THE IMAGINATION OF CLASS

Masculinity and the Victorian Urban Poor

Dan Bivona and Roger B. Henkle

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In Memory of
Roger B. Henkle
1937–1991
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When he died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of fifty-four in October of 1991, Roger B. Henkle left behind many grieving family members, colleagues, and students, past and present, from Brown University, where he taught for many years. I was one of the latter. Roger directed my dissertation, which I completed in 1987. As with all the others, I appreciated Roger’s wit, his enthusiasm, his intelligence, his energy, and his bonhomie; and, like the others, I felt his loss keenly.

Roger also left behind a very interesting but unfortunately rather incomplete manuscript which he had been working on up to the time of his death. It was entitled The Imagination of Class: A Study of the Middle Class Victorian Representation of the Urban Poor. At the request of a number of Roger’s colleagues and friends at Brown, including Robert Scholes, Michael Silverman, and L. P. Curtis, I agreed in 1992 to take on the task of writing, rewriting, and reconstructing the manuscript. Roger’s wife and literary executor, Carol, generously agreed to make me coauthor and gave me permission to make whatever changes were necessary to bring the manuscript up to final form.

I was somewhat reluctant at first to take on this task. I had just finished my first book and had begun research for my second, and I was wholly unable at the time to forecast when I might be able to begin the labor of reshaping Roger’s manuscript. The project itself I also found somewhat daunting in conception: however much freedom I had been given to remake the manuscript, it was not my manuscript. I worried about the expectation that I would produce “Roger’s” book and
whether or not I could reconcile my vision of the material with his. The manuscript itself needed more than simple editing: there were unwritten chapters and written ones in need of some rather dramatic changes; the amount of work involved would require that I dedicate more time to mastering the material than Roger had. Moreover, to be asked to take on someone else’s manuscript is rather a strange affair when you think about it. I felt myself anything but a clone of Roger Henkle and not at all well equipped psychologically for the task of bringing someone else’s dream to realization through my own efforts. I was not even sure that I agreed with his thesis. Would I want to write a book that contested his main claims?

In any event, the demands of my own career required me to put off serious work on the manuscript until four years ago when I began researching the subject in earnest. During the process of researching I discovered my own interest in the issue of poverty and its representation in discourse. I began to see my own way through the material. When I began rewriting the manuscript in earnest after having done the research, I felt a renewed appreciation for what Roger had already accomplished, but I also felt tensions emerging between my view of the material and his. At times, it seemed as if I was carrying on an argument with the dead. I had always been more of a post-structuralist than Roger, and differences between the way I would word something and the way he had worded it threatened, at least in my own mind, to promise irreconcilable conflicts of perspective that might find their way into inconsistencies in the book. What struck me initially as a serious, and potentially project-ending, problem became, as I worked my way through the material, an opportunity to refashion the material in a way that took cognizance of these differences. My argument with the dead, finally, I think, helped me to sharpen the argument. At least I hope it did. The jury is still out. In any event, I do feel obliged to acknowledge that the “we” of this text is a more factitious “we” than is usually the case in coauthored books. My “collaboration” with Roger on this book was, unfortunately, never face-to-face.

I benefited greatly from the advice of a number of people in putting together this book. These include Patrick Brantlinger, who read and commented on the original manuscript, and Roger’s colleagues at Brown, Robert Scholes, Michael Silverman, and L. P. Curtis. I am indebted to Carol Henkle for agreeing to allow me coauthor status, and for not losing faith that I would ultimately bring this project to
Preface

I wish to thank the English Department at Arizona State University for supporting this project by assigning me some research assistants who assisted me greatly. They include Laura Nutten, Heather Hoyt, and Amy D’Antonio. The latter two gave especially useful advice on the manuscript. I appreciate the advice I received from colleagues at a number of conferences at which I presented this material in recent years including the Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies conference, the Midwest Victorian Studies Association conference, and the Pacific Coast British Studies conference. I also want to thank the students in my seminar “Imagining Class in the Nineteenth Century” in spring of 2002 who contributed, sometimes despite themselves, to helping me think through the issues discussed here. I also wish to thank Kara Wittman for many discussions that helped to sharpen my thoughts.

None of these people should be blamed for any inconsistencies, omissions, or incomplete thoughts in the final product, not even Roger Henkle, my coauthor. For those, I take full responsibility myself.

Lastly, I want to thank my family: my wife, Jeanne, and my children, Laura, Michael, and Kate. They consistently had greater faith that this would be finished than I did.

Dan Bivona
Arizona State University
May 2005
On the contributors’ page for the Spring 1992 issue of *NOVEL*, the editors list Roger Henkle, whose article on George Gissing, Arthur Morrison, and urban poverty in late-nineteenth-century British fiction it contains. Following Roger’s name, they indicate that he “was at work on a book-length study of the fiction of urban poverty in late-Victorian England before his untimely death on October 5, 1991.” Thanks to Professor Daniel Bivona of Arizona State University, *The Imagination of Class* is at last the completed version of that book-length study. I am certain that Roger, our mutual friend and Dan’s former mentor and dissertation advisor, would be more than pleased with and proud of the result.

In the same contributors’ notice, the editors of *NOVEL* announce that I had “agreed to edit the almost completed manuscript.” Friends of Roger’s at Brown University, including L. P. Curtis and Mark Spilka, had indeed asked me to take a look at and hopefully edit the manuscript of what is now *The Imagination of Class*. I gladly did so and recognized that it was, like his earlier book *Comedy and Culture* (1980), original, ambitious, and on its way to becoming a major contribution to Victorian studies. However, the manuscript was less complete than we hoped. Though much of it was finished, major portions remained to be written, and I did not feel that I was the right person to become Roger’s coauthor. That person turned out to be Dan Bivona, who deserves much praise not just for finishing the portions that Roger was unable to complete but also for bringing the entire project up-to-date in a well-informed, sophisticated manner. He says in his preface to this
volume that he often felt he was “arguing with the dead,” but in my view the collaboration was much more about agreement than about argument.

The Imagination of Class deserves to take a prominent place among recent—and I stress recent, especially in the sense of up-to-date—studies of nineteenth-century British literature focused upon urban poverty and social class. Bivona has brought this book into dialogue with such recent works as Seth Koven’s Slumming and Simon Joyce’s Capital Offenses, both published in 2004. Whenever the issue of Victorian representations of slums and the poor arises, one thinks immediately of Dickens, from Oliver Twist to Our Mutual Friend. But numerous Victorian novelists, economists, journalists, and social critics dealt with aspects of class and urban poverty. These include Henry Mayhew, Hector Gavin, James Greenwood, Walter Besant, Richard Jeffries, H. G. Wells, Margaret Harkness, Beatrice Webb, Charles Masterman, and many others. Henkle and Bivona make the case that the British, bourgeois “imaginary” was significantly shaped and empowered by its interest in, writing about, and various “reformist” and “social work” attempts to cope with the urban underclass or “residuum.” Class formation or identification takes place through a process of othering, of differentiation; and it also takes place hegemonically—that is, through getting the “public” of a given society to consent to or acquiesce in always unequal power relations, including class hierarchies based in large measure on wealth and poverty, the possession of private property and dispossession.

As Henkle and Bivona point out, the subject of urban poverty was central not just to middle class identity formation, but more specifically to several types of masculinity, from the flâneur, or explorer of the slums and “lower depths” of London, to the social reformers, journalists, and increasingly professional sociologists such as Mayhew, Greenwood, and Charles Booth. They argue that “the interests of a predominately male professional class, which was in the process of formation throughout the nineteenth century, strongly influenced, indeed determined, the ways in which the Victorians represented poverty in the city of London.” Depictions of “the abyss” were also a staple of fictional realism, from Dickens to Gissing, Morrison, Jack London, and beyond. As well as any previous study, The Imagination of Class demonstrates the crucial nature of the cultural or ideological work that focusing on “the lower depths” performed in late-Victorian Britain. The authors stress that the “representations of urban poverty” they analyze are not necessarily inaccurate, ideological distortions of social reality. And yet these “representations may tell us more about what it meant to
be male and middle class in the nineteenth century than they tell us about what it meant to be poor."

Henkle and Bivona's analyses of works by such writers as Mayhew, Greenwood, Gissing, and Morrison are careful, cogent, and persuasive. If there needed to be a further compelling reason to read this study, it might well be the reason that it also should send readers back, repeatedly, to Roger's *Comedy and Culture*. More humorously and persuasively than most, that book makes the case for both comedy and culture as central to the study of nineteenth-century British history. Humor, and indeed laughter, may not seem to accord well with the abject, often tragic subject of poverty. But Dickens set a tone and a model, combining laughter with deep concern for social justice, that Roger Henkle exemplified throughout his career as a teacher and scholar.

In her tribute to Roger in the memorial issue of *NOVEL*, Diane Elam, also one of his former students, writes: "I remember the open vibrancy of his laughter as he made some remark, and I remember laughing out loud. It’s his laughter that I’ll always hear and the risks that I’ll always remember to take that were Roger’s real gifts to me" (327). Elam also says: “Simple dogma was never good enough for him, because he always believed in the possibility of a social justice which could not be the product of quiet acceptance” (326). In the rest of the commentaries in that memorial issue, other colleagues and students stress Roger’s generosity, his sense of humor, his irreverence for the solemnities of academia, and—most memorably—his laughter. "What I remember is the effect of Roger’s laughter,” writes another former student, Christina Crosby; while serving as editor of *NOVEL*, “he humanized the whole business of scholarly production” (322) and made it fun.

I, too, remember Roger Henkle’s laughter and “his rich appreciation for the sublime and the ridiculous in all parts of the profession,” as Caroline McCracken-Flesher, still another former student of his, writes (321). During several of my visits to New England, I experienced Roger’s hospitality—and his laughter. Perhaps, then, it is fitting to end this foreword to a book on middle-class Victorian representations of urban poverty by recalling how on one of those occasions Roger drove me around Providence in a car from an outfit called “Rent-a-Wreck.” His wife, Carol, needed their own car to commute to work. I think the “wreck” was held together, barely, by rubber bands. I remember the window on the passenger’s side was stuck open, and I’m pretty sure the door on the driver’s side was permanently locked. But Roger was just as proud of it as if it had been a Rolls Royce, in part because, in his
Dickensian way, he could make it the subject of endless jokes and laughter, mostly about himself and his own bad taste in rented jalopies.

In the editorial that leads off the memorial issue of NOVEL, Mark Spilka declared: “It seems fitting that Roger should be widely known for his protégés and disciples. His devotion to them was legendary, as was and is their return devotion” (232). Of those many successful “protégés and disciples,” none has returned Roger’s “devotion” more fully and appropriately than Dan Bivona by becoming the coauthor of this book. Thanks to him, The Imagination of Class is not just at long last completed, but is also a major new contribution to studies of Victorian literature, its interest in social justice, and its reciprocal influence on social class formation. It’s a Festschrift and then some to the memory of a great friend and teacher.
The poor were always with the English. Poverty had been of broad social concern since the Elizabethan period at least: the topic of ongoing debate, periodic legislation, sporadic philanthropy. But the London poor of the nineteenth century—particularly from the 1840s on—seemed to present a different phenomenon. The spectacle of poverty and associated degradation in Central and East London, and later in South London, gave rise to a new set of imaginative and cultural representations. It developed from and in turn created new relationships between an ascending urban middle class and the worst victims of the metropolis. Poverty became, as Gertrude Himmelfarb notes, “a cultural rather than an economic condition” (Idea of Poverty 366). The character of the London poor broke into the public consciousness as if it were a discovery, which was “at once painful and alarming” in the words of one observer, and the “sense of novelty did not seem to disappear till the 1890’s” (Victorian City 1: 18). New terms, such as “slum,” entered the vocabulary, and from the Victorian period on, almost as one conceived of the big city, one conceived at the same time of a festering, teeming, sullen nether world within it. The state of London’s poor came to exercise a strong imagistic influence, shaping the discourses of journalism, social work, government activity, and high culture.

At the heart of this development is the consciousness of class itself. The change in the relationship of the middle class toward those around it, such as the urban poor, ensues from the awareness, most strongly felt in the growing urban bourgeoisie, of itself as a class, in opposition
to other classes and in need of defining and asserting its own imperatives. Such an awareness had been forming for some time, but it began to solidify into what we have since come to associate with middle class culture only in the mid-nineteenth century. The city was crucial to this development, for its growth corresponded in large part to the rise of the middle class, and it was also the field in which the middle class carved out new ideals and new personal relationships that would replace the old ones of a society dominated by the rural-based upper classes. Moreover, the city’s dynamism was destabilizing older class relationships. The new middle class order was supplanting the old relations of paternalism and special influence, and this new order felt pressed to define the ways in which it would represent itself, how it would exercise power, what means of control it would be able to impose.

One of the early survey/studies of the East End slums illustrates how closely the construction of this imagined community was tied to middle class ethical imperatives. Hector Gavin’s *Sanitary Ramblings: Being Sketches and Illustrations of Bethnal Green* appeared in 1848, on the heels of the first systematic analyses of the deplorable sanitary conditions of East London, and in the wake of a cholera epidemic. Gavin was a practitioner of forensic medicine, and his study, a street-by-street description of the filth, stench, overcrowding, incidence of disease, conditions of buildings, and sanitary facilities, is one of the most praised and thoroughgoing instances of reportage. Yet he indicates in the opening paragraph of his report that more is at stake:

To believe that the middle and upper classes were fully cognizant that multitudes of their fellow-beings have their health injured, their lives sacrificed, their property squandered, their morals depraved, and the efforts to christianize them set at nought by the existence of certain well-defined agents, and yet to find them either making no effort to alleviate, or to remove these misfortunes, or with a stern heart denying their existence, would be to charge these classes with the most atrocious depravity, and the most cruel heartlessness and selfish abandonment. It is impossible to suppose that love and charity are so utterly unknown to this great Metropolis . . . and I believe that the hearts of many will be warmed and their spirits aroused to assist those who have undertaken the great work of sanitary improvement and social amelioration. (Gavin 3)

The ethical and pragmatic challenges are neatly joined here. Social responsibility is directly linked to class self-definition. Furthermore—
and this is crucial—the discarded poor of Bethnal Green, the people often characterized during the century as the “residuum” and “outcast London,” are now brought directly into the broader body politic; they are made part of our human condition as residents of “this great Metropolis.” Gavin is, as well, no dry statistician; his mode of assessing the conditions shares with many of the journalistic explorers of the slums whom we shall read a personal, lively eye for vivid writing. Of Diby-St, Globe-Road, he writes, “In this most dirty street, exists one of the most atrocious nuisances which it is possible to create. A person named Baker, lately dead, here formed a receptacle for every kind of manure. . . . The decomposing organic particles which are always being set free from this putrescent mass, are wafted by each wind that blows, over a population to whom they bring disease and death, as surely as, though more insidiously than, the deadly simoon” (Gavin 9–10). Even so, at another spot, Whisker’s Gardens, amidst this putrescence, a “few gentlemen” have cultivated flower gardens. Of one Gavin says, “When seen in his damp and dirty home, he is generally accused of personal uncleanliness, and a disregard of the commonest appearances of decency and regularity; yet, in his garden, he displays evidences of a refined taste and a natural love of beauty and of order. The two are irreconcilable, and as the one sentiment is natural and spontaneous, we are irresistibly led to regard the personal uncleanliness of the poor, and the impurities which surround their houses, as the results of agencies foreign to the individual” (Gavin 12). This disclosure of a slum-dweller’s “evidences of . . . a natural love of beauty and of order” places him on a cultural continuum with his betters. He and his kind are for a moment absorbed into the values—beauty and order—of the middle class, even as they display an absence of the other essential virtues of cleanliness and regularity. And the forces which distance the slum-dweller from “decency” and “regularity” are explicitly identified here with agents beyond the individual’s control that infect him from without.

It is not our intention here to suggest that the work of slum clearance, sanitary reform, and private charity in the Victorian age served only to soothe the consciences of the middle classes and had no benefits to the victims of poverty. Nor are we arguing that the middle class professional stance of detachment—the aspiration for objectivity inherent in sanitary reports, for example, the ethical imperative to understand social conditions accurately, independently of the writer’s own biases—is invariably meaningless ideological illusion, a “pseudo-detachment” disguising class bias and darker desires lurking beneath.
The Victorian age was one of the great ages of reform and the achievements of many of its reformers were genuine and helpful to actual people. Moreover, what we call the “professional middle class ethos,” to which figures like Gavin subscribe, can be seen as part of a larger commitment within Victorian culture to the ideal of “detachment.” As Amanda Anderson has recently reminded us, “detachment” had a range of meanings, most of them quite positive, to the Victorians themselves:

The cultivation of detachment involves an attempt to transcend partiality, interests, and context: it is an aspiration toward universality and objectivity. The norms through which that aspiration finds expression may be situated, the aspiration may always be articulated through historically available forms, but as an aspiration it cannot be reduced to a simple form of illusion, or a mere psychological mechanism. (Powers of Distance 33)

However, our contention here is that no discourse attains total transparency to its object, no matter how fervently the writer may aspire to achieve it. Discourse is a complex symbolic phenomenon in which the triangulated relationship among writer, reader, and object of representation must be taken into account. And when these elements are taken into account, the writings we discuss here reveal a complex picture in which postures of detachment were deployed as much to stage the virtue and comprehensive vision of the urban explorer as to bring the reality of urban poverty to the urgent attention of the British reading public. The writerly persona and its inscribed reader are fictive constructs but powerfully compelling fictive constructs. We analyze these constructs not to dismiss the real service reform brought to the victims of urban poverty, but to point out how the discourse on urban poverty also infused middle class writing about that social problem with an urgency and symbolic imagery that, in retrospect, can now be seen as contributing to middle class self-definition.

While the Victorians wrote about the slums for a variety of reasons and motives, our central contention here is that many of the images that they constructed served the purpose of self-definition of an emerging—and largely male—professional class. We have chosen the title we did to emphasize that our focus is on an imaginary construct. Since the publication of Benedict Anderson’s influential Imagined Communities, the term “imaginary” used as a noun has come to refer to the complex way in which people experience their relationship to others
on a variety of psychological levels, some of which are governed by assumptions that are not subject to question, assumptions, in many cases, never rising to conscious articulation. Commonly held beliefs about the shape of time and space—new ideas about simultaneity, for example—help to construct a shared, but ultimately authorless, lived “imagination” of the “nation,” in Anderson’s view. These assumptions or beliefs are lived but seldom more than sporadically interrogated. To cite another example, the philosopher Charles Taylor justifies his choice of the term “imaginary,” in the title of a recent book, because he is interested less in what social theorists have consciously articulated about how one is to judge human behavior according to certain norms than he is in how ordinary people “imagine” their relationships to others in a way that is often best expressed in shared “images, stories, and legends” (Taylor 23). We cite Anderson and Taylor not to suggest that none of the representations of urban poverty that we discuss here are accurate. Far from it. Rather, what we assert is that the representations may tell us at least as much about what it meant to be male and middle class in the nineteenth century as they tell us about what it meant to be poor. Anchored in commonly held middle class assumptions about “character,” “space,” “temporality,” and so on, the middle class imaginary of the urban poor is very revealing—although only partly revealing about the lives of those who would seem to be the main objects of its representations. In that sense we are examining a discourse that is notably situated.

The male middle class imaginary of urban poverty presents a complex picture, one in which anxieties about competition, violence, class-based resentment, individuality, and the need to differentiate oneself from the scions of inherited wealth influence the ways in which the urban poor are represented. As James Eli Adams notes in *Dandies and Desert Saints*, the growth of the professional middle class in the Victorian age was accelerated by the decay of fixed distinctions of rank, as the new industrial class system gradually supplanted the traditional patriarchy dominated by the landed aristocracy and gentry. New definitions of “the gentleman,” associating him with, for instance, a new internalized ethic of self-control, are put forth to differentiate the new middle class “gentlemanly” class from the older, rank-based status category. Along with this comes a significant set of new anxieties, as the “manliness” of the mainly intellectual labor performed by this Victorian professional class “gentleman” is called into question (Adams 1–9). The new rising class, in Adams’ view, is an anxious class, concerned with its social and political legitimacy, its ability to command the fealty of the
lower classes it would hope to command, its identity riven by the tensions that unrestricted competition breed.¹

As we will see in this book, one response to this anxiety was to hollow out a new sphere of manly adventure. The descent into the "slum" (and later, the "nether world" or "the abyss") became a means of asserting that intellectual labor—indeed, the act of writing itself—could entail manly exploration, requiring the exercise of extraordinary self-control if not personal courage. Social exploration in the urban slums became an act of adventurous roaming unfit for the more genteel readers whom Pierce Egan mocked in 1823 in *Life in London* as "fireside heroes and sprightly maidens, who may wish to 'see life' without receiving a scratch" (Egan 19). Egan is, of course, mocking his own readers, whose experience of the slums is beholden to his representations of them as a realm apart from middle class experience. Despite his taunts, the book nonetheless invites his readers to visit this realm cautiously but vicariously—with Egan as docent. Many of the writers we examine here, from Dickens and Mayhew through Greenwood, London, Masterman, and others, cast themselves in the role of reporters on a realm of experience that is either not immediately available to their own readers or too threatening for the more genteel among them to risk visiting in person. The "immediacy" of life in the slums becomes a carefully constructed experience to be widely shared in an age of growing literacy and the proliferation of newspapers and journals: its smells, its criminality, its outrages to the sense of decency presented by a writer who often parades his own mediating role between classes as his prime credential. Such a discursive strategy often shifts the focus somewhat from the poor, the object of these representations, to the affect of the reader and the risk-taking of the reporter, as if the main point of the writing were to demonstrate the manly courage of the reporter and the possibility for sympathy—or moral outrage—latent in the reader. In *The Imagination of Class*, we explore, above all, the ways in which the discourses on the urban poor create distance and the illusion of vicarious immediacy: how they "spectacularize" the urban poor for a growing Victorian readership.²

Males and the Urban Poor

The male experiential relationship with the urban poor thus takes on a special significance in this context. In the early Victorian period, the writings of Dickens and Mayhew spread out before the male reader a
lively otherworld or sphere of masculine experience. As Richard C. Maxwell observes, “street life comes to embody dreams and desires that London brings out generally; dramas of freedom, reconciling an environment that ‘assassinates you with reality’ and an individual sensibility that wants alertness and mobility” (Maxwell 102). It lures the reader with its imagery of undiminished personal vitality. The vision of the underworld of the 1850s and early 1860s follows the brief efflorescence in the 1820s and 1830s of the so-called Newgate novel, in which the protagonist was often larger than life, modeled after the criminal MacHeath of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*, Henry Fielding’s Jonathon Wilde, or Dick Turpin and other fabled blackguards chronicled in the *Newgate Calendar*, a popular record of infamous careers of crime. Their bravado, their charisma embodied, as much popular literature does, a set of desires, fantasies, and anxieties of the time—albeit ambiguously indulged by the middle class male reader. These scoundrels, like Edward Bulwer Lytton’s Paul Clifford, were often committed to sentimentalized and obscurely political schemes of social reform. They actually wanted to do something about the state of neglect and inequity, rather than recline in the immobility of guilt. They represented as well a kind of flamboyantly asserted subjectivity, much as the Byronic myth did on a more romanticized (and socially elevated) scale during the same period. The Newgate novel came on the scene at a moment when the possibility of assertive, individual agency was threatened by the growing constraints of modern society, with its divisions of labor, its enhanced domesticity, its diffusion of authority and affect. It seemed to arrest, for a moment, the descent into a nation of clerks and bureaucrats. Among men, the spectre of the loss of the capacity to act independently, even aggressively, acquired almost a mythic status, and the spurious image of a freer, bolder realm in the recent past found voice in the bravura renditions of such literature.

Another chronicler of the London slums, J. Ewing Ritchie, muses, in *The Night Side of London* (1861), “I should not like a son of mine to be born and bred in Ratcliffe-highway. That there would be a charming independence in his character, a spurning of that dreary conventionalism which makes cowards of us all, and under the deadly weight of which the heart of this great old England seems becoming daily more sick and sad, a cosmopolitanism rich and racy in the extreme—all this I admit I should have every reason to expect, but, at the same time, I believe the disadvantages would preponderate vastly” (Ritchie 98). So compelling is this myth of the bold and free male of worldly experience that James Greenwood, probably the most influential journalist
writing on the slums after Mayhew, finds himself compelled to fight off the residual influences of the earlier versions of romantic roguery:

The literature of the country is from time to time enriched by bragging autobiographies of villains confessed, as well as by the penitent revelation of rogues reclaimed, but, according to my observation, it does not appear that perseverance in the humbler walks of crime leads invariably to the highway of infamous prosperity... It is almost impossible to exaggerate the amount of mischief that is likely to result from such false and inflammatory pictures of... evil... It tends to magnify the thief's importance... with precisely the same kind of gallows-glory as is preached by the authors of 'Tyburn Dick.'... (Seven Curses 71)

Gallows-glory is certainly not being sought in any bourgeois reverie, but the allure of a vital realm of adventure, mobility, and action cannot be discounted. It splices onto the mentality of the 1850s that nostalgized image of what was always a mythic masculinity. It seems to provide a spectacularized male subjectivity, as a cover for, or evasion of, the contradictions that beset the ideology's construction of established capitalism's bourgeois subject. Tellingly, it also introduces an element of social resistance—overtones of outlawry, nomadry, even misogyny—into middle class masculine discourse. The urban slums (and the literature of imperialism) provide the ingredients for such a rebellious fantasy, although it would not be fully developed until the latter part of the nineteenth century.4

To be sure, these literary constructs owe some of their appeal to changes in the bourgeois household that took hold especially between the 1830s and 1860s, changes which increasingly separated, for bourgeois males, the spheres of home and work, and which attempted to confine their emotional lives increasingly within the bosom of the middle class nuclear family. That era is identified by John Tosh as the "heyday" of masculine domesticity: "Never before or since has domesticity been held to be so central to masculinity. For most of the nineteenth century home was widely held to be a man's place, not only in the sense of being his possession or fiefdom, but also as the place where his deepest needs were met" (Tosh 1). While this would change somewhat after the 1870s as increasingly men were bidden to embrace, at least imaginatively, "the view that domesticity was unglamorous, unfulfilling, and—ultimately—unmasculine," that change itself testifies to unsettling emotional accommodations that surely lay just under the calm surface of the period of masculine domesticity of the previous
three decades (Tosh 7). If the outlaw nature of these discourses suggests that they served as emotional or psychological compensation for the increasingly domesticated nature of male middle class life, we cannot, nonetheless, look at the relation of the bourgeois male with the East End as simply an encounter with the Other, an encounter which, by contrast, provides the observer with a definition of what he is not. It should be seen as a discourse: a set of negotiated, ambiguously phrased, imaginary relationships. Like any such discourse, this one favors certain figural and spatial patterns that sustain, in a displaced form, the desires and anxieties that inform it.

One of these patterns is that of the labyrinth: the East End coiled and twisted in narrow, dark streets in alley's and courtyards, in dead-ends, and then, deeper, into cellars, sewers, rat-ways. The journalist James Greenwood loved to chart those hidden passages. He describes in Low-Life Deeps a “condemned” alley in which it was discovered that underneath the street and many of the houses was a walled pit in which a brewery had once stored beer, and which was known to be haunted by the ghosts of at least two suicides. All these mazes glimmer with the luminosity of submerged life. “It must have startled innocent folk to learn that, but a year or so ago, no less than a hundred and seventy of the notorious St. Giles’s cellars were still in use as human habitations, and that, after the manner of rats and other burrowing animals, as many families, consisting of mother, father and a more or less numerous swarm of big and little children passed their lives in these dismal holes under the houses . . . all in the damp and dirt and dark” (Low-Life Deeps 168).

What connects the middle classes to such a spectral existence? Again, and again, they tell the tale of the immersion, of the plunge into the maze, of the attraction of being “lost” for a spell in the cellar of the City. Greenwood styled himself as the “Amateur Casual,” a master in disguise, who was so adept at passing as a slum dweller with petty criminals that he could move unnoticed among them, and participate in their awful mysteries. His most famous sketch is that of “A Night in the Workhouse,” in which he treats his readers to the processes of transformation, to that strangely exquisite moment when one passes out of respectability and security—out of “bourgeoisdom”—and into the vulnerability and frisson of another state:

At about nine o’clock on the evening of Monday, the 8th inst. (Jan. 1866), a neat but unpretentious carriage might have been seen turning
cautiously from the Kennington Road into Princes Road, Lambeth. The curtains were closely drawn, and the coachman wore an unusually responsible air. Approaching a public-house which retreated a little from the street, he pulled up, but not so close that the light should fall upon the carriage door. . . . From [the carriage] door emerged a sly and ruffianly figure, marked with every sign of squalor. He was dressed in what had once been a snuff-brown coat, but which had faded to the hue of bricks imperfectly baked. . . . Between the neckerchief and the lowering brim of the hat appeared part of a face, unshaven, and not scrupulously clean. The man’s hands were plunged into his pockets, and he shuffled hastily along in boots which were the boots of a tramp indifferent to miry ways. In a moment he was out of sight; and the brougham, after waiting a little while, turned about, and comfortably departed. This mysterious figure was that of the present writer. He was bound for Lambeth workhouse, there to learn by actual experience how casual paupers are lodged and fed, and what the ‘casual’ is like.

Of course Greenwood is only impersonating poverty. He can return to his middle class life; the brougham will fetch him back at the end. But many a reader must dwell upon the excitement of this experience, torn from the moorings of one’s customary context and behavior, into the realm of danger, adventure, irresponsibility itself.

Whether escorted by Greenwood, or Mayhew, or Ritchie, or Dickens’ Inspector Bucket, the English reader could venture across the line of class life and find a stimulation and connection. The trajectory is a symbolic one; it signifies interaction, penetration, imaginative participation. The discourse remains open in a special way, allowing a mode of psychic extension, for the middle class male, at least, which makes the excursion more than an adventure, more than a vicarious thrill. The motif of impersonation signifies an imaginative dissolution into the situation of the Other, a displacement of aspects of one’s own desires. Although the later discourse from the 1870s on retains traces of this transference, it does not accommodate the full play of the masculine myth. From then on excursions into the urban slums are inflected by the language of the sociologies, the social service worker, the education inspector, and the cultural arbiter, even when, as in the case of Jack London (as we shall see in chapter 4) the reporter is a well-practiced novelist attempting to duplicate Greenwood’s feats of impersonation.
Mayhew, Dickens, and Male Competitiveness

Henry Mayhew is perhaps the most important writer on the slums during the early-to-mid-Victorian period. While he is interested in the domestic lives of the poor, he is particularly interested in what they do for a living: how labor shapes them as people. He catches a phase when all manner of economic mobility appears possible—and when it seems that mobility and exchange are themselves the tokens of individualism. Eileen Yeo, writing of “Mayhew as Social Investigator” in The Unknown Mayhew, argues that he came upon the scene during a crucial transition between two phases of capitalism, when a more regulated and humane economy was giving way to a stage of intense competition, and that he had the rare insight to capture this change in terms of the social relationships of production (Yeo and Thompson 95). In the studies of the silk-weavers, needlewomen, tailors, and boot and shoe makers of Spitalfields who make up the contents of The Unknown Mayhew, he chronicles the demise of independent craftsmanship in the face of cheap labor piecework and market instability. In London Labour and the London Poor, he records a different facet of this transitional period: the sudden, almost aberrational explosion of individualistic commercial activity. He ponders over it himself:

It would be itself a curious inquiry to trace the origin of the manifold occupations in which men are found to be engaged in the present day, and to note how promptly every circumstance and occurrence was laid hold of, as it happened to arise, which appeared to have any tendency to open up a new occupation, and to mark the gradual process, till it became a regularly established employment, followed by a separate class of people, fenced round by rules and customs of their own, and who at length grew to be both in habits and peculiarities plainly distinct from the other classes among whom they chanced to be located. (Mayhew II: 147)

London Labour and the London Poor links together laborers, criminals, destitute victims, and street-sellers, but it is the latter, the costermongers and the various small entrepreneurs, hawking along the margins of the new economy, that dominate his account. As Stallybrass and White note, there is a carnivalesque quality to the study. That quality links the old cultures of country peddlers and small tradesmen to
something new, to the emerging subculture of the sellers of trinkets, souvenirs, leftovers, and cheap imitation goods. As Richard Maxwell remarks, the subeconomy that Mayhew describes engages in the metamorphosis of the jetsam of a culture that is speeding up its mass production of goods, that is beginning to waste things. The street folk survive on findings, on rags and discarded clothing and cigar butts and human and animal excrement. “The street-people, like London itself, could be defined through their relationship to junk. The class was itself a form of waste, individuals thrown out by the economic machine of the city as superfluous human beings. This economic irrelevance became a source of identity, pointing such people towards the universe of excrement or cast-off things—a universe they were specially equipped to transform, since only they could feel towards it that combination of empathy and miserly delight which London Labour describes” (Maxwell 96).

Marginalized as these people are, they parade a kind of cocky *joie de vivre* in their resourcefulness. Consider this antic example from Mayhew:

Fly-paper came, generally, into street-traffic, I am informed, in the summer of 1848. The fly-papers are sold wholesale at many of the oil shops, but the principal shop for the supply of the street-traders is in Whitechapel . . . A young man, to whom I was referred, and whom I found selling, or rather bartering, crockery, gave me the following account of his experience of the fly-paper trade. He was a rosy-cheeked, strong-built young fellow, and said he thought that he was “getting on” in his present trade. He spoke merrily of his troubles, as I have found common among his class, when they are over.

“I went into the fly-paper trade,— it’s nearly two years ago, I think— because a boy I slept with did tidy in it. We bought the papers at the first shop as was open and then got leave of the deputing of the lodging-house to catch all the flies we could, and we stuck them thick on the paper, and fastened the paper to our hats. I used to think, when I was in service, how a smart livery hat, with a cockade in it would look, but instead of that I turned out, the first time in my life that ever I sold anything, with my hat stuck round with flies. I felt so ashamed I could have cried. . . . I could hardly cry ‘Catch ’em alive, only a half-penny!’ But I found I could sell my papers to public-houses and shop-keepers, such as grocers and confectioners, and that gave me pluck. The boys caught flies, and then came up to me, and threw them against my hat, and if they stuck the lads set up a shout.” (Mayhew I: 435–36)
The fly-paper lad is only one of many Mayhew characters who lift our spirits with their intrepid ingenuity in the face of insecurity and humiliation. They speak the spirit of commerce, even of capitalism itself, in their own small-bore way. They sing the song of individualism. And yet they will be the first victims of capitalism. Most of these one- and two-man operations will be squeezed out, or if commercially viable (like fly-papers) they will be taken over by “legitimate” businesses that will mass produce and mass market. Those who make a living by sweeping the street, or disposing and trading in refuse, will disappear as these functions are assumed by municipalities or large contractors. Some labor-intensive marginal “occupations” such as match-box making will persist for several decades, and the English slums and lower working class areas will support its own subeconomy of services and trades, but essentially the commercial fair of Mayhew is doomed. After all, Maxwell is right: these people are themselves a form of waste. They are the tailings of the commodified economy.

As Mayhew himself often passionately argued, the underclasses of London illustrate the effects of the modern competitive society: the toll on the body of the worker, the displacements brought on by the caprices of the market and the introduction of more efficient mechanical production, the psychological deprivations of piece-work and of the marginality of the costermonger existence. Gagnier and Thompson and Yeo have described Mayhew’s complex and shifting attitude toward the English economic order, as he intensifies his attack on the unregulated and exploitative market and yet revels in the vitality he witnesses in its most chaotic realms. The *London Labour* vision of the underworld is governed by an ambivalent response that Dickens and other contemporary writers share toward the competitive ethos itself. Anyone working with the novel of mid-century England must remark to himself how strange it is that the great “plot,” the central narrative paradigm of male bourgeois life, is so rarely told in mid-Victorian England: the story of the man rising in the business world, whetting himself on competition, defining his subjectivity by the competitive process itself. The story is being told in actual lives all over England; it is the grist for books such as Samuel Smiles’ popular *Self-Help* (1859). But it is rarely the epistemic text of cultural expressions; the middle class man on the make almost never becomes the protagonist. This is the denied element in the representation of the middle class male. This is the contradiction in the bourgeois capitalist ideology of mid-Victorian England.

While competition, and the acquisitive urge that Max Weber contends is imbricated in capitalism, are not foregrounded in the great
novels and much of the cultural discourse of the period, they are nonetheless present there as sites of highly contradictory energy. If one were to take the pulse of the Dickensian text, were to analyze those modulations that tell of the loci of libidinal investment, one could find the muffled, irregular rhythms of the contradictory attitude by the author—and of his ideology—toward competition. There were few men as competitive as Dickens, few who could squeeze or summarily cashier a publisher as he did, few who reveled more in the give and take. Whenever the text acquires a darkly dramatic intensity in Dickens, we are likely to be in the city of individual competition and the driven man. Dickens can never fully mediate the immense psychic attraction the competitive struggle has for him. That is the reason why the “dark” scenes of his novels register so much more energy than the domestic ones, and why he so rarely ventures (after *Pickwick Papers*) into the “merry England” countryside. That is the reason why, as well, the endings of his novels prove so dissatisfying, why they never seem to produce an abatement of the energies he has unleashed in them. He has not worked through the contradictions of his attitude toward competition and economic struggle.

Nor has the ideology of the English middle class worked through the contradictions in which it sheathes competition. Capitalism and competitive business activity are socially constructed in terms of the deferral of pleasure that is innate to the middle class ethos. Embarrassed by the distasteful, “unChristian,” and ungenteel aspects of the marketplace and finance, the official culture sought to shift value away from the process of competition, often crude and selfish, and onto its goals. John Stuart Mill and others tried to temper the deterministic, result-oriented elements of utilitarianism. Competing and getting and building and investing were to be considered significant not in themselves, but as a means toward a better life. On the individual level this often meant a better home, a larger carriage, more money for the advancement of one’s children. Thus the pleasure associated with competition was deferred. Correspondingly the meaning of the activity was registered in something other than the effort itself: in its rewards. If value then does not inhere in the process itself, how can it be a basis for self-definition? Such a definition would by its nature be inchoate, only potentially realizable, and difficult to represent, for it is only from its termination, its closure as a social discourse, its result, that we can judge its true nature and submit it to ethical analysis. Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847) provides the classic contemporary
example of this dilemma, for its protagonist Rebecca Sharp embodies the entrepreneurial spirit beautifully; she is in life not for the results of her social and economic successes but for the pleasure of the game itself. She establishes her identity in the competitive process. But Thackeray, sharing the Victorian upper middle class cultural unease with such an ethos, finds himself at a loss as to how to close off his novel, and does so unsatisfactorily, where he is disconcertingly ambiguous in his assessments of Rebecca. Though he finally condemns her, she engenders, as Dickens’ competitive villains often do, much of the energy of the narrative; she is where the psychic action is.

Middle class entrepreneurialism often accounts, in fact, for the “gap” with which Dickens’ novels begin. The orphaned protagonists of his books, unable to find their origins, evolve in late Dickens into men, like Pip and Little Dorrit’s Arthur Clennam (both containing biographical traces of the author himself), who immobilize themselves with an indefinable guilt, or sense of “fault.” What agonizes them is the dim apprehension that the relationships of production of bourgeois capitalism themselves have led to the social inequities and engendered the alienation of modern urban existence. As a kind of punishment for this “primal crime”—and that term has particular resonance because of the guilt associated with the usurping by the middle class male (the son) of the old (the father)—both Pip and Arthur fail in their business aspirations: Pip never finds gratification in his quest for a gentlemanly life (the “gentleman” is a code in the Victorian period for someone who is worldly, who can still operate in the experiential realm, but not in the competitive/acquisitive); Arthur ends up in debtor’s prison. They must be “punished” because at some buried level, they surmise that their male class identity is bound up with the acquisitive urges of competition. This goes as much for the members of the professional class, whose position requires that they disavow it in public, as for the members of the entrepreneurial class, who are more given to celebrating publicly the virtues of competition.

In his earlier novels, such as The Old Curiosity Shop, Dickens tried to maintain some kind of distinction between “good” business activities and “bad” ones. Quilp, the arch-villain of that novel, engages in the undesirable activities of commerce and money lending. Similarly, James Carker stands for what has been denatured by the new economy: he represents unbridled ambition; he is a manipulator of texts—not a builder but a schemer. But both cases expose the Dickensian ambivalence, because Quilp is the source of much of the vital energy of the
novel, and Carker not only fascinates us, but shares with his creator certain writerly qualities of voyeurism and artistic talent. And both are imbricated in Dickens’ own repressed phantasm. Quilp lasciviously stalks the prepubescent Little Nell, who is explicitly inspired by Mary Hogarth, Dickens’ adoring young sister-in-law, who died in his arms, and who became for him an ambiguous symbol as sexual object and paradigm of purity. Carker, too, embodies illicit desire and debauchery, and his death under the wheels of a steam engine is rendered in language of intense sensuality.

The traversing of images of the competitive world and of sexual desire permeates Dickens’ writing and complicates the ideological contradiction that underwrites it. Figures such as Quilp and Carker epitomize desire. The objects of their lust are often implicitly commodified objects such as the idealized girl-child Little Nell, or explicitly commodified figures such as Edith Granger, who complains at one point that “I am a woman . . . who from her childhood has been . . . offered and rejected, put up and appraised, until my very soul has sickened. Hawked and vended here and there . . . until . . . I loathe myself” (Dombey 382). Even Lady Dedlock is commodified, on display at Chesney Wold as an elegant and beautiful possession, reflected in her expensive portraits, bound into the silence of the bought woman. An uneasy correlation exists between the commodifying and consuming of women as a form of sexual pleasure, and the aggressive excitement of the competitive world.8

In Dickens, then, sexuality is transposed onto competitiveness/acquisitiveness, deepening the psychic pull of the latter, but producing immense instability in the distribution of textual energies. For both these urges are repressed; they are both fraught with contradictions at the ideological level. Consequently, erratic displacements occur within the text. The sexual and economic axes are sometimes aligned, and sometimes opposed, and there is a frequent transposition of one upon the other. Women in the novels become fetishizations of economic desires; on other occasions, desire shifts away from the female human body onto economic objects; in still other instances, the association of sexual urges with competition produces a kind of displacement that has homoerotic overtones (through “bondings” with male fellow competitors, such as that between Bradley Headstone and Eugene Wrayburn in Our Mutual Friend).

Although such instability and conflation is to be expected when an already contradictory conceptualization is consistently elided, the crisis over male roles and male subjectivity necessarily charges these issues
with remarkable intensity. The guilt and anxiety that the middle class male author registers over the social conditions of England acquire added psychic energy from the libidinal issues tied up with them. In addition, the difficulties of representing competition as a process, as a meaningful mode of behavior in itself, and the refusal to acknowledge or come to terms with sexuality, produces a set of texts in which a powerfully energized range of signifiers exist without signifieds. The excess of floating signifiers is organized through one common affect: that of desire. Desire, as we know, sustains the consumer market—it is an unfulfilled desire, stimulated by constantly substitutable objects, which are appropriated, used for the consumer’s gratification, and wasted—a desire that is eroticized even on the economic level. The convolutions of this process clearly cannot be traced without close examinations of each text, which is not our purpose here, but it is enough to confirm that such a nexus of fundamental ideological contradictions militates against a stable construct of the bourgeois male subject.

By reading the ideological contradictions aroused by the competitive ethos of modern industrial society through Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*, we are able to see more readily the positive and negative qualities that the ethos connoted for the Victorian middle class observer. The openness, mobility, adventure, and apparent freedom of untrammeled economic activity could be shown alongside its destructive and dehumanizing social effects. The world of the costermongers, the marginally employed, and the poor becomes a theatre in which the dynamics of bourgeois entrepreneurship and commodification in some of their most primitive forms are played out. In such an arena, class, as it is customarily designated in Victorian social discussion, is elided. Although Mayhew was one of the first reporters to give us a systematic description of significant segments of the working classes, his effort in *London Labour* to set up the new categories of nomadic and settled indicates a disposition to approach the relation between the upper and lower spheres of society on new terms. As Regenia Gagnier has pointed out, by the time he began working on Book Four of *London Labour* Mayhew was deeply into a reorientation of working relationships that jumbled the normal class hierarchies (so that pure capitalist investors along with shopmen and goods transporters were grouped together as the Auxiliary class).9

Certainly his groupings of occupations and types, his attention to their habitats, their work and leisure patterns, their particular customs and languages, furthers the objective of designating the street people and slum dwellers as a kind of subculture—a collective that has shared
attitudes, patterns of living, and common experiential possibilities. They are portrayed as an enclave with its own internal dynamics. Such a narrative and analytical approach had sharply differentiated his depiction of the urban underworld from those largely anecdotal, largely imaginative, often touristic accounts of his predecessors such as Pierce Egan.

Mayhew himself persistently talks in terms of “class”: he says he defines “those who obtain their living in the streets of the metropolis . . . as a very large and varied class.” But given his predilection for biological terminology, it is quite likely that he is using the terms in the sense of a pseudo-scientific classification. As Gertrude Himmelfarb has shown, Mayhew is working in the midst of a general uneasiness about the appropriate terms for the poor, as distinguished from the marginal workers, the lower working class proper, and so on, and he is probably trying to impose some of his own sense of things within the welter of terms. In any event, as Mayhew represents the London poor and the street folk (as distinguished from the weavers, tailors, et al. of the earlier *Morning Chronicle* articles), he denies them that group self-awareness, that oppositional nature that E. P. Thompson postulates as the determinant of class. The elision is critical, for it means that the lowest stratum in English society will be fixed in a representation that deprives them of the characteristics of group consciousness necessary for class identity. If they are not seen as a class in the ways that the working class is, then they can be treated differently—and used differently discursively.

Nothing arrests the attention in Mayhew’s book more than the capacity of the street-sellers to mimic and rework the images of the dominant culture. The street people embody, in a distorted way, some of the displaced desires for masculine freedom; they are often bizarre pastiches of the cult of individuality; they engage in a ludic extension of the mercantile competitive ethos. The engaging account of the fly-paper vendor casts an almost parodic reflection upon commercial activity. He seems to be caught up in the self-propelling replication of commodification itself, for the commodity reproduces itself endlessly, and elaborates upon itself in variations and by-products, all in the highly self-reflexive market economy, in which use value has been replaced by exchange value—an arbitrary construct of worth. Commodification fires the energy of self-parody.

In this respect, commodification at the level of the street people seems to make them a subculture of the main socio-economic system.
Subcultural movements in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in England share the disposition to parody or rework the patterns of behavior and production of the middle class consumer culture. We have witnessed it in recent times in the reflexive responsiveness of England’s immigrants and working classes to the world of media, style, fashion, and cultural gesture. Out of the lower income neighborhoods and suburbs have come subcultural expressions of rock, mod, and punk, which are nurtured first among the lower classes as gestures of independence, even resistance (although often with a sense of irony), and are then co-opted and modified by the ever-adaptive mainstream, “respectable” culture. Subcultures give the styles and modes of the dominant culture a reflexive spin. Mayhew’s street people, however, do not attain to the status of a subculture, precisely because they are not sufficiently aware of the outlook of the “establishment” to be able to parody or to form a style of ironic resistance to it. They are not sufficiently cognizant of the hegemonic values to be able to work off of them in a way that critiques them. This is significant because it leads us into what he is telling us about the problematics of individual subjectivity in this urban/commercial environment.

Specifically, the urban poor lack the capacity to conceive of themselves and to project themselves symbolically. Admittedly, we are at the mercy of bourgeois representations of the East End. It is arguable that someone like Mayhew has simply blocked out the symbolic register; in later accounts, by voices from the slums themselves, a measure of conscious mimicry emerges. Nonetheless Mayhew’s most poignant or stunning accounts illustrate the limited capacities for self-conscious, reflexive awareness among the lower orders. Typical is the thirty-year-old costermonger who claims to have once served the Prince of Naples when that eminence came to London.

“But I don’t know nothing of the King of Naples, only the Prince. I don’t know what the Pope is. Is he any trade? It’s nothing to me, when he’s no customer of mine. I have nothing to say about nobody that ain’t no customers. My crabs is caught in the sea, in course. I gets them at Billingsgate. I never saw the sea, but it’s salt-water, I know. I can’t say whereabouts it lays. I believe it’s in the hands of the Billingsgate salesmen—all of it? I’ve heard of shipments at sea, caused by drownding, in course. I never heard that the Prince of Naples was ever at sea. I like to talk about him, he was such a customer when he lived near here.” (Mayhew I: 56)
Mayhew’s costermonger’s mind revolves in tight, interlooping circles, for his imaginative vocabulary is as limited as the experiential one. He lives mentally in a labyrinth that resembles the geography of his neighborhood. Without either kind of outreach, he has scant chance of transcending his immediate lot, of thinking in a symbolic register, or of achieving the kind of imaginative projection that allows him perspective on his or another social formation.

In a remarkably revelatory observation, Mayhew cautions:

We must not in the arrogance of our self-conceit condemn these men because they are not like ourselves, when it is evident that we should have been as they are, had not some one done for us what we refuse to do for them. We leave them destitute of all perception of beauty, and therefore without any means of pleasure but through their appetites, and then we are surprised to find their evenings are passed either in brutalizing themselves with beer, or in gloating over the mimic sensuality of the ‘penny gaff.’ Without the least intellectual culture is it likely, moreover, that they should have that perception of antecedents and consequents which enable us to see in the shadows of the past the types of the future—or that power of projecting the mind into space, as it were of time, which we in Saxon-English call fore-sight? (Mayhew I: 101)

The difference between “classes,” by this account, lies in qualities of mind. One quality is that of experiential and imaginative outreach—the appropriative mentality so characteristic of the middle class and significantly less developed in this lower class group. The other quality that Mayhew insists upon is that of culture, which by his terms, “perception of beauty . . . intellectual culture, [seeing] the shadows of the past,” he designates aesthetic sensibility, cultivation, perspective, breadth of mind.

And so the urban poor are hemmed in by the limitations formulated by bourgeois discourse itself. Discourse effectively keeps alive masculine fantasy, the possibilities of adventure, mobility, and exuberant individualistic commerce, the experiential, and it even works them through parodic manifestations. By returning to the labyrinth formula, this discourse effectively preserves the possibility of intrusion by manly adventurers from the West End while denying, or making more difficult to emerge, symbolic expressions that might emerge from within the labyrinth itself. The geographic limitations that sustain the myth of manly adventure are reinforced in the picture of the mind of
the poor as maddeningly self-enclosed, incapable of moving outside of tightly circuitous paths.

None of Mayhew’s urban denizens quite rivals the justly celebrated “Jack Black,” self-designated “rat and mole destroyer to Her Majesty.” Black also goes by the name of the Battersea Otter, because he catches barrelfuls of freshwater fish with his hands. He lives in a flat decorated with stuffed birds and animals, many of them his favorite rat-hunting ferrets, and he is as domestic as you like, for Mrs. Black proudly shows Mayhew the costume their daughter wore as the “Ratcatcher’s Daughter,” when she served behind the bar at a public house—a red velvet bodice, embroidered with silver lace. Jack bears the scars of dozens of rat bites with honor, but he has given up tobacco “since a haccident I met with from a pipe. I was smoking a pipe . . . and a friend of mine by chance jobbed it into my mouth, and it went right through to the back of my palate and I nearly dies.” Here his wife added, “There’s a hole there to this day you could put your thumb into; you never saw such a mouth.” Jack Black is one of the voices of London’s nether world that will feed a bourgeois imagination over many a sleepless night:

“One night in August—the night of a very heavy storm, which, maybe you may remember, sir—I was sent for by a medical gent as lived opposite the Load of Hay, Jampstead, whose two children had been attacked by rats wile they was sleeping in their little cots. I traced the blood, which had left lines from their tails, through the openings in the lath and plaster, which I follered to where my ferruts come out of, and they must have come up from the bottom of the house to the attics. The rats gnawed the hands and feet of the little children. The lady heard them crying, and got out of her bed and called to the servant to know what the child was making such a noise for, when they struck a light, and then they see the rats running away to the holes; their little night-gownds was kivered with blood, as if their throats had been cut. I asked the lady to give me one of night-gownds to keep as a cur’osity, for I considered it a *pheenomenon* . . .” (Mayhew III: 17)

Jack Black is himself something of a *pheenomenon*. He is the very mimicry of life: a figure thriving on the margins, a production of his own dialogue and ingenuity, the enterprising small operator in its most bizarre manifestations. The circumstances of Mayhew’s interview, in Black’s domestic abode, with his proud and doting wife, his mementos of past campaigns, and his appreciation for the stories that terrorize the bourgeois imagination—the rats eating at the children’s
hands and feet—convert Black into almost a parody of the ordinary man. He is, after all, a working bloke, a family man, a small contractor. But, like all the Mayhew characters, Black is a specimen of a quirky kind of individuality. An individuality is all that he represents, for he like the others in the slums never cracks the bourgeois humanistic code for the subject: he never attains to that complexity, that self-awareness and self-reflexivity.

In these ways, Mayhew’s opening up of the vast and exotic territory of the urban slums has imperialistic overtones. The observing culture needs the actuality of this world outside its own; it is vital that the slums be something that one can experience, if only vicariously or through a surrogate. But the crucial difference between the London netherworld and foreign colonies is the closeness: the thin line across which the imagination can travel to fantasize the reprise of a more primitive and “free” masculine life and can explore the exhilarating yet terrifying ways in which the new economic order exfoliates and degenerates at the same time. In such a relation, the distinction between literal and symbolic blurs, and the diminution of the individual subject can speak as much of the dangers facing the English middle class male as of the dehumanization of the poor. The immense evocative power of London Labour and the London Poor issues from its experiential, symbolic force as well as from its exposure of mid-century London’s terra incognita.

The Chapters

As our discussion of Mayhew reveals, the focus of this book will be on the construction of a particular kind of urban netherworld in the Victorian age. While not all the writers we consider in these pages are biologically male, we are particularly interested in how the writings of an emerging male professional class construct the urban poor of the city of London.

In the 1860s and 1870s, the urban poor were “discovered” by journalists as a fascinating underworld. Many also used the pathos of poverty for many of their most emotionally gripping sensations. In chapter 1 we examine the rhetorical effects of this work as well as its substance. In some of the journalistic accounts, such as those of the master of disguises and intrepid explorer James Greenwood, an insulating element of culture is insisted upon as a way of keeping the reader at a psychic distance from the effects of an encounter with the Other.
But the rise of “sensational journalism” breaks down that separation, by writing private morals into public discourse, and by creating a new kind of textual effect which undermines the normative way in which the reading experience shapes the subject. The incremental construction of a centered, integral being that is the object of the realist novel is replaced by a disruptive, emotively charged discourse. And this works in conjunction with sentimentalism to dissolve the boundaries between the reader and what he or she observes. The sentimental accounts of urban poverty are particularly important to this process, for their qualities of emotional excess and their codings of private ethical and material relations expose the reader to the affect of abjection. Coded as “female,” a threatening form of abject experience is constructed and distanced through the work of a number of male writers who took as their subject the urban poor. We examine here how the male writer’s stance of detachment, carefully constructed, is always under threat by overpowering emotional forces that threaten to engulf him.

In chapter 2 we discuss how the discourse of “culturalism” in the 1880s attempts to contain a threat that is coded, not as affective excess, but as emotional deadening. As middle class writers, inspired by what Beatrice Webb calls “a sense of sin,” descend upon the East End to participate in a variety of “missions” ranging from the C.O.S. through the settlement movement through Charles Booth’s famous fact-gathering study of poverty, the East End is constructed as a land of enervation. In the Autobiography of Webb, in the novels of her cousin Margaret Harkness, in the work of Walter Besant, and in the social outreach of a variety of new agencies aligned with what Donzelot calls “the social,” East End life is seen increasingly as a feminized landscape, its redemption requiring not only empirical fact-gathering of the sort to be made famous by Charles Booth, but active intervention in the interest of moral and psychological reconstruction of an essentially feminized social order. The spatialized representation of the netherworld continues to favor figurations of miasma and labyrinth, but without the investment of sensationalized affect that had so marked the work discussed in chapter 1. Rather, in constructing a more “professionalized” relationship between middle class observer and lower class subject, this discourse seeks the material recuperation and cultural pacification of a social order, a redemptive mission often conceptualized as the fostering of the proper consumerist tastes. Webb’s Autobiography, more so than other writings of the period, registers how the conditions of East End poverty constituted a threat to the integrity
of the middle class subject, an ethical challenge to those who would remake this world, a spur to the development of an empirical descriptive project of large-scale dimensions, and an inspiration for a political project of “permeation” that would seek to displace the threat of personal enervation into political reform.

Nowhere is that redemptive narrative more dramatically contested than in the novels of Arthur Morrison and George Gissing, which we examine in chapter 3. Morrison, the first of the major writers to emerge from the poorer areas of the East End, portrays an underclass that cannot be culturally “improved” and absorbed, and in which its distance from the mores of the dominant society and economic order is so great that it can only be represented symbolically. The hostility with which Morrison’s work was reviewed indicates that he not only irritated the nerves of the middle class, but also exposed the materialism that underlay late nineteenth-century British naturalism. Gissing’s The Nether World shares with Morrison’s work the determination to preserve the integrity of the representation of lower class life against the distortions of culturalism, and its expressions in working class popular culture. His own ambivalence toward the social resentments of the lower classes, however, articulates itself in the feverish, melodramatic portrayal of female sexuality, and in the curiously constricted, emotionally stultified personification of male desire.

Chapter 4 addresses the dominant phantasmic construction of the urban poor at the end of the century: the East End as “the abyss.” Here we are concerned with the way a number of male writers (Richard Jefferies, H. G. Wells, Jack London, Charles Masterman) register the historical moment of bourgeois hegemony as a moment of intractable class conflict, resistant to amelioration. This moment in the history of the middle class male mind would see the poor reduced to threatening fantasy objects, consigned to a hell from which there is no escape. This “discourse of the abyss” is itself traced by uneasy contradictions that emerge in middle class professionalism: they become evident in the emergence of an “authoritarian” theme that pulls Wells toward celebrating the Mandarin class, London toward politically self-defeating, dark irony, and Masterman toward contempt for projects of “culturalist” philanthropy. Yet they have a productive side as well, as the discourse of the abyss rounds upon itself, exposing, at least in Masterman’s writing, its own self-awareness as a production of a moment in the history of middle class thought.
- CONCLUSION -

Representing the Poor
and Forestalling Abjection

This book is about the intersection of gender and class. More specifically, our contention in this book has been that the interests of a predominately male professional class, which was in the process of formation throughout the nineteenth century, strongly influenced, indeed determined, the ways in which the Victorians represented poverty in the city of London. London was in the process of unprecedentedly rapid growth in the nineteenth century, and this rapid growth entailed many painful social adjustments. Although London was not the center of the First Industrial Revolution (the northern cities were), it was the center of British trade, the hub of its new transportation infrastructure, the focus of its banking activities, the center of its political life: in many respects, a large stage on which the developing middle classes could play out their relationship with the rest of British society while seeking a new and expanded role within that social order. The puzzling growth of abject poverty, which seemed to accompany the growing prosperity and political power of the Victorian middle class, could be noted in London, its social effects observed and discussed, and solutions proposed and carried out. Indeed, as we have argued, the seeming growth of abject poverty stimulated the process of middle class self-definition, as middle class professionals rose to answer the ethical challenge of poverty in the midst of plenty, offering solutions which drew on scientific expertise, which required the mediating role of the reporter, and which charged middle class life with an enlarged ethical mission to alleviate suffering,
whether it took the form of philanthropic efforts in the slums or heart-rending novelistic exhortation over which any good soul could cry.

While most of the writers we examine here are male, the issue of gender is more complicated than a simple biological model would seem to suggest. Indeed, it is our contention that a broader notion of gender is essential to understanding how this discourse on urban poverty operated. We discern, in this writing, the operation of certain class- and gender-based anxieties which derive as much from middle class male experience as from the observed reality of urban poverty. Fear about competition, to take one example, a fear that is constitutive of the Victorian male professional imaginary, inflects the representations of the poor from the early Victorian period, encouraging the construction of an “East End” which takes on the metaphorical clothing of a threatening labyrinth, in which the identity of the middle class subject is under constant threat by a feminine abject. The “threat” here is to the integrity of the middle class male self, and it is forestalled in a variety of ways which we have discussed. Although they took many different and complicated forms, we contend that attempts to forestall the collapse of defining boundaries served to shore up a middle class male subjectivity coming under threat by a variety of social phenomena. Moreover, that “threat” also opened up new possibilities for the professional class, as the discovery of poverty in the midst of plenty created opportunities to exercise ethical impulses in the public sphere, as the representation of the poor created new material for reporters to feed to a hungry public, as the descent into the abyss served the purpose of heroicizing the act of representation itself.

The discourse of the “abyss” which we have examined in chapter 4 marks a final change in the Victorian middle class’s assertion of its right to interpret the reality of life for the urban lower classes. It would be wrong, of course, for us to suggest that this discourse constitutes anything like the “final word” on the subject in the Victorian age. Writers like Wells, London, and Masterman were themselves involved in a very fraught relationship with contending discourses on poverty at the time: the “sentimental” tradition, the “culturalist” or the settlement movement, the COS, Booth’s emergent “sociological” tradition. These discourses overlap in their interests even if they construct their object—the urban poor—often in rather different ways, as we have already seen. Moreover, one could argue that the latter were more politically “effective” in the long run, as Britain, especially in the aftermath of World War I, took tentative steps in the long process of building a modern welfare state dedicated to diminishing class antagonism
and raising the poor up to a minimal standard of humane life. Surely, the latter movement, however one measures its success or failure, was influenced and shaped more directly by the political achievements of Fabian “permeation,” the success of the unionization movements, and—perhaps most importantly—the experience of social solidarity enforced during two punishing world wars in the twentieth century than by the arguments of impassioned intellectuals with a bleak view of the prospects for interclass understanding.

What is striking, though, about what we are calling the discourse of the “abyss” is, finally, its awareness of its own self-enclosure: to follow Masterman in pursuit of “the hooligan” and “John Smith” does not even require a trip to East London. We have been, to some extent, pursuing a tale of the gradual imposition of ideological hegemony, achieved finally at the end of the century, and symptomatized by the self-enclosure of this discourse. The “otherness” of the urban poor passes, in Masterman’s writing, into a kind of sameness, as writing about the East End devolves into a critical complaint about the limited structures of value and significance available to the middle class writer who wishes to awaken his readers to the reality of social problems in their midst. In that sense, some of this writing becomes a kind of second-order writing on urban poverty in relation to the need for self-assertion of the middle class male writer. While we have attended throughout this study to the self-consciousness of these discourses, their writers’ winking awareness that they are addressing a middle class audience in the terms familiar to the middle class, a tendency evident in Dickens and Greenwood no less than in Gissing, London, and Masterman, we must nonetheless acknowledge, at the end, the ability of some of this writing to register an alien sensibility and alien possibilities that signify beyond what they seem to. There is a sense in which the achievement of hegemony marks the moment of its contestation: the possibilities glimpsed beyond the veil of conventionalized representation strategies are themselves signs opening into a different universe of understanding, as yet, in the pre-War era, still powerless to be born.
Notes to Introduction

1. See Lauren Goodlad’s recent, and persuasive, argument that the new nineteenth-century “professional” ethos involved as much competitiveness as its opposite number—the “entrepreneurial” ethos (“A Middle Class Cut in Two” 154). It is, of course, Harold Perkin, in *The Rise of Professional Society* (1989), who is most responsible for differentiating a developing “professional” ethos from what he calls the “entrepreneurial ethos” of Victorian middle class society.

2. Simon Joyce argues in *Capital Offenses*, “the dominant trend of urban social observation during the nineteenth century . . . [was one] which sought to maintain an absolute distinction between the spectating subject and the contemplated object” (*Capital Offenses* 22).

3. Louis James chronicles the working class editions and variations on this literature in *Fiction of the Working Man*.

4. The empire provides another such theatre for the acting out of elements of this male fantasy. As the various images of the London underworld as “darkest Africa on our own doorstep” indicate, the slums are often depicted as objects of the imperialistic imagination, whose domestic implications have been documented by Patrick Brantlinger in his *Rule of Darkness*, Dan Bivona in *Desire and Contradiction: Imperial Visions and Domestic Debates in Victorian Literature*, and Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather*.

5. Although we do not have space to develop the theme fully here, it should be noted how much emphasis work in Victorian Studies over the past ten years has given to challenging the traditional “separate spheres” model of Victorian middle class life. The recent work of John Tosh, Amanda Anderson, Elizabeth Langland, and Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, to name just a few, has registered this theme over and over again. That the so-called “domestic sphere” was hardly a haven from intense competitive pressures is familiar to readers of Victorian domestic fiction, even if it is sensation novels such as *East Lynne* that highlight the intensity of female-to-female competitiveness within that sphere most melodramatically. Moreover, as Tosh has argued, the traditional “separate spheres” notion has
obscured the fact that Victorian middle class males enjoyed the "distinctively masculine privilege" of relatively unrestricted access to both "domestic" and "public" spheres (Tosh 77).

6. It is important to note that the term "East End" in the discourses we examine here is used as often in a cultural as in a geographic sense throughout the nineteenth century, gradually evolving a geographical specificity only in the 1880s and 1890s while retaining, nonetheless, its cultural meaning as that which opposes a hegemonic "West End." As Simon Joyce points out in Capital Offenses, "the hegemonic culture represented by London's West End . . . requires a correspondingly demonized East End, against which it is able to validate and consolidate its generalizable, normative, and (supposedly) classless values" (Capital Offenses 37). Dickens' "East End," for example, was more often than not, St. Giles in the West End. Jack London's, by contrast, was East London, although even he stretches the term to embrace a broader geographic conception of poor London.

7. Originally published in the Pall Mall Gazette, the sketch is reprinted in Keating, Into Unknown England 33–34.

8. For a more sustained treatment of this issue, see Debra Epstein Nord's Walking the Victorian Streets.


Notes to Chapter One

1. See Seth Koven's Slumming for an interesting discussion of Greenwood's "A Night in a Workhouse." Koven argues that the story insinuates that the workhouses enabled the sexual exploitation of younger boys and men by older men, although given the conventions of the day, the story can do no more than hint at this theme. Koven 25–87.

2. The professional becomes, as Harold Perkin observes, one prominent formulation for the middle class male's role in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Origins, chapters VIII–IX. For an overview of how the "professional" comes to differentiate himself from the "bourgeois" male, see Perkin's The Rise of Professional Society. As mentioned in the Introduction, identification with the aims of the "professional" class did not exempt one from competitiveness. This is certainly clear in the case of Dickens. For an account of how male writers began signing their essays in the periodical press and how this connected with the emergence of a new category of "literature" that came increasingly to be distinguished from "book chat" and, indeed, to acquire cultural prestige in the era of mass literacy, see Laurel Brake, Subjugated Knowledges.

3. For a discussion of the wide range of Bohemian male life in nineteenth-century London and the fraught issue of "respectability," see Huggins.

4. Brake's Subjugated Knowledges is particularly good on the subject of how from the mid-nineteenth century onward, certain honorific cultural categories are erected to differentiate the valuable work of the professional from the putatively less valuable work of the hack. Whether it is William Michael Rossetti opining that the only art criticism likely to be of any use in the future is that by "professional men" who can speak "ex cathedra [about] what attempts in art are desirable to be made"
(19) or Matthew Arnold, coining the term “New Journalism” in 1887 in order to differentiate what he considered the demotic brand of Stead-inspired popular sensationalism from the trustworthy and informed “old journalism” that he presumably had been practicing for thirty years (83), the late nineteenth century saw many instances of middle class male professional intellectuals attempting to vaunt their own expertise, devalue that of nonprofessionals, and construct the outlines of new objects which it becomes their social duty to discuss publicly: “literature,” “art,” “cultural criticism,” rather than the penny dreadful, “sensation” fiction, and sensational journalism which kowtows to popular taste for stimulation at all costs. This is by no means an exclusively male phenomenon, as anyone who has read Margaret Oliphant’s intemperate attack on sensation fiction can see, but it was particularly associated with middle class male professionals who had the ready access to influential organs of opinion that many women lacked.

5. It is worth noting here that there is some evidence that actual working class reading habits were not that different from the habits of many middle class people. Jonathan Rose has recently argued that it was the great literary “classics” which formed the most important and influential reading material for most working class people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—at least for most of those working class people who wrote the memoirs which formed the basis for his study. See his The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes.

6. For a particularly lucid explanation of suture, its conceptualization in the work of Emile Benveniste and others, and of the ideological interpellation of the subject, see Kaja Silverman, “Suture” and The Subject of Semiotics 194–236.

7. For an interesting discussion of the politics of working class literacy, see Brantlinger’s The Reading Lesson 93–120. Among other things, Brantlinger argues that only Tory writers like Disraeli, among the early generation of Victorians responding to Chartism, were able to allow the working class to represent itself in discourse. Middle class writers (such as Kingsley and Eliot) tended to work hard (and anxiously) to de-legitimize working class radical discourse.


9. Mearns was assisted in the preparation of the article by James Munro and W. C. Preston.

10. See Chase and Levenson on the “unwalled poor”: “the definition of a family was architectural as well as biological” (Chase and Levenson 47–48).

11. Beatrice Webb’s (née “Potter’s”) allegation that incest is common among the urban poor appeared in her 1888 report in Booth’s Life and Labour of the People of London. Cited in Himmelfarb, De-Moralization: 118.

12. The closest anyone has come is Deborah Wynne in her recent book The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine.


15. Interestingly, Hadley argues that early nineteenth-century melodrama appears to be doing the same thing but is actually rooted in an earlier, nonperformative, patriarchal mode of social identity formation in which performance and being are not separate (Hadley 21). Edmund Burke harkens back to that mode in his Reflections, when he argues that in tearing off the “drapery” of social authority,
the French revolutionaries were not simply laying bare some shameful “truth” but were rather destroying civilization itself: the accoutrements of “civilization”—its “staging”—are its essence.

16. This is clearest in the case of Gladstone, the “People’s William,” although Bright was also a precursor of this new “populist” style which was made necessary when the three great Parliamentary reforms of 1832, 1867, and 1884 broadened the franchise significantly. See Jenkins’s description of the launch of Gladstone’s “Midlothian” campaign against Disraeli’s pro-Turkish foreign policy—the first truly modern, populist political campaign in Britain (Jenkins 399–434).

17. Since pundits are still today constantly complaining about this process, one must assume that it is a defining feature of middle class culture since the late nineteenth century: a culture in which a discursive nostalgia for a pure “private sphere” marks its always already contaminated state, much as nostalgia for a lost “haven in a heartless world” becomes the index of the always already fallen state of our social order.

18. Quoted in Schultz, p. 29.
20. “The ‘parades of Pain’ that Tennyson rehearses in In Memoriam and the martyrdom of Sydney Carton in Dickens’ Tale of Two Cities are just two instances in which masculine identity is realized through a regimen of solitary but emphatically visible suffering, which claims the authority of manhood while estranging the hero from all forms of collective identity” (Adams 16).

21. It is interesting and more than a little alarming to see the return of the “moralization” of poverty and its effects in the contemporary work of an historian as astute as Gertrude Himmelfarb. In De-moralization, she offers what sounds like a moral defense of the New Poor Law, suggesting that a society that punishes poverty is inevitably expressing the high value it places on work and self-respect: “Today the very word ‘stigma’ has become odious, whether applied to dependency, illegitimacy, addiction, or anything else. Yet stigmas are the corollaries of values. If work, independence, responsibility, respectability are valued, their converse must be devalued, seen as disreputable. The Victorians, taking values seriously, also took seriously the need for social sanctions that would stigmatize and censure violations of those values” (De-Moralization 142).

22. Needless to say, “purity” is a constructed category, usually set in opposition to defilement, but capable of taking a wide range of forms. The classic statement of purity’s relationship to the culturally determined schemas that construct it can be found in Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger.

23. We are thinking particularly of his famous description of the Podsnap plate in Book I, chapter 11 of Our Mutual Friend.

24. See Terry Lovell, Consuming Fiction and N. N. Feltes, Modes of Production of Victorian Novels.

Notes to Chapter Two

2. Webb was hardly alone in the Victorian age in attempting to subdue egoism
through a commitment to the ascetic rigors of scientific pursuits. George Levine has recently written about two others—Karl Pearson and Walter Pater—in a similar light.

3. As Lauren Goodlad reminds us, “Foucauldian” theorists, of whom Donzelot is a prime example, have too often relied too heavily on French models from which they have generalized to all of Europe. Britain was notably the “least bureaucratized” of the major European states during this period (Victorian State 8). That said, it is nonetheless demonstrably true that surveillance of the Victorian working class in Britain was accelerating throughout the century. The passage of the Education Act of 1870 gave new impetus to the process as school inspectors such as George R. Sims fanned out across London charged with the duty of assessing whether working class children were attending the board schools.

4. Although Philip Abrams argues that British sociology defined itself only when it graduated beyond empiricism into a discipline that could develop theories about the nature of the social process (p. 85).

5. This is registered in a number of working class autobiographies which tell the story of how the Education Act required attendance at the Board Schools. See, for instance, P. A. Heard’s An Octogenarian’s Memoirs or Thomas Bell, Pioneering Days.


8. Child custody laws favored fathers throughout the century, although the late century saw some changes. See Chase and Levenson on the case of Lady Caroline Norton (Chase and Levenson 21–45). The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 first granted custody of children under 10 years of age to a mother upon proof that the father was abusive or neglectful (Stone 140).


10. Debra Epstein Nord argues that in choosing an “analytic” posture toward poverty that drew her to work with her cousin Charles Booth, Webb was choosing a “masculine” rather than a “feminine” vocation. Walking 190.


12. We have more to say about Besant’s analysis of lower class work in chapter 4.

13. Meacham 12. See also Briggs and Macartney.

14. Quoted in Meacham 38.

15. For an excellent analysis of All Sorts in the context of political reform, see Neetens.

16. See Bowlby.

17. Besant stresses in his other writings that East London is primarily a crafts and industrial area (East London). But it is vastly different from Mayhew’s vital scene; gone essentially is the varied costermonger society, and Besant observes that most workers now do piece work in which they can have little identification with the finished product (27). And in these writings as well, the theme is the need for more cultivation among the lower classes.

18. See Birkin and Bowlby.


20. Simon Joyce argues, “middle-class philanthropy and reform movements worked upon the needs of the East End poor to promote a revised version of
working-class culture which was no longer articulated within a traditional model of class conflict. Such a model was instead consistently demonized by the discourses of urban reform as regressive and exhausted, out of step with new projections of class cooperation.” (“Castles in the Air” 2)

21. See Bailey.
22. Cottam chapter 2.
24. Wim Neetens shrewdly argues that Besant’s strategy was to demarcate the respectable working class from “the unfit, the degraded classes.” Neetens 257.

Notes to Chapter Three

2. While we recognize that Mean Streets is a collection of short stories, and shares with the late nineteenth century short story in general its Chekhovian and Maupassantian restraint and relative absence of dramatic modulation, nonetheless, we would argue that the subject matter of many of the late nineteenth century English short stories affects the form. For another instance in which the refusal to treat the heroine as an auratic object of commodity desire dictates the style, we would point to Dorothy Richardson’s Pilgrimage.
3. For a particularly lurid critique of naturalism, see Arthur Symons’ essay, “A Note on Zola’s Method,” pp. 154–64. See also Henry James, “Nana,” 1880, pp. 84–96.
4. See Bowlby for an account of the fascination of the naturalist writers with the department store.
5. New Review, 16, no. 94 (March 1897), 329.
7. Gertrude Himmelfarb takes this one step further in the late twentieth century when she argues that contemporary historians are victims of the illusion that the Victorian middle and working classes lived by different values. See De-Moralization.
10. See Bowlby chapters 6 and 7.
11. It is ironic to read of the failure of Jane’s education in light of Jonathan Rose’s contention that such a course of reading was seen by many working class people as a liberating way out of the small-minded, quotidian concerns that grinding poverty imposed. Gissing’s view is clearly darker, and closer to that of Charles Masterman, as we shall see in Chapter 5.
12. See John Lester, Journey Through Despair 1880–1914, and David Daiches, Some Late Victorian Attitudes.
13. This helps account for the particular style, the dead classicism, that Jameson says characterizes Gissing’s writing, for it is in itself a symptom of the particular culturalism of the alienated late nineteenth century intellectual. By contrast, classicism has a very different role—more vital—in the emergence of Aestheticism and the construction of homosexual identity among the middle and upper middle classes at the end of the century. See Linda Dowling’s *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. We are taking a somewhat different view of this issue from that argued by Debra Epstein Nord in *Walking the Victorian Streets*. While Nord makes the valuable point that the streetwalking woman often came to represent the “experience of the masculine spectator” (Nord 6), she also views the *flâneur* as essentially retreating into invisibility à la Baudelaire. As we will argue below, the pose of disinterested observation does not make one invisible, but rather makes one’s costumed self the visible center of a scene ordered by one’s own active assumption of a role on the urban stage. See also Walkowitz’s classic discussion of urban spectatorship (Walkowitz 15–39) and James Eli Adams’s argument that a number of male roles—Victorian gentleman, Carlylean hero, Tractarian priest, and Tennysonian poet—are implicated in a dandyesque theatricality they profess to disdain (Adams 10).

2. This assertion needs to be qualified as well, because Toynbee Hall was given the mission of reshaping of working class lives through the public staging of middle class tastes.

3. Amanda Anderson offers the broadest definition of Victorian “detachment” in *The Powers of Distance*: “Detachment is meant to encompass not only science, critical reason, disinterestedness, and realism, but also a set of practices of the self, ranging from stoicism to cosmopolitanism to dandyism” (*Powers* 7).


5. “If, as John Bender and D. A. Miller variously contend, the novel became that ‘cultural institution,’ to borrow Miller’s words, that upheld privacy and the existence of an ‘autonomous “secret” self,’ then early melodrama—as it was written, adapted and performed before English men and women—was the mode that, by exposing the secrets of the self and other private sites, insisted on the primacy of an older ethic” (Hadley 71).

6. On East London’s “godlessness,” see Roy Porter: “Three surveys (1851, 1886 and 1903) documented this popular paganism. East and South London had the nation’s lowest church attendance. In working-class inner areas fewer than one in five attended a place of worship. London was no city of God: on Sunday 30 March 1851 only 874,339 of London’s population of 2,362,236 attended any form of public worship” (Porter 298). On the press and the “Whitechapel Horrors,” see L. P. Curtis. It is worth noting the irony that the closing of 200 East London brothels by the Metropolitan police in early 1888 as a direct response to the 1886 repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act forced many prostitutes to prowl the streets late at night, exposing more East London women to the risk of evisceration by “Jack the Ripper” than would have been the case had the brothels continued to be tolerated by the police.
7. Llewelyn Smith was committed to the Lamarckian view that acquired bad traits would inevitably be inherited by subsequent generations of the poor (Walkowitz 35).

8. Martin Green, Seven Types of Adventure Tale 47–68. We would argue that much Victorian travel literature served a similar fantasy function for middle class readers, especially such works as Henry M. Stanley’s narratives of his African explorations, which were major bestsellers in the Victorian age.


10. On “proletarianization” see Harry Braverman. For a discussion of Kipling’s treatment of the natural world in The Jungle Books as governed by a complex division of labor that fosters the interdependency necessary to social order, see Bivona, British Imperial Literature, pp. 69–98.


12. James Kincaid’s Child-Loving offers a now-classic statement of how the Victorian insistence on childish sexual “innocence” worked to eroticize children by providing just the repressive cover such fantasy needs.

13. Nietzsche will, of course, refer to this dichotomy as “master” and “slave moralities” and distinguish the controlling virtue of the former as contempt for weakness and the controlling virtue of the latter as mercy. See Beyond Good and Evil: 199–237.

14. That does not keep him from continually insisting that he is exploring “unknown” territory. See Peluso 64.

15. Victorian travel literature was often given to retraversing an already written landscape. Pratt’s Imperial Eyes discusses this from an angle different from Said’s Orientalism.

16. We certainly do not mean to suggest that the book is free of hyperbole, for even the few passages quoted here supply notable examples of that rhetorical device.

17. Notably, this “neat” mapping of class and geography was something Charles Booth’s map of London had already challenged by showing that many members of the “respectable” classes continued to live in East London in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, especially along some of its main avenues.

18. See Robert Peluso’s discussion of how London’s discussion of “efficient management” repositions the United States as an efficient bureaucratic-industrial state poised to replace a decaying British imperial metropole: 70–74.

19. There are too many examples of this to be worth citing all, but here is just one: “Moreover, by the mere fact that he forms part of an organised crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian—that is, a creature acting by instinct.” Widener 62.

20. In her recent book, Paula M. Krebs claims that at the time of the Boer War, the British press tended to cast the Boers as an “entire country of the lower class” (Krebs 108). This tendency emerges with great clarity from Millicent Fawcett’s report on conditions in the British concentration camps for Boer women and children: “Fawcett’s nationalism and the class privilege that allowed her to see the Boer mothers in camps as ignorant, lower-class women who, like slum-dwelling English, needed housekeeping lessons from the middle class, prevent her from letting her feminism challenge British imperialism” (Krebs 78).


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