclusion is read in the context of the story as a

whole, when Laura's unconscious desire for the lower-class world of the Scotts is

considered, when her conflict with the narrator is explicated, and when her personal

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growth through her experience with Scott's body is recognized, it becomes clear that the crisis is one of form. "Couldn't" reflects Laura's refusal to present her experience in the form that she starts to employ. In other words, "what life was she couldn't *bring herself* to explain *in that manner*."

The poignancy of Laura's silence is then reinforced by the ridiculous nature of Laurie's response. In the final speech act of the text, he employs the same linguistic structure that his sister has just abandoned. Laura's understanding is based upon her experience. Of all the members of the Sheridan family, Laurie is seemingly the most able to intuit her thoughts, given that he has accompanied her on her "prowls" and there is no indication that any of their other siblings have ventured outside the confines of their upper-class existence. Even so, her perception at that moment is dominated by her visit to the corpse, and Laurie has no access to this. Indeed, his initial questioning of Laura indicates that his expectations regarding the event are far removed from her experience down the lane. But, the Sheridan linguistic paradigm, in which he is clearly immersed, renders both his lack of understanding and Laura's truncated assertion finally irrelevant. He does not need to hear Laura's statement in order to reply to it. In the upper-class world, the listener's role is only to provide assent, and he readily does this. Moreover, by suggesting agreement without asserting anything, he employs a form which epitomizes the linguistic strategy of the Sheridans, and in doing so, he exposes its utter inadequacy as a means for understanding the world.

Ultimately, Laura's departure from the Scott's and her silence before Laurie amount to a rejection of both spheres and an attempt to establish a separate space in which she can begin to define the terms of her own subjectivity. Contrary to Satterfield's

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assertion, she will not "in all likelihood remain in the refuge of their bright house on the hill" (70). Walker's suggestion that the social crisis in "The Garden Party" is unresolved stems from his inability to imagine Laura redefining her relationship to the rest of the Sheridan's: "Will she not now have to reorient her feelings toward her family?" (357). The textual evidence demonstrates clearly that she does just that, and therefore the social crisis is resolvable. When read as an exercise in social criticism, "The Garden Party" does not go so far as to advocate the embracing of the lower class world represented by the Scotts. It does, however, clearly criticize and ultimately reject the false paradise symbolized by the Eden-like world of the Sheridans' garden party.

Conclusion

Closing this study with a Katherine Mansfield short story is, to some degree, like playing cards with a "stacked deck." Although of all the texts considered "The Garden Party" is the only one whose strategy of objectification does not break down at some point in its narrative, such consistency is much more easily maintained for sixteen pages than over, say, the fifty-nine chapters of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Similarly, my underlying argument that turn-of-the-century texts explore new formal strategies for depicting class interaction rests upon the assumption that Victorian fiction handles similar incidents through the construction and manipulation of plot. Given that short stories generally and Mansfield's especially feature limited plot development, the lack of narrative interventions like those seen in *New Grub Street* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not surprising.

Those qualifications do not, however, diminish either the importance or accomplishment of this text. "The Garden Party" represents a culmination to the general phenomenon of inter-class connection in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British literature. It explores the pervasive nature of class distinctions by mapping class identity onto its occupational, spatial and linguistic structures and then challenges those boundaries through the figure of Laura Sheridan. Throughout, her repeated transgression of class expectations is supported by a strategy of objectification integrated into the very temporal structure of the story, and at no time does plot itself serve as the mechanism for resolving class interaction.   Ultimately, "The Garden Party"'s strategy of objectification is so effective that it need not speak out to launch a pointed attack on the snobbishness and privilege of Britain's class system. It can simply lapse into silence.

NOTES

[1]   To some degree that absence is merely an effect of the short story form which does not allow for an abundance of narrative manipulation. Nonetheless, this text still stands out in its genre for having a relentlessly linear narrative that stays focused on continuously occurring events and takes only one brief detour to describe past experience, and objectification plays a large role in facilitating that progression.

[2]   Only Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is more recent, having been first published in 1925.

[3]   The daughter of a prominent businessman who was later knighted, Mansfield came from an upper-middle class background and was raised in both England and New Zealand. In March of 1907, a garden party thrown by her mother in Wellington was interrupted when a poor man died in a street accident nearby. Similarly, Iversen has proven that the Sheridans' estate does echo strongly the home in New Zealand where Mansfield lived at age eleven, but he is also quick to point out that in writing the story, she did not primarily seek to "re-create a day in the life of her family" (21 – 22).

[4]   In "Irony in 'The Garden Party'," Satterfield boldly proclaims that "All of the writing on Katherine Mansfield's most anthologized story recognizes or implies that 'The Garden Party' is a fable of

initiation," thereby suggesting a unanimity of critical opinion about the story (68). But, his position is untenable because in actuality, any number of articles do not allude at all to the idea of initiation. See, for instance, Pilar Alonso Rodriguez's "The Role of Interstitial Connectives in Complex Narrative Discourse: Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party'" and Hubert Zapf's "Time and Space in Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party',". Moreover, I intend to counter Satterfield's basic premise and show that in fact, this is *not* a story of initiation, but one of rejection.

[5]   Since the appearance of Walker's article, critics have sought ways to establish the unity that he sees as lacking. The most common approaches have been to subordinate the social question to other aspects of the text, notably its existential and mythological implications. Donald S. Taylor and Daniel A. Weiss began this trend in 1959 with "Crashing the Garden Party" and many others have followed. For example, Iversen provides a compelling interpretation of "The Garden Party" as a symbolic representation of the Garden of Eden (8 – 10). As Sorkin has noted, all of these readings have merit and there can be no denying the presence of mythological and existential dimensions to the story, but focused as they are upon very limited aspects, these readings do not serve to provide an adequate, encompassing reading of the story that recognizes its narrative commitment to social questions. (441, n.4).

Robert Murray Davis takes a somewhat different approach to Walker's observation and suggests that both the complexity and the unity of the story have been exaggerated and to remove this "distortion," the reader must simply "place the conflict within Laura alone and thus see its unity" (61). Although expedient, such a position is hardly supportable because as will be shown, one of the key tensions within the text is essentially a dialogic one and emerges in the gap between Laura's actions, particularly those which find her crossing social class boundaries, and the narrator's response to them. Contrary to Davis's assertion, conflict in "The Garden Party" cannot be wholly contained within Laura, and the story resists such a reductive approach.

[6]   Nownes' inability to establish resolution within "The Garden Party" which was discussed earlier stems in large part from the fact that he fails to recognize that the active and biased role which the narrator plays: "The third-person narrator set at Laura's elbow intrudes only occasionally… simply setting scene and arranging casual details that… may or may not resonate symbolically to the individual reader" (51). Contrary to Nownes' reading, the narrative voice within "The Garden Party" intrudes constantly. Because

it undertakes a clear attempt to infantalize Laura, it does far more than merely arrange details and does not occupy a neutral position within the text.

[7]   In "The Unity of 'The Garden Party'," Davis discerns the general pattern of infantalization apparent in the first portion of the text: "It is as a child that Laura hugs her brother, speaks on the telephone, and, with a child's impulsive sentimentality, responds to the "darling little spots" of sunlight" (62). His analysis, however, fails to recognize the crucial role that food plays in making Laura look like a child.

[8]   Certainly on one level, her attraction to the lane has little to do with social class. The very fact that she was not allowed to go there as a child makes it appealing. As Freud notes in "The Most Prevalent Forms of Degradation in Early Life," "Some obstacle is necessary to swell the tide of libido to its height" (213).   Here, he is speaking specifically of sexual urges, but his assertion can apply to desire in a more general sense as well, much like the cliché, "we always want what we can't have." Having reached adulthood, she can circumvent the her parent's ban, and by walking down the previously forbidden lane, she symbolically demonstrates her independence from her family's rule.

[9]   Both Satterfield and Fred C. Robinson note the connection between Laura and "laurel." Satterfield reads this as symbolic of a "victory crown" (68), while Robinson links this to the laurel tree and interprets her as a symbol of "drastically protected innocence."

[10]   Inexplicably, little critical attention has been paid to this crucial fact. Although he bases his findings on Constable's 1948 edition of *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* which leads to his arriving at slightly different page totals, Iversen does recognize the imbalance in the story's construction, but gives it little consideration. He states only "That the first part should take up two-thirds of the story is reasonable enough…" (27). Zapf uses Iversen's realization as a starting point for a more complete argument, noting that while Iversen's "observation is correct as far as it goes, Iversen does not notice the temporal implications of this arrangement of the story" (n.8 54).

[11]   The fixation with headgear actually begins immediately after Laura crosses the road: "Women in shawls and men's tweed caps hurried by" (294). The tweed caps provide continuity as the spatial dimensions of the story shift and also prepares for the return of the externalized spectacle of Laura's bonnet.

CONCLUSION

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

Over the course of the preceding pages, I have attempted to identify and explicate the nature and implications of an unmistakable trend in British fiction written between 1890 and 1925 that until now has gone unexplored. My analysis has, however, left untouched several major areas of inquiry that suggest possible avenues for future study.

To begin with, although I have referenced a wide variety of texts from this period, several that I have merely touched upon would benefit from a more detailed explication in the context of my model, especially *Howards End*, *The Secret Agent* and *Women in Love*. I have also overlooked other major works completely, some of whom deserve consideration as participants in inter-class connection. James Joyce's *Ulysses* with its myriad of interconnecting characters from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and its fascination with objects of all kinds presents itself as an obvious candidate for analysis. The ways in which class relations impact both the text's employment of objects and its multiplicity of fictional forms is a topic worthy of study. Similarly, Virginia Woolf's infamous "materialists" of "Modern Fiction," H.G Wells, Arnold Bennett and John Gallsworthy, cast a long shadow over turn-of-the-century fiction, and given that I am arguing for inter-class connection as a ubiquitous presence during this period, they deserve consideration as well. Although in Woolf's eyes, these three distinguish themselves solely by writing of "unimportant things," this study has demonstrated that seemingly trivial things often have a great impact on narrative form. Wells' *Kipps* and *Tono-Bungay* and Bennett's *The Old Wives Tale*, built as they are around individuals attempting to step above their initial social standing, all seem tailor-made for analysis in

the context of inter-class connection. Gallsworthy's*Forsyte* saga, however, appears less

so, since it focuses on the tribulations of a single family that occupies a relatively well-

defined socio-economic position. In any event, I leave those texts for future study.

Second, I have not attempted to situate my findings in the debates over the nature

of modern subjectivity that underscore attempts to define the character of Modernism and

Post-Modernism. My understanding of objectification would seem to support critics like

Marianne Dekoven who, taking a cue from Eugene Lunn's *Marxism and Modernism*,

declares in *Rich and Strange: Gender, History and Modernism* that modernism is

characterized by the "demise of the integrated and unified subject" (6). It would also

seem to contradict Irving Howe's suggestion in "The Idea of the Modern" that

"subjectivity becomes the typical condition of the modernist outlook" (142). As I noted

from the very outset of this dissertation, I am not arguing that objectification merely

applies to the lower classes. The examples of Alec Stoke-d'Urberville and Laura

Sheridan demonstrate that the poor are not the only ones who can be seen as objects.

That said, it is worth considering whether Howe's vision of modernism as an exploration

of extreme subjectivity rests upon an inherent class bias, wherein interiority is only

granted to those characters who hold status, wealth and / or privilege.

Lastly, by focusing as its does on both object fascination and compulsive desire,

this dissertation has touched upon the two primary components that define fetishism.

Although that concept lurks on the fringes of this study and intrudes briefly into it upon

occasion, the understanding of class-interaction in turn-of-the-century fiction as a

fetishized event merits exploration, particularly given that the first medical and

psychological explorations of sexual fetishism emerged in the 1880's and 1890's. Robert

A. Nye labels this period as the "classificational golden age of contemporary sexology" and notes that "it was the rare sexological treatise that did not cite contemporary novels and the unusual novel that did not display a grasp of psychological technique" (13). My discussion of the psychological elements driving inter-class connection has relied predominantly on Stallybrass and White's class-focused analysis in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Relating class interaction more directly to the dynamics of sexual desire would likely shed greater light on the compulsive elements that are so evident in many of these text. As with the other two aspects, however, I also leave that discussion for another day.

In conclusion, looking over the model that I have proffered in this dissertation, I concede that my theory of inter-class connection is a broad one, especially my criteria for defining what constitutes an act of objectification. Nonetheless, my analysis does reveal a consistent pattern of literary practice across all of these works, and that pattern, moreover, reflects a series of distinct socio-economic trends that first took shape in Britain in the 1880's and continued to develop throughout the turn-of-the-century. Therefore, I argue that the emergence of inter-class connection and its accompanying practice of objectification constitutes a distinct and readily identifiable practice in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century British fiction that merits careful analysis. Studying inter-class connection reveals the key role that social class plays in the shaping both the form of texts and their essential rhetorical and political perspectives.

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