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# **Representations of the Aristocratic Body in Victorian Literature**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the representations of the aristocratic body in Victorian literature. This thesis argues that the authors often wrote, coded, and interpreted an aristocrat's physical form as a paradoxical object which reflected many of the complex interclass issues and socio-economic transitions seen throughout the Victorian era. By exploring distinct, sequential genres and types of 'popular' fiction in this dissertation, I investigate a broad-spectrum literary treatment of aristocratic bodies as cultural paradoxes: for the same usage of the aristocratic body to crop up again and again in disparate, discrete, and hugely popular forms of literature speaks to the nineteenth-century resonance of the aristocratic body as a codeable symbol and textual object.

I use what is termed 'popular fiction': fiction largely excluded from the canon, yet with a very large contemporary readership and authors or genres which *continued* to be widely read immediately following the publication of those individual texts. Popular fiction is, by its very nature, the type of literature that can most reasonably be considered to represent the general, broad-spectrum views of large populations, and in doing so these texts can be used to determine wide-scale desires, anxieties, and expectations surrounding the subjects they contain.

Body theory and gaze theory serve as the overarching foundation for exploring the portraiture of aristocratic characters by authors from all classes, although individual chapters deal with their own theoretic approaches to the texts examined within them. Chapter 1 on silver fork fiction from the 1820s to the 1840s uses socio-economic theory, including Bourdieu's idea of *habitus* to examine the genre's treatment of aristocratic bodies as consumer goods and luxury products, which in turn reflected contemporary shifts in social and economic class hegemony. Chapter 2 on G.W.M. Reynolds's radical 1840s to 1850s serial, *The Mysteries of the Court of London*, uses the medical humanities and masculinity theory to investigate the text's endemic infertility in aristocratic men; Reynolds uses the biology of aristocratic male bodies as the locus for moralistic discussions about primogeniture and politics. Chapter 3 on the sensation fiction of Mrs Henry (Ellen Price) Wood utilises feminist theory to illustrate Wood's portrayal of female aristocrats as bodiless, and yet continually gazed upon; Wood uses the aristocratic female body as a magnifying glass to depict the nineteenth-century female experience, in particular the paradoxes of adhering to private, domestic ideologies while at the same time fulfilling the requirements of the public gaze. Chapter 4 explores the influence of evolutionary theory upon two sister-genres of the *fin de siècle* Medieval Revival:

Ruritanian fiction in Part 1 and a genre I have named the Evolutionary Feudal in Part 2. In Part 1, the aristocratic body is represented as outside of evolution; the genre provides escapism from Darwinism and *fin de siècle* anxieties of history and (d)evolution by whitewashing the feudal era and subscribing to Thomas Carlyle's theories of divinely- or cosmically-appointed leaders. Part 2 focuses on texts which depict a post-apocalyptic world returning to a feudal Dark Age, and in which aristocratic bodies are seen evolving or devolving; rather than whitewashing history, the Evolutionary Feudal locates history's darkest origins in the aristocratic body as a way of predicting possible futures and coping with the concerns of degeneration.

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**Author's Declaration**

I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and I certify that this thesis is my own work, except where indicated by referencing, and that I have followed the good academic practices noted on the Declaration of Originality form that was submitted with this dissertation.



## Introduction

In 1983, the historian R.F. Foster stated that in the realm of nineteenth-century scholarship, study of the working class was ‘historiographically exhausted’ but the aristocracy was ‘not yet academically respectable’, so the middle classes would be the next major locus for critical examination.<sup>1</sup> Foster’s prediction proved to be partly accurate: now, more than thirty years later, academic work on the aristocracy is limited, while research on the middle and working classes remains very active.

In the field of Victorian literature, this frequent reticence to discuss an entire social class is not only remarkable, but problematic. In terms of population, the aristocracy in the nineteenth century was ‘consistently less than 1 per cent of Britain’s population, and never over 5 per cent’, and yet literature from the time disproportionately abounds with aristocratic characters.<sup>2</sup> Aristocratic characters feature in most Victorian genres, were written about by authors from all socio-economic backgrounds, and, depending on the type of literature and how aristocrats were depicted in the text, appeared in narratives tailored to a wide variety of demographics. Considering this class’s literary ubiquity, it is perhaps surprising that there is a comparative dearth of knowledge and theory surrounding it. Antony Taylor argues in his 2004 historical work on public hostility towards the British aristocracy, *Lords of Misrule*, that ‘the social history of landed society was entirely disregarded. Until relatively recently it was a subject that was both neglected and under-researched. The role of the great aristocratic dynasties was simply acknowledged, rather than analysed’.<sup>3</sup> Taking the influence of an entire social class at face value, especially with little analysis of its relationship to other classes, might be argued to undermine the study of class as a whole. And, as Taylor indicates, while there *was* a very slight upsurge in academic work on aristocrats in the 1990s and early 2000s, it was largely accomplished by Taylor himself and a few other historians, most notably David Cannadine, Lawrence James, Stella Tillyard and, far earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Norbert Elias; their expansion of this field, while crucial and ground-breaking, is largely restricted to an historical approach.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R.F. Foster, ‘Tory Democracy and Political Elitism’ in *Parliament and Community*, ed. by Art Cosgrove and J.I. McGuire (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1983), pp. 147-175 (151).

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Newby, *Women’s Lives: Researching Women’s Social History 1800-1939* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2011), p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Antony Taylor, *Lords of Misrule: Hostility to Aristocracy in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> David Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 1999); Lawrence James, *Aristocrats* (2009) (London: Abacus, 2010); Stella Tillyard,

In the realm of literary criticism, studies of aristocrats are usually brief, and often only a part of a study of a specific author or genre. For example, there are a great number of references to the aristocracy in critical works on silver fork fiction and sensation fiction, as well as in studies of the works of Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy, H.G. Wells, and Mrs Henry Wood (among just a few); however, the aristocracy is not often the focus of these discussions, and therefore many of these critical references are brief and often take perspectives of the aristocracy for granted. The aristocracy gets more attention in scholarship on the Victorian cult of King Arthur and on the transformation of the idea of the gentleman, although here the focus tends to be far more on the middle classes. Among the works devoted to the reading of the aristocrat in literature are Donna C. Stanton's 1980 *The Aristocrat as Art*, which only looks at French literature, David Quint's 2010 "Noble Passions: Aristocracy and the Novel", which reads portrayals of aristocracy as stuck in a libertine past, Muireann O' Cinneide's 2008 *Aristocratic Women and the Literary Nation, 1832-1867*, which examines the historical role of aristocratic women upon political and literary sectors, and Len Platt's 2001 *Aristocracies of Fiction*, which focuses on the aristocracy in literature only in the *fin de siècle* and early-twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> Platt argues that the aristocracy was represented earlier in the Victorian era as a class marginalised by progress, but that by the turn of the century aristocrats were more central in texts and used to indicate general decline in Britain.<sup>6</sup> Further, Platt argues that for a majority of the Victorian era, the aristocracy was largely represented in clichéd ways, in which they were 'jumped through standard narratological hoops and portrayed through representational routines', a contention which this dissertation strives to complicate and contradict.<sup>7</sup>

My literary approach to Victorian aristocracy extends the research on the upper class outside of its largely historical and sociological realms, while building upon and connecting together many smaller-scale critical references to aristocrats in literature. My approach enables a greater scrutiny of cross-class perspectives, since instead of analysing

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*Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa, and Sarah Lennox, 1740-1832* (London: Vintage, 1995); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (1939), trans. by Edmund Jephcott (1978), ed. by Eric Dunning, John Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994, repr. 2000), and *The Court Society* (1969), trans. Edmund Jephcott (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1983; repr. 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Donna C. Stanton, *The Aristocrat as Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); David Quint, 'Noble Passions: Aristocracy and the Novel' *Comparative Literature*, 62:2 (2010), pp. 103-121; Muireann O' Cinneide, *Aristocratic Women and the Literary Nation, 1832-1867* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Len Platt, *Aristocracies of Fiction: The Idea of Aristocracy in Late-Nineteenth-Century and Early-Twentieth Century Literary Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2001), p. ix.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiv.

aristocrats solely as historical figures or examining only the realities of their class experience, this research explores textual *representations* of aristocrats, not all of which were produced by members of the aristocracy. However, despite this dissertation's prioritisation of aristocrats in literature, it must be noted that analysis of these textual representations of aristocrats relies heavily and necessarily upon both a historical perspective and upon an understanding and inclusion of other class groups. As the field currently stands, the aristocracy as a class is largely understudied and often isolated from studies of other classes. This segregation mirrors, to some extent, the aristocratic system itself, in which, as will be discussed, exclusivity and social division play a large part. Despite its real or perceived segregation, the aristocracy does not and cannot operate independently from other classes. Even the superlative nature of the terminology connects it to other groups: the Greek etymology of 'aristocracy', 'a ruling body of the best citizens', implies the existence of other citizens.<sup>8</sup> The terms 'upper class' and the 'upper ten thousand' imply correlating lower groups. 'Exclusives', a nineteenth-century synonym for those participating in aristocratic high society, implies someone or something being excluded. Class groups in a single society are too closely enmeshed and reliant upon the existence of each other in order to ever be viewed entirely discretely.

The interdependence of class systems is especially relevant to this literary portraiture, given the nineteenth-century shifts in class power; it is here that an historical perspective is vital to the understanding of the representations of aristocrats. As I will discuss over the course of this dissertation, social, economic, and political hegemony transitioned slowly and irregularly, but heavily, from the aristocracy to the middle classes over the course of the nineteenth century. Bulwer-Lytton wrote in 1833,

[w]e live in an age of visible transition – an age of disquietude and doubt – of the removal of time-worn landmarks, and the breaking up of the hereditary elements of society – old opinions, feelings – ancestral customs and institutions are crumbling away, and both the spiritual and temporal worlds are darkened by the shadows of change.<sup>9</sup>

While this transition was by no means completed in the nineteenth century, and while the process started decades if not centuries before, the nineteenth-century literary sources I will discuss in this dissertation are evidence of growing contemporary consciousness of changing relationships between aristocratic and other classes in nineteenth-century Britain.

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<sup>8</sup> 'aristocracy, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2015)

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/10753?redirectedFrom=aristocracy#eid>> [accessed 7 July 2015].

<sup>9</sup> Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *England and the English*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1836) p. 237.

A further factor influencing the representation of aristocrats in this period was the growth of literacy which, at the start of the Victorian era, was at roughly 55 per cent of the adult population in England and Wales and at 96 per cent by the end of the Victorian era.<sup>10</sup> As middle- and lower-class readership and authorship expanded, with it came middle- and lower-class representations of aristocrats. The evolving social, political, and economic relationships between the aristocracy and the middle and lower classes became a frequent and major component of aristocratic representation. As will be seen in the examination of specific texts, portrayals of aristocratic characters were often used to represent contemporary interclass struggles, tensions, and perspectives. Individual representations of characters frequently became synecdoches for entire class groups, and in that way class identity could be explored, relationships understood, and futures hypothesised. In short, this dissertation will focus largely on aristocratic portraiture in literature, but does so often (although not exclusively) through a middle- or lower-class gaze; by doing so, one may place these distinct and disconnected literary representations in the greater context of class relationships.

My first task is to explain what I mean by ‘aristocracy’. In this dissertation, the term ‘aristocracy’ is used loosely and synonymously with the terms ‘nobility’ and ‘upper class’; what is signified with the use of these three largely interchangeable terms is a single socially elite and exclusive group comprising the three separate categories of royalty, the hereditary peerage, and minor nobility (i.e. the baronetage). Dominic Lieven, following in the footsteps of David Cannadine’s *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, writes in his historical study of aristocracy:

the peerage was only one section of the traditional upper class. There was also the baronetage and the broader untitled landowning gentry, all of which would have been defined as noble [...] Aristocracy and gentry were part of the same ruling class [...] To write a history purely of the peerage would therefore be to omit a key element in the story of how England’s upper class confronted their rapidly changing society.<sup>11</sup>

It is largely this view of the upper class that will be employed in this dissertation, although I argue that ‘aristocracy’ must be expanded to include royalty, since most royal figures also tend to hold aristocratic titles. Further, royals are, without question, represented in Victorian literature as social, political, and economic leaders subjected to the public gaze

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<sup>10</sup> Alexis Weedon, *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836-1916* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Dominic Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe, 1815-1914* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. xiii.

and textual interpretation in the same capacity as non-royal aristocrats. What is significant to this definition is the concept of inherited power and influence, especially in relation to the increasingly more enfranchised Victorian middle classes. This inheritance includes not only hereditary wealth and political power, but also the styles, habits, modes of living, and various other cultural shibboleths which, in many middle- and lower-class representations, seemed to socially Other the aristocracy. As will be evidenced in this dissertation, the strict definitions of aristocracy and the perceptions of what those definitions meant came to contrast with, and thereby help define, the classes under it. Literary depictions of shifts *from* aristocratic styles of influence necessarily discuss shifts *to*: from inheritance to merit, from feudalism to capitalism, from exclusivity to enfranchisement, by way of just a few broad examples of the perceptions of transitioning power. While the focus of this dissertation is on the literary representations of aristocrats and not of any other social group, it is significant to stress that these aristocratic representations were frequently authored by, read by, and used within the texts as foils to, members of the middle and lower classes. The aristocracy may have been sometimes perceived and represented as a discrete Other, but it is impossible to fully disentangle one social group from any other; as such, influences of the Victorian middle and lower classes will necessarily permeate this work, but only in relation to the portraiture of the aristocrats within the texts.

However, I exclude the gentry from the ‘aristocracy’ as I discuss it in this dissertation. The gentry includes members of often very wealthy, untitled, typically landowning families with long histories of local socio-political influence; this idea of gentry became familiar in Victorian literature through the trope of the county squire. However, the gentry often lack the national socio-political status and influence of the aristocracy; they are therefore generally categorised as a class below and outside of the nobility, though their wealth and interaction in social circles may occasionally place them on an otherwise equal footing. The concept of gentry, which is without strict definition and therefore permeable, became especially porous as the nineteenth century progressed, during which time wealth and landownership further expanded the middle classes and the ideas of the ‘gentleman’ and the ‘lady’ became more bourgeois and, most significantly for the parameters of this research, less a strict product of lineage.<sup>12</sup> The liminal and unstable

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<sup>12</sup> For comprehensive examinations of this concept, see Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ‘Introduction’ in *Cheveley, or The Man of Honour* by Rosina Bulwer-Lytton (1839), ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, 6 vols, series ed. by Harried Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), V, pp. ix- xxvii (xxiv); Gwen Hyman, *Making A Man: Gentlemanly Appetites in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*

nature of untitled gentry therefore requires its exclusion from this work. The focus of this dissertation is on representations of those members of society who are strictly ‘upper class’: titled individuals, or those closely related to titled individuals, or those who participate so heavily in high society life as to be deemed part of aristocratic circles. To some extent these circles may include members of the gentry, but otherwise the gentry will not be included in this dissertation on its own merit.

High society life is a key concept in defining aristocracy. ‘Society’ was a form of social participation that was deeply reliant upon lineage and heavily regulated through myriad devices to ensure aristocratic or upper-class exclusivity. The idea of class in this dissertation, and in Chapter 1 in particular, is connected strongly to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*. *Habitus* comprises the various types of capital (economic, social, cultural, educational, and even physical capital, among just a few examples) that an individual possesses, which are used by society at large to assess that individual. In short, one’s behaviour, appearance, knowledge, and tastes are used by society as shorthand ‘to function as markers of “class”’.<sup>13</sup> Aristocracy, both in this dissertation and as understood by many of the Victorian writers later examined, does not merely mean the presence of a title, wealth, or even necessarily what would now be termed ‘lifestyle’, although some concepts and portrayals of aristocracy do rely heavily upon these items. Rather, the determination of ‘aristocracy’ and its portrayal in literature is often defined by a relationship between classes: the *habitus* of the aristocracy, however shifting and evolving it may be over the course of the Victorian era, is sufficiently different from the *habitus* of middle- and lower-class readers and writers in order to classify the aristocracy as an Other. The *habitus*, in combination with several other interpretive facets that will be explored below, renders the aristocrat a highly coded, interpretable figure.

Finally, the words ‘aristocratic’ and ‘noble’ are used in this dissertation as global terms to describe the perceived characteristics of this group. As such, ‘aristocratic’ and ‘noble’ undergo shifts in meaning, chapter by chapter, as perceptions and representations of aristocrats change. For example, in Chapter 4, Part 1, the term ‘noble’ undergoes a large shift in definition, transforming the meaning into one of divine essence rather than an inherited determiner of a place in the socio-political hierarchy.

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(Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009); David Castronovo, *The English Gentleman: Images and Ideals in Literature and Society* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1987); and Robin Gilmour’s *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981).

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), trans. by Richard Nice (1984) (London: Routledge, 1984, repr. 1999), p. 2.

With the parameters and terminology of ‘aristocracy’ outlined, the specific locus of my investigation into the representations of aristocrats must be explained. As stated before, criticism and theory of the aristocracy occur mostly in historiographical or sociological scholarship, and as such make little explicit critical comment on the overwhelmingly large, aristocracy-riddled field of Victorian literature. This imbalance between what is *available* to read and one’s knowledge of *how* to read creates difficulties in selecting a starting-place for criticism. This question is doubly problematic when we consider the extreme variety in the portrayals of aristocrats: in Victorian literature, aristocrats are omnipresent, but not homogenous. Aristocrats are portrayed both as individuals and as a social class, scattered on an enormous spectrum of feeling and judgement, in myriad works and genres, and read by audiences as widely diverse as the authors who portrayed them. While there is, unquestionably, a large degree of mutability in the role of the aristocrat as a literary subject, it is perhaps more apt to argue that the role of the aristocrat as a literary subject is *to be* mutable. This systematic literary mutability is one of the overarching tenets of this dissertation, and will be exemplified through the representation of aristocratic bodies.

While there are innumerable perspectives through which one could examine the representations of aristocrats in Victorian texts (linguistic patterns, levels of agency and influence, relationship to wealth and politics, or moralistic influence, by way of just a few examples), physical descriptions of aristocratic bodies are particularly vibrant and affected by genre- or author-specific patterns, especially in relation to the descriptions of other classes in those same works. This dissertation therefore focuses on representations of the aristocratic body. While the use of bodies as the locus for investigation will be explained more fully in the section below on body theory, it is worth noting here that aristocrats tend to be highly visual and physical figures in Victorian literature: they are often recognised on their own merit, or through a family resemblance, or identified by complete strangers as members of the aristocracy through their vaguely defined ‘noble countenances’ and unclear physical stamps of ‘good breeding’. More significantly, there is a general trend of bodily expectations placed on aristocrats by authors, readers, and characters alike, though those expectations are hugely varied from text to text, author to author, and genre to genre. These expectations are the result of a viewer coding an aristocrat at his or her most surface level (social status and external appearance) and using those surface markers to determine or simplify, on behalf of an entire class, far more complex, internal, and individual

processes such as behaviour, bodily performance, health, and morality. The external transforms into shorthand for certain presumed correlating actions.

An aristocrat's conformity to or departure from these expectations is often at the crux of the narrative arc. For example, the genre of silver fork fiction provided an outlet for the expected glamour and beauty of aristocratic bodies and bodily accessories, with many of the genre's narratives of social climbing relying largely upon how well characters lived up to these expectations. The moralised biology of the male aristocrats that G.W.M. Reynolds describes in his *The Mysteries of the Court of London* conforms to his radical expectations for the future of the class as a whole. In the texts of Mrs Henry (Ellen Price) Wood, the description of the bodies of female characters drastically changes as they ascend or descend the social hierarchy and, as in her *East Lynne*, those changes can be so extensive that they can make an aristocratic female unrecognisable to her own husband and children. In *The Prisoner of Zenda*, Rudolf Rassendyll's hereditary physical features betray his royal lineage and dictate some expected corresponding behaviour; facsimile physical inheritance is the point on which the mistaken-identity plot of the novel operates, and one of the chief characteristics of the Ruritanian fiction genre that sprung up in *Zenda*'s wake. And in a series of texts which I call 'Evolutionary Feudal', the realities and limits of evolution clash with systems of primogeniture, leaving societies with leaders whose bodies cannot always live up to the Darwinian dominance of their forbearers.

### Aristocracy and the Public Gaze

Fiction usually invites the reader to lend his or her imaginative gaze to the text by witnessing and visualising the characters and situations created. This gaze is especially present when the subject of that writing is highly visual, as with the vivid portraiture of aristocratic bodies, and is frequently gazed upon by other characters in the text. Nineteenth-century fiction both encouraged the public gaze at aristocratic bodies, and commented on this gazing. To take one example from silver fork fiction, in Lady Theresa Lewis's 1834 novel *Dacre*, the narrator decrees, 'It is the fate of distinction [*i.e.* of upper-class society] to be most often misjudged, because obscurity is not *judged* at all'.<sup>14</sup> Lewis, who was an aristocrat by birth, the wife of the famous novelist T.H. Lister, and a prominent author herself, voices this sentiment through a third-person narrator and may be

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<sup>14</sup> Lady Theresa Lewis, *Dacre: A Novel*, ed. by The Countess of Morley, 3 vols (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, 1834), I, p. 150, emphasis mine.



speaking from her own experience in the public eye.<sup>15</sup> Lewis explains here that personal image is not one's own. As a public figure, one's image is open to public consumption, with little control over how that image may be interpreted or judged. Aristocrats in particular are public figures through virtue of their status, a status which makes them conspicuous to the public eye. In 1842, an article in *The Foreign Quarterly Review* noted that 'the prestige of high-sounding names tends to give [...] an equal degree of conspicuousness and notoriety. The public gaze is bent on [them] with all the eagerness of expectation. High birth had already raised these very different personages to a lofty stage with multitudes crowding round as spectators'.<sup>16</sup> These two notions of judgment and expectation are at the heart of a great deal of rhetoric surrounding the aristocracy, and expectations of authors and readers, both positive and negative, inform the subsequent portrayal and interpretation of aristocratic characters.

A few major critical sources on the gaze, especially in relation to the body, have formed part of the general theoretical framework for this dissertation. Michel Foucault's work on the policing gaze in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) correlates vision with power and considers being visible a trap. His work therefore helps us to understand part of the shifting relationship between highly visible 'public' aristocrats and the often middle-class 'private' writers and readers who projected, examined, and policed those visible aristocratic bodies. Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) extends and reinforces Foucault by identifying the concept of a woman's 'to-be-looked-at-ness'.<sup>17</sup> By adding a gender dynamic to the Foucauldian gaze, Mulvey reveals the sense of entitlement which often accompanies such a gaze; this work is especially significant to Chapter 3 of this dissertation which deals with the contradictions of aristocratic visual femininity. Kimberly Rhodes's *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture* (2008) extends Foucault and Mulvey's arguments, contending that bodies become textual objects through their regulation by visual and patriarchal institutions. As the aristocracy was, in many ways, a highly patriarchal institution, Rhodes's argument complicates the representation of upper-class bodies in literature: the theme of aristocratic self-objectification, even to the point of self-victimisation, is a common thread throughout this research.

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<sup>15</sup> D.A. Smith, 'Lewis, Lady (Maria) Theresa (1803-1865)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Online edn., October 2006  
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16595>> [accessed 13 January 2015].

<sup>16</sup> Antonia Gallenga, 'The Aristocrat of Italy', *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, 28:56 (January 1842), 362-397 (p. 362, emphasis mine).

<sup>17</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16:3 (Autumn 1975), pp. 6-18 (p. 11).

John Berger, in his classic exploration of the gaze in *Ways of Seeing* (1972), argues that the locus of the gaze ‘is an act of choice’ and that ‘we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.’<sup>18</sup> Drawing on Berger, I argue that the choice to view the aristocratic body in Victorian literature reveals just as much—if not more—of the gazer than it does of the gazed-upon. Leo Braudy, in his *The Frenzy of Renown* (1986), synthesises both Foucault and Berger’s arguments to include class-based and celebrity structures. Braudy writes that ‘fame is always compounded of the audience’s aspirations and its despair, its need to admire and to find a scapegoat’, and that ‘the heart of what it meant to “go public” was to be entrapped by the gaze of others, to be reduced by their definitions, and to be forced into shapes unforeseen’.<sup>19</sup> This dissertation considers that the choice of an aristocratic literary subject is part of an audience’s need ‘to admire and to find a scapegoat’; however, this research expands Braudy’s theory out of the boundaries of modern celebrity and argues that the theory may be applicable to older and traditional institutions of fame, in this case, the aristocracy.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Kate Flint’s *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (2000) and Martin Willis’s *Vision, Science and Literature, 1870-1920* (2011) help to illustrate how appropriate the theory of the gaze is for this work, since it was so consciously applied to art, literature, and modes of thought during the Victorian era itself. In their work on the visual imagination in Victorian literature, Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan argue that ‘Nineteenth-century aesthetic theory frequently makes the eye the preeminent organ of truth’.<sup>21</sup> Flint on the other hand, argues that, although fascinated with the act of seeing, many Victorians considered the eye to be imperfect and not an organ of objective truth, while Willis contends that ‘vision was fragile: characterized as illusory [...] as it was penetrative, or found to be opaque as readily as it was perspicuous.’<sup>22</sup> Acknowledging the unreliability of the gaze is implicit in the structure of this dissertation, as the differences in

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<sup>18</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972, repr. 2008), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown*, (1986) (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 9; p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> The development of formal concepts of celebrity culture is often attributed to Max Weber at the turn of the century. See Charles Kurzman, Chelise Anderson, Clinton Key, et. al., ‘Celebrity Status’, *Sociological Theory*, 25:4 (December 2007), pp. 347-367; and Richard Schickel, *Common Fame: The Culture of Celebrity* (London: Pavilion, 1985), p. 23-24. ‘Celebrity’ would therefore be seen by some scholars as an anachronistic term, although its concepts and effects still applied to those in the public eye long before Weber. See Joseph A. Boone and Nancy J. Vickers’s ‘Introduction: Celebrity Rites’, *PMLA* 126:4 (October 2011), pp. 900-911 (p. 906).

<sup>21</sup> Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan, ‘Introduction’, in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. by Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). xix-xxix (pp. xxix-xx); Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. xiv.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Willis, *Vision, Science and Literature, 1870-1920* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), Google e-book, p. 2.

social and cultural perspectives are at the forefront of the study of aristocratic representation in this research.

While this study's focus and theoretical approaches are specifically on *literary representations*, it is important to note that the role of aristocratic bodies inside the public gaze has a strong foundation in the historical and sociological role of the aristocracy in Britain, and how that role began to be transformed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries into celebrity culture. There is a lengthy tradition of historical and anthropological work which investigates the way in which the popular gaze on the body of the leaders affects relationships between elite and popular groups. Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* (1939) and *The Court Society* (1969) examines the role of the aristocrat, citing the suitable representation of one's body under the gaze of others as one of the most significant elements for socio-political survival.<sup>23</sup> James Frazer provides another major theoretical framework for understanding this relationship, for both nineteenth-century and modern readers, in his seminal *fin de siècle* and Edwardian anthropological study *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) when he describes a common primal understanding of a leader: 'His [a king's] person is considered [...] as the dynamical centre of the universe, from which lines of force radiate to all quarters of the heaven [*sic*]; so that any motion of his – the turning of his head, the lifting of his hand – instantaneously affects and may seriously disturb some part of nature'.<sup>24</sup> If it is believed, as Frazer argues that it was in antiquity and still is in certain cultures, that a leader's body is divinely connected to the land and the fate of the people he or she rules, it follows that that body will be gazed upon and monitored for public reassurance and for signs of change. A ruler's physicality becomes coded in the eyes of the people, and the coding becomes engrained in a collective cultural consciousness over time. Anticipating Foucault, Frazer highlights a certain general tendency for societies to police bodies with the gaze to ensure conformity to certain values or standards, and for certain behaviours to become internalised and normalised.

Since it 'has been estimated that in the medieval world the average person saw one hundred other people in the course of a lifetime', local lords achieved a certain level of fame and distinction due to their proximity to an audience, and their simultaneous unreachability, being near but above that audience.<sup>25</sup> Aristocrats were likely the subject of

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<sup>23</sup> Elias, *The Court Society*, p. 71; p. 116.

<sup>24</sup> James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1922 edition (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 202.

<sup>25</sup> Braudy, p. 27.

a public or ‘common’ gaze far more than national leaders isolated at court.<sup>26</sup> While this was the state of the gaze in feudal environments (or, at the very least, how some Victorian authors and scholars presented the gaze in feudal society, as will be evidenced in Chapter 4), the importance of the gaze was not diminished in modernity. The transition away from feudalism and into a more urban, industrialised society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries affected the aristocracy as much as it affected the middle and lower classes, especially in terms of media and proximity.<sup>27</sup> If industrial opportunities pulled workers into cities, then the formation of the London social season during this time pulled a great number of aristocrats into the city as well, resulting in more aristocrats being subjected to a broader gaze. Further, the increase of print media and rising literacy rates in the early nineteenth century had a direct link to social and political concerns of the middle and lower classes.<sup>28</sup> New technologically-enabled access to aristocratic images created ‘an embryonic mass society in which the fascination with public figures fed the commitment to representational politics’.<sup>29</sup> Readers and viewers of prints were able to form judgments on physical appearance and developed subsequent expectations on a new mass scale, and to view images of leaders far outside their own particular sphere. One might argue that with the rise of print media, spheres of aristocratic influence drastically widened, creating not only a larger viewing public, but also a larger public to represent, serve, or entertain. If anything, new social structures and technological advances seemed to lash aristocratic appearance and interpretation even more firmly to the concerns and desires of the populace.<sup>30</sup>

Having broadly outlined some of the major theoretical and historical approaches to the gaze which I draw on in the course of this dissertation, I now address the theoretical

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<sup>26</sup> Braudy argues that with ‘the rise of centralized kingship and monarchy, the court and king became the center that organized the ceremonies and rituals of public life[....] The king was at the top of the earthly hierarchy’ (391). Though not expressly stated, Braudy’s logic dictates that if a monarch was at the top of a pyramid of ceremonies, symbols, and meaning-making, that meaning would only gain broad comprehension for nobles and gentry to mimic those ceremonies and symbolic actions at a broader, local level where *they* were at the apex of the pyramid and dictated ceremonies and meaning for those who would never have any exposure to court or monarchy. Braudy’s understanding of the gaze and class also appears to have a foothold in nineteenth-century literature: the texts used in my chapters on Ruritanian and Evolutionary Feudal fiction also deal heavily with notions of hierarchy and local leadership.

<sup>27</sup> Fred Inglis, *A Short History of Celebrity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> For discussion of the effects of eighteenth-century media, see Andrew Pettegree’s *The Invention of News* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014); Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini’s *Ballads and Broad-sides in Britain, 1500-1800* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010); Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: the cultural contexts of eighteenth-century English fiction* (London: W.W. Norton, 1990); and Janine Barchas, *Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Braudy, p. 390.

<sup>30</sup> See Braudy, p.399, and P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* (1997) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p.203. Further, the chapter on silver fork fiction heavily explores the early-nineteenth-century connection between aristocracy, technology, and public desires and consumption.

overlap between aristocracy and the notion of *celebrity*, both of which are frequently placed in the same position in the public gaze. Richard Schickel sees little correlation between the gaze upon modern celebrity and the gaze upon historical aristocrats:

Yes, there had once been royalty, and rulers from the beginning of history had occasionally showed themselves to their public who, assuming their kingdoms were at the time peaceable, responded with awe and fervor to these brief glimpses of the mighty [...] But the tone of the relationship between the admired and their admirers was quite different from that with which we are familiar today.<sup>31</sup>

However, a contrary argument is made by P. David Marshall, who writes in *Celebrity and Power* that '[i]n politics, a leader must somehow embody the sentiments of the party, the people, and the state. In the realm of entertainment, a celebrity must somehow embody the sentiments of an audience'.<sup>32</sup> But Marshall, who demarcates the celebrity as a purely bourgeois figure who seeks fame and could therefore never be a part of the traditional aristocratic system, overlooks the intersection of his own arguments, where aristocrats provide both leadership (at least historically) *and* entertainment through their elevated social influence, making them two-fold celebrities with a double audience.<sup>33</sup> It is this position in the public eye that makes them such complex figures: since aristocrats are not typically elected to whatever social or political leadership they may exercise, they do not necessarily have to conform to the sentiments of their public audience in order to keep their place. As leaders, however, their images are coded in the public mind as significant, and therefore any portrayal of that physical form will to some extent reflect public interpretation and sentiments. If not *blank* canvases, for their physical forms are too richly coded in the public gaze for that, aristocratic bodies in literature are at least palimpsestic canvases for the projection of the cultural values, fears, and desires of authors and readers.

I shall argue, therefore, that representations of aristocrats (who, in their position as an elite and visible group possess physical bodies subject to public gaze) serve as literary canvases for various readerships. Concerns, desires, and systems of thought, no matter how seemingly unconnected to class or society, have been projected onto aristocratic bodies as a way of handling or comprehending those concerns, desires, and systems of thought. The representation and treatment of aristocratic bodies in literature becomes a significant and frequently-used literary tool, and the patterns of that usage may be a means by which a modern audience can gauge various cultural mindsets in the Victorian era. The

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<sup>31</sup> Schickel, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> P. D. Marshall, p. 203.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 6

aristocratic body in Victorian literature proves to be highly mutable, and an avenue through which the lower and middle classes, and to some extent even the upper class itself, can approach new modes of thought or engage with topics of concern.

### Aristocracy and Body Theory

Exploring the inter- and intra-class portrayals of aristocratic bodies as highly visual social symbols requires an analysis of the depictions of their bodies. The body is perhaps the most universal and mutable social symbol: all living beings possess a body, experience life through a body, and can judge others and define themselves through observable differences in bodies. The body therefore becomes a major locus from which one may read, write, code, and interpret differences, views, and expectations. The theoretical foundations of this research are informed by a number of critical works on the body.

In her 1970 work on symbolism in human culture, *Natural Symbols*, Mary Douglas argues that the human body is the primary, mutable symbolic image of a society: 'The human body is common to us all. Only our social condition varies. The symbols based on the human body are used to express different social experiences'.<sup>34</sup> Douglas presents an accessible entry point for body theory: if one investigates representations of a social class, and if the body is the primary image upon which social symbols are constructed, then this investigation must naturally start at the beginning, with the body. Susan Bordo in her work on the male body writes that '[r]epresentations of the body have a history, but so too do viewers, and they bring that history – both personal and cultural – their perception and interpretation [...] Cultural interpretation is an ongoing, always incomplete process, and no one gets the final word'.<sup>35</sup> The representations of bodies in society have a traceable language and history and carry significant information about what cultural meanings were attached to those physical forms and processes. Therefore for the purposes of this work, aristocratic bodies are visual, codeable, readable textual objects whose 'meaning' or 'purpose', in this context, is determined far more by the gaze and judgment of others than by any intrinsic or universal qualities. Because of the ways in which aristocratic bodies are used in the Victorian literature I analyse later, I view bodies externally, through the representations, gazes, and codings of others, and not from any stance of individual bodily experience or subjectivity.

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<sup>34</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (London: Barrie & Rockliffe: The Cresset Press, 1970), p. vii.

<sup>35</sup> Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), p. 29.

The work of Foucault again becomes an essential structural element of this research, as his 1976 *History of Sexuality, Volume I* was a major component in the foundation of social constructionism.<sup>36</sup> Social constructionism views the body as at least partially a cultural construct, instead of viewing it as something fixed, inherent, and a discloser of natural and innate truths. As such, it makes a valuable theoretical contribution to this dissertation, as it sees readings and treatments of bodies as largely ideological and symbolic. Unlike Foucault's work, however, this dissertation does not discount the biological realities of bodies entirely, as will be evidenced in Chapter 2 (where the medical humanities are engaged to discuss aristocratic fertility) and in Chapter 4 (where two Medieval Revival genres either exaggerate or entirely disregard the mechanics of evolutionary biology).<sup>37</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, in her approach to the body in her work on sensation fiction, writes, 'Tracing the cultural construction of the body or sexuality has revealed how ideologies are naturalized by the often invisible work of attaching meanings to physical processes'.<sup>38</sup> This complex cultural fastening of signifier to signified is hugely prevalent in the portrayal and reading of aristocratic bodies, where the textualisation of these aristocratic bodies and their physical processes have been naturalised over centuries, creating a complex, contradictory, and often unconscious social lexis.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* again becomes central here, since *habitus* often imprints upon the body and makes the body a readable text from which others may interpret class status. In the mid-Victorian era, '[c]lass', Pamela K. Gilbert has pointed out, 'could be read as an essential trait, in the way that gender was'.<sup>39</sup> The qualification of bodies as textual objects is key to understanding the chief argument of this dissertation. I argue that representations of aristocratic bodies very rarely reflect any inkling of 'the self'—of a character's individuality as a human being. Because aristocratic bodies in Victorian texts often serve as manifestations of general anxieties, desires, or opinions on various topics, the aristocratic body is usually carefully constructed by its author to reveal *habitus*. If a character is given a title or a place in high social standing by a Victorian author, it is for a purpose; there are no aristocratic Victorian characters whose titles or status are completely irrelevant or tangential to the text. To some degree, aristocrats in

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<sup>36</sup> Judith Butler, 'Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 86:11 (November 1989), pp. 601-07, p. 601.

<sup>37</sup> Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5

<sup>38</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Pamela K. Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Woman's Popular Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 67.

Victorian literature are always representatives of their class, be it certain segments of that class, or the class as a whole. It is this removal of individuality and self which forces a classification of aristocratic characters as textual objects. The literary aristocratic body serves as Thing, a material shape that is made and consumed, upon which writers and readers may project ideas, views, and emotions.

This dissertation does not consider philosophy and theory about the body which was in use before the long nineteenth century. The body theories which proved to be most useful in this dissertation were theories contemporaneous with the authors examined below, or theories which had developed since the time of their writing. The exclusion of body theory from centuries past has only a few exceptions in this dissertation. In Chapter 1 on silver fork fiction, there is an echo of Descartes' view of the body as a machine composed of individual parts which can be taken apart, analysed, altered or improved, and reassembled. In Chapter 3 on the texts of Mrs Henry Wood, Wood's depiction of female aristocrats in the public eye lightly recalls the gender schism in the works of Rousseau, although that chapter employs more modern theory that deals far more heavily with the body, gender, and class than does Rousseau's work. In Chapter 4, Part 1, on Ruritanian fiction, there is a brief analysis of the body from various medieval views of physical inheritance. However, Ruritanian texts were fanciful and do not evidence any legitimate Victorian scholarship of medieval views. Since the Ruritanian genre makes reference to at least 500 years of history in several (sometimes imaginary) cultures, commenting on the accuracy of this medieval body theory goes far beyond the scope of this dissertation. Finally, Chapter 2 on G.W.M. Reynolds and his *Mysteries of the Court of London* and the two-part Chapter 4 (which includes both Ruritanian fiction and Evolutionary Feudal fiction) include allusions to the eighteenth-century naturalistic view of the body. This view contends that individuals are defined by their bodies' capabilities and limits, and it is the extent of these biological capabilities and limits in individuals which, in large numbers, shape social, political, national, and economic structures.<sup>40</sup> While this particular branch of body theory was developed long before the Victorian era, it partially shaped the views of some of the authors in this dissertation. For example, Reynolds expresses in his texts the

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<sup>40</sup> For an overview of naturalistic views of the body in an historical context, see *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. by Michel Feher, with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi, trans. by Lydia Davis, 3 vols (New York: Zone, 1990), III; Londa Schiebinger's 'Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy', in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (London: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 42-84 (p. 43); and Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine Between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), pp. 19-42.



belief that the aristocratic institution cannot survive because of the limited reproductive capacity of aristocrats. Ruritanian authors frequently define leadership through the physical capabilities of their hero-kings, and Evolutionary Feudal authors often criticise inherited leadership for not understanding the physical limits of evolution.

This dissertation makes only partial use of integrated body and gender theory. At the forefront of this dissertation is the mutual influence of class and the body. The influence of gender plays a secondary role in many of my readings, coming to the fore on the occasions when gender, class, and the body become inextricably linked in the texts examined. In these instances, gender theory specific to that particular chapter, theme, or text will be used, rather than a single theorist or branch of theory being used in a broad spectrum across the whole dissertation. Further, this dissertation does not make use of any body theory involving race, nationality, religion, imperialism, or colonialism. The forms of bodily ‘Othering’ I discuss are purely class-based. The narratives examined in this dissertation take place only in Great Britain, with the exception of Ruritania which, though a fictional Continental country, serves as a stand-in for medieval England. As far as these texts make evident, the aristocrats examined are all white, Protestant, and British (or more accurately, English), and they have no interaction with any other lands, nationalities, or races that in any way affects the representation of their bodies. This dissertation also does not deal with any body theory related to disability, purely because the texts examined do not represent any of their aristocratic characters as dealing with disability

### Choice of Texts

Antony Taylor argues, ‘[m]ost histories [of the aristocracy] have followed David Cannadine’s view that aristocracy is best understood from the top down. Books like his *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* simply take on trust the views that aristocrats articulated about themselves’.<sup>41</sup> I argue, however, that if aristocrats have historically had the hegemonic influence and educational skills to promote particular views of their own social class, then this historical and literary hegemony had deeply shifted by the beginning of the nineteenth century as the middle classes rose in economic, social, and political power, and literacy rates grew. With the expansion of middle- and lower-class authorship and literary demographics came middle- and lower-class representations of aristocrats. In short, although aristocrats may still have maintained some elements of their social dominance in the Victorian era, far more diverse voices and

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<sup>41</sup> Taylor, *Lords*, p. 7.

opinions were beginning to shape society and can therefore provide modern critics with a much more deeply nuanced view of the aristocracy as seen from multiple perspectives. In order to gauge patterns of coding of the aristocratic body by Victorian fiction-writing authors and the Victorian fiction-reading public, texts must be carefully selected in order to reflect the taste of at least some of the Victorian fiction-reading public.

The first step in refining the selection of texts is geographical: all of the major authors whose fiction is examined in this dissertation are British. The only two exceptions are Frances Hodgson Burnett, who spent equal time in America and Great Britain and is claimed by both countries in their literary histories, and the Irish Lady Morgan, who wrote silver fork novels about the aristocracy in Ireland. The focus on Great Britain, instead of a broader view of English-speaking countries in the Victorian era, creates clearer definitions and more distinct boundaries. It is a matter of debate whether nineteenth-century Irish, North American, and Australasian Anglo societies could be classified as ‘Victorian’—a debate which goes far beyond the scope of this work. In either case, the latter two did not possess an aristocracy (as it has been defined for the purposes of this dissertation) of their own, while the aristocracy of Ireland, as is evidenced in Lady Morgan’s writings, was sometimes considered culturally discrete from the British aristocracy. To examine the views of authors and readers whose entire aristocracy is imported or foreign would open this dissertation to more questions and complications than it could feasibly attempt to address.

The second step in refining the selection of texts is chronological: though the focus of this dissertation is largely on literature written during Victoria’s reign, and while this dissertation topic will continue to be referred to as ‘Victorian’, what is being investigated is literature of the Victorian era as informed by the long nineteenth century. Many critics have debated how far the Victorian era actually aligns with the years of Victoria’s reign, or if the term ‘Victorian’ should be employed at all.<sup>42</sup> In this dissertation and for the sake of clarity, the term ‘Victorian’ will be employed to signify events which occurred in, and cultural perceptions (both historical and current) held about, the years of Victoria’s reign, unless otherwise noted. It cannot be emphasised enough, however, that *culturally* the Victorian era was not a distinct, homogenous, and impermeable period which appeared

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Wheeler, *English Fiction of the Victorian Period*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 1994), p. x; Gail Marshall, *Victorian Fiction* (London: Arnold, 2002), p. 7; John Lucas, ‘Republican versus Victorian: Radical Writing in the Later Years of the Nineteenth Century’, in *Rethinking Victorian Culture*, eds. Juliet John and Alice Jenkins (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 29-45; Louis James, *The Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 1; Alice Jenkins and Juliet John, ‘Introduction’, in *Rereading Victorian Fiction* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

fully formed at the beginning of Victoria's reign and disappeared at her death. Therefore, while the term 'Victorian' will be used in this dissertation largely as a demarcation of time, it will be softened by many acknowledgements of influences outside this period.

The timeline of major texts for this dissertation begins in the 1820s, with the onset of silver fork fiction, and ends roughly in the late 1890s, though one Ruritanian text, Burnett's *The Lost Prince*, was published as late as 1915. The four chapters are divided into roughly equal lengths of time, with a span of approximately twenty years allotted to each chapter. The first chapter focuses on the 1820s and 1830s, the second the 1840s and 1850s, the third the 1860s and 1870s, and the fourth the 1880s and 1890s. By looking at the entirety of the Victorian era, in addition to referencing a couple of decades on either side, I hope to explore whether literature evidences any demonstrable pattern of change over time in the representation of the aristocracy. As this dissertation will explore in depth, the aristocracy was frequently portrayed to be in a period of transition and even crisis during the entirety of the Victorian era; as a result, the aristocracy as an institution was opened up to questions, paradoxes, speculation, and changes in perception. Although the aristocracy was consistently represented as in crisis, the nature of the perceived crisis, as well as the questions to be asked, changed over time and as different literary genres addressed the aristocracy in their distinctive ways. A chronological approach under an historical lens is the most effective method of highlighting these changes and patterns.

After geography and chronology, the third step in refining the selection of texts is the question of purpose. Understanding how the represented aristocratic body was used as a tool in Victorian literature will affect which texts can best illustrate this usage and therefore be included in this dissertation. Even in the midst of enormous external transitions, and amongst several different genres and authors (the choice of which will be explained below), aristocratic bodies were widely used as the same sort of literary tool to deal with the same sorts of cultural issues. The literary portraiture of aristocrats very frequently reveals far more about the class perspective of the author and his or her readership than it reveals about the aristocracy itself. Despite the often overt anxieties surrounding the aristocracy and its future seen in Victorian literature, the aristocracy remained a stable enough cultural institution over the course of the century to be used continually as a palimpsestic textual object, and remained fascinating enough to readers and writers to be included as a prominent literary subject in large numbers of works. Despite the nearly one hundred years between the earliest text and the latest text in this

dissertation, the treatment of the aristocracy as a textual symbol remains largely consistent, even though the symbol itself may change in representation over time, and even amongst different demographics in radically shifting social landscapes. Literary representations of aristocrats are, unwaveringly, expressive of social opinion in the Victorian era.

The fourth and final step in the refining of textual choices for this dissertation is the question of genre: what type of texts should be included under the parameters defined. Firstly, this research examines only prose fiction: mostly novels, with the occasional short story whenever a short story is of particular thematic or contextual importance to its author, genre, or subject of the chapter. Prose is the mode of choice largely because perceptions of the aristocratic body tend to be expressed better when there is a large cast of characters from different classes, making for easy comparison of bodily features, and when the narrative is long enough to depict aristocratic physicality operating inside many different situations. There were too few longer poetic texts (verse novels, narrative poems, ballads, and dramatic monologues) that were specifically about aristocrats and had a focus on the aristocratic body to make poetry a viable option for this dissertation.

The type of prose fiction most appropriate for this dissertation is what is often termed ‘popular fiction’; as will be defined below, popular fiction is, by its very nature, the type of literature that can most reasonably be considered to represent general, broad-spectrum views of large populations—in this case, the views of the middle and lower classes. While this dissertation in no way claims that popular fiction could speak on behalf of large swathes of the Victorian reading public, it could also be considered indicative of specific social climates. The genres and authors examined in this dissertation generally participate in new and short-lived narrative styles, often have diverse reading demographics, require no exceptional levels of education to enjoy the texts, and make frequent and conscious allusions to contemporary news stories, parliamentary issues, scientific advances, and social anxieties.<sup>43</sup> Most significantly, each type of popular fiction examined in this dissertation is very distinct from every other type; there is little overlap in terms of genre, authorship, and even time span for the popularity of these types of fiction. Therefore, for the same usage of the aristocratic body to crop up again and again in

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<sup>43</sup> The classification of the demographics reading these texts was determined by scholarship on the texts’ sales and marketing history, reviewer and publication history, and even occasionally the author’s expressly stated target audience.

disparate, discrete, and hugely popular forms of literature illustrates the lasting resonance of the aristocratic body as a codeable symbol in the general consciousness.

In his “Popular Fiction Studies: The Advantages of a New Field” (2010), Matthew Schneider-Mayerson laments the lack of a clear definition of popular fiction, stating that it is usually ‘defined by what it is not: “literature”’.<sup>44</sup> This dissertation views popular fiction as fiction that was excluded from the literary critical canon (at least largely, or until recently), and yet had a very large contemporary readership and was written by an author or in genres which *continued* to be widely read immediately following the publication of those individual texts (even if those authors and genres did not necessarily have a long-term audience). The implication of high contemporary readership is that the views of the aristocracy expressed by these authors and genres in some way corresponded to or appealed to the views already held by their target audience. High readership of a lone text could be attributed to many causes, but a continued high readership (especially when the author or genre maintains similar views and patterns of aristocrats in subsequent works) suggests a correlation, if not necessarily causation, between the author’s perspective and the reader’s perspective. It is unlikely that readers continued to purchase and consume texts with whose sentiments they did not agree or which they found alien. One could not argue that any given reader of popular fiction would agree, in whole or in part, with the sentiments expressed in a text; however, on a large scale the popularity of a work, author, or genre can show patterns of agreement amongst readers.

It is necessary first to address why this dissertation mixes the use of whole genres (silver fork fiction in Chapter 1, and Ruritanian fiction and Evolutionary Feudal fiction in Chapter 4) with works from single authors (G.W.M. Reynolds in Chapter 2 and Mrs Henry Wood in Chapter 3). What is most crucial to this dissertation is to have a uniformity of theme amongst the works in each chapter; the distinction between many works with *many* authors and many works with a *single* author is less important than the uniformity of each author or genre’s representations of aristocracy. This dissertation examines recurring and evolving patterns surrounding the portraiture of aristocratic bodies in very popular but largely unconnected and transitory literary movements; therefore, the inclusion of both genres and authors, and each one’s dissimilarity from every other, only serves to strengthen the assertion that the representation of aristocratic bodies in literature serves as a potentially universal literary tool or cultural gauge which may be reset *ad infinitum* to

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<sup>44</sup> Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, ‘Popular Fiction Studies: The Advantages of a New Field’, *Studies in Popular Culture*, 33:1 (Fall 2010), pp. 21-35 (pp. 22).

serve as coded symbol for external issues. The selection of authors and genres as chapter topics ultimately depended upon which authors or genres provided coherent patterns of use of aristocratic bodies, and did so from rich and novel perspectives. For example, silver fork fiction, the subject of Chapter 1, overtly treats bodies as consumer products and looks at the body in terms of production, value, and luxury status. The silver fork novels treat the aristocratic body as a locus around which the genre's explicit commentary on socio-economic issues, anxieties, and desires may orbit. More significantly, since many silver fork novelists were aristocrats themselves, this genre not only enables readers to see how aristocrats portrayed their own physicality, but placed aristocrats in a dual position as both labourer and as the product they produce. This overwhelming focus on production and aristocratic body as consumerist 'Thing' urges one to read representations of the aristocratic body through lenses of political economy.

G.W.M. Reynolds's *The Mysteries of the Court of London*, the subject of Chapter 2, makes a consistent commentary on aristocratic male fertility: Reynolds's texts dramatise the reproductive failures of aristocratic bodies and represent them as a political rallying point for his lower-class readers. Issues of aristocratic fertility, when coupled with medical literature contemporary with Reynolds's writing, reveal the innovative approach Reynolds adopted in his political argument against primogeniture. His portrayal of the male aristocratic body as reproductively doomed creates a complex space where subjective issues such as morality and gender dynamics are portrayed as biological fact.

The works of Mrs Henry (Ellen Price) Wood, the subject of Chapter 3, consciously comment upon gender issues and class mobility. The intersection of these two realms is most explicitly manifested in Wood's portraiture of the aristocratic female body, which is used in many of her texts as a symbolic magnifier of the contradictions and struggles of Victorian femininity in general. Many of Wood's works revolve around an aristocratic female protagonist, her relationship to a bourgeois community, and how her role in the public eye contrasts with or negates her private domestic role. Wood addresses the idea of female selfhood through the juxtaposition of aristocratic women with bourgeois women: the former are public figures, and yet seem to have no bodies or physical drives in spite of their highly visual status, while the latter are private figures who are not looked at, and yet have the luxury of possessing sensory bodies and physical selves. By overlaying class status with bodily portrayals, one is able to explore some of the difficulties and contradictions of expected femininity and womanhood in Victorian society.

The Ruritanian and the Evolutionary Feudal genres both have aristocratic physical heredity at their cores and use their narratives to address concepts of leadership and evolution from diametrically opposite positions. For this reason, these genres are examined in relation to each other in order to strengthen the perspectives and patterns found in each. Each genre uses the aristocratic body and its physical lineage as a way of addressing concerns about the impending future and understanding social origins. The first part of Chapter 4 discovers an anti-evolutionary, pro-Carlylean view of the Ruritanian aristocrat as a divinely-appointed leader whose physicality and lineage is somehow outside of time and evolution. This sub-chapter is then contrasted by the sub-chapter on the Evolutionary Feudal, whose post-apocalyptic texts place the entire aristocratic system within the confines of natural law and evolution, stating that a contemporary position of hereditary power is the result of a biologically-superior ancestor. This linked approach to the aristocratic body through Darwinian critique provides the opportunity to compare two otherwise contrasting genres.

Of course, there are considerable costs to viewing a single trope in largely unconnected genres over such a long timeframe. Most significantly, the research has the potential to become diffuse. A much narrower window would allow for a deeper understanding of the circumstances in a single decade, or even a single year, that lead to certain types of portraiture. A narrower timeframe would also enable a more comparative analysis of literature, focusing on the similarities or differences between the representations of aristocrats in texts written at the same time. Conversely, if the large timeframe was maintained, but only examined a single author or genre, a better understanding of that single author or genre's development over time could be achieved. However, what proved to be more important for this project was not an exhaustive exploration of one tightly-knit group of texts, but rather a single thematic thread which crops up in, and links together, very disparate texts and perspectives. In order to trace the extent of this thematic thread's reach, it was therefore crucial to maintain a long timeframe, include a variety of authorial and audience background, select genres and authors who are very distinct and detached from each other, and view each genre or author only once instead of over multiple chapters. Wherever possible, the examination of self-contained genres and authors has proved to be most useful: Reynolds and Wood both wrote largely in a single genre and for a single audience; silver fork and Ruritanian fiction, for example, both appear as more or less fully formed as genres, had enormous and instantaneous popularity, lasted briefly, and disappeared without splintering into different genres or

seeming to have much lasting impact on the rest of the literary world.<sup>45</sup> Considering how closed off and neatly packaged these genres are, the appearance of the same thematic thread surrounding the representation of aristocrats in them is hugely significant to the arguments made in this dissertation.

### Conclusion

The cultural history of the aristocracy in the nineteenth century is fraught with lacunae, contradictions, and uncertainty. While documenting the intense middle- and lower-class scrutiny of and fascination with aristocrats, scholarship also often ignores the cultural significance of that group, or even occasionally undermines that significance. In his 2003 *The Victorians*, A.N. Wilson argues that the survival of monarchy and aristocracy in England ‘was not a token of its strength of but of its triviality’, while Lieven argues that complex interclass perceptions of the aristocracy are the result of good public relations, writing that British aristocrats had ‘a far better press than its German or Russian counterparts’.<sup>46</sup> In a fascinating swap, the aristocracy—which was so frequently portrayed in Victorian literature to hold supreme power over other class groups—is often located by historians primarily in terms of other classes’ power. Lawrence James, for example, writes that ‘there were aristocrats [...] who recognised that compromise was infinitely preferable to extinction [...] submission to public opinion and flexibility paid dividends’, while Cannadine argues that ‘one of the greatest strengths of the British aristocracy has been its capacity to present itself as venerable, while constantly evolving and developing’.<sup>47</sup> Although James and Cannadine both realise the aristocracy’s potential for complexity and heterogeneity, their depiction of the upper class’s desire for mutability indicates that its cultural power largely resided with the middle and lower classes, rather than as an intricate network of relationships, identities, and influences involving all three major classes.

Of course, these are all historical views of aristocracy and they examine Victorian class structures from materialist perspectives, which naturally reveal the large-scale, well-documented trend of growing bourgeois wealth and influence and the slow disintegration of aristocratic hegemony. What an examination of literature can illustrate, however, is how much power the aristocracy maintained ideologically and symbolically, even—or especially—amidst these historical shifts. This maintenance of aristocratic power as a

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<sup>45</sup> To lesser extents, Reynolds’s Chartist radical fiction and Wood’s sensation fiction conform to these criteria of ‘flash-in-the-pan’ popular fiction, though many would argue that their impact on the rest of the literary world was immense and on-going.

<sup>46</sup> A.N. Wilson, *The Victorians* (London: Arrow Books, 2003), p. 244; Lieven, pg. xx.

<sup>47</sup> Lawrence James, *Aristocrats*, p. 3; Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, p. 2.



textual device deeply complicates the historical and sociological research on the aristocracy, making power structures of the Victorian era far richer and less neatly resolved.

That the aristocracy tends to be unemphasised in academic work perhaps indicates how much influence the aristocracy still has in the public mind: we are silent lest we be perceived as shallow fawners or bitter attackers. And while it would be difficult for one to argue that the upper classes were marginalised or victimised in any capacity, it is still significant to understand that the erasure of a topic does not negate the existence of that topic: if anything, silence serves to further fetishise the topic and make problems of class the more insidious for their lack of general examination and analysis. This dissertation strives merely to broaden the field of literary commentary on the aristocratic body, which is often a peripheral issue in theoretical works and yet has such traction in common thought and practice.

## Chapter 1 – The Business Model of the Aristocracy: Socio-economics, Consumerism, and Class in the Silver Fork Novels

### Introduction

Silver fork novels (interchangeably and often through their own self-definition called ‘fashionable’ novels) were a popular but short-lived genre in British literature from the 1820s to the 1840s.<sup>48</sup> Despite this genre’s impact on and ubiquity in the early nineteenth century, it has only recently begun to gain recognition as a subject worthy of academic study, although the parodies of this genre are still often better known than the genre itself.<sup>49</sup> The novels were not only an entertainment, but could also (and perhaps prevalently *did*) serve as middle-class guides to upper-class modes of living, the genre’s defining characteristic being its representations of aristocrats and their fashionable world. These novels anticipate and embody Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*, and the influence of personal background, wealth, education, social status, etiquette, and taste upon culture and social interactions. Bourdieu writes, ‘Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier’; the novels are in large part exercises in the classification of the writer and reader in relation to a highly-desirable upper-class Other.<sup>50</sup> Apart from the novels’ focus on aristocratic high society, the single point around which the genre was located, the dozens of novels which comprise the genre are as various in style, quality, and message, as are the backgrounds of the genre’s numerous authors. At a surface level, there is no greater connection between these texts than their reporting on aristocracy, celebrity, high fashion and faddish etiquette. The genre was largely dismissed by its contemporary critics as frivolous, regardless of the skill of individual authors. Thomas Carlyle famously dedicated an entire vitriolic chapter (‘The Dandiacal Body’) of *Sartor Resartus* to the novels, declaring them unreadable: ‘that tough faculty of reading [...] was here for the first time

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<sup>48</sup> For an overview of the silver fork genre, see Edward Copeland, *The Silver Fork Novel: Fashionable Fiction in the Age of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Alison Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature from 1814 to 1840* (1983) (London: Faber and Faber, 2012); the *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841* series, ed. by Harriet Devine Jump, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005); Matthew Whiting Rosa, *The Silver-Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding Vanity Fair* (1936) (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1964); April Kendra, ‘Gendering the Silver Fork: Catherine Gore and the Society Novel’, *Women’s Writing*, 11:1 (2004), pp. 25-38; Cheryl A. Wilson, *Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012); and Winifred Hughes’s ‘Silver Fork Writers and Readers: Social Contexts of a Best Seller’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 25:3 (Spring 1992), pp. 328-347.

<sup>49</sup> April Kendra, ‘Silver-Forks and Double Standards: Gore, Thackeray and the Problem of Parody’, *Women’s Writing*, 16:2 (2009), pp.191-217 (p.191).

<sup>50</sup> Bourdieu, p. 6

foiled and set at nought [...] Loving my own life and sense as I do, no power shall induce me, as a private individual, to open another *Fashionable Novel*'.<sup>51</sup>

However superficial the overarching subject matter may be, the popularity of these works coincided with the onset of significant and often precarious political, social, and economic changes in Great Britain. These real-life changes were depicted in the novels in (what was perceived at the time to be) the shallowest and most vapid of terms, and yet the novels enjoyed an immense readership; that in itself is cause for academic consideration. Most critics of silver fork fiction investigate this relationship of text and history, mostly with a particular focus on hegemonic or commercial perspectives. Edward Copeland asserts several times in his *The Silver Fork Novel: Fashionable Fiction in the Age of Reform* (2012) that 'the significant role of silver fork novels in the political and social debates of the Reform era cannot be overestimated [...] Novels of fashionable life were novels about power, who has it and who doesn't', while Cheryl A. Wilson in *Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel* states that 'the novels primarily educated readers into becoming middle-class consumers'.<sup>52</sup> However, it is the *connection* between these two realms, power and consumerism, that serves as the foundation for most silver fork novels. To view hegemonic power structures and consumerism and consumption separately when looking at silver fork fiction is to deny the novels half of their significance.<sup>53</sup> The consumerist nature of silver fork novels is so well-documented, as is their depiction of shifting social powers, that a marriage between the two readings seems both a logical and necessary extension of current work.<sup>54</sup> Tamara S. Wagner comes closest to dissecting this critical overlap in her work *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction* by arguing that the silver fork genre 'channeled anxieties engendered by a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape', but she spends most of her chapter on silver fork novels discussing novels that

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1834), ed. by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 210-11.

<sup>52</sup> Copeland, p. 2; C. Wilson, p. 80.

<sup>53</sup> While, of course, many modern critics of the silver fork genre touch upon both subjects, most focus very heavily on one topic or the other. For example, Copeland discusses consumerism almost solely under a lens of political reform, identifying fashion as really 'the drapery of power' (p. 6). Cheryl A. Wilson, on the other hand, discusses political and social power, but always from a consumerist, economic perspective, arguing that consumerism was a way through which the novels demonstrated the relationships between and the transcendence of classes (p. 7).

<sup>54</sup> For an overview of the consumerist nature of silver fork novels, see C. Wilson's *Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel*; Rosa's *The Silver-Fork School*; Clare Bainbridge, 'Introduction', in *Granby* by Thomas Henry Lister (1826), ed. by Clare Bainbridge, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), I, pp. xiii-xxxv; and Tamara S. Wagner's *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010). For an overview of their depiction of shifting social powers, see Copeland, Kendra's 'Gendering', and Adburgham's *Silver Fork Society*.

are not generally considered to be part of the silver fork genre, and thus the subject remains largely unexplored.<sup>55</sup>

By applying a reading drawing on elements of socio-economic theory to the genre as a whole, one can see how these novels synthesized political, sociological, and economic developments surrounding the aristocracy. The discourse of the texts, as well as the genre's general publication and marketing schemes, commodified aristocrats and the aristocratic body to a high degree. This class commodification thereby raised the value of the aristocratic body in the social sphere, while simultaneously *devaluing* it by coding it as Thing. This genre and its treatment of aristocratic bodies is a crucial starting point for this dissertation, as it quickly establishes some of the contradictions, paradoxes, and complexities of Victorian views on the aristocracy which will crop up repeatedly in following chapters. In particular, silver fork novels problematise and underscore an alarming contrast in the literary treatment of aristocratic bodies, in which aristocrats are envied, glamorised, and emulated, while simultaneously being slighted, debased, and dehumanised through the rampant textual objectification of their bodies. The literary commodification of upper-class body and identity placed aristocrats in a complex dual role of being both a worker (as an author producing these texts) inside the silver fork system, as well as its chief product. The aristocrat is represented as objectified by middle-class readers and writers, as his or her lifestyle is devoured by them in literary form in order to be mimicked in their own middle-class lives. In his work on aristocratic power and libertinism in novels, David Quint sees the general middle-class consumption of aristocrats as continuing to this day: 'The aristocracy justifies its continuing existence by being an object of fantasy and consumption in the social imagination.'<sup>56</sup> Quint's theory that the aristocracy intentionally self-objectifies is at the heart of the silver fork genre and will be explored at length over the course of this chapter.

Further, the popularity of the genre urged rapid production from its authors, many of whom were aristocrats themselves. A great number of authors' publication rates spiked drastically when writing silver fork novels; many never wrote so prolifically, or at all, after the decline of the genre.<sup>57</sup> There was also great pressure put on authors not only to

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<sup>55</sup> Wagner, *Financial Speculation*, p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> Quint, p. 120.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Bulwer-Lytton wrote at least five silver fork novels in as many years; his non-silver fork works never came close to the same rapid rate of production. Catherine Gore wrote at least one and as many as five novels per year from 1829 until 1847, after which her writing speed drastically slowed. Benjamin Disraeli wrote 15 of his 18 works during the 20 years in which silver fork novels were fashionable, the remaining

be quick in their production of novels, but also to verify their *habitus* by demonstrating personal authority upon the subjects they wrote. Those authors who did not have titles therefore sometimes assumed pseudonymous ones, or often had to claim a false proximity to high society in order for their novels to be published and purchased. This surface reliance on authorial authenticity and authority revealed the perceived social and economic value of titles and class identity. This genre's subsequent manufacture, mining, and marketing of class uncovers a certain perspective that identity may merely be a cog in a commercial cycle.

These novels are political, if not always explicitly then at least intrinsically, and the literary and historical importance of their commentary on contemporary Parliamentary and governmental affairs and structures cannot be underscored enough; the novels often provide nuanced stances on contemporary issues, made all the richer for their interclass and interparty representations. These representations allow readers to better understand the political perspectives of an author from one class or party through the arguments made by his or her characters from a different class or party. Because of this significance, the political background and corresponding opinions expressed in this genre have already been amply discussed by other critics. These discussions, however, rarely include commentary on the body.<sup>58</sup> This chapter will investigate the ways in which aristocratic bodies were represented and codified in the public consciousness as capitalist products. In doing so, a more sociological reading of the silver fork novels may be undertaken, as well as an investigation of the sociological and philosophical impact that economic theory has on these novels.

In order to better establish the argument of this chapter, the genre must be more thoroughly contextualised, along with a comprehensive view of the use of economic theory in relation to these texts.

### Silver Fork Novels

As noted above, the quality, style, authenticity, and themes of each silver fork novel varied greatly from author to author; therefore, the critical parameters of this genre are ambiguous, and the definitions of 'silver fork novels' and 'silver fork authors' are broad and mutable. Edward Copeland, for example, states that '[a]t present there is no

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three works appearing only after a 23-year literary hiatus (his political career did not gain momentum until the mid-1850s, so his political duties were likely not the sole cause of this hiatus).

<sup>58</sup> Most thoroughly by Edward Copeland in his chapter 'Reform and the silver fork novel' in his *The Silver Fork Novel: Fashionable Fiction in the Age of Reform* (pp.65-99).

general framework for identifying “the silver fork school” in the outlines of its historical and literary contexts’, but then adheres to the authorial boundaries set by Matthew Whiting Rosa in his 1936 *The Silver Fork School*, which was for many decades the only framework provided for the genre. Copeland, in Rosa’s footsteps, argues that the ‘number of authors writing silver fork novels [...] is not difficult to determine – around eight significant authors, four men and four women, with a few extras tucked in around the edges’.<sup>59</sup> This view not only ignores most of the authors contributing to the genre, but drastically reduces the size and, therefore, social and economic impact of the genre. April Kendra argues that there are ‘two competing definitions of the genre’ which are split down gender lines: the masculine ‘dandy novel’ and the female ‘society novel’, each coming from their own literary traditions and adhering to their own criteria.<sup>60</sup> Alison Adburghman insists that silver fork novels must be set at the time that they were written and reflect *contemporary* high society, though this criterion excludes a high percentage of texts that, in all other respects, could be considered silver fork novels (including some of the genre’s most famous works and parodies, like *Cecil*, *The Disowned*, and *Vanity Fair*, all of which are set before and during Napoleonic times).<sup>61</sup> Other critics embrace the vagaries of the genre and draw its boundaries around any of the dozens of novels from the 1820s to the 1840s (or even 1850s, in some instances) that give glimpses into high life and may act as middle-class guidebooks. Wilson, for example, broadly defines them as ‘novels of high life’ during this period.<sup>62</sup> It is Wilson’s definition that informs this chapter.<sup>63</sup> Under the parameters of this definition, even parodic works such as Thackeray’s two 1848 texts, *Book of Snobs* and *Vanity Fair*, the latter of which is commonly considered to have been the death knell for the silver fork genre, will be included for the purposes of this argument: while silver fork novels fell out of fashion in the 1840s and became less sincere in their guidebook purpose, they still maintained the same rhetoric and formulas used by previous texts and still satisfied the same middle-class demand to consume aristocrats, which, as this thesis aims to show, never faded over the course of the Victorian era despite its myriad guises and manifestations.

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<sup>59</sup> Copeland, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Kendra, ‘Gendering’, p. 25.

<sup>61</sup> Adburghman, *Silver Fork Society*, p. 135.

<sup>62</sup> C. Wilson, p. 28.

<sup>63</sup> I draw the line, however, at the inclusion of Jane Austen’s work as anything more than an influence on the silver fork genre, or the inclusion of the social problem novels of Elizabeth Gaskell, both of which Tamara S. Wagner includes in her work on silver fork literature, *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction*. These types of novels, though occasionally looking at scenes of high life and examining class transitions, do not approach issues and portrayals of the upper class in anywhere near the same way or capacity as the silver fork novels.

The genre is often considered to have been sparked by Theodore Hook's *Sayings and Doings* (1824), Robert Plumer Ward's *Tremaine* (1825), and Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* (1826).<sup>64</sup> The term 'silver fork' originated sarcastically in William Hazlitt's 1827 article, 'The Dandy School', in which Hazlitt decries the genre as being 'filled up with the most trite impertinence' and writes, 'the quality eat fish with silver forks [...] Mr. Theodore Hook has never forgotten [that] since he first witnessed it, viz. *that they eat their fish with a silver fork*'.<sup>65</sup> The general readership of silver fork novels, as has been overwhelmingly determined by modern critics, tended to be middle class, although Copeland believes that cheap newspaper production may have allowed these texts to reach a far greater population amongst the lower classes.<sup>66</sup> However, given that marketing and reviews for the books largely appeared in middle- and upper-middle-class publications (such as *Blackwood's*, the *Quarterly*, *Fraser's*, the *Examiner*, and the *Athenaeum*, among many others), and considering the class demarcations provided by the type of instructions in the novels, it is not difficult to determine that the genre's target demographic was the middle classes. In particular, these novels were marketed toward *nouveau riches*: the upper-middle classes with newly-acquired expendable incomes who might be searching for knowledge of upper-class behaviour, and therefore personal validity and confidence in their own upper-class social interactions.

That the audience was so heavily middle-class and that the novelists were frequently members of high society (or pretended to be) is crucial in understanding how this genre reflected shifting and sometimes paradoxical views on class power. In Catherine Gore's *Pin Money* (1831), a minor character named Lady Derenzy explains at a fashionable gathering, 'Class is a word obliterated from all vocabularies but those of school-ushers, - Scotch gardeners, - and political economists [...] the only distinction *I* ever perceive [...] is that which exists between *those who buy and those who sell*'.<sup>67</sup> Gore, whose works are always deeply and openly concerned with the intersection of wealth and

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<sup>64</sup> Hughes, 'Silver Fork Writers and Readers', p. 329; Harriet Devine Jump, 'Endnotes' in Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Godolphin* (1833), ed. by Harriet Devine Jump, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), III, pp. 321-345 (p.359, n. 159).

<sup>65</sup> William Hazlitt, 'The Dandy School', *The Examiner*, 1033 (18 November, 1827), pp. 721-23 (p.722).

<sup>66</sup> Copeland, p. 24; C. Wilson, p. 29; Wagner, *Financial Speculation*, p. 32; Rosa, p. 6-7; Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society*, p. 2; Harriet Devine Jump, 'General Introduction to *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*' in *Granby* by Thomas Henry Lister (1826), ed. by Clare Bainbridge, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, 6 vols, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), I, pp. ix-xxii (pp. x-xi); Cynthia Lawford, 'Introduction' in *Romance and Reality* by Letitia Landon (1831), ed. by Cynthia Lawford, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, 6 vols, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), II, pp. ix-xxvii (p. xiii).

<sup>67</sup> Catherine Gore, *Pin Money*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), I, p.303, emphasis mine.

society, here pithily captures the absurdities and contradictions not only in the silver fork genre, but in the uncertain and unsettled hegemonic shift from total aristocratic wealth and power to greater middle-class wealth and power. Lady Derenzy implies that those from high society are unquestionably still the consumers—those who ‘buy’—while being outside high society is synonymous with trade and labour—those who ‘sell’. The middle classes are not specified in one group or the other, since the size and economic breadth of that class could place a middle-class individual on either end of Lady Derenzy’s polar definition. Gore not only captures the ambiguity of the middle class’s socio-economic position (which was one of the chief topics in silver fork fiction), but also, through Lady Derenzy’s confident assumption that she is of the ‘buying’ class, Gore simultaneously underscores the burgeoning ambiguity of the aristocracy’s position. While these novels depict aristocrats as mass-consumers and indicate that the middle class should venerate and follow aristocratic good taste, and while many middle-class characters in the texts are associated with production (being wealth manufacturers or professionals who provide services), the reality was that some from high society produced and sold silver fork novels to middle-class consumers.<sup>68</sup> Lady Derenzy’s definition helps to show the breakdown of traditional class barriers and the inextricable coupling of economics with social issues; however, it also illustrates how problematic and complex that breakdown had become for contemporary readers.

More than the fiscal rhetoric inside the novels or the external buyer/seller class complexities, one must also consider what patterns of criticism reveal about this genre as a barometer of general socio-economics in the early nineteenth century. Silver fork novels have been, for the most part, neglected as an academic subject until the last two decades. This critical neglect originates with many of the novels’ contemporary reviewers who excluded most of its texts from the constructed canon of ‘great’ literature. An anonymous reviewer in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1835 blamed the ‘talentless’ aristocracy for the genre as a whole by saying, ‘let it not be imagined that we intend to censure the aristocracy for attempting to become citizens of the republic of letters [...] But we do blame them for their attempt to establish a monopoly, and create a censorship of fashion in

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<sup>68</sup> Many of the novels contain a ‘vulgar middle class’ character whose new-found wealth allows them to purchase luxuries without discretion, like *Vivian Grey’s* Mrs Million, or Mrs Porter in Miss Cathcart’s *The Heir of Mordaunt*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1835), whose flashy dress leads her to give the impression of ‘an enormous well-fed macaw’ (II, p. 112). While these characters are subjects of ridicule, they are also instructive for the reader: the essence of fashion, as indicated by the silver fork genre, is effortlessness; trying too hard is the mark of the vulgar.



that department where talent should be the only censor'.<sup>69</sup> The use of 'monopoly' complements Lady Derenzy's definition in *Pin Money*, though from a different perspective, both implying that production is not where the aristocrat belongs and pushing the aristocracy back into its traditional role as the consumer. A further reduction of both the genre and the aristocracy comes from Andrew Bisset, another reviewer writing anonymously in the same year, who wrote in the *Westminster Review*, 'The curiosity and eagerness of the readers to look into the private lives of those who were the arbiters of their destiny [*i.e.*, aristocrats] [...] were such as to make them little fastidious about such trifles as sense or style'.<sup>70</sup> This reviewer reduces aristocrats' social value as far as possible, suggesting that with no 'sense or style' there can be no real purpose or usefulness for the texts. These reviews, and most others, treat the novels as inconsequential frippery, and yet they answer the novels' socio-economic discourse with (probably unintentional) socio-economic discourse of their own. The novels themselves critique their own genre, and indeed they sometimes perversely share the opinions of reviews that the genre is of inferior literary quality or that their focus on fashion and aristocracy promotes a reprehensibly frivolous message. In Catherine Gore's *Women As They Are* (1830), two fashionable minor characters say (in Gore's parody of contemporary literary criticism), "'ours is the age of aristocratic literature; and such novels as Tremaine, Granby, Pelham—"<sup>71</sup> "Tremaine! – that moralizing driveller!" interrupted Lady Isabella [...] "And Pelham! – with its sparkling conceits, that blind one, as though the pages were dried with diamond dust".<sup>72</sup> Disraeli continues this satire of both the genre itself and its detractors in his 1826 *Vivian Grey* by defining a novelist of 'fashionable' works as 'a person who occasionally published three volumes, one half of which contain the adventures of a young gentleman in the country, and the other volume and a half the adventures of the same young gentleman in the metropolis'.<sup>73</sup> Edward Bulwer-Lytton engages less playfully with middle-class reviewers than Gore and Disraeli in his *Godolphin* (1833) as a fashionable actress lectures the eponymous Godolphin on the deficiencies of fashionable novels, like the very one the characters populate:

<sup>69</sup> 'A', 'The Talent of the Aristocracy, and the Aristocracy of Talent', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, 2:20 (August 1835), pp. 515-528 (p. 516).

<sup>70</sup> [Andrew Bisset]. 'Aristocratic Revelations', *Westminster Review*, 22:44 (April 1835), pp. 314-321 (p. 316).

<sup>71</sup> See Robert Plumer Ward's *Tremaine, or the Man of Refinement*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1825); Thomas Henry Lister's *Granby* (1826), ed. by Clare Bainbridge, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto), I; and Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham; or the Adventures of a Gentleman*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1828).

<sup>72</sup> Catherine Gore, *Women As They Are, or the Manners of the Day*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 3 vols (London, Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), II, p. 235.

<sup>73</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Vivian Grey* (1826) (New York: George Routledge and Sons, 1853), pp. 23-24.

Sometimes I canter through a dozen novels in a morning [...] They tell us how Lord Arthur looked, and Lady Lucy dressed, and what was the colour of those curtains, and these eyes, and so forth: and then the better sort, perhaps, *do* also tell us what the heroine felt as well as wore; and try with might and main to pull some string of the internal machine; but still I am not enlightened – not touched. I don't recognize men and women: they are puppets.<sup>74</sup>

The actress reiterates complaints of the critics by acknowledging the genre's tendency toward the quick production of often facsimile novels, frequently read as a mechanical manufacturing process, and the attention the genre gives to objects over character, or objects *as* character (and vice versa).<sup>75</sup> However, this self-reflexive passage indicates Bulwer-Lytton's desire to rebuff criticism even as he concurs with it; he reveals, through his adherence to the silver fork style, his conviction that silver fork novels *could* be more than vehicles of fashion and that the aristocracy *could* be subjects worthy of great literature, as he seems to perceive his own work to be. Taken together, the reviews and the novels create a dialogue from two different class perspectives, the 'aristocratic' novels often ceding that the middle-class has gained significant wealth and hegemony, while the 'middle-class' reviews express anxiety, hidden under disdain, that the genre's popularity may allow the aristocracy to continue its traditional social and financial predominance. As has been examined, detractors of the genre often seem to couple the perceived literary worthlessness of the genre with its subject matter, high society. Their incredulosity that these novels could gain such a high readership illustrates not only their view of these novels as literarily deficient, but also indicates a level of animosity towards the attention, desire, and envy given to the aristocratic characters 'trifling' in their pages and the aristocratic names 'monopolising' their covers.<sup>76</sup>

It is only very recently that research has expanded beyond the opinions expressed by nineteenth-century reviewers and the novels have started climbing out from under their negative reputations. According to Copeland, the texts also have long been excluded from canonical status for several reasons. Firstly, the novels possess inextricable ties to transitory fashion, the one becoming outdated with the other. Secondly, the novels are highly intertextual and frequently *romans à clef*, which may obscure much of their meaning for modern readers. Thirdly, the subsequent Victorian burial of these texts due to the political and social embarrassment felt for these products of a previous generation has

<sup>74</sup> Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Godolphin* (1833), ed. by Harriet Devine Jump, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, 6 vols, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), III, p.85-86.

<sup>75</sup> Ellen Miller Casey, 'Silver-Forks and the Commodity Text: Lady Morgan and the *Athenaeum*', *Women's Writing*, 16:2 (2009), pp. 253-62 (pp. 252-53).

<sup>76</sup> 'A', 'The Talent of the Aristocracy', p. 516; [Bisset], p. 316.

made them critically and commercially forgotten. Finally, the sheer scarcity of these novels, which often did not go beyond two or three editions, has limited their more modern circulation and subsequent analysis.<sup>77</sup> In fact, the recent slow growth of a new readership for silver fork fiction (albeit, mostly in academic circles and not in popular ones) again parallels the rhetoric of the novels themselves: the novels, now often rare items in special collections, provide their new readership with a seemingly exclusive view of a hidden point in culture.

### Socio-Economics

‘Socio-economics’, or ‘social economics’, is the relatively recent name for a very old and nameless field of study—nameless because it covered the overlap between moral philosophy and political economy.<sup>78</sup> As a field with a long history of practice but a short history of theory specific to itself, socio-economics now has many definitions; it is employed in this dissertation as economist John B. Davis does in his *The Theory of the Individual in Economics*, to signify the use of economics in the study of society and the individual—that socio-economics ‘begins from a social perspective’ and applies economic theory to society, rather than the opposite.<sup>79</sup> In this chapter, contemporary economic language is used to investigate, clarify, and problematise the relationship between the middle classes and the aristocracy, as well as to show how the silver fork genre used nineteenth-century economic language to the same effect. While a comprehensive history of socio-economics would go far beyond the capacity of this chapter, it is crucial to broadly summarise the background of the field, indistinct though it was, and to define some widely-accepted concepts, both from classical economics and from more current work on socio-economics, materialism and consumer culture.

In his introduction to Adam Smith’s seminal work, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), political economist Andrew Skinner writes, ‘To many contemporaries Smith’s message was both powerful and attractive, while to us, armed with the benefit of hindsight, he appears as the herald if not the prophet of a new order’.<sup>80</sup> While one could not argue that economics and economic philosophy (socio- or otherwise) did not exist or were not

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<sup>77</sup> Copeland, p. 3; C. Wilson, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup> Richard M. Coughlin, ‘Introduction’, in *Morality, Rationality, and Efficiency: New Perspectives on Socio-Economics*, ed. by Richard M. Coughlin (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), p. 3-13 (p. 3).

<sup>79</sup> John B. Davis, *The Theory of the Individual in Economics: Identity and Value* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 120. Another major branch of socio-economics does precisely the opposite, and applies sociological, psychological, and anthropological theories to *economics*.

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Skinner, ‘Introduction’ in *The Wealth of Nations (Books I-III)* by Adam Smith (1776), ed. by Andrew Skinner (London: Penguin, 1970), repr. 1986, pp. 11-97 (p. 12).

utilised until Smith's work, the sense of a 'new order' was certainly borne out in much of the literature that stemmed from his writing in the following sixty years, not least of which is the silver fork genre.<sup>81</sup> The 'new order' to which Skinner refers was, of course, not only Smith's clarification of a laissez-faire market but also the industrialised world's general shift away from feudal models of trade in favour of the urban, industry-centric, bourgeois-operated business model that has come to be synonymous with the Industrial Revolution. Further, the joint influence of Smith's writing (and that which built on it) and the reality of social change resulting from transitioning class hegemony and wealth combined to create an economically-conscious society attempting to make sense of this 'new world order'. Economics became one of the lenses through which early nineteenth-century British society could view and understand all of human experience, with *value determination* becoming an interpreter of experience and identity.

Before proceeding, it is important to understand what is meant by the use of the term 'value', a usage derived from Marx's definition, though Marx was working from and against a long tradition of political economy and did not invent this concept. Marx refines distinctions of value in *Capital* (1867), arguing that consumer objects are neither intrinsically good nor bad, but may be judged based on their *use-value* and their *exchange-value*, the two halves that make up the term 'value' as a whole. Briefly, an object's use-value is the sum of its material, physical qualities, and how well those qualities satisfy a need: its *usefulness*, or what it can do for the consumer upon consumption. For example, if the object in question is an item of food, its use-value would comprise its nutritional qualities, its level of freshness, the skill of its creation, and how it tastes. On the other hand, an object's exchange-value is the amount of currency or goods one is willing to exchange for the object in question. This value is more difficult to determine because it relies upon synthesising a great number of subjective or changeable data into a quantifiable price-range; this data includes, among other things: use-value, economic inflation, target consumer demographic, consumer price expectations, competition, and demand.

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<sup>81</sup> Including the works of classical economists such as David Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy & Taxation* (1817) (London: Dent, 1911); T.R. [Thomas] Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy* (1820), ed. by John Pullen, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy* (London: Baldwin, Craddock, and Joy, 1821); as well as Karl Marx, *Capital* (1867), trans. By Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, 1<sup>st</sup> English ed. (1887), ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, repr. 2008), and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), trans. by Samuel Moore of 2<sup>nd</sup> German ed. (1872) for 1<sup>st</sup> English ed. (1888) (London: Penguin, 2002), works which were direct attacks on Smith's views.

When economics becomes *socio*-economics, however, value is subject to anomalies of psychology, such as the concept of ‘conspicuous consumption’ introduced by early- twentieth-century economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen—a concept which, as will be discussed below, was stressed in silver fork fiction, both in its discourse and in its operation in society.<sup>82</sup> ‘Conspicuous consumption’ is a term used by socio-economists ‘to indicate those phenomena of consumption which escaped the logic of utility maximization at minimal cost’, and deals with the relationship between the elite and the *nouveaux riches* in which the latter try ‘to legitimize their recently acquired social positions through visible demonstration of their success’ in which they show their distance from the world of practical necessity.<sup>83</sup>

It is with this understanding of conspicuous consumption and luxury items that a modern reader is better equipped to recognise the significance of silver fork novels, their impact on consumer and material culture, and how their economic language was a response to contemporary issues surrounding class, wealth, and a reordering of society. The significance of these novels lies in their discourse and in the structures surrounding their production, where, as will be made apparent, aristocrats were both labourers, as well being represented as the products themselves.

### A Socio-Economic Reading of the Silver Fork School

#### **Use-Value of the Silver Fork Novel**

The pervasiveness of economic theory and the sense of a mercantile new world order is nowhere more apparent than in silver fork fiction, where economic language is applied to vastly disparate topics by myriad voices and personalities. For example, the narrator of Theodore Hook’s *Sayings and Doings, Second Series* (1825) says, ‘As for the Opera pit, it is the Royal Exchange of good society [where] the smallest difference in the

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<sup>82</sup> For further critical applications of Veblen in the humanities (and in particular his concept of conspicuous consumption), see Platt’s *Aristocracies of Fiction* (in which he also applies Veblen to the representation of aristocracy in literature, although in a fin de siècle Darwinian context); Elizabeth Wilson’s 2003 *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (1985) (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2003), who uses it to discuss consumerism and fashion; Stuart Ewen’s *Captains of Consciousness: Consumer Culture* (1976), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2001), who uses it to discuss advertising and consumer culture; Penne Restad’s ‘The Third Sex: Historians, Consumer Society, and the Idea of the American Consumer’ *Journal of Social History*, 47:3 (Spring 2014), pp. 769-86, who uses it to discuss the imperatives of consumption in turn-of-the-century America; Peter Womack’s ‘Dialogue and Leisure at the Fin de Siècle’, *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 42:2 (June 2013), pp. 134-56, who sees connections between Veblen and aestheticism; and Patrick Brantlinger and Richard Higgins’s 2006 ‘Waste and Value: Thorstein Veblen and H. G. Wells’, *Criticism* 48:4 (Fall 2006), pp. 453-75, who examine modern constructions of wealth and waste in Wells and Veblen.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture* (London: SAGE Publications, 2007), p. 66.

rate of exchange is calculated to a fraction'.<sup>84</sup> In his 1831 novel, *The Young Duke*, Benjamin Disraeli writes of his protagonist, 'having been stamped at the Mint of Fashion, as a sovereign of the brightest die, he was flung forth, like the rest of his golden brethren'.<sup>85</sup> In Mrs Cadell's 1832 novel *The Reformer*, she writes of one of the characters, 'He was indisputably a monied man, for he had money in the stocks written legibly on his face'.<sup>86</sup> In this genre, economics are portrayed as mutable, inescapable, and at the heart of social interaction; exchange, valuation, and calculation are here represented as so ubiquitous that they may easily overlay scenes in which socialisation and aesthetic appreciation are supposed to be the focus. Every element of society comes down to value, but in a combination of both social and economic determinations; as will be made apparent, nowhere in the genre was the concept of value more prevalent than in relation to and textual portraiture of the aristocratic body. In order to understand the significance and 'value' of those bodies, first the concept and usage of value must be discussed, along with an explanation of the publishing, manufacturing, and marketing environment of the silver fork novel industry.

The question of value in the silver fork novels went far beyond the genre's rhetoric and became heavily emphasised and consciously embedded in its manufacture, advertising, purchase, and use. Alexis Weedon, in her study of the history of British publishing, discusses at length the considerations that authors, publishers, and readers undertook in determining the economic and cultural values of texts at this time.<sup>87</sup> Weedon reviews nineteenth-century book publication in general, but the complexities surrounding these calculations only grow when one analyses the value-determination of silver fork novels specifically. The novels had many types of value: value of the entertainment they provided, the celebrity or souvenir value with which a titled author imbued his or her text, the commercial value they held for their publishers, the critical value they had for literature in general, or, most significantly for this genre, the value of upper-class knowledge they could transmit to bourgeois readers. Cheryl Wilson argues that the 'novels did hold considerable value for nineteenth-century readers [...] much of which was self-consciously created by authors and publishers – and this process of creating value is part of what makes the novels relevant for literary study today'.<sup>88</sup> Wilson does not, however, clarify what this value was to readers, authors and publishers, so if one is to discuss silver fork

<sup>84</sup> Theodore Hook, *Sayings and Doings, Second Series*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1825), III, p. 93.

<sup>85</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *The Young Duke*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), I, p. 37.

<sup>86</sup> Mrs Cadell, *The Reformer*, 3 vols (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832), I, p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Weedon, p. 89.

<sup>88</sup> C. Wilson, pp. 2-3.

novels in socio-economic terms, then the value of these novels (value which the genre constructed and referenced with such frequent self-awareness) must be analysed.

Firstly, the value changes based on what consumers believe they are purchasing: the material book itself, entertainment, knowledge, potential for consumer self-improvement, or some combination of all of these. Use-value (specific solely to this genre) may therefore be determined by how well-written the novels were (often poor-to-mediocre, as was overwhelmingly determined by the critical reviewers of the day), how entertaining the novels were (variable), how much knowledge of high society *habitus* they imparted (often a great deal), and the potential for the reader to improve and realistically emulate high society life (very little).

However, these novels provide one further use that overlaps with, but ultimately goes far beyond, entertainment and knowledge: providing the reader with consumable manifestations of aristocrats themselves. Silver fork novels are heavily imbued with and tied to the aristocrats who produced them and populate their pages, so the consumption of these novels, and the use to which one can put their information, is heavily tied to the consumption of aristocrats and the use to which one can put information about their lives. As was argued in the introduction to this thesis, elite groups, through their very nature, elicit attention (driven by criticism, admiration, envy, or anxiety) from those who are not part of that group. Silver fork novels, written always about and often by aristocrats, frequently provided a twofold way for the middle and lower classes to continue this tendency towards class attention, in this case through consumption. As aristocratic identity became more and more wrapped up in the production of these novels through the genre's mining and appropriation of aristocratic culture, lifestyle and knowledge for public or private mimicry, the novels became extensions of aristocrats themselves: they were memorabilia from an individual's life, forged in that individual's mind, containing the individual's voice and perspective, and bearing that individual's name (the name increasing the value of the novel and the novel increasing the value of the name). Authorial or supposed authorial identity is inextricable from silver fork texts, especially if one attempts to understand the social contexts surrounding the novels, as well as to understand their perceived value and, therefore, popularity. In this reading of silver fork novels, one must not only explore the use-value of silver fork novels, but also the represented use-value of aristocrats in general, the former a continuation of the latter.

If one adds into the calculations how well the novels encapsulated the *beau monde*, gave the middle-classes a voyeuristic view into aristocratic lives, and satisfied the demand for upper-class culture, then the use-value of these texts aligns with their popularity and now makes sense from a consumerist perspective. As the introduction to this thesis has demonstrated, an elite group has an intrinsic psychological value for those not in that group, not only from the celebrity, entertainment and envy perspectives, but also because the group's unattainability and elusive distance from the general population makes it easy for the members of that group to become emblematic surrogates for that general population: any wants, worries, or outlooks of the people may be easily projected onto elite forms.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, the silver fork novels are valuable to the public not only by providing the middle class with greater exposure to aristocratic authors (perceived to be a rare 'product'), but also by providing a vehicle by which aristocrats may be widely written, read, and discussed in ways that conform with public needs or ideologies—in this instance, with the desire to code the world in economic terms.

Silver fork novels demonstrate, through their tropes of consumption and commodification, that as the middle classes attempted to legitimise their new positions through the practice of conspicuous consumption, aristocrats began to be represented more frequently as luxury products, as just another of the fashionable consumer goods they were seen to recommend in silver fork narratives. This practice of celebrity commodification is aptly described by Fredric Jameson in *Postmodernism*: Jameson argues that the commodification of objects turns back upon the individuals who are associated with those objects, that celebrities 'are themselves commodified and transformed into their own images'.<sup>90</sup> If, in silver fork fiction, aristocrats are represented as being incessantly concerned with luxury goods, it is only a matter of time before they are transformed in the social consciousness into that image: an object concerned with objects, a Thing whose value is easy to determine.

### **Manufacture and Publishing**

The manufacture and publishing of silver fork novels enabled a complex relationship between consumerism and aristocratic body and identity, a relationship which is often paralleled in the rhetoric of the texts themselves. Marx and Engels write in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) that the *bourgeoisie* 'has resolved personal worth into

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<sup>89</sup> Frazer, p. 202; Braudy, p. 399; P. D. Marshall, p. 203.

<sup>90</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 11



exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade’.<sup>91</sup> The publishing system at the time exemplifies this claim, tempting aristocrats with hundreds and even sometimes thousands of pounds per novel, the price in direct correlation to the aristocrat’s fame, level of title, and ability to demonstrate (or fake) a significant connection to high society; it is the commodification of personal worth at its most basic level. In turn, the public mirrored that commodification through proportional spending: Henry Colburn who, along with his sometimes-partner Richard Bentley, published over half of all silver fork novels and sold the novels he published to circulating libraries for the exorbitant price of 31s. 6d.<sup>92</sup> This price was roughly twice the normal rate of fiction, silver fork and otherwise, from other publishers, a price which libraries paid.<sup>93</sup> Colburn’s advertising strategies created such high demand for his books or for certain authors (in particular Lady Rosina Bulwer-Lytton, whose 1839 *Cheveley* was a tell-all *roman-à-clef* about her public separation from her husband) that the libraries almost always turned a profit.<sup>94</sup> While one could not assume that the success of novels is determined purely by the level of social status or ‘value’ of their authors, Colburn’s extreme focus on marketing and pursuit of upper-class authors speaks to some perception, by Colburn and by his readers, of the high exchange-value of aristocratic novelists. This high exchange-value is hardly surprising, since aristocrats were themselves products that continually produced further products (the silver fork novels), which, in turn, encouraged the further purchase of goods and the reinforcement of the high aristocratic lifestyle which would keep readers returning to silver fork publications for further information.

The parts of the novels which directly engage with aristocratic circles often read as one part trade literature or fashion magazine, one part London directory, and one part *Debrett’s* or *Burke’s Peerage*. It is perhaps telling that *Burke’s Peerage* was first published by none other than Henry Colburn, just as the silver fork school rose to prominence.<sup>95</sup> The two markets very likely fed into each other: *Burke’s* was a useful

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<sup>91</sup> Marx and Engels, p. 222.

<sup>92</sup> The depression of 1843 forced Colburn to reduce his prices down to a tenth, from 31s. 6d. to 3s. 6d., and then later to 2s. 6d. (Weedon, p. 47). This reduction in price was likely in part due to his heavy association with the silver fork genre and its descent in popularity at around the same time.

<sup>93</sup> Rosa less conservatively estimates the number of Colburn’s publications to be nine-tenths of all silver fork novels (p. 178), but Rosa is not clear on what he considers a ‘silver fork’ novel. Given that he only considers eight silver fork novelists worth studying (p. 7), the implication is that his parameters around the genre are narrow; Colburn undoubtedly published the majority of works written by those few authors.

<sup>94</sup> Mulvey-Roberts, ‘Introduction’, p. xiii; Copeland, p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> Rosa, p. 179. Editions of *Debrett’s*, the leading competitor to *Burke’s*, that were published in the 1820s and 1830s had a much older and more established publisher, Rivington.

reference source to have, since most silver fork novels were *romans à clef* and required a ‘key’ to decode, the ‘key’ being a general knowledge of upper-class society; a subscription to *The Morning Post* was another important purchase, since it told or alluded to many of the real-life society announcements and scandals that would eventually become fodder for novelists.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, most of these ‘aristocratic’ products sparked a need for further purchases. Winifred Hughes claims in her article on the silver fork best-seller that these novels ‘exploited the middle-class obsession with the aristocracy’. While Hughes’s claim is reasonable, it is also more complicated than she states: it is difficult to exploit a consumer who defines demand, especially when that demand is voyeuristic and turns people or class identity into a consumable luxury good.<sup>97</sup> Far more exploitative is the reduction of a subset of society—even by the very members of that same subset—to yet another commodity. Cecil, Catherine Gore’s aristocratic narrator of the 1841 novel of the same name, writes in his ‘memoir’: ‘Ten to one, they [readers] will try to Burke [and Hare] my book [...] dissecting me to ornament their hideous museum. Bless their five wits! Every inch of me would be discovered in their dull pages, glittering like diamonds on the brow of some dingy dowager!’<sup>98</sup> By correlating murder and grave-digging with reading, and autopsy with textual criticism and appropriation, Gore shows just how firmly an aristocrat’s book *is* the aristocrat him or herself, at both a bodily and class-identity level; Cecil’s assertion that his identity would be chopped up piecemeal to decorate the *bourgeoisie* and their subsequent works like ‘diamonds’ indicates the middle-class scrambling for aristocratic ‘luxury goods’, even at the expense of the very aristocracy they seek to mimic. The silver fork novels present a mimesis of aristocratic bodies and structures in the production and sale of the books, a mimesis that extends both to the authors who wrote the books and the characters inside them.

### Aristocrats as Objects

It is not just the silver fork novels themselves that parallel an aristocrat’s physical form, but also the objects inside those novels: ‘[S]ilver fork novels become crammed with objects, giving them a distinctly materialist character’, as Wilson notes, but those objects

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<sup>96</sup> *The Morning Post*, as depicted by silver fork novelists, was considered an aristocratic newspaper since it was one of the leading sources for society news. There is hardly a single silver fork novel that does not make reference to this publication as a source for important information regarding the *beau monde*.

<sup>97</sup> Hughes, ‘Silver Fork Writers and Readers’, p. 330.

<sup>98</sup> Catherine Gore, *Cecil, or The Adventures of a Coxcomb* (1841), ed. by Andrea Hibbard and Edward Copeland, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, 6 vols, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), VI, p. 4.

are often listed alongside or in connection to aristocrats.<sup>99</sup> In the anonymous 1827 novel *Hyde Nugent*, the author writes of high society gatherings, '[T]here is rouge, and splendor of dress; and stars are there, and feathers, pearls, and diamonds, eyes of sunny brightness, and locks hyacinthine. Statesmen there are, and generals'.<sup>100</sup> The crowd is defined first in terms of objects, broadened out to include body parts, and then finally and briefly people as a whole are listed. The people themselves are little more than set-dressing, part of the *mise-en-scène* of society, playing the role of 'accessory' to their own accessories. Letitia Landon in *Romance and Reality* (1831) writes, 'Lady Mandeville [...] was born to what she was fit for; she was originally meant to be ornamental, rather than useful. In short, she exactly resembled a plume of ostrich feathers, or a blond dress'.<sup>101</sup> This description not only catalogues Lady Mandeville as an accessory instead of as a human being, but also makes deeply pessimistic socio-economic claims about her use-value, or lack thereof.

Silver fork novels also consciously connect aristocratic names to the concept of brands, mimicking the connection found in real life: the Duchess of Devonshire became connected with the Wedgewood brand after the company named one of its flowerpots after her, while the Duke of Wellington and Admiral Lord Nelson became brands in their own right through mass-produced memorabilia or recovered tokens from the Napoleonic Wars, and numerous other aristocrats and high-profile figures conspicuously used or endorsed (or were said to have used or endorsed) pharmaceuticals, medical treatments, and even physicians.<sup>102</sup> The genre reflects this branding of aristocrats most overtly in Gore's *Cecil*, when Lady Ormington, Cecil's mother, realises her status as a public object, since she objectified her own beauty to gain a title through marriage. She delights in giving her name and identity to items she has worn or with which she is associated: 'fashionable notoriety constituted the object of her desires [...] There was an Ormington *pouf* and an Ormington *ris-à-ris*; an Ormington green and an Ormington minuet'.<sup>103</sup> This branding of the family name raises the Ormingtons in the public consciousness as the public pursues those stylish items, but it ultimately becomes a dubious honour as Lady Ormington ages

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<sup>99</sup> C. Wilson, p. 10.

<sup>100</sup> Anon., *Hyde Nugent*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1827), II, pp. 125-26.

<sup>101</sup> Letitia Elizabeth Landon, *Romance and Reality*, (1831) ed. by Cynthia Lawford, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, 6 vols, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), II, p. 222.

<sup>102</sup> Judith Schneid Lewis, *In The Family Way: Childbearing in the British Aristocracy, 1760-1860* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986), p. 8; Peter W. Sinnema, *The Wake of Wellington: Englishness in 1852* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006), p. 65; Stuart Semmel, 'Tourism, Collecting, and Memory After Waterloo', *Representations*, 69 (Winter 2000) pp. 9-37 (p. 29); Keith Souter, *Medical Meddlers, Mediums and Magicians: The Victorian Age of Credulity* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2012), pp. 21-25, 27-29.

<sup>103</sup> Gore, *Cecil*, p. 9.

and those items simultaneously fall out of fashion. She is forced to continually reinvent herself and to keep her brand fresh, but finds it an unsustainable process and retires from the world; just as with every faddish object, Lady Ormington has her season. All of the fine items in question become extensions of the aristocratic body and identity, with their physicality up for valuation as yet another item in a catalogue.

This correlation of body with brand is not a product purely of a socio-economic reading nor purely of middle-class capitalism. Many aspects of elitism are intrinsically commodified in society in general and amongst the aristocracy in particular; silver fork novels merely serve to underscore, caricature, and exacerbate these conditions further. For instance, the very notion of ranking individuals automatically places them under the constraints of value determination. The grander the title, the more power and potential usefulness the holder of that title has: his or her use- and exchange-values increase. The grander the title, the rarer the individual: rarity is also a component of increasing exchange-value.<sup>104</sup>

It is precisely this intrinsic valuation that the middle class readers and publishers accentuated. If the texts are, in many respects, expressions of aristocratic identity, and aristocratic identity is valued by the level of one's title, then a good indicator of a novel's success should be the title of its author or, if untitled, how closely and publicly the author associates with those who are titled. Authors were indeed read in greater numbers and paid more if they were aristocratic. Copeland points out that 'Sydney Owenson, it was said, waited until her husband-to-be, a physician, had a title, so that she could published more profitably as *Lady Morgan*'.<sup>105</sup> Harriet Devine Jump argues that '[i]f not actually written by aristocrats, the earliest of these novels were generally presented to the public as works which provided an insider's insight into the privileged world of high society [...]. In all these cases, it was the accuracy of the picture of fashionable life that provided the greatest selling point'; Henry Colburn capitalised on this desire for authorial authenticity by recruiting several titled authors including 'Constantine Phipps, Lord Mulgrave (and later Marquis of Normanby) [...] and Lady Charlotte Bury, daughter of the Duke of Argyll'.<sup>106</sup> Readers did buy silver fork novels by non-titled or non-fashionable authors, but the

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<sup>104</sup> There is usually only ever one monarch per realm at a time; in England there can only be 27 dukes at any given moment, whereas earls may number in the hundreds; the lower the rank, the fewer restrictions on who and how many people may possess it.

<sup>105</sup> Copeland, p. 15.

<sup>106</sup> Harriet Devine Jump, 'General Introduction', I, pp. ix-x.

addition of a title confers a level of implied quality, or at least authority as a high-society guide book, onto the text itself.<sup>107</sup>

One silver fork author, Mrs Alexander Blair, even went as far to adopt the *nom de plume* ‘Lady Humdrum’ which, though undoubtedly understood by her contemporary readers to be a fake title, probably preserved enough mystery about her real identity and recalled the *roman à clef* nature of the novels to garner her a higher readership than she likely would have earned as plain Mrs Blair. In fact, toying with the middle-class desire to classify and quantify aristocrats through their identity was one way in which publishers further capitalised on the success of the novels. This is exactly what happened with Benjamin Disraeli, one of the leading silver fork novelists, when he anonymously published *Vivian Grey* (1826); the publicity around the author’s identity skyrocketed him to fame when that identity was eventually discovered.<sup>108</sup> The enticement of discovering a secret was not the only reason why readers read and discussed anonymous texts: they were instructed by the texts themselves that this discussion and speculation was an aristocratic pastime. Disraeli self-reflectively depicted in his anonymous *Vivian Grey* a conversation between two reading fashionables:

“By-the-bye, who is the author of Tremaine?”

“It is either Mr. Ryder, or Mr. Spencer Percival, or Mr. Dyson, or Miss Dyson, or Mr. Bowles, or the Duke of Buckingham, or Mr. Ward, or a young officer in the Guards, or an old Clergyman in the North of England, or a middle-aged Barrister on the Midland Circuit”.<sup>109</sup>

*Tremaine* (1825) was, in fact, written anonymously by Robert Plumer Ward the year before, and silver fork novels are nothing if not intertextual; as one novel becomes the fashion, it then becomes the subject of fashionable discussion in a subsequent novel.<sup>110</sup> The revelation that aristocrats also read silver fork novels was more than a mere instruction for the middle classes to follow suit—it was important to an aristocrat’s social

<sup>107</sup> Tamara S. Wagner, ‘From Satirized Silver Cutlery to the Allure of the Anti-Domestic in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing: Silver Fork Fiction and its Literary Legacies’, *Women’s Writing*, 16:2 (2009), pp.181-90 (pp. 182-83).

<sup>108</sup> C. Wilson, p. 27-28.

<sup>109</sup> Disraeli, *Vivian Grey* p. 49.

<sup>110</sup> Edward Bulwer-Lytton also references *Tremaine* in his 1828 novel *Pelham* (II, p. 89). Lady Erpingham, the female protagonist of Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Godolphin* (1833) is mentioned in Lady Blessington’s 1837 *Victims of Society* (p. 108) as a character in what is apparently a shared universe. Thackeray, in addition to referencing his own characters and works many times in subsequent texts, refers to an ‘old Lady Mary MacScrew’ in his 1846-1847 *The Book of Snobs* (p. 94), an allusion to an old Miss MacScrew in Rosina Bulwer Lytton’s *Cheveley* (1839). The less explicit examples of silver fork intertextuality are too numerous to mention, since they mostly revolve around a character possessing the same last name as one in previous texts; there are a great number of Danverses, Coningsbys, Granbys, Forresters, Cavendishes, De Veres, and Jermyns (as well as those with rhyming or homophonic surnames) that populate silver fork texts.

position to discover who was writing what about whom. James A. Secord writes of aristocratic authors that '[a]nonymity had long been used within court culture to manipulate and maintain the lines between public and private. Authors could be acknowledged within their coteries while not suffering the taint of literary commerce'.<sup>111</sup> While the anonymity of the genre enabled aristocrats to reside in the liminal space between public and private, to be identified somewhere between class culture and consumer product, and to gain fame and money without the 'taint of literary commerce', anonymity had further uses. Aristocratic authors could launch social attacks against others while maintaining a veneer of deniability. The identity of an anonymous author would help provide a key to his or her characters' real-life counterparts, and thus impart more value to the text. Further, if the supposed goal of the middle-class reader was to become a part of high society and to become acquainted with the personalities of this circle, there was no better way to gain that footing than by using these texts to mine identity, to become familiar with voices and writing styles, and to memorize facts and traits, from which one may piece together an identity. Understanding that aristocrats wrote, read, and were the subjects of these texts, the middle classes read them all the more keenly in order to 'be in on the joke', however much that understanding may have been purchased instead of an innate part of their social identity.

### The Business Model of the Aristocracy

Titles are not the only way in which aristocrats are represented as systematically commodified; silver fork novels underscored several other ways, exclusive to the aristocracy, in which class identity was inextricable from use- and exchange-values. One of these was the commodification of aristocrats by the notion of 'house' and family. Individuals are products of their houses, to serve and benefit that house as a representative of the brand. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Ernest Maltravers* (1837) expounds upon the cold and profit-driven nature of aristocratic family: 'For me individually, sire, my relation does not care a rush – but he cares a great deal for any member of his house being rich and in high station. It increases the range and credit of his connexion'.<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Elton Smith's 1836 *The Three Eras of Woman's Life* continues this rhetoric in terms of power instead of money, as an aristocratic mother discusses her daughter's beauty: 'Fifteen years hence she will have ripened into the perfection of beauty. The child is mine [...] It is pleasant to

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<sup>111</sup> James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 180.

<sup>112</sup> Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Ernest Maltravers, or, the Eleusinia* (1837), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851), I, p. 176.

perpetuate my empire in my daughter’, demonstrating that her child is merely an investment, an extension of her own reputation, and a means by which she can maintain familial influence.<sup>113</sup> In the 1827 anonymous novel, *High Life*, another aristocratic mother discusses branding her child appropriately as the ‘product’ develops: “‘Oh! my plan,” said the Countess, “is to give every child two names, and call it the ugly one all its life, unless it bids fair to do justice to the pretty one; for nothing can be more *outré* or ridiculous, than to see a person with a name to which they do not justice”’.<sup>114</sup> Most houses in silver fork fiction not only possess sigils, mottos, or colours to distinguish the ‘brand’, but also inherited markers like family resemblances, personality traits, or hobbies. One’s body becomes indistinguishable from one’s family history and reputation. In Rosina Bulwer-Lytton’s *Cheveley* (1839), the non-aristocratic hero admires the aristocratic heroine by thinking, ‘he had never seen such exquisitely beautiful hands and arms, those unmistakable quarterings of nature’s heraldry’.<sup>115</sup> He divides her into the quarters of her own aristocratic heraldry, so indivisible is her physical body from her social position.

In the world of silver fork fiction, the older a title or the older a family, the more dignity is conferred upon that family. The goal is not only financial profit, but the continual manufacturing of products (through the birth of family members, particularly males) to keep the family on a forward trajectory. In Catherine Gore’s *Mothers and Daughters* (1831), the narrator is sarcastically outraged on behalf of the protagonist, Lady Maria’s, family that Lady Maria was ‘guilty of producing a *daughter* in utter disregard of the Heddeston Court entail! A daughter, however, it was; and [...] a *second* came to magnify the sum total of her disasters!’.<sup>116</sup> The story centres around Lady Maria’s perceived social and familial failure and economic distress after producing three daughters and a single son who does not survive childhood. While the silver fork novels often exaggerate the social notion of despair upon having a daughter, the novels also underscore the real and dire economic consequences for those whose property is legally tied to the production of a son and the continuation of the family business and ‘brand’.

The family-as-business trope was also expanded in silver fork fiction through a discussion of new technology which, in addition to having practical applications, was

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<sup>113</sup> Elizabeth Elton Smith, *The Three Eras of Woman’s Life*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1836), III, p. 105.

<sup>114</sup> Anon., *High Life*, 3 vols (London: Saunders and Otley, 1827), II, pp.192-93.

<sup>115</sup> Rosina Bulwer-Lytton, *Cheveley, or, The Man of Honour* (1839), ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, 6 vols, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), V, p. 312.

<sup>116</sup> Catherine Gore, *Mothers and Daughters*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley 1831), I, p. 13.

often at the forefront of discussions of fad and fashion. With the advent of improved, industrialised travel like trains, better carriages, and McAdamized roads both society families and companies expanded their circle of business.<sup>117</sup> Just as a company could set up branches or franchises in other cities, so were society families able to migrate beyond their estates (or headquarters) with ease, having houses in London for the season, lodges in Scotland for grouse shooting, cottages at the seaside for their health, and villas on the Continent, making their realm of business both rural and urban, domestic and international.<sup>118</sup> While this was not a new practice, the ease of travel and the increasing rigidity of certain social seasons and practices dictated where aristocratic business was being done. To be caught in London after August, for example, was the sign that business was failing. Multiple versions of the same (possibly fictitious) story float around silver fork criticism: as Rosa recounts in his version, a woman insists that the front shades in her London home are always kept down after August, despite continued residency in the home, because she doesn't want neighbours to think she cannot afford to leave the city.<sup>119</sup> Lister paints the bleakest of pictures of life outside of the season in *Granby*:

Who that has visited London in November would ever wish to visit it in that month again? [...] London – half-denuded, smoky London – dense in smoke and thin in population – with an atmosphere that you may handle, and scarcely a pair of fashionable lungs to gasp it down [...] in place of these ornamental, personages swinging their ‘fashionable length of limb’ in slow and solemn saunter, - grave, spare, professional men in black, with half gaiters and green umbrellas.<sup>120</sup>

The city is not only denied glamour in the absence of fashionable people, but also life and purpose. Describing the black-clothed professionals who remain behind as both ‘grave’ and ‘spare’ correlates the working middle classes with death, though it was primarily members of this class who read silver fork novels. Though the quotation from Lister is a reduction of the middle classes into undesirable material, it is also a confirmation of the upper classes as desirable products, products whose desirability stems in part from their rare, unreachable nature: they are available for a short time to the public before disappearing, never allowing the public demand to be fully sated.

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<sup>117</sup> Clare Bainbridge, ‘Endnotes’ in *Granby* by Thomas Henry Lister (1826), ed. by Clare Bainbridge, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, 6 vols, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), I, pp. 371-390, (p. 373, n. 33, n. 34).

<sup>118</sup> The London season officially opened in February, when the Parliamentary session opened, though the season did not become truly fashionable until fox hunting ended in April. The season lasted through July, when Parliament adjourned (Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society*, pp. 217-18).

<sup>119</sup> Rosa, p. 43.

<sup>120</sup> Lister, *Granby*, I, pp. 338-39.



This aristocratic focus on seasonality only reinforces the silver fork novel's tendency to represent aristocrats as luxury products. Cheryl Wilson, using Roland Barthes, argues that '[f]ashion's temporal and ephemeral nature [...] contributes to the cyclical and mechanized nature of the system of fashion in which the attractions of the present are constantly receding into the past and being replaced with something new'.<sup>121</sup> Much like the seasons in high fashion today, there was a highly temporal aspect attached to all facets of aristocratic life: Mrs Ross writes in *The Governess* (1836), 'On the present occasion, all the subjects above alluded to [grouse, partridge, and fox hunting] were "out of season;" and nothing unseasonable, except the delicacies of the table, was authorized at Elphinstone'.<sup>122</sup> In Theodore Hook's *Sayings and Doings, Second Series* (1825), Hook's aristocrats take this temporality a step beyond desire and demand, and into need and identity. Hook writes, 'there are times and seasons when one thing ought to be done, and times and seasons when another thing ought to be done; we must consider our station and dignity, Ma'am, or else what do we live for?'.<sup>123</sup> Not only does Hook's allusion to Ecclesiastes 3:1 ('To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven') take fashionable seasonality into the realm of religious dogma, but the yearning, worrisome question 'what do we live for?' highlights the key issue: what is the use-value of the aristocratic system? In the context of Hook's argument, the use-value is the continuation of the mechanised institution of high living, all other purpose long since dissipated. The maintenance of one's 'station and dignity', in Hook's view, is a cold and dehumanised business dependent on scheduling and seasonal supplies.

'The Season, like the fashionable novel, is somewhat formulaic and predictable, providing a background against which any number of individual dramas and scandals could play out'.<sup>124</sup> It was this very predictability of style and content that encouraged critics to pan most silver fork novels as manufactured products. Even Lord Normanby in his own silver fork novel, *Yes and No* (1828), satirises the genre's tendency towards facsimile and repetition by asking, 'Do you know the modern recipe for a finished picture of fashionable life? Let a gentlemanly man, with a gentlemanly style [a play on both writing style and style as title], take of foolscap paper a few quires; stuff them well with high-sounding titles – dukes and duchesses, lords and ladies, *ad libitum*'.<sup>125</sup> The Season

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<sup>121</sup> C. Wilson, p. 36.

<sup>122</sup> Mrs Ross, *The Governess, or, Politics in Private Life* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1836), p. 28.

<sup>123</sup> Hook, *Second Series*, III, p. 256.

<sup>124</sup> C. Wilson, p. 36.

<sup>125</sup> Constantine Henry Phipps, Lord Normanby, *Yes and No, A Tale of the Day*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), I, pp. 135-36.

and its recurring patterns further connect the aristocrat, whose identity is so coupled with silver fork fiction, to a mechanised existence as both labourer and product. The silver fork genre portrays the system that developed around aristocrats as something upon which their reputations and identities depended and from which they could not escape, creating an endless cycle of routine behaviour leading to business and marriage, which produce capital and products (children), who in turn enter the system. In the case of the aristocracy, the commodities they produce are more aristocrats, as marriageable as possible—though production should be restricted to a certain level in order to keep rarity, and therefore value, up. In the anonymous 1835 novel *Finesse*, two of the characters lament an imprudent and unstylish rate of production: “‘How many children have they, Miss Mush?’ ‘Ten, positively ten!’ she groaned, ‘and the youngest only six months old. Oh! it’s a sin and a shame – quite shocking! Little nasty thing, I have not yet seen it’”.<sup>126</sup> (*Finesse* 2:32-33). While the characters of *Finesse* imply a deficiency in morals or style through having too many children, a character in T.H. Lister’s 1832 *Arlington* takes a more practical approach, seeing too many children as a drain on aristocratic resources: ‘I was a seventh son; he [my father] did not know what in the world to do with me’.<sup>127</sup> The system encourages a process by which labourers (married aristocrats) make products (unmarried aristocrats), which in turn become labourers after sale (marriage).

The exchange-value in this instance is not purely monetary, although money plays an enormous role, as the careful tallying and calculation by silver fork characters of estate incomes, lump sums, annuities, dowries, and potential inheritances, tells the reader. Rather, aristocrats found further exchange-value in titles, social influence, and political power, all of which could be obtained by the same method, marriage, which is really one of the few methods by which an aristocrat could obtain exchange value. The other major way, as has been discussed, was through authorship and the selling of one’s aristocratic self through silver fork fiction, but this did not tend to be as lucrative as a fortunate alliance. Most silver fork novels are marriage plots, partly because the marriage depicts the primary, endless, struggle of aristocratic existence: the familial business alliance which turns a profit or makes an important connection and generates the production of more commodities to place on the market, which, in turn, make more profit and more important connections through wise matches.

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<sup>126</sup> Anon., *Finesse*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1835), II, pp. 32-33.

<sup>127</sup> T.H. (Thomas Henry) Lister, *Arlington: A Novel*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832), I, p. 45.

The Marriage Market: The Female Aristocratic Body

The marriage market is one of the most discussed elements of silver fork fiction, both by scholars and within the texts themselves. Though, as has been suggested, marriage was by no means the only capitalist, consumerist element of the aristocratic system, it was certainly the most overtly mercantile, which is reflected in nearly every silver fork text, as marriage candidates are weighed for economic and fashionable suitability. It could not be put in plainer terms than in *Granby*:

“I ought to tell you that Mrs. Ingleton positively opens her matrimonial bazaar with two new nieces and a cousin next season.”

“She is really inexhaustible,” said Lady Elizabeth, “but I’m afraid the supply rather exceeds the demand. Did you see any thing [*sic*] of the new batch?”<sup>128</sup>

The language of supply and demand, seasonality, and new products not yet on the market, has, in this quotation, exemplified how economics have completely invaded both the social and the domestic spheres and vice versa. The two women holding the discussion were subjected to the same objectification of the marriage market themselves, and yet are happy to continue the discourse of people-as-products in high society; the fluidity and rapidity with which individuals can transform into consumer, labourer, or product is key to understanding how the aristocratic system was represented in silver fork novels. Furthermore, this quotation represents society marriages in such bleakly commercial terms that less explicitly consumerist discussions of marriage in subsequent chapters and novels cannot help but be tainted by it.

Many silver fork novels depict the commodified marriage market in critical and overt tones: for example, Charles White’s 1828 novel *Almacks Revisited* lectures that there ‘is something peculiarly characteristic of the commercial spirit which pervades the people of this country, in thus converting the daughters of a family into mere articles of barter and exportation’.<sup>129</sup> In Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848), objectification of women continues even long after their immediate role in the marriage market is complete. The wife of Sir Pitt Crawley turns from luxury object to an object of perfunctory use: ‘Her roses faded out of her cheeks, and the pretty freshness left her figure after the birth of a couple of children, and she became a mere machine in her husband’s house, of no more use than the late Lady

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<sup>128</sup> Lister, *Granby*, p. 45.

<sup>129</sup> Charles White, *Almacks Revisited, or Herbert Milton*, 3 vols (London: Saunders and Otley, 1828), I, p. 19.

Crawley's grand piano'.<sup>130</sup> Despite the explicitness of these critiques, the utter pervasiveness of capitalist language in the silver fork genre, especially when the genre discusses women or marriage, makes it difficult for the audience to read even the most conventional or banal passages without searching for economic double entendres.

Though both male and female aristocrats equally desire marriage through the constructed requirements of their society, Catherine Gore's eponymous narrator in *Cecil* identifies the slight skewing of market demand towards the male 'product' rather than the female. Cecil says, 'I must have regarded Almack's [a weekly high-society ball] as one regards the slave-market at Tangier or Tunis'.<sup>131</sup> Both sexes are products, and both sexes are consumers in a symbiotic relationship, but men have a higher use-value in this equation due to the aristocratic system of primogeniture; women may contribute money and social connection to and produce children in a marriage, but it is rare that women can hold inheritable titles or entailed estates in their own right. As is demonstrated in Caroline and Henrietta Beauclerk's *Tales of Fashion and Reality* (1836), 'a man raised his wife to his own level in society', not the other way around.<sup>132</sup> Men also had the option of joining the army or running for Parliament, both of which held the potential to increase prestige, rank, and finances without any necessary aid from marriage; a woman's fortune was tied almost solely to the man she married. So while men had higher values inside this system and were perhaps more desirable and hard-to-acquire 'products' for marriage, women were forced to objectify themselves twice as much to make up for their lower use- and exchange-values. The protagonist in Catherine Gore's *Cecil*, who already considered himself a 'slave' to be sold on the marriage market, shows the even more difficult position of women on the same market:

I do not half like the position in which this order of things has placed the poor little dears [i.e., women]! – They are told to be modest, gentle, undesigning; then [...] sent forth to dance and sing for the captivation of passengers, - and threatened with punishment if they return at night unsuccessful from their campaign. – For my part, I never blame them when I see them capering and showing-off their little monkey-tricks for conquest.<sup>133</sup>

Cecil, in placing himself, as a male, in the position of a slave on the marriage market and women in the position of performing monkeys illustrates a very clear gender divide in

<sup>130</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) ed. by John Carey (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 93.

<sup>131</sup> Gore, *Cecil*, p. 304.

<sup>132</sup> Caroline Frederica and Henrietta Mary Beauclerk, *Tales of Fashion and Reality, First Series* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1836), p. 85.

<sup>133</sup> See footnote 78; Gore, *Cecil*, p. 364.

value: he is still human, and worth far more; women are animals, and worth far less. Further, though both groups are literal and metaphorical captives trapped in a greater system, his comparison to slavery implies a greater unwillingness and struggle to be 'sold', while the comparison to performing monkeys implies a certain level of complicity or greater urgency on the part of the monkey (i.e., woman) to sell itself.

The same constructed glamour and reliance upon turning the body into a luxury object is here, in the marriage market, employed by female aristocrats to gain husbands. Short of social connections and a large dowry, the only other use-value that silver fork novels ascribed to female aristocrats within the patriarchal system was their looks, which the novels do not hesitate to describe in terms of purchasable commodities:

[Ladies] are not fond of exposing to investigation the mystery of their washes and pomades [...] Blue veins were sealed in one packet, and a rising blush was corked up in a crystal phial. Eyebrows – eyelashes – lips – cheeks – chin – an ivory forehead, and a pearly row of teeth, - all were [...] furnished by Thévenot.<sup>134</sup>

Marguerite, Countess of Blessington, further elaborates this bodily construction of value in her *Victims of Society* (1837). She writes,

The jetty locks I admired were, I was informed, the properties of the ladies they adorned, only because they had *bought* them; the pearly teeth I praised, were *chefs d'oeuvre* from some fashionable dentist; the dark eye-brows that struck my fancy, owed, I was told, their rich black to the newly invented die [*sic*]; and even the red lips, emulating the hue of coral, had been tinged, as my informant stated, by a chemical preparation.<sup>135</sup>

While these descriptions of constructed female beauty are intended to place it in the light of cold, calculated manufacturing, the description further reinforce the idea of timeliness and seasonality when it comes to aristocrats as luxury goods. These novels endlessly reinforce the message that women had a very short window in which to present themselves as the best available product. This window began in a girl's first season, usually around age 17 or 18 when she 'came out' and was presented at court. The court appearance was the official marker of a girl's appearance on the market as an object for sale. The Countess of Blessington explores this first court appearance in *Victims of Society*, lamenting, 'I have never seen a group of our young *debutantes*, at their first presentation at court, without being reminded of the horses [...] decked in plumes and tinsel [...] preparatory to their

<sup>134</sup> Gore, *Cecil*, p. 11-12.

<sup>135</sup> Marguerite, Countess of Blessington, *Victims of Society* (1837), ed. by Ann R. Hawkins and Jeraldine R. Kraver, *Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841*, 6 vols, series ed. by Harriet Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), IV, p. 48.

exhibition for sale; while those who intend to purchase, flock round to examine their points and paces'.<sup>136</sup> While Blessington aptly depicts the dehumanising aspects of the marriage market and contemplates women as products, she fails to capture the nuance of the female aristocratic role inside that marriage market. Letitia Landon, in *Romance and Reality*, better expresses the duality of the female aristocratic position:

You speak as if you considered a ball matter of pleasure, not business! Do you imagine a girl goes through her first season in London with the view of amusing herself? [...] A young lady in a quadrille might answer, like a merchant in his counting-house, 'I am too busy to laugh – I am making my calculations'.<sup>137</sup>

In this quotation one can see the complex relationships a female aristocrat has both with others in society and with herself, relationships that could be examined in the light of Marx's socio-economic view that, 'labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market'.<sup>138</sup> In Landon's quotation, the female aristocrat 'calculates' (as the labourer) what her product is worth, to whom she should best market her wares, and what qualities of that product she should emphasise in that product's manufacture; of course, the product that she sells is herself, and the feigning of amusement during a ball so she might be put to her best advantage, all the while making calculations, is another form in which labour takes shape in the aristocratic world, forcing human interaction to become merely a calculation for the ultimate goal of profit and production. In the quotation from Blessington, as in her novel's title, the female is the *victim of society*; in Landon's quotation, the uncomfortable reality is that women are both the victims of society and the active (if not necessarily happy or willing) participants in that self-victimisation.

Like many products, the newer the girls were to the market, the more exchange-value they could receive from that market. The more seasons a girl sees, the more outdated she becomes and the lower her exchange-value drops: two seasons in, she should set her sights at lower-ranking aristocrats; three seasons in, the younger sons of aristocrats or wealthy commoners; four seasons in, anyone respectable who will have her. In *Cecil* Catherine Gore becomes metafictional and satirically self-aware of the genre by providing a lengthy guide-within-a-guide for the aspiring debutante, laying out these duties in no uncertain terms:

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<sup>136</sup> Blessington, *Victims*, p. 23.

<sup>137</sup> Landon, p. 103.

<sup>138</sup> Marx and Engels, p. 227.

Q. What is the first duty in life of a well-educated young lady?

A. The first duty in life of a well-educated young lady, is to make an excellent match at the close of her first season [...]. During her first season, she may restrict herself exclusively to eldest sons of peers. On the second, she must include healthy baronets. Should she be so unfortunate as to survive a third, she will have to submit to the necessity of an eligible younger brother.

Q. How is the well-educated young lady to discriminate on a first introduction between an elder and a younger brother?

A. The Elder brother is usually quiet, unpretending, and careful of committing himself. The younger brother is better-dressed, better-looking, gives himself airs, and will probably talk nonsense and squeeze her hand, not being like to be brought to an explanation by her Chaperon.

Q. What course must a well-educated young lady pursue, to insure an excellent match at the close of her first season?

A. She must look and talk as pretty as she can; but avoid the imputation of being a flirt.<sup>139</sup>

This passage is presented satirically as a catechism of capitalism, where young girls are indoctrinated into the quick assessment and maximisation of their own worth, a worth which is largely derived from the quick assessment and market-value of others. Elizabeth Elton Smith continues the rhetoric of female appraisal in her 1836 *The Three Eras of Woman's Life* by writing 'I have always thought there is a certain something [...] a kind of delicate, scarcely perceptible freemasonry, - which enables a woman of any tact to discover immediately, at first sight, whether a man is married or unmarried', implying not only that one's social conditions can be manifested physically, but more significantly the belief in those manifestations and one's ability to comprehend them instantly are a sign of good breeding and personal quality.<sup>140</sup> Again, women's personal worth is reliant in some way upon the worth (or the detection of worth) of others.

Further highlighting these manufactured assets of the female aristocratic 'product' is the emphasis placed on women's accomplishments in fashionable circles. A great number of silver fork novels depict noble young women in moments of leisure, though that leisure is almost always occupied by the production of useless materials, as though women were demonstrating their capacity to manufacture fashion itself: fans, screens, netting, microscopic song books, paintings that will never be hung, and embroidery that will never be displayed. Most female accomplishments are depicted in these novels as

<sup>139</sup> Gore, *Cecil*, pp.289-90.

<sup>140</sup> E. Smith, I, p. 158.

empty facsimiles and rote duplications of great works, in which women can demonstrate their understanding of popular trends and their ability to reproduce fashion in their own lives. The goal is not to innovate, but rather to decide upon and adhere to popular styles. In *Granby*, the daughter of a baronet receives the fashionable advice that ‘you may manufacture any thing [*sic*] – from a cap down to a pair of shoes – always remembering that the less useful your work the better’.<sup>141</sup> In *Romance and Reality*, the female protagonist, Emily, ‘betook herself to the leafy labyrinth of [sewing] a muslin flounce, *la belle alliance* of uselessness and industry’.<sup>142</sup> A noblewoman in the anonymous *The Davenels* (1829) states how little her own desire comes into her self-manufacture when weighing up the benefits of learning versus the benefits of performing accomplishments: ‘I would rather possess accomplishments: learning may be very satisfactory to oneself, but accomplishments are the means of pleasing those one loves’.<sup>143</sup> She is willing to sacrifice learning and a personal sense of worth in exchange for social acceptance through performativity—a performativity which, as the genre points out in dozens of instances, is solely used to bump up the value of women, will stop immediately after purchase (*i.e.*, marriage), and has no legitimate value in nor bears any influence on the greater realms of art, music, and manufacturing. She ‘pleases’ through busy and staged uselessness, lack of use (synonymous with luxury and decadence) being one of the aristocratic use-values.

Despite the uselessness of what they manufacture, the lives of female aristocrats are depicted in silver fork novels as production-centric. These illustrations of female lives demonstrate a societal feverishness for women to display their personal accomplishments to the men who will ‘purchase’ them in marriage. These accomplishments highlight their status as ‘products who produce’, with the production of baubles and frippery coming to stand in for the *real* use-value of producing and raising children.<sup>144</sup> Of course, the production of children is a use-value that cannot be tested until after ‘purchase’ (at least not without scandal), so accomplishments hold a two-fold symbolic value: firstly by demonstrating a woman’s social competency in understanding and being able to reproduce items of high fashion, and secondly through coding that woman as a centre of activity and output, who will likely continue her productivity through the creation of children. A young woman in the aristocratic system is twice the product and twice the labourer a male

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<sup>141</sup> Lister, *Granby*, p. 37.

<sup>142</sup> Landon, p. 10.

<sup>143</sup> Anon., *The Davenels, or, a Campaign of Fashion in Dublin*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1829), I, p. 141.

<sup>144</sup> Anthea Callen, ‘Sexual Division of Labor in the Arts and Crafts Movement’, *Woman’s Art Journal*, 5:2 (Autumn 1984 – Winter 1985), pp. 1-6 (p. 1).



aristocrat is, due to primogeniture and reproductive time restraints. It is critical that female aristocrats capitalise upon their use- and exchange-values in a timely manner, to produce more female aristocrats for the market.

### Conclusion

Silver fork novels underscored and sometimes even championed the inherent materialist aspects of life in high society and, as an extension, the inherent materialist aspects of life in middle-class society which was supplanting aristocratic predominance in early nineteenth-century Britain. It was these very inherent materialist aspects of high society life which made aristocratic bodies such a understandable, easily-codeable locus for discussions of money and value in the widely shifting socio-economic landscape.

However, the business model which reduced human bodies into products and class identity into ‘luxury goods’—especially in the lifestyle guide form of the silver fork genre—proved to be an ultimately unsatisfying consumer experience, since the bodies of others cannot be owned and *habitus* cannot be purchased: no matter how many silver fork novels middle-class consumers read, those novels were never going to transform the consumer into an aristocrat. The average reader was never going to pull away from the crowd to ascend the social ladder; the novels were mass-produced for a large middle-class readership, so one’s peers gained the same knowledge at the same time, continually levelling the field for all social climbers. This left the reader ultimately no better off than he or she was before buying the product, the genre’s popularity devaluing its own use-value (unknown to or disregarded by the consumer); at best, these novels allowed consumers to keep up with knowledge as it emerged to the general public, but never enabled them to learn of it first-hand or, more significantly, to create or be the subject of new fashions, scandals, or events. This dissatisfaction left middle class consumers with an unfilled demand, for which publishers produced a monumental supply; the raw material of this supply was, as has been explored, the aristocrat and the representations of their bodies. It is therefore middle-class desire for cultural appropriation that is at the heart of this commodification—a commodification that, while intrinsically present in some aristocratic structures throughout all of history, was brought to the socio-economic foreground in the early nineteenth century, and (despite the silver fork genre ending in the 1840s) it has yet to begin its retreat.

## Chapter 2 – “Unblessed by Offspring”: Fertility and the Aristocratic Male in Reynolds’s *The Mysteries of the Court of London*

### Introduction

The quotation which titles this chapter is found, in some form or another, in reference to nearly every aristocratic couple in G.W.M Reynolds’s 1840s-1850s serialised radical melodrama.<sup>145</sup> Reynolds’s text frankly and bluntly places the blame for infertility upon the male partner, creating an underlying message that ‘the miserable husband is impotent’.<sup>146</sup> This chapter analyses the manifestations of endemic aristocratic infertility in Reynolds’s work and explores Reynolds’s socio-political necessity of promoting such an extreme medicalised perspective of upper class men. Literary critic Len Platt argues that the medicalisation of aristocratic male characters in Victorian literature (usually through sexual diseases, gout, and poor mental health) was merely a common trope or ‘narratological hoop’ through which the characters were jumped in order to demonstrate the moral failings of the upper classes.<sup>147</sup> While Reynolds certainly utilises all of these literarily common ‘class’ illnesses for the purpose of demonstrating the moral failings of the aristocracy, his usage and coding of the aristocratic body is far more complex than Platt allows. While Reynolds was not the first author or political activist to portray aristocratic bodies in a negative, medicalised light, his contributions to this trope adhere to a significant pattern in the larger discourse of early nineteenth-century perceptions of aristocratic biopolitics, in which the ‘regulation of biological processes and functions became increasingly important to policy makers and public health campaigners in the course of the nineteenth century’.<sup>148</sup> This is especially true at the time of Reynolds’s writing, in which policy and power seemed to be the most directly tied to medicine, biology, and masculinity: 1832 reform bill, the Chartist movement, European revolutions, and the British primogeniture debates of the 1830s and 1840s often led to ‘the subject of gender and masculinity, for the debate over who should rule often devolved into a debate over who belonged to that privileged group called “men”’.<sup>149</sup> Aristocratic bodies, which

<sup>145</sup> G.W.M. Reynolds, *The Mysteries of the Court of London* (1848-1856). 10 vols (Boston, MA: The Oxford Society, 1920), I, p. 376; III, p. 102; III, p. 236; IV, p. 146; VI, p. 19; VI, p. 440; VI, p. 441; VII, p. 19; X, p. 446-47.

<sup>146</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, IV, p. 392.

<sup>147</sup> Platt, p. xiv.

<sup>148</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain 1880-1939* (Oxford Scholarship Online, January 2011). DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199280520.001.0001>

<sup>149</sup> David Rosen, ‘The volcano and the cathedral: muscular Christianity and the origins of primal manliness’, in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed. by Donald E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 17-44 (p. 21).

had previously been literary conduits for discussions of economic power in the silver fork novels, are here used in the same way for discussions of moralistic, medicalised masculinity and primogeniture.

Of all Reynolds's varied arguments against the aristocratic establishment, his richest and most complex point of attack is found in his focus on impotence and infertility. Children are conspicuous by their absence from the text. Until the very end of the series, none of the dozens of aristocratic characters is able to produce a single child in wedlock. Though many illegitimate children are begotten by both male and female nobles, the aristocrats' socio-legal emphasis on primogeniture only qualifies children by their legitimacy, with legitimate male children being the surest means of the line's survival and the most definite proof of masculine virility. Reynolds states in several ways that the infertility or impotence lies with the male. This statement seeks to undermine the aristocracy in popular opinion, since, as will be explained, the attack on the male engages directly with Victorian mores of masculinity, including effective leadership, and control. Infertility inside of wedlock is presented by Reynolds as a badge of both immorality and ill-health. By impugning aristocratic reputations on the basis of fertility, Reynolds is able to underscore some very real concerns of the populace. Many of his readers were still able to remember the various succession crises from 1817 to 1837 which were brought about by the infertility of George III's children.<sup>150</sup> It is against this background that Reynolds presents his argument: that rule by primogeniture does not work even at its most basic, biological level and should be eradicated from the political system.

Though rarely read today, G.W.M. Reynolds was one of the early Victorian era's most popular authors.<sup>151</sup> His 'writing became increasingly popular in the colonies, across Europe and in the United States, where he was widely pirated, plagiarized and imitated' and his obituary in *The Bookseller* called him 'the most popular writer' of his time.<sup>152</sup> His

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<sup>150</sup> Of George III's fifteen children, only three produced any living, legitimate offspring, not counting George IV's daughter, Princess Charlotte, who survived until adulthood only to die in childbirth.

<sup>151</sup> For comprehensive overviews on Reynolds's work, see Trefor Thomas, 'Introduction' to *The Mysteries of London* by G.W.M. Reynolds (1844-48), ed. by Trefor Thomas (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996), pp. vii-xxiv, and 'Rereading G.W. Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London* in *Rereading Victorian Fiction*, ed. by Alice Jenkins and Juliet John (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 59-80; Anne and Louis James, *G.W.M. Reynolds: Nineteenth Century Fiction, Politics, and the Press* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Ian Haywood, 'George W.M. Reynolds and The Trafalgar Square Revolution: Radicalism, the Carnavalesque and Popular Culture in Mid-Victorian England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 7 (2002), pp. 23-59; and Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, 'Spectacular Women: *The Mysteries of London* and the Female Body', *Victorian Studies*, 40:1 (Autumn, 1996), pp. 31-64, among just a few.

<sup>152</sup> Anne Humpherys and Louis James, 'Introduction', in *G.W.M. Reynolds: Nineteenth Century Fiction, Politics, and the Press*, ed. by Anne Humpherys and Louis James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 1-15 (p.6); 'Obituary', *The Bookseller*, 3 July 1879, pp. 600-01 (p. 600).

most widely-read texts, *The Mysteries of London (MoL)* and its prequel, *The Mysteries of the Court of London (MoCL)*, were serialised from 1844 to 1856, generating weekly sales estimated between 30,000 and 40,000 at the beginning of their runs, and later estimated by Reynolds around 200,000.<sup>153</sup> These serials were equal parts silver fork novel, Newgate novel, radical propaganda, and soft-core pornography. With dozens of characters and storylines bridging the gaps between classes, from the monarchy and the poorest of criminals, *MoL* and *MoCL* attracted nearly as diverse a readership.<sup>154</sup> The second serial, *MoCL*, revolves around twenty years in the life of George IV during his days as Prince of Wales and Prince Regent and focuses far more heavily on the lives of the aristocracy, as well as expressing far more anxiety about leadership through aristocratic bodily dynamics than *MoL* does.<sup>155</sup> It is for this reason this chapter will focus exclusively to Reynolds's later work. This anxiety felt by Reynolds, who had a background in Chartism and French Republicanism, enabled him to disburse a major part of his political agenda: to unmask aristocrats as unhealthy voluptuaries ill-suited to the government of a nation:

By the living God, all this [aristocratic injustice] is intolerable [...] it assuredly is far more than sufficient to make ye chartists, republicans, and communists [...] But, no; the working men of England require not sophistry [...] to account for the evils which they endure. The causes are too palpable, too glaring, too apparent [...] for the causes thus alluded to exist in [...] chiefly our aristocracy, with its hereditary titles and its law of primogeniture, its usurpation of all the governmental and administrative powers of the state, its heartless tyranny and its cold-blooded avarice, its voluptuousness and luxury, maintained at the expense of starving millions.<sup>156</sup>

Undoubtedly, not all of Reynolds's readers agreed with his political propaganda, nor sought out the texts for that purpose; politics aside, his use of the urban gothic made his serials thrilling to read, and some of Reynolds's most enthusiastic readers and collectors were part of the aristocracy themselves, like the first Baron Queensborough who proudly affixed his coat of arms to his bound volumes.<sup>157</sup> However, Reynolds was notably adept in

<sup>153</sup> Berry Chevasco, 'Lost in Translation: The Relationship between Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* and G.W.M. Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London*', in *G.W.M. Reynolds: Nineteenth Century Fiction, Politics, and the Press*, ed. by Anne Humpherys and Louis James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 135-47 (p. 140); Reynolds, *MoCL*, III, p. 91.

<sup>154</sup> Thomas, 'Introduction', (pp. xv-xvii).

<sup>155</sup> I will be using The Oxford Society's privately-bound 10-volume edition of *MoCL* from 1920 and will cite references by volume and page number instead of by their original weekly publication date. It is ironic, given Reynolds's stance on the inevitable destruction of the aristocracy, that the few bound volumes of his work produced for middle- and upper-class collectors had more physical longevity than the inexpensive weekly papers produced for lower-class citizens. There are few, if any, complete and surviving collections of *MoL* or *MoCL* in newspaper form.

<sup>156</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, III, p. 186.

<sup>157</sup> Thomas, 'Rereading', (p. 59).

the business of newspaper publishing and knew what viewpoints would sell copy to his particular group of readers.<sup>158</sup> He founded many publications, his *Reynolds's Newspaper* 'stood alone as the most popular and stable radical weekly', and the serials enjoyed twelve years of continuous popularity; his anti-aristocratic writings catered to a large audience, and the texts may be interpreted today as representing a section of popular opinion against the titled class at that time.<sup>159</sup> As the silver fork genre had demonstrated from the 1820s until the early 1840s, there was a large demand for works which simultaneously censured and glamorised the vices endemic in wealthy communities, condemning the aristocracy while still encouraging envy and awe of them. Despite his radical politics, even Reynolds himself fell prey to the allure of the upper classes and developed 'an aristocratic taste for good living'.<sup>160</sup>

In fact, many of the vagaries and contradictions expressed through aristocratic bodies in the silver fork novels crop up again in Reynolds's highly dissimilar popular fiction, in slightly different guises; the aristocratic body again proves to be an excellent canvas upon which complex social issues and perspectives may be played out. Though Reynolds encourages an uprising of those who 'are oppressed, enslaved, and trampled upon by the arrogant, indolent, and tyrannical aristocracy' and disparages monarchs like '[t]hat dreadful King, George III, in comparison with whom Nero was an angel and Caligula a saint', Reynolds romanticises the aristocracy, and thereby encourages his readers' desire to emulate them.<sup>161</sup> Though he rails against any inherited status, his plots frequently offer titles and wealth to his moral, middle-class characters as the reward for good behaviour. This paradoxical reward system confusingly implies both that leadership and status should be earned individually, and that inheritable power is the ultimate prize. Rohan McWilliam, historian of Victorian radicalism, succinctly summarises these innate contradictions by saying that, to Reynolds and his readers, the aristocracy was 'the one group in society that is perceived as truly free': while freedom on one hand implied glamour and empowerment, it also spoke of aristocratic independence from feudal

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<sup>158</sup> Thomas reports a record in Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* of working-class people reading Reynolds aloud and 'cursing the aristocracy' ('Rereading', p. 59); this became a regular social event for many of the newly-literate lower classes, who found enjoyment in literature written specifically with their views and interests in mind.

<sup>159</sup> Michael H. Shirley, 'G.W.M. Reynolds, *Reynolds's Newspaper* and Popular Politics', in *G.W.M. Reynolds: Nineteenth Century Fiction, Politics, and the Press*, ed. by Anne Humpherys and Louis James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 75-89 (p. 75); Thomas, 'Introduction', p. xvi.

<sup>160</sup> Humpherys and James, p. 4.

<sup>161</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, VII, p. 113; V, p. 54.

<sup>161</sup> Rohan McWilliam, 'The French Connection: G.W.M. Reynolds and the Outlaw Robert Macaire', in *G.W.M. Reynolds Nineteenth Century Fiction, Politics and the Press*, ed. by Anne Humpherys and Louis James, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 33-49 (p. 46).

responsibility and a denial of the obligations they owed to the populace. This simultaneous reinforcement and undoing of the cultural hegemony of the nobility, even in the most radical anti-aristocratic literature, illustrates the complexity of perceptions of the aristocracy as both an institution and as a literary trope.

### Masculinity and *Mysteries*

Though Reynolds's use of gender and sexuality in *MoCL* is complex, it is not necessarily sophisticated. His plots and extended bodily tropes indicate a confusion of biological function with contemporary cultural mores, and he provides no definitions nor adheres to any strict word-choice in his rhetoric on the body, gender, and sexuality. Since he relies on reproductive biology as a baseline for subjectively calculating health, normality, and social suitability, quotations from *MoCL* may contain terminological overlap; however, in the framework of my criticism on Reynolds, I have applied a strict biology/culture schism between the terms 'male' or 'man', and terms such as 'manhood,' 'unman,' 'manliness' and 'masculinity'. The former implies a biological classification, the latter a set of cultural ideals or identities. While such a definition might go without saying in the realm of modern gender studies, it is necessary to define in the context of this own work so the definition may therein provide clarity to that of Reynolds's.

The masculine models celebrated or disparaged in *MoCL* are more clearly defined by Reynolds, who venerates the working-class men who '[r]ise early, [and] toil hard all day', while he abhors 'the pampered, insolent, overbearing aristocrat'.<sup>162</sup> James Eli Adams explores in his influential work on Victorian masculinity, *Dandies and Desert Saints*, that the idealised roles of manhood in the Victorian era included but were not limited to the 'gentleman, dandy, priest, prophet, soldier, and professional'.<sup>163</sup> There is, of course, no single, unified Victorian concept of what it meant to culturally embody one's sex. Manhood could be in contrast to womanhood, boyhood, or animal baseness; for Reynolds, manhood was in contrast to all three. Reynolds's texts are purveyors of Republicanism, middle-class morality, and the Protestant work ethic. As such, they subscribe to a type of heteronormative masculine identity which was best summarised by John Ruskin—though there is otherwise no connection between Ruskin and Reynolds—in 1865 essay, "Of Queen's Gardens": that the 'man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation

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<sup>162</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, III, p. 186.

<sup>163</sup> James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 15.

and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest'.<sup>164</sup> This is a vision of masculinity which many critics consider characteristic of the Victorian period: that the 'Victorian period registered the most extreme form of gender segregation yet seen in an industrialized nation'; that 'self control, restraint and distance became the hallmarks of ideal masculine identity'; that 'the meaning of masculinity was self-evident and it involved emotional reserve and physical discipline'; that the 'healthy man is strong, assertive, tolerant, moderate in his appetites, hard-working, adventurous, responsible, and wise'.<sup>165</sup> It is significant to a reading of Reynolds that these definitions are all largely based in notions of middle-class manhood.<sup>166</sup> Therefore the aristocracy (frequently portrayed in literature and art as leisured, concerned with fashion, and of immoderate appetites) was sometimes seen as lacking in masculinity, a trope or perception that Reynolds exploited in his own literature for his personal politics. In particular for Reynolds's working-class audience, the aristocracy in general, and certainly in Reynolds's representations of them, would have been seen as effeminate.<sup>167</sup>

This is, of course, only one-half of a binary set up in Reynolds's discourse on gender. He does address biological and medical issues surrounding his female characters as well. However, since his treatment of femininity is equally complex, but less concerned with fertility, transgressions of the body, and Republican politics, I will discuss the other half of this binary only as it directly concerns male reproduction.

Reynolds challenges the manhood of his aristocratic characters and deprives them of fertility through a combination of two processes: 'feminisation' and 'emasculatation'. Reynolds does not name them as such, but the processes are very distinct in his work. Feminisation occurs when Reynolds applies physical and behavioural traits he considers feminine to a male character: physiological frailty, female beauty, vanity, and lack of agency. On the other hand, his process of emasculatation is characterised by the symbolic neutering of a male character by depriving him of that which Reynolds considers masculine: sexual virility, reproductive potency, personal agency, strength, and hardiness.

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<sup>164</sup> John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens' in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: George Allen, 1897), pp. 87-143 (p. 107).

<sup>165</sup> Martin A. Danahay, *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) p. 2; John Potvin, *Material and Visual Cultures Beyond Male Bonding, 1870-1914: Bodies, Boundaries and Intimacy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 2; Andrew Dowling, *Manliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 1; Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, 'Introduction' in *Gender, Health and Popular Culture*, ed. by Cheryl Krasnick Warsh (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), pp. vii-xvii (p. viii).

<sup>166</sup> Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 11.

<sup>167</sup> Ying S. Lee, *Masculinity and the English Working Class* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007; repr. 2013), p. 33.

Feminisation adds traits, emasculation subtracts; the former creates a character with the capacity to be either gender, the latter neither. Both are utilised for the same end: to imply a disrupted or disturbed physiology which has a direct impact on one's health, fertility and suitability to rule. Though Reynolds's aristocratic male characters are often confused and wavering about the state of their bodies and masculinity (and therefore its connection to politics, health, and morality), Reynolds is confident in his own cultural constructs, foiling his own male characters. Gender theorist Harry Brod, working from sociologist Michael Kimmel, sheds light upon Reynolds's treatment of gender norms as clearly defined, saying that 'for a man to admit that he has questions about masculinity is already to admit that he has failed at masculinity'.<sup>168</sup> While John Tosh argues that definitions of bourgeois masculinity in the nineteenth century were in no way certain or unified, in Reynolds's work there is no room for ambiguity, uncertainty, or vacillation when it comes to gender and, by Reynolds's personal extension, political power.<sup>169</sup> Signs of gender liminality are, to Reynolds, indicative of corruption or illness.

Though Reynolds plays with notions of gender, sexuality, and identity through the bulk of his work, there are three characters which represent three distinct junctures within his arguments about aristocratic fertility and gender polarity: Lord Florimel, the Earl of Desborough, and the Prince Regent. The lives of these men and their inability to produce children in wedlock characterise the potential outcomes of the aristocratic life-cycle, as perceived by Reynolds. He uses their fates as proof of the validity of his Republican politics, which argues strongly against inherited power, since, 'Depravity would seem to run in their blood, and to be as traditionary as their titles and estates'.<sup>170</sup> By using gendered medicine to critique the aristocracy, Reynolds is able to manipulate his reader's assumed conventional mores regarding family values, gender binaries, and bodily norms into a nuanced political argument. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla argue in their work on body deviance that there was a strong nineteenth-century belief that one's moral character was rooted in biology, which led to society's 'feverish desire to classify forms of deviance, to locate them in biology, and thus to police them in the larger social body'.<sup>171</sup> The following sections on feminisation and emasculation, therefore, explore forms of

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<sup>168</sup> Harry Brod, 'Studying Masculinities as Superordinate Studies' in *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory*, ed. by Judith Kegan Gardiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 161-75 (p. 162).

<sup>169</sup> John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), p. 39.

<sup>170</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, VII, p. 11.

<sup>171</sup> Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, 'Introduction: Mapping Embodied Deviance', in *Deviant Bodies*, ed. by Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp.1-18 (p. 1; p. 12).



deviance in the aristocratic male body, how deviance affects fertility, and how Reynolds classifies and polices these individuals in the larger social and political body.

### **Feminisation**

Lord Florimel represents the feminised male aristocrat in *MoCL*. He is one of Reynolds's least gender-polemic males, being a dandy who takes his sexual pleasure by dressing as a woman, 'Gabrielle', in order to gain the trust of and then seduce honourable women: "[W]e will be friends, bosom friends, Gabrielle, will we not?" "Till death!" Replied the nobleman. "And now let us seal our friendship with a kiss".<sup>172</sup> To Reynolds's assumed reader, this single predilection not only makes Florimel a cad, but also a sexual deviant. Apart from denoting homosexual tendencies (which may overlap, but are inherently unaffiliated, with transvestism—a distinction which Reynolds does not and could not make), Florimel's cross-dressing also conjures thoughts of lesbianism, since he is performing femininity during the sexual conquest of another woman.<sup>173</sup> This performance makes the heterosexual character appear to be a homosexual for both genders, creating a sub-duality even inside his already-present sexual dyad.

One is able to see his duality on the surface, beginning with his names: 'Florimel' is his ancestral surname which should be given to the sons who will continue his line, but 'Florimel' also means 'honey-flower' and is the name of a female character in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. His first name, Gabriel, should indicate that he, like the archangel, is a harbinger of the births of important men. However, if one takes the biblical reference to its logical conclusion, the archangel is incapable of producing offspring of his own and merely announces the arrival of a moral, lower-class man who will rise to supreme leadership. In addition, Florimel feminises his male name by the addition of feminine qualities onto the masculine base: Reynolds specifically draws attention to Florimel's addition of extra letters to the pronunciation of his name: 'with that stress upon the final syllable of the Christian name [...] "Gabrielle Florimel," said the nobleman [...] laying a stronger emphasis on the "el"'.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, I, p. 175.

<sup>173</sup> The concept of transvestism did not even appear until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dr Magnus Hirschfeld, German sexologist, coined the term in his 1910 publication, *The Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2003). His study was the first scientific work to conclude that the practice of cross-dressing was, in fact, divorced from the state of homosexuality. Previous to this definition, cross-dressing was viewed as a lewd and criminal act tied almost solely to the realm of male homosexual prostitution. See Vern L. Bullough's 'Transvestism: A Reexamination', *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, 4:2 (1991), pp. 53-67, (p. 53).

<sup>174</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, I, p. 170.

Reynolds does not hesitate to locate this deviance far beyond Florimel's behaviour and in Florimel's body itself. The depictions of Florimel's physicality are almost caricatures of feminine beauty:

a razor had never touched his cheeks, which has all the damask and peachlike loveliness peculiar to the softer sex. His complexion was singularly fair, clear, and stainless; his nose was small and perfectly straight, his lips were red and full, and his teeth brilliantly white and faultlessly even. His neck was long and gracefully turned, his ears remarkably small and delicate. He wore his rich chestnut hair flowing in a wavy mass over his shoulders; and as it was parted with great precision above the high and open forehead, its arrangement completed the feminine appearance of the youthful noble's countenance [...] For beautiful he indeed was,—not handsome [...] Florimel was very short for a man [...] and nothing could exceed the delicate whiteness of his hands and the diminutive modeling of his feet. His voice corresponded with this feminine style of beauty.<sup>175</sup>

The long accounts of Florimel's delicate beauty are purposefully gender-ambiguous, which only emphasise their transgressiveness; in his first series, *MoL*, one of Reynolds's main plots involved an attractive young man who turned out to be secretly a woman: 'He was a youth, apparently not more than sixteen years of age [...] his countenance, which was as fair and delicate as that of a young girl [...] was framed by his] long, luxuriant hair, of a beautiful light chestnut colour'.<sup>176</sup> Since Reynolds constructs many of the same ambiguities around Florimel in *MoCL* (even their hair is the same colour and worn in the same way), it is not immediately clear that Florimel is actually male. Given the lightly pornographic nature of the work, Florimel's gender-ambiguous deviance may even extended to and 'corrupt' the reader, who may assume through Reynolds's prompting toward sexual attraction that Florimel is a woman in disguise; in this way, Reynolds's working-class readership can feel the direct effects of the transgressive aristocratic bodily upon themselves and its 'contamination' of their own morality.

By the time Florimel is introduced in the text, other beautiful women have already been described in identical language; of the Clarendon sisters alone, one of whom becomes Florimel's wife, Reynolds says, 'their complexions were equally fair and beautiful [...] Their foreheads were high and open, their mouths small, and with lips red and ripe as cherries, and their teeth of pearly whiteness'.<sup>177</sup> Describing Florimel as 'peachlike' is meant to further pervert his gender and fertility—by relating his good looks in terms of fruit, Reynolds subverts a common metaphor for a sexual and fecund woman,

<sup>175</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, I, p. 134.

<sup>176</sup> Reynolds, *MoL*, I, p. 7.

<sup>177</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, I, p. 24.

just as he did when describing the Clarendon sisters' lips as 'cherries'. Florimel is the embodiment of a fertile woman, though his reality as a male makes it impossible for him to bear children. This infertility is compounded when the text simultaneously admits that he will never father children, either. Early in the series Reynolds indicates that, since Florimel's roguery and depraved habits render him incompatible with a gender-normative marriage, his line would almost assuredly end with him. 'Possessed of immense wealth, and with no parents nor elderly relatives to advise him, he devoted all his time and all his thoughts to the pleasures of love', showing that Florimel too well enjoys his autonomy away from the pressures and responsibilities of the family unit.<sup>178</sup> He also lacks the loyalty, reliability, or maturity which *should* be requisite for marriage and the successful rearing of children; instead he is '[f]ickle, inconstant, and easily excited by a new and pretty face'.<sup>179</sup> Everything about Florimel revolves around transitory pleasure and transgression, in direct opposition to the wholesome and long-lasting happiness that Reynolds implies is found in gender-binary family life. Creating a clear cause and effect, Reynolds introduces Florimel as an extremely feminised character and then states, 'He was unmarried and likely to remain so; for the idea of linking himself to one woman was, in his estimation, something too dreadful to contemplate', the implication being that if Florimel married, it might impede his association with the other women in his life—both the ones he conquered and the one he performed.<sup>180</sup>

The redemption of Florimel's fertility becomes one of the major subplots during the first five volumes of *MoCL*. Having met the beautiful but stubbornly virtuous Pauline Clarendon, one of the protagonists of the series, he chooses to reject his empty aristocratic life and prove his middle-class masculine worth to her through a total realignment of his body and behaviour. When circumstances force him to don female attire again for the sake of an intrigue, he sustains a concussion and becomes an invalid for three days. The immediate and severe repercussions serve as a warning: sexual 'sickness' breeds physical sickness. That he calls himself 'Miss Plantagenet' during his final instance of transvestism further ties this behaviour to the unhealthy, lewd aristocracy.<sup>181</sup> From that moment, his character rebuffs all that is feminine—Reynolds's focus transfers from Florimel's looks to his actions, from a body coded as a feminine visual object to a body coded as a masculine source of action. Reynolds celebrates Pauline as one half of a gender binary, for her

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid, I, p. 135.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, I, p. 134.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, I, p. 135.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, IV, p. 205.

idealistic womanhood inspires Florimel into idealistic manhood: “‘If I be thus changed, Pauline [...] it is your bright example that has worked so salutary an effect’”.<sup>182</sup> Their relationship undergoes several tests, but he never falters in his new devotion to middle-class morality and they ultimately marry at the end of Volume 5.

Though he is rescued from his decadent lifestyle by their marriage, the damage to his fertility seems to already have been done. When Volume 6 begins, set nearly twenty years later, they ‘remained unblessed by offspring’, though the logistics of the plot would not have been impeded by the presence of children.<sup>183</sup> Reynolds is quick to blame his characters for their infertility, and the background evidence he provides makes Florimel culpable, instead of his wife, Pauline. Where Florimel is in fact the last of his line (indicating a hereditary struggle with fertility), Pauline has a sister who gave birth to a daughter, Florence. In later volumes, Florimel makes Florence his heir, for lack of a better candidate: as ‘Lord Florimel had no children of his own, he soon learned to love little Florence as dearly as if she were his daughter’.<sup>184</sup> Her heiress status, along with the details of her aristocratic birth and upcoming aristocratic marriage, means that Florence is the last hope for the continuation of at least four noble lines. Her untimely death in the last volume means the complete extinction of those lines, of which Florimel’s is chief.

Denying Florimel the capacity for reproduction, Reynolds casts a pall on the character’s health. The childless life Florimel had predicted for himself before marriage became the life he could not alter after marriage. Since he and Pauline look similar (their physicality being described in the same language), Reynolds implies a certain fruitless, masturbatory solipsism in Florimel’s attraction to his wife. Further and more significantly, transvestism was punishable under the law, as it was associated almost solely with homosexuality, and especially with homosexual prostitution.<sup>185</sup> Therefore, Jennifer Terry’s argument in her work on nineteenth-century science and homosexuality can easily be applied to Florimel, whose masturbatory relationship and early transvestite (read: homosexual) activities were both seen as acts of ‘self-pollution [which] drained the male body of its vitality and left no offspring to show for it [It led] to a point of no return, leaving the ‘youthful sinner’ [...] in a state of ‘physical impotence’ that made an

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, I, p. 194.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, VI, p. 440.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, VI, p. 441.

<sup>185</sup> Susanne Davies, ‘Sexuality, Performance, and Spectatorship in Law: The Case of Gordon Lawrence, Melbourne, 1888’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7:3 (January 1997), pp. 389-408 (p. 393).

adjustment to heterosexual relations impossible'.<sup>186</sup> To Reynolds, deviant behaviour is inextricably linked with one's biological make-up, and immorality is a form of incurable sickness; one can be socially redeemed, but physiology cannot be amended.

### Emasculation

On the opposite end of Reynolds's gender-and-bodily-deviance spectrum is the Earl of Desborough, the most clearly emasculated character in the series. He is also the only character around whom Reynolds centres a frank and largely non-symbolic discussion about reproductive issues. Most other characters' infertility is only alluded to; for example, two noblemen who have proved incapable of begetting children in wedlock are described as frequent smokers, constantly 'impregnating the air with the smoke of their cigars'.<sup>187</sup> This ephemeral, impermanent impregnation is the only type they can generate with their phallic cigars which, by their very nature, diminish into ash. However, the Earl's situation is described in language of remarkable clarity as 'the lamentable physical misfortune which rendered me unfit for marriage, well knowing, in fact, that ten thousand sources of misery would eventually be summed up in the terrible word impotency'.<sup>188</sup>

Unlike some aristocrats in the series (including the Prince Regent, Letitia Lade, the Duchess of Devonshire, and the Marquis of Holmsford), the Earl of Desborough likely had no single real-life counterpart (there is no earldom associated with Desborough), though Reynolds may have had an historical basis for the character. He may have been referencing the Earldom of Desmond, which went extinct three times in rapid succession in the seventeenth century, before ultimately being swept under the umbrella of a grander title and then largely ignored.<sup>189</sup> While the language used to depict the Earl's situation is non-symbolic, his character and body nothing but symbolic, making him the standard bearer for all emasculated male aristocrats in Reynolds's fiction.

Much like Lord Florimel, the Earl's entire existence is viewed as a vehicle for producing offspring: when production fails, his existence fails. Unlike Florimel, however, the Earl is not infertile because of feminisation, but because he is medically impotent—the ultimate emasculation to Reynolds. The Earl's inability to participate in sexual activity

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<sup>186</sup> Jennifer Terry, 'Anxious Slippage between "Us" and "Them": A Brief History of the Scientific Search for Homosexual Bodies' in *Deviant Bodies*, ed. by Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp.129-69 (pp. 132-33).

<sup>187</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, IX, p.327.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, III, p.93.

<sup>189</sup> G.E.C. (George Edward Cokayne), 'Desmond', in *The Complete Peerage*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. by Vicary Gibbs, 13 vols (London: St Catherine Press, 1916), pp. 232-58 (pp. 254-58), IV.

denies him status as a man and keeps him embedded in boyhood. He has neither feminine nor masculine qualities, but is rather a wraith-like void. The cause of the impotence is never revealed, though it appears to be a congenital fault or symptom of a childhood disease: he does not recall a time without it, and when he asks the physician, “‘Then there is no hope [...]?’” the answer is, “‘None, my lord’”.<sup>190</sup> He is the only character seen to consult a physician about a non-life-threatening issue, and the only character whose physician is completely unable to provide any treatment. Since all other appearances of doctors in the series involve either childbirth or impending fatality, Reynolds singles out the Earl and traps him somewhere between life and death—repeatedly called a ‘corpse’, and yet still living.<sup>191</sup>

Much of Reynolds’s frankness surrounding the Earl is composed through the Earl’s own cognizance of his medical issues, a self-awareness which Florimel does not share. This knowledge, and the Earl’s inability to move either fully into bodily life or bodily death prompts an anxiety-ridden break-down while Florimel and other aristocrats remain happily ignorant of the medical implications Reynolds writes into their lives. Where other aristocrats are vice-ridden automatons, driven solely by personal desire from one scandal to another, the Earl’s quiet self-perception serves as a figurative first awakening of the titled class. As the Earl contemplates his purpose in society and realises he is incapable of fulfilling that purpose, his only recourse is to immediate self-destruction.

Michael H. Shirley states in his work on Reynolds, ‘The solution to centuries of stagnation was not, he [Reynolds] believed, violent revolution to create a classless society, but a *peaceful* and yet constant agitation to bring about fundamental change’.<sup>192</sup> The Earl’s self-destruction, while a violent act in itself, can be read in the context of the serial as being representative of the gentle transformation Reynolds hoped to enact in society, in total opposition to the ferocious revolutions which were occurring across Europe at the time of his writing. By awakening the aristocracy to their own truth and exposing them as no longer capable of fulfilling their socio-biological purpose, they might readily dissolve their own establishment. Though the Earl’s suicide seems like an extreme action which is anything *but* peaceful, Reynolds uses it to demonstrate a willingness on the part of the aristocrat to do what he, Reynolds, believes to be right and to end their ‘lives’ as aristocrats on their own terms, instead of by bloody overthrow. Though infertile the nobles

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<sup>190</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, II, p. 103.

<sup>191</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, I, p. 378; III, p. 93; IV, p. 458.

<sup>192</sup> Shirley, p. 87 (*italics mine*).

may be in his work, Reynolds's use of rehabilitated or virtuous aristocrats like the Earl and Florimel shows a surprising level of faith and optimism in the class he belittles, especially given how irrevocably he portrays their inbred immorality to be.

The key difference between the Earl and Florimel is that the Earl's condition is not based upon behaviour affecting the body, but is rather the result of the body affecting behaviour. He and, by extension, his position and estate are infirm and not self-sustaining. There is no insinuation that the Earl's condition was the result of decadence, for he is presented as a decent, if pathetic, character. His lamentation that he 'was madman enough to think and to hope that there might be such a sentiment as a love of divine nature [i.e., romantic love], apart from gross enjoyment, and existing rather as an essence than a sensuousness' is in direct contrast with the profligate speeches of other aristocratic males, but it serves the same function.<sup>193</sup> The Earl reveals a characteristic that renders him unsuitable for fathering offspring. Where Florimel once rejected standard family life for the duality of feminisation, the Earl wants embrace family ideals but does not have the capacity of even *one* sex to make it a reality.

The inverse relationship between the Earl and Florimel continues: Florimel's dissoluteness causes infertility, while the Earl's infertility causes dissoluteness. This connection is established early in the series when the reader is introduced to his wife, the Countess. She, being 'at times devoured by desires and rendered restless by fierce passions', is furious that he has not been able to consummate their relationship after so long a marriage and refuses to participate socially as a wife inside the family unit: 'a cold, imperceptible tremor swept over her frame the instant that the earl appeared upon the threshold of the apartment'.<sup>194</sup> Wracked with guilt for his inability to satisfy her, the Earl encourages and even arranges for his wife to take a lover. Though he is sickened and further emasculated by the idea ('there was a profound melancholy devouring the nobleman's very vitals [...] his cheeks were growing pale, his form emaciated'), his wife's happiness and the need for an heir, legitimate or otherwise, are too strong an inducement to resist, further breaking down the idea of the aristocratic family into the cynical combination of mere alliance and appearance.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, I, pp. 380-81.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, I, p. 382; I, p. 377.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, III, p. 30.

In his book on body politics, Dominic James posits that in Victorian England, 'the rational mind was gendered male and the dependent body as female'.<sup>196</sup> This is a model which perfectly encapsulates the dysfunctional marriage between the Earl and Countess. She, 'whose passions were, however, more potent than her reason' is a slave to her bodily appetites and relies upon the Earl's strength of character and reason to keep her from infidelity.<sup>197</sup> Since his emasculation renders him passive, he has no strength of character, and the rational masculine mind is overpowered by the irrational feminine body: 'And if hell's flames were immediately to follow the consummation of her [the Countess's] frailty, she would not resign these few moments of Elysium to save herself from that eternity of pain'.<sup>198</sup> He fails to fulfil his part of the gender-binary, leading to imbalance, domestic havoc and moral erosion.

As with Florimel and Pauline, Reynolds again gives hope of a happy ending before ultimately destroying the lives of his sympathetic aristocrats. The countess repents, reconciles with her husband and together they undergo a moral, physical, and marital rehabilitation. However, the Earl is never able to recover from his shame and from the dishonour he allowed his wife to pursue. The constant fear of his impotence being made public drives him to despair and, combined with his reflections on the futility of his existence, he commits suicide. Being virtuous, the Earl is granted the only significant moment of aristocratic agency and masculinity in the series; since the Earl is noble, in both the literal and metaphorical senses of the word, he uses this moment for the betterment of the people by resigning his 'faulty' aristocratic body. Throwing himself from the roof of his stately home in the presence of his wife, the manner of his death parallels his plummet in her eyes, as well as the unstoppable descent of his family and class. He prefers a swift death to a long life filled with the knowledge of his shortcomings. His last words, 'You will make the world believe it was an accident, Eleanor', implore his wife to maintain their public face and do the best she can for their class, even as he consciously acts against the living façade propagated by the aristocracy.<sup>199</sup> To the last, he cannot bear the indignity of a revelation and must maintain the appearances required of his station.

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<sup>196</sup> Dominic James, 'Back to the Future of the Body', in *Back to the Future of the Body*, ed. by Dominic James (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 1-16 (p. 7).

<sup>197</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, III, p. 28.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 200.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, V, p. 269.



Reynolds refuses to give most of his aristocratic characters the joyous and fulfilling resolution he begins to set up, depicting the aristocracy's collapse as inevitable. That he creates tragedy more frequently for his *sympathetic* aristocrats—men he described as 'charitable in the extreme' and 'affable and gracious', but 'ill-fated'—underlines the harshness of the aristocratic institution, which makes victims of both its members and the lower classes it oppresses.<sup>200</sup> While Reynolds certainly expresses cathartic pleasure in the fictional downfall of an unpleasant leader, the destruction of his sympathetic aristocrats is the true means by which he advocates change.

### **Feminisation and Emasculation in Unison**

As the core antagonist to a revolving series of protagonists, the Prince Regent suffers the brunt of Reynolds's criticism: not only does his status as future king attach the most serious political ramifications to his infertility, but he also embodies emasculation and feminisation in equal parts. The Prince was feminised in popular culture—the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan said the Prince had “‘the most womanish mind” he had ever come across’ and the Duchess of Devonshire reported that he was ‘too much like a woman in men's cloaths [*sic*]’.<sup>201</sup> This feminisation was partly due to the Prince's adherence to the model of the dandy. The dandy was, by the time of Reynolds's writing, falling deeply out of fashion along with the silver fork novels and becoming what Adams calls a ‘grotesque icon of an outworn aristocratic order, a figure of self-absorbed, parasitic existence’.<sup>202</sup> Danahay goes so far as to say that ‘being a dandy was about as close as any man could come to rejecting his masculinity’.<sup>203</sup> The Prince Regent's admission in *MoCL* that ‘I was formed and fashioned to spend my existence pleasurably, and not in the routine of business and serious affairs’ implies a feminised rearing, as seen in the depictions of women's leisure in the silver fork novels.<sup>204</sup> While this claim does not seem to be founded in truth, the Prince Regent was reputed to blatantly prioritise pleasure over his obligations, in clear contrast to the masculine Protestant work ethic which Reynolds espoused for his readers.<sup>205</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, I, p. 134; I, p. 377; V, p. 376.

<sup>201</sup> Christopher Hibbert, *George IV* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 127; Christopher Hibbert, ‘George IV (1762-1830)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Online ed., ed. by Lawrence Goldman (January 2008). <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10541> [accessed 14 February 2013].

<sup>202</sup> Adams, p. 21.

<sup>203</sup> Danahay, p. 6

<sup>204</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, VII, p. 142.

<sup>205</sup> For further work on the Protestant work ethic in the Victorian era, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: and Other Writings* (1905), ed. and trans. by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells

While the term ‘Protestant work ethic’ is anachronistic to Reynolds and his work, being first coined by Max Weber in 1905 and used by him to understand the economic differences between countries that are predominantly Catholic or predominantly Protestant, the concept greatly underscored Reynolds’s rhetoric. Weber writes that ‘*one’s duty consists in pursuing one’s calling [Berufspflicht]*, and that the individual should have a commitment to his ‘professional’ [*beruflichen*] activity’, a notion that Reynolds applies to his characters by rewarding those who carry out their professional duties and punishing those who do not.<sup>206</sup> Conceptions of the Protestant work ethic have largely evolved for Victorian scholars, often coupled with Samuel Smiles’s 1859 *Self-Help* and becoming synonymous with middle-class labour, asceticism, and respectability, especially in opposition to perceived upper- and lower-class sloth, immoderation, and vice. Danahay goes so far as to argue that ‘[m]ale Victorian identity was modeled on the Protestant work ethic’, while Adams qualifies this argument more, stating that self-discipline ‘is the distinguishing feature of professional men’ and that Victorian gender tropes were informed by ‘the religious paradigm of Victorian self-regulation’.<sup>207</sup> It is this combination of feminine dandyism and the lack of masculine work ethic that enable Reynolds to target the Prince—the head of the unemployed, immoderate, leisured, and fashion-centric aristocracy—with such ease and panache.

In *MoCL* the Prince Regent is first introduced as a feminine character. He is in delicate health (being severely hung-over) while gingerly attempting a long bath and toilet at his vanity table. The implication by Reynolds is clear: decadence breeds weakness, and weakness is womanly.<sup>208</sup> The Prince is interrupted by some close friends, one being Lady Letitia Lade, ‘the Amazon’. Though a real-life friend of the Prince Regent, her portrayal in *MoCL* is far from biographical; rather, she is a mirror image of the Prince, her masculinity underscoring his femininity. Letitia revels in her marriage to a lord who ‘is well-nigh in his dotage [....] He lets me do just as I like’, and repeatedly takes advantage of her husband’s frailty, as well as the weaknesses of the aristocratic men in her circle.<sup>209</sup> She dresses in men’s apparel in striking contrast to the Prince, who is still in his dressing gown.

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(New York: Penguin, 2002); Monica F. Cohen’s *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel: Women, Work and Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Adams’s *Dandies and Desert Saints*; Danahay’s *Gender at Work*; Tosh’s *Manliness and Masculinities*; Eric Kwan-Wai Yu’s ‘Productive Fear: Labor, Sexuality, and Mimicry in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 48:2 (Summer 2006), pp. 145-70; and John Attridge’s “‘Human expertness’: Professionalism, Training, and the Prefaces to the New York Edition”, *The Henry James Review*, 32:1 (Winter 2011), pp. 29-44.

<sup>206</sup> Weber, p. 13.

<sup>207</sup> Danahay, p. 7; Adams, pp. 7-8.

<sup>208</sup> Hyman, p. 77.

<sup>209</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, I, p.253.

The Prince's dress immediately places him in the confines of the feminine body as defined by Reynolds: part of the pornographic element in the text revolves around beautiful female characters being voyeuristically presented to the reader in an early-morning state of undress, and these scenes were emphasised as essential moments in the text by the illustrations which accompanied each weekly volume.<sup>210</sup> As the Prince sits in bed, indecent but for the bed sheets, Letitia says, "[H]ave your bath, by all means. Here, I will give you your dressing-gown and slippers" [...] "And you mean me to rise in your presence?" asked the prince'.<sup>211</sup> When he does, she lasciviously leers at him for being "in *dishabille* [*sic*]," she added, with a significant glance at the prince's figured silk dressing-gown and embroidered red morocco slippers'.<sup>212</sup> The Prince's introduction is also the first instance of the repeated dressing gown nudity trope of the text, and he is the only man to join Reynolds's coterie of semi-nude women.

The Prince and Letitia soon draw back into the Prince's bathroom to consummate their relationship. He is vulnerable and frail, she is strong and well; he is undressed in the manner of other female characters, she is dressed as a man; for the sexual act, he retreats further into his suite while she moves forward, invading his space. He even compares his bathroom to 'the harem of a Turkish palace', a safe, appropriated living space solely for the female (in this instance, the Prince), and of which the male (Letitia) is only a visitor.<sup>213</sup>

This scene is crucial in the medical analysis of the Prince in subsequent volumes. By placing him in the confines of a weakened female body, Reynolds is able to construct a correlation between the Prince's fertility and venereal disease, specifically syphilis, which the Prince perhaps inherited from his own father in the text. Reynolds repeatedly connects gender transgression with poor health and susceptibility to dissoluteness. The Prince, who does not have the desired masculine hardihood present in Reynolds's more admirable male characters, is trapped in an ouroboros: femininity leads to sickness, which leads to further femininity, which leads to further sickness. As the narrative continues and one sees the results of his many liaisons, the evidence of syphilis begins to accumulate, most notably that many of his sexual conquests have fertility issues after exposure to him. Mrs

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<sup>210</sup> It is unknown whether any illustrations were created of the undressed Prince in his introductory scene, so a comparison of his illustrated depiction with those of female characters shown 'in *dishabille*' [*sic*] is unable to be reached. Each volume of the Oxford Society's edition of *MoCL* contains only a single illustration in the frontispiece, though several dozen (perhaps hundred) more illustrations were published along with the text during the serial's run. Of the ten volumes in this edition and their respective ten illustrations, eight depict examples of undress or other lascivious behaviour.

<sup>211</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, I, p. 159.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, I, p. 162.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, I, p. 162.

Fitzherbert, Letitia Lade, and Venetia Trelawney are never able to give birth at all, while Queen Caroline, Octavia Clarendon, and Agatha Owens each give birth to a single girl (all of whom die) and never conceive again.

More than fertility issues, his mistresses and children struggle with mental and physical health in a way that suggests syphilitic contagion. Agatha Owens gives birth to his still-born child before dying in an asylum. Venetia Trelawney becomes ‘a prey to melancholy’.<sup>214</sup> After his ruination of Octavia Clarendon, she goes mad, feeling his “‘coils environ me!’” [...] a terrible laugh which pealed from her lips spoke out the appalling truth. Octavia Clarendon was a maniac!’.<sup>215</sup> The ‘coils’ are in reference her growing madness, an illness for which she and her friends blame the Prince exclusively. She never fully recovers and dies young. Twenty years later, their illegitimate daughter encounters the Prince for the first time and grows madder with each new exposure to him, finally running from him in a frenzy and throwing herself to her death. “‘Perdition!’” ejaculated the prince. “‘She is mad! She will do herself a mischief!’” [...] At this instant a terrific cry burst forth [...] Down she had fallen, down, down’.<sup>216</sup> His legitimate daughter, Princess Charlotte, is presented with an unspecified mental disorder which frequently gives her pensive bouts of melancholy and anxiety over her heredity, believing she came from ‘a race whose infamies had rendered it accursed in the sight of Heaven, and whose punishment had to some extent, in the person of the lunatic king, commenced upon earth’.<sup>217</sup>

Even women who spurn his advances suffer from brief mental instability, as though they ran the risk of sexual infection through sheer proximity to him: the Countess of Desborough says he has a ‘polluted embrace’, Rose Foster ‘felt as if she were going mad’, and Pauline Clarendon’s ‘whole form shook as if with a strong spasm passing through it’.<sup>218</sup> The Prince’s femininity is tied tightly to the concept of ill-health, and the exposure of others to his feminine sickness leads to the contagion and destruction of those closest to him: his mistresses and children. By placing the Prince Regent in a feminine form, Reynolds takes arguments against the aristocracy into areas where typical political discourse could not tread—namely, into an attack with a biological imperative.

The Prince Regent’s femininity is in many ways the cause of his emasculation, since it traps him in the liminal space between the binaries of manhood and womanhood,

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid, VII, p. 204.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, II, p. 422.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, X, p. 434.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, VIII, p. 211.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, II, p. 189; III, p. 136; III, p. 369.

making him perform as neither quite one nor the other. Reynolds treats his gender-atypical male characters as almost mule-like in their hybridity, unable to reproduce because of a perceived impurity or duality. While the Prince is certainly capable of the sexual act and precipitates several pregnancies, he is also presented as the anti-father, the destroyer of families and the next generation. Reynolds's preoccupation with fatherhood as a necessary component of leadership is seen most clearly in the Prince Regent, who is depicted as being capable of neither. This metaphor is at the forefront of Reynolds's Republican politics, portraying the Prince as 'the heartless man who is one day to become the Father of his People!', as well as literally, as a man who fathers sickly, stillborn or murdered children.<sup>219</sup> During a nightmare about all his sexual crimes against women, the Prince sees the

lovely girls whom he had wooed and either seduced or ravished in his time, fair creatures who had gone down to the tomb with broken hearts and blighted affections [... S]ome of them appeared to have babes in their arms,—spectral babes, as ghastly as the parents [...] babes which were the fruit of those pleasures that the prince had purchased either by means of the most insidious perfidy or the most heartless violence. And those infants had all died either at their births or soon afterward, some sacrificed to the fatal compression adopted by their miserable mothers to conceal their shame, others murdered outright by suffocation, or even by a bloody violence, during the puerperal aberrations of those dishonoured beings who gave them birth [...] Yes, mothers and babes alike glared thus on the prince, babes and mothers reproached him equally with their dead, lustreless orbs [... H]e was the man who deserved to be stigmatized as the moral murderer, if not the actual assassin.<sup>220</sup>

These deaths are a pointed attack on Hanoverian rule: that the Prince, instead of providing fatherly nurture to his subjects, maintains his comfort, power and pleasure through the destruction of their innocent lives. He unmans himself through his refusal to accept the consequences and responsibilities that are the result of his licentiousness, instead looking for 'pleasures which are purchased by tears, lamentations, and premature deaths'.<sup>221</sup> The Prince is medically and socially neutered from producing legitimate children by his own physiological defects, decadent lifestyle, inability to provide for himself and inability to provide for others. In Reynolds's work, the Prince and his line are untenable in the changing landscape of the nineteenth century.

Further emasculating him, Reynolds depicts the Prince as situationally impotent in several instances. One occurrence was based on the reports of the Prince's real-life

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid, I, p. 290.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, III, p. 142-43.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, III, p. 145.

wedding night with Princess Caroline of Brunswick.<sup>222</sup> Reynolds signals the importance of recalling such an event by pulling the narration away from the wedding party and asking the reader to ‘resume the thread of our narrative in its proper place [...] the Prince of Wales was bearing home his bride to Carlton House’.<sup>223</sup> That the public’s ‘proper place’ is with the newlyweds in their bridal chamber illustrates not only the stakes the nation had in their marital relations, but also the importance Reynolds places on aristocratic sexuality in the confines of his argument and the importance their bodies have as narrative devices. Reynolds reports that, despite the huge political importance of the conjugal meeting, the Prince’s decadence overcame his responsibilities: he fell down senseless with drink and, come morning, ‘only one person had lain in that nuptial bed’.<sup>224</sup> That he could not keep himself upright on his wedding night is a clear double-entendre, providing the punch line to Reynolds’s long discourse on fertility and debauchery.

The Prince’s virility becomes the butt of a second grim joke, this time centring on the Prince’s prowess in the face of middle- and lower-class virtue. In what turns out to be an equally farcical and horrifying series of events, he begins kidnapping women who are unresponsive to his wooing and imprisons them in a secluded domicile with the intention of obtaining their favours through violence. He kidnaps women more than half a dozen times, and yet he never once successfully commits an assault; there is always an interruption or escape, as though the universe conspired to keep him from consummation: ‘And that she would become his prey beyond all possibility of salvation or rescue, he did not doubt [and yet he became] thoroughly baffled by Camilla’s heroic flight’; and again, in Vol. 3: ‘as every moment saw her struggles becoming weaker and her cries more subdued, while the triumph of the prince appeared more and more certain. But suddenly the door was burst violently open, and Tim Meagles [the Prince’s friend] rushed into the chamber’.<sup>225</sup> Though the daring escapes work as merely wishful triumphs of the lower classes over the abuses of the upper class, they also play into Reynolds’s construction of the Prince as a sexual weakling: firstly by making him resort to such low acts, and secondly by making him unable to perform the acts, even when he is theoretically in total control and domination.

Reynolds’s denial of aristocratic sexual dominance is reinforced by the Prince’s close friend, the Marquis of Leveson, a childless man who is a ‘widower, and already on

<sup>222</sup> Hibbert, ‘George IV (1762-1830)’ in *Oxford DNB*.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, IV, p. 305.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, IV, p. 325.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, II, p. 319; II, p. 326; III, p. 56.

the bleak side of sixty', who attempts violence against women in a similar manner.<sup>226</sup> No doubt inspired by the Prince's operation in earlier volumes, the Marquis converts a secret chamber in his mansion into a den of booby-traps to ensnare his victims, the most notable item being a chair with spring-loaded manacles 'that clasped her wrists and the steel bands that fastened their gripe [*sic*] upon her shoulders', rendering its user helpless.<sup>227</sup> Once again, however, every attempt is foiled by a last-minute interruption or complication, rendering the Marquis impotent: 'But just at the moment when the Marquis of Leveson fancied that our heroine was sinking into a profound insensibility [the door] of the suite was thrown violently open'.<sup>228</sup> That his lair is inside his home instead of in a separate location further corrupts the idea of a healthy, sexually-normative aristocratic home-life; it would be impossible for the Marquis to marry or rear children in a location which comprises such horrors, the two options clearly depicted as mutually exclusive. Being long widowed and childless, it is significant that the Marquis chooses to remain so and instead participates in sexual encounters which could only produce illegitimate children. Reynolds argues that sexual deviance is, by its very nature, a complete rejection of an aristocrat's biological duty, and a failure of the aristocratic body.

The Marquis proves to be just as feminised and emasculated as the Prince Regent, who, at the head of the aristocracy, set the standard for the actions of its members. Just like the Prince Regent, the Marquis is feminised by his weakened female body, with its history of 'long and serious illness' and his dandified habits, 'with an admirable wig, a brilliant set of false teeth, dyed whiskers, the use of all the choicest cosmetics, and the artistic skill of a Parisian tailor'.<sup>229</sup> He is then equally emasculated through his bestial and savage physiology, which stands in direct opposition to Reynolds's depiction of the thoughtful, genteel ideal of Victorian manhood. His inhumane actions against women, as well as his physical description, remove masculine characteristics and render him an animal: 'At the first glance he might have been mistaken for a bear escaped from the zoological gardens [...] for he wore such an enormous quantity of hair about his face as almost to destroy the features that identify him as a human being'.<sup>230</sup>

The Marquis's social position requires him to look to the Prince as an authority on all matters and to mimic the Prince whenever possible; further, the Marquis is part of the

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid, VI, p. 19.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, VII, p. 328.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, VII, pp. 332-33.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, VI, p. 156; VI, p. 20.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, X, p. 21.

Prince's close social circle, the rest of whom knowingly accept their friends' repeated rape attempts. When the Marquis's attack on a young girl seemingly kills her, his friend Sir Douglas Huntingdon debates reporting the Marquis to the authorities before shrugging it off, saying, 'I myself have not been immaculate enough in my life to feel justified in becoming the accuser of others [...] I have so many faults of my own to screen that I consider it but just to throw a veil if possible over the faults of my friends'.<sup>231</sup>

The Marquis serves as a stand-in for the Prince Regent. They are near the same age, have the same habits, friends, social status, physicality, and are both feminised and emasculated. While the history of the Prince Regent is too well-documented for Reynolds to punish him accordingly, the Marquis of Leveson did not exist and could therefore receive poetic justice for his decadent body and lack of gender polarity, without Reynolds rewriting history.<sup>232</sup> The Marquis's death, therefore, would be equally fitting for the Prince Regent: the Marquis is captured in his own booby-trapped chair while his mansion burns to the ground, in a literal and metaphorical inferno. As a crowd gathers outside to watch, 'a large portion of the building gave way, and much of the interior was for a few brief instants exposed to the view of the crowd gathered in the street', revealing the Marquis's horrifying chamber, true nature, and status as the final victim of his own decadent abuses.<sup>233</sup> The fate of the Marquis is Reynolds's compensation for his arch-villain, the Prince, escaping the serial unscathed. However, Reynolds felt that his serial was to the real-life Prince what the fire was to the Marquis: a force which strips away the glamorous surface to reveal the moralistic truth to the general populace. 'And then a man will arise [Reynolds's allusion to himself], bold enough to tear away the glossy veil which hides the deformities of the mighty by birth'.<sup>234</sup>

To Reynolds, the Prince symbolises everything that was wrong in the history of England's leadership, and through virtue that most aristocratic values and behaviours had remained unchanged, the Prince represented everything that was *still* wrong with leadership at the time of his writing:

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, VII, p. 455.

<sup>232</sup> Though hardly an accurate biographer, Reynolds stays true to the broad strokes of history, especially as they concern his more well-known, real-life characters. While this restrains him from disciplining villainous characters with the severity Reynolds vocalises that they deserve, it also allows him to claim that his work is more truthful than it actually is—a privilege Reynolds takes advantage of many times (e.g. III, p. 145; IX, p. 434; X, p. 107, etc.).

<sup>233</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, X, p. 248.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, III, p. 145.



Oh, who would have thought that two-thirds of the great nobles now assembled were, if stripped of all the prestige of their rank and honours, nothing more or less than the most infernal robbers, usurpers, and oppressors that ever preyed upon the vitals of the industrious millions [...] But so it was then, so it is at the present day, and so it will ever be with the British aristocracy until the knell of its corrupt, iniquitous, and accursed existence be rung by the mighty voice of the popular will.<sup>235</sup>

By using the Prince, a long-dead and still unpopular figure, Reynolds was able to hide behind the barrier of history and incur slightly less risk in his critique of contemporary figures. While his criticisms were, on the surface, for aristocrats of the decadent Regency era, they were very much also targeted on current aristocrats who failed to adhere to the new, middle-class moral code which largely excluded any gendered or bodily deviation, and thereby vilified them further in the popular political mind set.

### Conclusion

Trefor Thomas argues that Reynolds's 'weekly penny fiction can be understood as an impure, almost hybrid mode, half weekly newspaper, half romance'.<sup>236</sup> While his weekly fiction did include elements of contemporary news stories, *MoCL*'s outlandish plots and overt political agenda provided a far more explicit bias than was seen in other, non-radical news sources. It is interesting to note, therefore, the urgency with which Reynolds declares his message and his relentless avowal of its truthfulness. He says: 'Reader, this picture of [...] the aristocracy is not too highly coloured, no, nor a whit exaggerated. Ten thousand facts might be brought forward to testify its truth', while his character, Venetia Trelawney, laments that 'there are so very, very few books in which the world is depicted truly'.<sup>237</sup>

While it is clear that aristocratic males did not suffer from a fertility epidemic of the magnitude depicted in *MoCL*, what may very well be true is the popular perception of which Reynolds reports and to which he provides fodder—that there was a constructed biological imperative that argued against perceived aristocratic injustices and, more importantly, found a medical reason to discredit rule by primogeniture.<sup>238</sup> Antony Taylor,

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid, II, p. 213.

<sup>236</sup> Thomas, 'Rereading', p. 60

<sup>237</sup> Reynolds, *MoCL*, IX, p. 434; X, p. 107.

<sup>238</sup> Sociologist Dennis H. Wrong asserts that, while the level of fertility in the upper classes of every society in every era has been comparatively lower than that of the lower classes of the same society, there is no indication that these levels dropped below average in the Regency or Victorian era. Wrong, 'Class Fertility Differentials Before 1850', *Social Research*, 25:1 (Spring 1958), pp. 70-86. In addition, other scholars contemporary with Reynolds, like William Godwin, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Martineau, disagreed with the notion that low aristocratic fertility was necessarily the result of heredity. The more likely cause was

scholar of Victorian perceptions of the aristocracy, writes that ‘for G.W.M. Reynolds, the British aristocracy was tainted, bearing the historical stain of the Norman Conquest and carrying inherited predispositions toward tyranny’.<sup>239</sup> While no one could refute this claim on Reynolds’s views, Reynolds’s critique went a great deal further; Taylor’s own use of the words ‘tainted’, ‘stain’ and ‘inherited predispositions’ indicate his awareness of Reynolds’s fascination with heredity and physiology, and by extension, the influence heredity and physiology had on the state of the nation. His hostile bombardment of aristocratic bodies served as the perfect junction between medical anxieties and Victorian values, casting suspicion not only on the aristocrats’ ability to rule but on their very ability to survive.

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aristocratic prudence and caution, as they chose instead to enjoy the economic and social freedoms that came with having fewer children.

<sup>239</sup> Antony Taylor, “‘Some little or Contemptible War upon her Hands’: *Reynolds’s Newspaper* and Empire’, in *G.W.M. Reynolds: Nineteenth Century Fiction, Politics and the Press*, ed. by Anne Humpherys and Louis James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 99-119 (p. 105).

### **Chapter 3 – Public vs. Private: Aristocratic Female Bodies in the Works of Mrs**

#### **Henry Wood**

##### **Introduction**

The works of the sensational novelist Mrs Henry Wood, also known as Ellen Wood or Ellen Price Wood, provide modern scholars with an ambiguous and often contradictory treatment of gender and class.<sup>240</sup> Wood wrote nearly forty novels and around four hundred short stories, in addition to purchasing and serving as editor of the *Argosy Magazine*, making her one of the most prominent and prolific writers of the mid-Victorian era.<sup>241</sup> Wood's narratives are frequently social dramas with a broad cast of characters, letting readers view a community from a range of class perspectives (perhaps most famously done in her large, amorphous *Johnny Ludlow* series). Her texts often centralise around female characters and depict the conflicts arising from class mobility.

In spite of her hundreds of texts, many of which deal with gender and class in the same ways, Wood's textual intersections of gender and class remain ambiguous. Her work often contains the same contradictions or paradoxes surrounding middle-class views of the aristocracy that were seen in the silver fork novels and Reynolds's *The Mysteries of the Court of London*. In fact, her use of class and gender is just as unsurely understood as Wood is herself: little is known about her personal life, she wrote few letters or diaries, and her heavily constructed public persona as the domestic, submissive invalid lady-writer, 'Mrs Henry Wood', is often at odds with her capable, assertive, and energetic professional actions.<sup>242</sup> Some critics view her agency and assertiveness in deciding her own image, and her firm boundaries between her public and personal lives, as indicative of an under-arching proto-feminism.<sup>243</sup> Others connect Wood's chosen, constructed identity to her deep conformity to her middle-class target audience, reading in her public persona an implicit acceptance and reification of patriarchal hegemony. Phegley, for example, blames Wood's exclusion from the canon and from much modern criticism on her lasting

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<sup>240</sup> Despite being referenced by modern scholars roughly equally under her own name and under her husband's name, she is referred to in this chapter as Mrs Henry Wood. In this chapter, it is mostly her professional life which is discussed, so it is appropriate that she is referenced by the public, professional identity of 'Mrs Henry Wood', which she so carefully constructed. Most scholars on Wood provide no rationale for their choice in what to call her.

<sup>241</sup> Adeline Sergeant, 'Mrs. Crowe. Mrs. Archer Clive. Mrs. Henry Wood', in *Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign* (London: Ballantyne Press, 1897), pp. 149-92, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/36641-h/36641-h.htm> [accessed 27 April 2015]; Emma Liggins and Andrew Maunder, 'Introduction: Ellen Wood, Writer', *Women's Writing* 15:2 (2008), pp. 149-56 (pp. 150-51).

<sup>242</sup> Jennifer Phegley, 'Domesticating the Sensation Novelist: Ellen Price Wood as Author and Editor of the *Argosy Magazine*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 38:2 (Summer 2005), pp. 180-98 (p. 181).

<sup>243</sup> Liggins and Maunder, p. 151.

reputation as ‘too conventional, too conservative’.<sup>244</sup> Wood has been read as the epitome of Victorian snobbery, creating narratives that only serve to fawn over the aristocracy and to demonstrate her own knowledge of high circles—a knowledge that was frequently ridiculed for its inaccuracies and deficiencies.<sup>245</sup> She has also, as will be seen, been read as overly concerned with the positive representation of the middle classes, as Wood repeatedly portrays the middle classes as the antithesis of the aristocratic groups in her novels, groups which are usually on the decline from decadent and degenerative behaviour.<sup>246</sup>

Whether deeply conservative or subversively radical, Wood’s works indicate unease over the shifting intersectionality of class and gender, and this intersectionality finds its staging ground most strongly in her representations of female aristocratic bodies. It is my contention that some of her texts can be read as a treatise on the paradoxes of gender expectations in the mid-Victorian era which are highlighted through a lens of class. Specifically, Wood illustrates certain patriarchal pressures and contradictions that are placed upon women as a whole by society, though to Wood those pressures and contradictions are best emphasised in analysing the role of *aristocratic* women, who, according to her portraiture, are doubly bound by the limitations of and expectations placed on their gender and class group. The expectations and paradoxes that Wood highlights, with her aristocratic women characters standing in as hyperbolic representatives for all womankind, largely revolve around the role of women’s bodies and their place in both the visual/public and private/domestic spheres. As will be made clear below, Wood traps her aristocratic female characters in a space where they are constantly viewed and gazed upon, and are yet represented as somehow lacking bodies and bodily experiences. Her aristocratic females are physically seen and consumed by the public gaze, and yet are utterly disembodied, indicating the incompatibility of the public and private ideologies to which society indicates they should conform. Wood’s works of popular fiction, which are equally distinct from both the silver fork novels and Reynolds’s radical

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<sup>244</sup> Phegley, pp. 180-81.

<sup>245</sup> For example, in her work on sensation fiction, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), Winifred Hughes takes exception to Mrs Henry Wood’s snobbery in *Verner’s Pride* (1863). Hughes writes, ‘In *Verner’s Pride* Mrs. Wood [...] betrays herself as the outsider, the glove manufacturer’s daughter, imagining the incredible refinement of the upper-middle and gentry classes to which she does not belong’ (119).

<sup>246</sup> Wood’s 1862 novel *Mrs Halliburton’s Troubles* (London: The British Library, 2010) is perhaps the strongest example of her celebration of middle-class values. The narrative redefines the concept of a gentleman through two foils, the hard-working poor male protagonist who is raised in an environment of perseverance, and the wealthier, decadent male antagonist, who is raised in an environment of luxury and entitlement.

gothic serials, evidences some of the patterns that cropped up in both: the aristocratic body is used as a literary lightning rod upon which other issues may strike, and yet still reveals deeply-rooted uncertainties and contradictions about the interclass roles and positions of the aristocracy.

Wood's texts with aristocratic female protagonists are, for obvious reasons, the most useful in analysing the effects of class upon female bodies. These texts are especially useful when those aristocratic female protagonists exhibit class mobility and are compared to female characters of different social ranks in the text.<sup>247</sup> Since a surprising number of Wood's texts contain these criteria, the texts that deal with gender, class, and bodies in the public eye in different ways ultimately best serve this chapter. These texts, as will be made clear, exemplify a mid-Victorian social dissonance present in certain gender expectations, a dissonance that Wood sees as heightened at the intersection of gender and class. As will be outlined in the theoretical frameworks below, these social structures are embedded in Wood's literary representations of bodies, which enable modern critics to decode complex mores contemporary with Wood's writing.

It would be impossible to discuss Wood's use of class, gender, and the body without analysing *East Lynne* (1861), easily her most popular work and the text for which Wood is best known. This chapter's focus on class mobility, the public gaze, and female identity demands an examination of her lesser-known 1867 novel, *Lady Adelaide's Oath*, which was retitled in editions from 1879 and onward, as *Lady Adelaide*. Though the novel is an unconventional choice for academic work on Wood, the emphasis later placed by Wood and her publishers on the character of Lady Adelaide in the title, with Lady Adelaide's identity rebranding the novel at a very visual surface level, creates an imperative to explore the gender and class dynamics of the narrative, and gives this text more significance for this chapter than some of Wood's other more popular or better remembered works. The final text is Wood's novella, *The Surgeon's Daughters*, which was part of her 1887 collection of short stories *Lady Grace and Other Stories*. This novella contains an instance of female bodies being read and coded in terms of class status, an instance so significant and overt that it necessitated the work's inclusion; in addition, the novella continues the trajectory begun by the first two novels, in which Wood's

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<sup>247</sup> For example, in Wood's 1887 novella, *The Unholy Wish*, the middle-class Emily Bell is given immediate and vivid physical description, while the aristocratic Miss Hardwick is not described at all. What could be read as a narrative oversight on Wood's part could actually be a significant and purposeful omission, continuing the rhetoric of her previous works. *The Unholy Wish*, in *Lady Grace and Other Stories*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1887), III, pp. 171-284.

aristocratic protagonists become more and more disembodied and removed from their own narratives.

Wood's work is so extensive that an entire dissertation could be devoted to this particular reading of her texts. However, the limits and focus of this chapter necessitate that only three texts out of hundreds can be examined. While the previous chapter on silver fork fiction looked at dozens of texts shallowly in favour of a deeper examination of the genre as a whole, most of those texts were similar and formulaic; they did not rely upon plot or character development as much as they relied upon a general representation of a lifestyle and class system. Wood's texts, on the other hand, while just as numerous and in many ways very similar to each other and to other sensation fiction, rely heavily upon narrative and individual character development; it is therefore far more difficult to create a meaningful analysis of works if they are look at only shallowly and in large numbers.

The clear cost of limiting the works discussed to three is that the sheer extent of Wood's writing on body, gender, and class goes unexamined and therefore unknown. However, the benefits of choosing such a small group of texts mean that each text is thoroughly scrutinised and greater intertextuality amongst the three texts can be more easily discerned. Further, by using her most popular novel, one of her less-successful novels, and one of her shorter works (all three from different points in her career), one can determine a level of thematic consistency in Wood's work.

Of all the novelists of the 1860s and 1870s who centre their texts upon intricate portraits of class and the body, Wood is most relevant to this study for several reasons. Firstly, she was a very successful sensation novelist whose works are only starting to gain significant critical attention: in this respect her critical profile fits well with this dissertation's use of once-popular but now under-recognised literature. Secondly, Wood's focus on the female aristocratic body and the effects of class mobility on that body creates parallels and extensions to arguments made in previous chapters. Where the silver fork novels contemplated the rise of the middle classes, Wood's texts deal more with the corresponding descent of the aristocracy; where Reynolds's work denounced the class system through problematising aristocratic masculinity, Wood's texts comment upon class and gender systems through problematising aristocratic femininity. Thirdly, though this chapter does not take a biographical approach to Wood's work, her sharp divorce of public from private life and her paradoxical cultivation of a domestic public persona support the

theoretical framework and may inform my particular readings of her texts. Finally, there has been a small amount of recent criticism completed on Mrs Henry Wood, and my work helps facilitate both an expansion of the canon and greater readings of her texts.<sup>248</sup>

Before analysing Wood's texts, it must first be noted, however briefly, that while Wood is referred to here as a sensation novelist (a point which seems to be entirely beyond dispute in both contemporary and historical criticism), this dissertation is not a study of sensation fiction and to do justice to such a large and unwieldy genre as a whole would require more than the focus of a single chapter. However, Wood's writing did not occur in a vacuum, nor does any subsequent analysis of it, especially considering that a great deal of scholarship on sensation fiction, both historical and modern, is preoccupied with concepts of body and gender. The very word 'sensation' indicates a level of involvement with the body and the senses, and this work must necessarily build on the work that has come before it.

Winifred Hughes, in her influential work on sensation fiction, *The Maniac in the Cellar*, carves out a significant foothold for the theory of this chapter, stating that 'Whether heroine or villainess, it is always a woman who demands the spotlight in the typical sensation novel'.<sup>249</sup> Hughes places the spotlight on female characters, although in the context of this chapter, the narrative and visual focus is not dictated or demanded by female characters themselves, but is rather a structural manifestation of societal norms and expectations surrounding gender. Hughes further argues that:

speech, action, and *external appearance* must bear the weight of character portrayal in a genre that is specifically – insistently – concerned with extreme passions and intricate emotional states [...] without the benefit of any revelations of their internal processes. Often the secret itself prevents full disclosure of motivation to the reader.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Some, though by no means all, of this new work includes Elisabeth Jay's edition of *East Lynne*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Kay Boardman and Shirley Jones, *Popular Victorian Women Writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Phegley's 'Domesticating the Sensation Novelist'; Emma Liggins and Andrew Maunder's special issue of *Women's Writing* dedicated to Wood, 15:2 (2008); Elizabeth Steere, *The Female Servant and Sensation Fiction* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Lyn Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2011); Lyn Pykett's edition of *St Martin's Eve* by Mrs Henry Wood (1866), *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction 1855-1890*, series ed. by Andrew Maunder, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004), III; Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina, *Victorian Sensations* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006); Andrew Radford, *Victorian Sensation Fiction* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Laurie Garrison, *Science, Sexuality and Sensation Novels* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>249</sup> Hughes, *Maniac*, p. 45.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26, italics mine.

The spotlight in sensation fiction is not only on women, but on women's bodies, which 'must bear the weight of character portrayal'. In sensation fiction, bodies and external appearances are heavily coded and interpreted with social signifiers, since internal processes are frequently concealed from the reader in order to maintain narrative tension.

Another chief critical perspective of the sensation genre revolved around the genre's ability to influence the body, and thereby somehow alter one's health, morality, and nature. For example, numerous critics have traced or worked from the argument that 'the continuity between reading and transgressive practices posed a threat to social and political stability'.<sup>251</sup> Sensation novels in particular were seen to have 'inspired a new form of reading, one that depended first on the physical effects it inspired in the reader and secondly on the psychological effects that occurred as a result of this form of reading', that the novels 'offered the possibility of reading with the body'.<sup>252</sup> Andrew Mangham in his *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction* (2007) explores the reversal of this process, in which real cases of female violence, insanity, and bodily sensation were fed back into the genre, inspiring the very stories which could go on to produce more violence, insanity, and bodily sensation. Elizabeth Steere traces class-based views of reading with the body, with one of the perceived chief dangers being the genre's ability to blur boundaries through physical sensation: that the genre produced bodily feelings in its readers, feelings which transgressed gender, class, national, and ethnic lines and somehow tainted or Othered one's physiology through exposure to narrative. This connection between sensation and reading serves as the basis for numerous modern critical works on sensation fiction and, perhaps more significantly, even some Victorians themselves consciously defined the reading of sensation novels as a bodily experience, perhaps one with serious physical consequences. Lyn Pykett and Pamela K. Gilbert both look not only at the assumed damaging effect of sensation novels on individual bodies, but also on the public body: in her *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel*, Pykett argues that sensation fiction was 'taken to be evidence of a cultural disease', while Gilbert's *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (1997) examines how popular fiction, and in particular sensation fiction, came to be associated with contagion and a threat to certain hegemonic identities.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Barbara Leckie, *Culture and Adultery: The Novel, the Newspaper, and the Law, 1857-1914* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 21.

<sup>252</sup> Garrison, pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>253</sup> Pykett, *Sensation Novel*, p. 7.



The hegemonic identities specifically perceived to be threatened are largely patriarchal: all of these critics indicate that the bodies primarily affected by sensation fiction are female bodies, and that women therefore present a potential for biological risk to society as a whole, though it is Andrew Mangham's 2007 *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction* that focuses specifically on this gender divide. Mangham traces the perceived medical effects of sensation fiction on women and shows the various claims of Victorian physicians that women were constitutionally weaker and more susceptible to madness, compulsions, and crime. Further, Mangham illustrates the Victorian medical fear of women's bodies as conduits, with mental impulses and weaknesses transferred to healthy children through the umbilical cord or breast milk.<sup>254</sup> Understandings of the body and, in particular, the female body in relation to sensation fiction become textual sources for mapping cultural anxieties and the perceived status of society in the Victorian era.

These anxieties and theoretical approaches are neatly exemplified in an 1863 article in *Punch*, advertising for 'The Sensation Times, and Chronicle of Excitement'; the prospectus of this fictitious journal reads as follows: 'This Journal will be devoted chiefly to the following objects; namely; Harrowing the Mind, Making the Flesh Creep, Causing the Hair to Stand on End, Giving Shocks to the Nervous System, Destroying Conventional Moralities, and generally Unfitting the Public for the Prosaic Avocations of Life'.<sup>255</sup> While the advertisement goes on to lambaste sensation fiction in general, this opening sentence creates a sense of duel parody in which both the genre and those reasons for opposing the genre (namely, bodily harm) are caricatured. The focus on the body, and on reading fiction through the body, becomes gendered when the advertisement states that 'Paterfamilias, having duly enjoyed them [the sensation stories in the journal], tells his family "he thinks they had better not read"' (193). This sentence articulates the fear for the 'weaker' constitutions of women (who are placed on the same level as children in this advertisement), as well as undermining the overprotection of women by showing the Paterfamilias's wariness over what amounts to a mild source of enjoyment for him. A modern critic is able to see through both primary sources from the genre and the contemporaneous criticism of that genre how deeply embedded anxieties about the body and gender were.

In her 'Introduction' to *St Martin's Eve*, Lyn Pykett discusses another realm of bodily control in sensation fiction that is significant to the framework of this chapter:

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<sup>254</sup> Mangham, p. 32.

<sup>255</sup> 'Prospectus of a New Journal', *Punch*, Saturday, 9 May 1863) p. 193 (p. 193).

voyeurism. She reads Wood's *St Martin's Eve* as a novel revolving heavily around the notion of class-based surveillance of the upper classes, primarily by servants and the lower classes and the effect this gaze has on society.<sup>256</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Steere reads *East Lynne* as a series of class-based gazes, with Lady Isabel Vane losing control when 'she is monitored by a house full of gossiping servants who appear to understand her household and her relationships better than she herself does', all of which is reversed when Isabel herself becomes a domestic employee in her home.<sup>257</sup> Brian W. McCuskey, in his 'The Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgression' goes as far as to say 'Privacy, one of the cornerstones of Victorian domestic ideology, remains under siege as long as the family remains under surveillance'.<sup>258</sup>

Notions of privacy, domesticity, and surveillance in the Victorian era have historically been considered by critics to fall on gender lines. The model of upper- and middle-class Victorian culture in which men are associated with the public spheres of work and politics, and women with the private spheres of domesticity and morality, is well recognised.<sup>259</sup> Philippa Levine writes in her work on Victorian feminism, 'the ideal division between domestic woman and public man was never realized in many homes, and never became the dominant reality. As an ideology, however, it was highly effective in ordering people's values according to its precepts'.<sup>260</sup> It is this ideology that is especially prevalent in the works of Wood, although Wood herself was both a public *and* domestic figure. Further, it is well-articulated in nineteenth-century scholarship that Victorian culture tended to gender the mind as masculine and the body as feminine.<sup>261</sup> While no one could claim that these roles were asserted globally and unconditionally during the Victorian era, nor could claim that these binaries have not been complicated or unpacked by modern scholars, these two separate polarities do appear in the structure and rhetoric of many Victorian works. The gendered divisions between public/private and mind/body

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<sup>256</sup> Lyn Pykett, 'Introduction', in *St Martin's Eve* by Mrs (Ellen Price) Wood (1866), *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction 1855-1890*, series ed. by Andrew Maunder, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004) III, pp. vii-xxii (p. xiii).

<sup>257</sup> Steere, p. 117.

<sup>258</sup> Brian W. McCuskey, 'The Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgression', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28:2 (2000), pp. 359-75 (p.359).

<sup>259</sup> For lengthy examinations of this concept, see Danahay's *Gender at Work*, Rhodes's *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), and Cvetkovich's *Mixed Feelings*. Further, Harrison and Fantina argue that one of sensation fiction's great achievements want to 'probe gender roles and push the boundaries of the Victorian ideology of separate spheres' (xv).

<sup>260</sup> Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 12-13.

<sup>261</sup> Terry and Urla, p. 12; Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, 'Introduction to Section One', in *Feminist Theory and the Body*, ed. by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 17-20 (p. 18).

serve as a persistent, though often complex and sometimes even unconscious, ideologies—ideologies which Wood’s texts both reaffirm and undo overtly.

The discrepancies in logic when these two schemas are overlaid are ample: for example, it becomes difficult to reconcile man’s role in the public sphere if he is also linked to the mind, which is by necessity private and personal. The casting of women as the moral centres of society becomes impossible to maintain when women are also frequently associated with the fallibility and implied sinfulness of the flesh. Most importantly, if bodies are gendered female, and yet bodies were also pervasively and even intrusively *looked at* in the Victorian era, as this dissertation has aimed to show, the expectation that women remain in the private sphere is at odds with the view that their bodies are meant for public consumption and gaze.

In her 2008 work on Victorian visual culture, Kimberly Rhodes argues that women’s bodies were so heavily regulated through often opposing institutions and viewpoints that women had little chance of shaping their own bodily image, effectively neutering identity and agency.<sup>262</sup> Pamela K. Gilbert reads gendered bodies as inherently paradoxical when it comes to issues of morality and class: ‘Class could be read as an essential trait, in the way that gender was [and yet] a gentleman, however degraded in his experiences, remains a gentleman; a lady degraded is a lady no more’.<sup>263</sup> Gilbert argues that traits of women’s bodies are, by one set of conditions, fixed and stable and, by another set of conditions, mutable and unstable. Pamela Horn illustrates in her 1997 *Ladies of the Manor* the dichotomy between ideals of femininity in the upper classes, where women were expected simultaneously to live lives of leisure and privilege while also living lives of duty, self-sacrifice, and certain forms of labour. Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt base their collection of source readings on the role of the Victorian woman on this premise, writing,

the ideal Victorian woman – was a uniquely paradoxical creature. Revered as a semi-sacred mother figure, but considered incapable of sexual enjoyment; regarded as superior to man morally and spiritually, but held to be inferior to him in intellect and personality; credited with enormous influence at precisely the moment in modern history when she was probably most powerless; ostensibly idolized as the bearer of “the stainless sceptre of womanhood” in terms which seemed to suggest a measure of contempt; lauded (within limits) for her physical charms, while her normal

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<sup>262</sup> Rhodes, pp. 6-7.

<sup>263</sup> Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body*, pp. 67-68.

sexual processes were labelled “pathological”; surely there are few beings who have been described in such contradictory terms.<sup>264</sup>

Although some of these definitions of Victorian femininity have been challenged by critics, one of the pervading elements of both Victorian and modern understandings of nineteenth-century femininities seems to be the overarching issue of contrariness, of competing ideologies which created narrow or impossible spaces for performing gender. In her work on concepts of ancestry in Victorian literature, Sophie Gilmartin argues that the Victorians were very conscious of the dual positions of high-born women, writing:

In nineteenth-century Britain the popular fascination with the lives of royal women was partly inspired by the way these queens and princesses [Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots] dealt with this genealogical dilemma: being both royal and female they inhabited both the public and private spheres, and their blood relations were both dynastic and familial.<sup>265</sup>

Gilmartin illustrates not only that the Victorians were keenly aware of the paradoxical position of a woman in a public role, but goes on to argue that this awareness and anxiety often resulted in an entreaty for women to focus on the domestic.<sup>266</sup> The paradoxes of competing ideals show not only the problems faced by the Victorians in determining a woman’s role, especially in relation to class (as will be evidenced in Wood’s writing), but also the difficulties faced by contemporary critics in attempting to understand and unpack this role. The role of women, as exaggerated by Wood through her focus on *aristocratic* women, is less about individual traits, which sometimes happen to contradict each other or render each other impossible, and more about contradiction and impossibility *being* the role itself.

A combined analysis of the gender and class dynamics in Wood’s works shows a very clear pattern: while aristocratic women are not necessarily more severely trapped by patriarchal systems than their middle- and lower-class counterparts, their elevated class position at least highlights the social contradictions that women in general are expected to navigate. Judith Lewis goes so far as to argue that ‘although aristocrats enjoyed an exalted status in society as a whole, women of that class had very little status within their own families’.<sup>267</sup> While Lewis’s characterisation simplifies aristocratic female status and does

<sup>264</sup> Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt, *Free and Ennobled* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979), p. 1.

<sup>265</sup> Sophie Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 55.

<sup>266</sup> Gilmartin writes, ‘the popular depictions of royal women were often drawn so as to reassure British women that they were better off in the private sphere, and that those royal women who had become entangled in genealogical ambitions, emphasizing dynasty rather than family, often made a sad end’ (56).

<sup>267</sup> Judith (Schneid) Lewis, “‘Tis a Misfortune to Be a Great Ladie”: Maternal Mortality in the British Aristocracy, 1558-1959’, *Journal of British Studies*, 37:1 (January 1998), pp. 26-53 (p. 29).

not take into account the diverse dynamics, complex social structures, and heterogeneity of aristocratic families, one must acknowledge that aristocratic female status and identity were seldom fully autonomous. The dependency of female status upon male or dynastic status is crucial to understanding Wood's representation of aristocratic women, who are often portrayed as (sometimes unwilling) extensions of their fathers or husbands. For example, in her 1864 *Lord Oakburn's Daughters*, Wood depicts how a father's general tyranny over his daughters is heightened when he inherits a title; he considers his daughters' conduct to require even greater policing and restraint since, through no fault of their own, they will now attract public attention and judgment, and must therefore represent him well publicly by remaining private and discreet. While almost all of Wood's female characters suffer at the hands of men or at male-driven institutions, Wood's aristocratic female characters seem to suffer on a grander or more absurd scale, a scale which is dictated by the greater social expectations that their high class position requires of them.

Their suffering is manifested through one specific trope: the lack of a body. Wood's portraiture of aristocratic women lacks corporeality, a trait she reserves largely for her middle- and lower-class women or for male characters in general, regardless of class. Her aristocratic females are discussed a great deal by narrator and other characters alike, usually in terms of beauty, style, and the emotion their physical presence instils in the viewer. An extreme and emblematic example comes in her 1863 novel *The Shadow of Ashlydyat*, where the eponymous 'shadow' is the death of the first Lady Godolphin, ancestor to the aristocratic protagonists, at the hand of her husband. Her absence is able to traverse centuries, evoke an emotional response in the subsequent holders of the title, and even dictate how they live their lives. Though she is technically nowhere, her legend is omnipresent, making her constantly felt and seen without requiring a body.

Despite being constantly seen and gazed upon, the bodies of aristocratic females are especially absent in comparison with characters from other demographics; the reader rarely gets the specific details of an aristocratic woman's body and appearance. These women characters are denied the reality of physical needs and instead only express emotional ones; they are repeatedly referred to as objects or in terms of intangible ideas instead of being described as individuals, or even humans; and the plots are structured around an absence of physical presence. In *Castle Wafer: or, The Plain Gold Ring* (1868), the aristocratic heroine, Adeline, suffers from consumption, with her literal absence (her

gradual wasting away) serving as the climax of the novel.<sup>268</sup> Wood writes, ‘People talk sometimes of the “beauty” of consumption, but they should see Adeline de Castella. Nearly all apparent symptoms of the disease have passed away. Never was she so beautiful as she is now, delicate and fragile of course [...] Her features are more than ever conspicuous for their exquisite contour’.<sup>269</sup> Adeline’s beauty and selfhood are reliant upon her lack of presence: the less of her there is, the more her features stand out. Further, though she suffers from a very physical disease, all symptoms and suffering are denied, as though Adeline were a form of life too lofty for bodily sensation.

This lack of body is further complicated by what Laura Mulvey calls in her work on the gaze, ‘woman’s to-be-looked-at-ness’.<sup>270</sup> The lack of a body in Wood’s texts is often perplexingly juxtaposed with how frequently those characters’ non-bodies are gazed upon: the upper-class female characters are public figures, whether they seek out that public gaze or not. While this ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ is experienced by most of Wood’s female characters, it is heightened drastically in her aristocratic females since their position in the public eye further problematises the already problematic situation of being a woman. The demands on these characters’ bodies and identities are purposely ludicrous.

This inverse relationship between body and gaze becomes clear through a comparative analysis of female characters from lower classes. Many critics read Wood as the ultimate champion and destigmatiser of social mobility, although her depiction of social mobility is often ambiguous and requiring of some sacrifice by her characters.<sup>271</sup> The paradoxes in Wood’s representations of social mobility are strongly informed by her inversion of the female body with the gaze. As women ascend or descend the social hierarchy, they are denied or granted physicality. When Wood’s aristocratic women descend the scale, there is often a reclamation of identity and body-hood, since a lower social status means, to Wood, one fewer tether to patriarchal institutions and duties. The aristocratic characters that descend the social ladder are (for the first time, and in a confused space where punishment mingles with liberation) allowed to acknowledge

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<sup>268</sup> The narrative of Wood’s *Castle Wafer: or, The Plain Gold Ring* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, Publishers, 1868) though published on its own in 1868, seems to have first appeared, at least in part, as a subplot in Wood’s 1866 novel, *St Martin’s Eve*.

<sup>269</sup> Wood, *Castle Wafer*, p. 77.

<sup>270</sup> Mulvey, p. 11.

<sup>271</sup> Marie Riley, ‘Writing for the Million: The enterprising fiction of Ellen Wood’, in *Popular Victorian Women Writers*, ed. by Kay Boardman and Shirley Jones (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) pp. 165-85 (p. 165); Susan Balee, ‘Correcting the Historical Context: The Real Publication Dates of “East Lynne”’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 26:3 (Fall 1993), pp. 143-45 (p. 144); Tamara S. Wagner, ‘“Essentially a Lady”: Resistant values of the shabby-genteel in Ellen Wood’s Novels of High Life’, *Women’s Writing*, 15:2 (2008), pp. 199-218 (pp. 201-02).

hunger, thirst, exhaustion, and physical pain. This is not to say that Wood implies any benefit in belonging to one class or another; most of her depictions of social change, whether up or down, are bittersweet and it is therefore difficult to determine any consistency regarding class preference, privilege, or suffering. In short, the aristocratic female characters in Wood's novels are denied, through paradoxes of conflicting ideals, one of the most primal levels of identity and self. Their tense navigations of the contradictions of femininity serve as hyperbolic representations for the difficulties faced by nineteenth-century British womankind in general.

The role of women's bodies in the public eye—the general gaze being largely inescapable for aristocrats, as this dissertation has illustrated—is a topic fraught with nuance, contradiction, and controversy. Wood engages heavily with women's bodies in the public eye, along with the ensuing contradictions and controversies that entails. One of these major contradictions, although for Wood generally only applicable to her aristocratic families, was what critics Karen Chase and Michael Levenson call the Victorian 'Theater of Domesticity'.<sup>272</sup> Chase and Levenson trace the rise of the Victorian celebration of the privacy of the family, and especially the privacy of women. This celebration was subverted by a voyeuristic mass media even as that mass media reified the importance of that privacy. This domestic voyeurism was nowhere more prevalent than in aristocratic circles where the events of private lives occasionally become matters of state or forms of mass entertainment. As has been evidenced through many historical examples of public domesticity and its effect on the interpretation of the female body—examples which will be examined below and which set the social precedent and gender coding evident in Wood's writing—aristocratic women, when put in the public spotlight for a middle-class audience, were largely judged by the moral and behavioural standards of that audience. In the public eye, if not necessarily in their own class group, aristocratic women were held to the same ideological criteria as middle class women, but did not enjoy the same anonymity or privacy in their social embarrassments. Upper-class female sexuality is perhaps the most frequent and prominent example of public domesticity: imprudent marriages, divorces, infidelities, and reproductive struggles often garnered a national spotlight for the aristocracy; the public was usually far less forgiving of the female participants and their 'weak' bodies or 'sinful' urges.<sup>273</sup> Private issues became public property, by virtue of class;

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<sup>272</sup> Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>273</sup> Sexual and matrimonial scandals in the aristocracy and their influence over female reputation and perceptions of body have been evidenced amply by historians. See Gail MacColl and Carol McD. Wallace's

domestic life for aristocratic women was transformed into entertainment, a consumer product (as has been seen in the chapter on silver fork novels), or a matter of political public interest (as has been seen in the chapter on Reynolds). For example, in his 'Introduction' to excerpts from her magazine, James Drummond relates how Ishbel Gordon, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, was criticised in highly publicised gossip for her domestic arrangements, with many considering her familiarity with her servants and tenants to border on inappropriate.<sup>274</sup> By virtue of her stature alone, the private arrangements of her household were turned into a source of public amusement and outrage. Judith Schneid Lewis discusses the commodification of celebrity-aristocrats, even regarding their most intimate habits: 'If the Duchess of Devonshire's endorsement of a Wedgewood flower pot (bearing her name) guaranteed the worldwide sale of thousands, then her patronage of a physician or her enthusiasm for breast-feeding were similarly influential'.<sup>275</sup> The most intimate details of her health and bodily choices were transformed, through the voyeurism surrounding her status, into public fads. Chase and Levenson write of the 1839 Bedroom Crisis in Queen Victoria's first year on the throne:

The history of kingship has always been a record of tense dealings between the private and public bodies of the sovereign, but in the case of Victoria the tension inevitably sharpened. The problems of her sex [...] meant that Victoria came to symbolize a mythology of private experience – its vulnerability, its innocence – even as she was held, and held herself, to the exacting standard of impersonality.<sup>276</sup>

Victoria's situation, and the public reaction to it, embodies the exact contradiction found in Wood's writing, where aristocratic females are trapped in the incompatible overlap between the ideals of private femininity and the ideals of public figurehead-ship and duty. Much of the public reaction to the lives of aristocratic women indicates little room or tolerance for their bodily functions or desires, despite the public's often prurient interests in just such topics. As public figures, aristocratic women are automatically converted into public symbols, and as women, they are infused with certain precepts for private life. In

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*To Marry an English Lord* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1989, repr. 2012); Lawrence Stone's *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England, 1660-1857* (1993) (Oxford Scholarship Online, October 2011), <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198202547.001.0001>>; Leckie's *Culture and Adultery*; Mulvey-Roberts's 'Introduction', p. xiii; Pamela Horn's *Ladies of the Manor*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1997), p. 166; O'Connell's *Aristocratic Women*, p. 3; p. 94; and Newby's *Women's Lives* (p. 109; pp. 120-22) among just a few.

<sup>274</sup> James Drummond, 'Introduction' in *Upstairs to Downstairs: Advice to Servant Girls and Weary Mothers*, ed. by James Drummond, extracts from 1891-96 issues of *Onward And Upward* by Ishbel Gordon, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983, repr. 1991) pp. 1-12 (p. 3).

<sup>275</sup> J. S. Lewis, *In the Family Way*, p. 8

<sup>276</sup> Chase and Levenson, p. 47.



Wood's novels in particular, the literary and social rhetoric surrounding aristocratic women shows them to be therefore twice as idolised and emblematised as middle- or lower class women, and twice as dehumanised and disembodied.

### East Lynne

Wood's second novel, *East Lynne*, proved to be her most popular and enduring work.<sup>277</sup> The popularity, content, and style of *East Lynne* are often interpreted by critics as being indicative of Wood's status as a barometer of middle-class feeling. Marie Riley argues that Wood's inclusion of contemporary topics and use of popular genres and narrative devices provide 'the modern reader with a snapshot of mid-century fictional concerns', while Boardman and Jones in their work on popular Victorian women writers find that Wood was 'a writer very much in tune with her public and her celebration of bourgeois values has much to tell us about the textual construction of class and gendered cultural identity'.<sup>278</sup> In particular, I argue that Wood's work reflects bourgeois values at an intra-class level, revealing not only some middle class perspectives on class and gender, but also indicating what they believed the upper classes thought about the same.

The formula of *East Lynne* was one that Wood would repeat successfully during the 1860s and 1870s. It contained topical material, in this instance the Marriage Reform Act of 1857 and a slew of train crashes receiving vast amounts of press coverage; a religious and moral conservatism that neutralised any shocking sensational content; a series of corrections Wood made in subsequent editions in reaction to the expressed tastes of her readership, a practice which seems to be standard in Wood's career; and a style defined by modern critics as perfectly 'middle-brow' which enabled it to be read by the largest possible audience.<sup>279</sup> In short, despite the possible proto-feminist radicalism underlying her work, Wood's body of work is largely considered to be the very essence of middle-class taste and opinion.

*East Lynne* tells the story of Lady Isabel Vane, daughter of a kind but dissolute earl whose early death threatens her socioeconomic security. She takes shelter in a marriage to an upstanding middle-class lawyer, Archibald Carlyle, away from whom she is eventually

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<sup>277</sup> *East Lynne* went through five editions in its first year of print alone (Sergeant), 24 editions in its first ten years (Riley p. 166), and 36 editions in its first twenty, indicating 'the ready market for Wood's writing' (Liggins and Maunder, p. 150). Wood's *Lady Adelaide's Oath*, by way of comparison, only went through nine editions in its first twenty years.

<sup>278</sup> Riley, p. 167; Kay Boardman and Shirley Jones, 'Introduction', in *Popular Victorian Women Writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 1-21 (p. 12).

<sup>279</sup> Liggins and Maunder, p. 151; Riley, p. 165.

seduced by a depraved aristocrat, Levison. After being severely disfigured in a railway accident, Lady Isabel returns home and becomes governess to her own children under an assumed identity. She suffers while witnessing Archibald's happy remarriage to her middle-class rival, Barbara, before revealing her true identity and dying at the novel's conclusion.

Body, class, and gender are so entwined in the very premise of the novel that it is difficult to unravel one element without a simultaneous unravelling of the others. The novel's opening sentences, which describe Isabel's father, prepare the reader for this tightly linked relationship:

His hair was grey, the smoothness of his expansive brow was defaced by premature wrinkles, and his once attractive face bore the pale, unmistakable look of dissipation. One of his feet was cased in folds of linen, as it rested on a soft velvet ottoman; speaking of gout as plainly as any foot ever spoke yet [...] His years were barely nine-and-forty; yet in all, save years, he was an aged man.<sup>280</sup>

The choice to open the novel with the highest ranking man in its pages, instead of with the novel's female protagonist, replicates the reality of the social order: upper-class men come first. The second character seen is Archibald Carlyle, who comes for a meeting with the earl, pushing Isabel's presence even further down the scale of importance behind middle-class men. Isabel's name serves as the title for this first chapter and she is referenced by the Earl throughout, and yet she is not introduced to the reader until several pages later. Her presence hovers over the chapter with nothing to substantiate it until she appears; structurally, Lady Isabel is introduced as all surface and no substance. When Isabel finally appears before the reader, Archibald Carlyle's thoughts precede the narrator's, 'Who – what – was it? Mr Carlyle looked, not quite sure whether it was a human being: he almost thought it more like an angel'.<sup>281</sup> That Isabel is deemed to be a 'what' and an 'it', with a questionable status as a human being, exemplifies the undermining of Victorian female identity at a systematic level; though Archibald is a deeply respectful and considerate character and his thoughts are intended as the highest praise of his reverence for her beauty, even his highest praise is condescending and dehumanising. He gazes upon her without seeing, and his reaction to her indicates that she is not an individual, but rather a series of intangible impressions to be given to others. It is significant that the Earl is initially seen only through narration, and yet Isabel is seen through the eyes of the middle-

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<sup>280</sup> Mrs Henry (Ellen Price) Wood, *East Lynne* (1861), ed. by Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 5

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

class proxy for the reader, Archibald. Her ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ is more apparent, and yet she is perceived far more shallowly than her aristocratic male counterparts.

Further, Lady Isabel’s ethereal nature is juxtaposed with her father’s earthy portraiture to reify his possession of a body, and her lack of one. His pain speaks not only of his palpable physical presence, but also of his physical history, with gout often stemming from the frequent sensual enjoyments of eating rich food and drinking to excess, as was explained frequently and with vitriol in Reynolds’s *Mysteries of the Court of London*. His body is so present that even single body parts have voices: one of his feet speaks ‘of gout as plainly as any foot ever spoke yet’. That Isabel is revealed to be beautiful, young, and have dark hair is hardly sufficient description for a protagonist, especially when compared with the richness of the description of her father who is, at best, a secondary character who dies early in the first volume of the novel. The relationship between their respective introductions continues: ‘Lord Mount Severn raised his swollen eyelids and drew the clothes from his flushed face. A shining vision was standing before him, a beauteous queen, a gleaming fairy; he hardly knew what she looked like’.<sup>282</sup> His physicality is real, and is given the right to privacy. He is in a private room in his own home and is gazed upon only by the reader. Isabel is viewed by both the reader and the characters in the text; in this scene, she is leaving to attend a concert and has dressed with purposeful exquisiteness because her presence at the event will raise more charitable money. She is consciously attending in order to be looked at by the locals, and to serve as the real attraction at the concert instead of the music. Despite the social and financial value given to her presence, she is yet denied a body in her father’s assessment of her and is again qualified as a ‘what’ instead of a ‘whom’. Ideals of femininity are at odds in this scene, in which her class role as a purveyor of care and support to her father’s tenants conforms to ideals of aristocratic femininity and Christian charity, and yet is simultaneously undercut by her departure from the home with the overt intention to put her body on display in a public forum.

Isabel’s visual presence and bodily absence are further accentuated when middle class women enter the text and the reader is able to see how female body dynamics (namely, how those bodies are represented and react to external sources) respond to patriarchal structures in different class groups. When the town of West Lynne hears that the earl will visit his home, East Lynne, the township ‘was in ecstasies. It called itself an

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

aristocratic place, and it indulged hopes that the earl might be intending to confer upon it permanently the light of his presence, by taking up his residence again in East Lynne'.<sup>283</sup> His physical presence is enough to help an entire township hone and elevate its identity; Isabel is treated merely as an accessory to his status, since the decision to move, the title, and the house are his.

Where the earl's effect on the town is positive and his presence lends itself to their evolving self-definition, the effect of Isabel's presence is far more ambiguous, encouraging a mixture of eager anticipation, escapism, judgment, and hostile competition in the townspeople, especially in the townswomen. The earl's presence only helps to bolster the identity of others. Isabel's presence both bolsters the identity of others while simultaneously causing feelings of inadequacy; Isabel is a reductive force, even in the act of increasing and improving. Having never seen the earl or Isabel, nor knowing how they might be dressed, their scheduled first appearance at church causes a panic for suitably glamorous clothing amongst the locals: 'West Lynne seems bent on outdressing the Lady Isabel. You should have been in at the milliner's yesterday morning'.<sup>284</sup> It is only Lady Isabel whom West Lynne is bent on outdressing—the earl's presence is its own reward, while Isabel's worth stems from how she conforms to the town's visual expectations.

Those expectations are well revealed through one of the townswomen's choice of dress on the Vanes' first church appearance: 'they saw something looming up the street, flashing and gleaming in the sun. A pink parasol came first, a pink bonnet and feather came behind it, a grey brocaded dress, and white gloves'.<sup>285</sup> The outfit in question can be seen as a desire to emulate, as well as to compete with, Lady Isabel—namely, to mirror and thereby enhance Isabel's identity, as the townswomen understand it, while also striving to reduce that identity by appearing in superior dress. The outfit, though entirely dissimilar from anything Isabel ever wears, could be read as a successful mirroring of Isabel's situation: the wearer is rendered visually conspicuous, and yet despite being known personally to all of her viewers, her identity is absent from the quotation, with the viewer qualifying her as a 'something' and through a list of her accessories. This emulation of female aristocratic identity illustrates that the middle-class defined that identity as visual and objectified. This middle-class demonstration of high fashion could also be read as a gauche misunderstanding of money and style which, as Chapter 1 on

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

silver fork fiction illustrated, was often ridiculed in the 'less is more' style of the aristocracy. This is especially true when compared to how Isabel and the earl actually dress for church: 'some strangers came quietly up the aisle; a gentleman who limped as he walked, with a furrowed brow, and grey hair; and a young lady [... T]hey could not be the expected strangers, the young lady's dress was too plain'.<sup>286</sup> This passage is crucial not only for demonstrating the visual significance of the aristocrat, but also for underscoring Wood's message about the discrepancies between the upper and middle classes. The reader is able to see the middle-class misjudgement of aristocratic identity, wealth, and style, and the upper-class misunderstanding of the visual needs and desires of the middle classes.

Barbara Hare, Isabel's middle-class foil, is far more active and independent than Isabel, though both live in oppressive male environments. She fills the role of detective in the murder mystery subplot of the novel, defying her tyrannical father's orders so she may contribute a great deal toward the investigation. Her father, Justice Hare, serves as a more explicit criticism of the patriarchy than the other men in the novel. While not an immoral or malicious man, his absolute reign over his household is based on tradition, Mrs Grundyism, and his own comforts, to the despair of his anxiety-riddled wife. The pettiness of his demands illustrates the consistent low-level devaluation of women under a male-driven institution, where minor oppressions lead to major systematic ones under the guise of common practise and convention. His stature in the town as an honest and hardworking gentleman who has ties to the law reinforces his conviction in his own self-righteousness. Wood writes, 'Justice Hare was stern, imperative, obstinate, and self-conceited; she [Mrs Hare], timid, gentle, and submissive [... H]er life had been one long yielding of her will to his: in fact, she had no will; his, was all in all'.<sup>287</sup> Wood's portrayal of the Hares, and, in fact, also her portrayal of Archibald Carlyle and Levison, is not so much to reveal intentional malice in the male subjection of women but rather a society-wide indifference to their plight. What these three patriarchs have in common is that they all equally benefit from a system which places their needs and influence above all others.

The differences between the Hare household and the Vane household are class-based. Firstly, the duties of the Hare women are more individualised and private to suit a small, nuclear, untitled family. Secondly, the Hare women are not as isolated by their class and gender as Isabel is, since their household contains a small female network of equals

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

instead of a lone mistress and her servants; even were Isabel's home to be filled with female relatives, the subject of precedence would surely infiltrate her relationships, at least to a small degree, keeping her segregated by levels of prestige. The Hare household, however despotic, is intimate and contains fewer contradictions than Isabel's. Barbara is described as 'a pretty girl, very fair, with blue eyes, light hair, a bright complexion, and small aquiline features' (21).<sup>288</sup> Her description, though fairly bland, has the benefit of being purely physical, unlike Isabel's indefinable luminescence; Barbara also has the benefit of having the slight irregularity of aquiline features, a description which connotes a level of masculinity and is therefore unusual in depictions of beautiful young heroines. Barbara is also depicted as having 'inherited his [Justice Hare's] will, but in her it was softened down'. With these two descriptions one can see Wood's inclusion of patriarchy at a middle-class level, though its presence is diluted by female agency: Barbara is defined physically, but for her physicality to exist, it must be slightly masculine; she has a will, but for that will to exist, it also must be slightly masculine. Wood writes that Justice Hare bore 'a resemblance to his daughter', casting Barbara in a role of narrative superiority to him.<sup>289</sup> She is introduced first, and Justice Hare is described in relation to her. However, Wood has already undone the female identity she here attempts to establish. Logistically, Barbara must bear a resemblance to her father, instead of the other way around, since her very existence relies upon his. Further, Barbara was initially described in relation to Justice Hare before he appeared on stage, with a patriarchal presence looming over her before he is even a textual reality, establishing him as an authority over her body almost subliminally. Barbara is presented as an individual at a surface level, though ultimately defined by her nearest male relation. She enjoys the possession of a body and a strong sense of self (or at least the illusion of a body and a strong sense of self) due to her class status, though her gender keeps her from being entirely independent.

As a middle-class family, the Hare women are not gazed upon and get to enjoy the mixed blessing of bodily awareness and sensation. Mrs Hare, Barbara's mother, is an invalid held captive by her anxiety and general ill-health. Chronically cold and thirsty, she believes herself unable to have fires lighted or tea served without her husband's permission, his total control over her body remaining even when he is not present. The victimisation of Mrs Hare is distressing to the reader, especially considering Wood's own

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

status as an invalid.<sup>290</sup> In her biographical work on Wood, Lucy Sussex posits that this invalidism was a motivating force in Wood's career, saying, 'This was perhaps the one thing Wood could not control: her body'.<sup>291</sup> The parallels between Wood and Mrs Hare are prominent, especially if both of the tightly-knit Hare women are taken into account: Mrs Hare, though infirm, is submissive, gentle, and feminine, just as Wood decided to portray herself publicly; Barbara is an unyielding force of action and production, just as Wood was in her professional life. When both characters are taken together as a stand-in for the middle-class Wood, especially in relation to the disembodied Isabel Vane, the idea of the body takes on a new significance as an item of intense private worth, serving as the foundation for selfhood. An individual body may be controlled by others, but its base sensory level cannot be stopped, restricted, or lived by anyone else.

As Barbara and Isabel swap positions in the text, so does the portrayal of their bodies change. Isabel's transition, like the rest of her experience, is depicted by Wood as more extreme, with a loftier starting point and a correspondingly hard drop. The significance of their mutual exchange of positions, which will be explored individually below, must first be taken together in comparison with the mobility and mutability of men in the novel. Plainly, though there is a general trend in *East Lynne* of the rise of the middle class and the slow decay of the aristocracy, the narrative gives witness to no active class transition for men: all changes in position were long-coming before the start of the narrative, and the resulting portraiture merely shows men, established. Even amidst an apparent shuffling of class order, there is a solidity to the male experience: at the start of the novel, the earl's fortune and health had been dwindling away for decades, Levison was an established rake, Isabel's uncle had long expected to inherit the earldom, and even Archibald Carlyle opens the text with the purchase of East Lynne, the result of years of hard work that show the middle class's realignment into aristocratic spaces. The reader is not able to read the male body in the same way that he or she reads the female body, because the male body is not as visible: any major displacements or conversions that it goes through have happened before the reader's gaze is applied to it.

Pamela K. Gilbert, in her work on the body in Victorian women's popular novels, describes this double standard of bodily coding in literature by writing,

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<sup>290</sup> It is likely that Wood developed scoliosis in her teens, leaving her largely bed-ridden. See Sergeant; Lucy Sussex, 'Mrs. Henry Wood and her Memorials', *Women's Writing*, 15:2 (2008), pp. 157-68 (p. 163).

<sup>291</sup> Sussex, p. 163.

The bodies of women, being more permeable, more mutable, more *textual* than those of men, depended more on context for their meaning, and were vulnerable to rereadings – or rewritings – through experience which could change them essentially. In short, a gentleman, whoever degraded in his experiences, remains a gentleman; a lady degraded is a lady no more.<sup>292</sup>

This issue of nobility, of being a ‘lady’, is at the forefront of *East Lynne*’s plot, not only with the fall of Isabel Vane but also with the rise of Barbara Hare, and their correlating bodily evolutions. As has been examined, the active Barbara and her relationship to her body-conscious mother demonstrate a beneficially personal, if at times fraught, middle-class domesticity. After Barbara’s marriage to the divorced Archibald Carlyle, she joins him at the top of the town hierarchy in his newly-constructed middle-class form of aristocracy through wealth, with Barbara stepping into Isabel’s vacant position both as Archibald’s wife *and* as the public first lady of West Lynne. Barbara’s body reacts accordingly to her status as the new bourgeois nobility: she is shunted to the back of the narrative. Just like Isabel, Barbara quietly produces children off-screen, and exhibits little bodily intimacy in her love-match—at least as opposed to the intimacy seen in her middle-class mother’s marriage, which even gives the audience a view of Justice and Mrs Hare inhabiting a bed together.<sup>293</sup> The difficulty with reading Barbara as she ascends to a new style of aristocracy is that there is little there to read: what must be read is absence, her newfound publicity having rendered her neutral.

In her introduction to *East Lynne*, Elisabeth Jay reads Barbara and Isabel’s inverse transitions in class and domesticity in a feminist light, arguing that Barbara was an engaging character in the first half of the book, but in the second, after her marriage, ‘she becomes little more than a complacent wife and mother [....] Isabel, by contrast, ceases to be the passive object of discussion that she is in the first part, becomes a narrative focalizer, and achieves a degree of agency’.<sup>294</sup> What Jay does not list in this series of contrasts is Isabel’s drastic physical metamorphosis which, while operating as a conservative narrative punishment for Isabel’s promiscuity, also liberates the character and the novel from typical conventions. The combination of Isabel’s train crash injuries and poverty not only strip her of her identity as the beautiful Lady Isabel, but they send her bodily portrayals ricocheting from total aristocratic disembodiment, far beyond the

<sup>292</sup> Gilbert, *Disease, Desire and the Body*, p. 68.

<sup>293</sup> Wood, *East Lynne*, p. 229.

<sup>294</sup> Elisabeth Jay, ‘Introduction’ to *East Lynne* by Mrs. Henry Wood (1861) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, repr. 2008), vii-xxxix (p. xxi).



obedient-but-present bodies of the middle-class women, and into the individualist realm of men. Wood writes of Isabel immediately after her accident,

she heard them say that she would not survive amputation, and that nothing else could be done, that she must die whether there were an operation or not. The injuries lay in one leg, and in the lower part of her face [....] She was unable to move, but the shock had deadened sensation, she was not yet in pain, and her mind was for a short interval preternaturally clear and lucid.<sup>295</sup>

Not only does Isabel's impossible survival render her a Christ figure, but with the final sentence, one is able to see her full transition through the gendered class systems. Despite her critical injuries, she is still disembodied and feels no pain, her 'deadened sensation' akin to her portrayal since the start of the text. However, the narrator indicates that this time will soon be at an end, that Isabel 'was not *yet* in pain', and bodily sensation is impending. Before the middle-class bodily suffering arrives, Isabel is correlated with the mind, completing the gendering of her physical description as male. In a single paragraph, Isabel is placed on an equal descriptive footing with men, her situation has granted her enormous amounts of agency, and she comes into possession of both a body and (gendered male) mind.

The shedding of all residual aristocratic markers and codifiers takes Isabel only a matter of pages, a process which happens in tandem with her physical recuperation. 'She [Isabel] was not travelling under her own name; she left that behind her when she left Grenoble'.<sup>296</sup> Wood, in an obvious pun, has Isabel depart both from Grenoble and her noble identity in the same moment. She changes her name to 'Madame Vine', maintaining her original Vane identity but camouflaging it with a single alteration. Though her wounds are considered hideous by others and she wears bright spectacles, ill-fitting clothes, and an odd hat to obscure her looks, she has the anonymity of an individual not held in the public gaze and whose physical disfigurements free her from being held to feminine and domestic ideals. For the first time, she is conspicuous, but not looked at—a complete reversal of the modest and reticent Lady Isabel whose looks were analysed and treated as a form of entertainment. The catharsis is clear in Wood's writing: 'She [Isabel] longed, none knew with what intense longing, to be unknown, obscure, totally unrecognized by all [....]

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<sup>295</sup> Wood, *East Lynne*, pp. 320-21.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid*, p. 326.

Thus the unhappy Lady Isabel's career was looked upon as run [...] It was over. Lady Isabel Vane was as one forgotten'.<sup>297</sup>

Judith Schneid Lewis's 1986 historical work, *In the Family Way: Childbearing in the British Aristocracy, 1760-1860*, examines the transformation of domestic ideals and practices in the aristocracy, while A.P.W. Malcomson's 2006 *The Pursuit of the Heiress: Aristocratic Marriage in Ireland 1740-1840* looks at the monetary, legal, and social effects of moneyed and upper-class marriages, both of which help to unpack the socio-historical significance of Isabel's adultery. Lewis's research illustrates the transformation of the marriage institution from one of family concern, public stature, and economic consideration in the eighteenth century, to one more focused on love matches, privacy, and domesticity in the nineteenth century. This transformation of focus created obvious complications for the aristocracy, whose personages remained highly public and whose very survival as an institution still depended on the realistic financial and social calculations that surrounded aristocratic marriages in the eighteenth century and before, calculations which Malcomson considered to be 'common sense' for the aristocracy.<sup>298</sup> Isabel's marriage and subsequent pursuit of love outside of marriage exemplify the impossible cultural position in which she is placed. She must decide between her personal welfare in an advantageous marriage or her personal happiness and identity in a romantic connection. In both instances, her body and identity are equally reinforced and restricted by her choice: her social identity and friendships will be affected inversely to the pursuit of her own desires; she can be fulfilled personally or socially, but not both. Her body is also called upon, in the one instance to perform sexually (or not) as she wishes (though Levison pressures and manipulates her, the decision is ultimately her own), or to perform sexually as required by her spouse. In the former instance, children she may bear will suffer from the taint of illegitimacy and both her legitimate and illegitimate children may legally be taken from her. In the latter instance, she may be forced to bear unwanted children as her duty dictates, but will earn access to them through her continued 'suitable' behaviour. The conditions of her sexuality and childbearing are not the only bodily concerns to consider: as is seen, when married to Archibald, Isabel is rescued from poverty and possible homelessness, wanting for nothing under his roof, but under Levison's influence she returns to near-starvation and squalor, with extensive bodily harm

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid, p. 327.

<sup>298</sup> A.P.W. Malcomson, *The Pursuit of the Heiress: Aristocratic Marriage in Ireland 1740-1840* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2006), p. 3.

resulting from a train wreck. In either situation, her body is not her own to support and her identity is still hugely dependent upon the man of her choice.

Isabel's adultery and subsequent divorce also highlight significant issues of class and its effect on domesticity. Returning to Lewis's research on the changing ideals of marriage, one can see an even deeper misalignment between Isabel and Archibald. Due to the business-like nature of many marriages before the mid-Victorian era, and to a lesser extent during and after it, aristocratic women were able to embark upon extramarital affairs provided they followed stringent rules: first producing legitimate 'heirs and spares' and then, above all, being discreet.<sup>299</sup> While certainly not encouraged, Lewis writes that female adultery was tolerated so long as one 'never embarrassed one's husband in public', further restricting the behaviour of the overly-viewed female and asserting the need for a false domestic persona to be shown in public.<sup>300</sup> As will be evidenced, Isabel Vane, caught between class systems and the evolving marital landscape, was not allowed the option for this public mask: her middle-class marriage dictating sincerity while her personal title demanding the public gaze.

While Levison's nonchalant approach to infidelity speaks to his more antiquated aristocratic views on sexuality and marriage, Archibald Carlyle's blind devotion to his wife conforms to his more modern and deeply middle-class views on domesticity, the nuclear family, and the pursuit of love in marriage, views that Isabel herself has come to espouse. While Archibald's treatment of Isabel is always respectful and caring, he unwittingly falls into the trap of domestic misogyny described by John Stuart Mill in his 1869 *The Subjection of Women*. Mill writes, 'Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments. All men except the most brutish, desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave, but a willing one', a desire which Isabel sometimes fulfils, out of her own indoctrination into female subservience.<sup>301</sup> Their first kiss is rife with dictated gender norms and a miscommunication of desires and motives, he out of passion, and she out of a confused sense of duty: 'He drew her closer to him, bent his face, and took from her lips his first kiss. Isabel was passive; she supposed he had gained the right'.<sup>302</sup> This kiss is juxtaposed with the first, albeit platonic, kiss Archibald gives Barbara: upon bringing her a locket as a present, he

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<sup>299</sup> MacColl and Wallace, pp. 251-53.

<sup>300</sup> J. S. Lewis, *In the Family Way*, p. 39; Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society*, p. 118.

<sup>301</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869) (London: Virago Press, 1983), p. 26.

<sup>302</sup> Wood, *East Lynne*, p. 112.

bent down and kissed her cheek, swung through the gate, laughing, and strode away. “Don’t say I never gave you anything,” he turned his head round to say [...] “Don’t say I never gave you anything,” she murmured; “did he allude to the chain or to the—kiss? Oh, Archibald, why don’t you say that you love me?”<sup>303</sup>

In both instances, there is unclear communication and motivations, asymmetrical desire, physical agency on the part of Archibald, and passivity on the part of the woman.

However, Barbara is subject of the pain of romantic longing, clear-cut desires, and even the partial fulfilment of those desires, while Isabel, at best, feels a tepid satisfaction at fulfilling her duty to the patriarchy.

Despite Archibald’s status as the sympathetic and honourable hero of the novel, his major failure is his assumption that his middle-class male perspective is the universal perspective. By assuming Isabel would only marry him out of love instead of from necessity, he places her on the pedestal of middle-class Victorian womanhood and leaves her no room to manoeuvre, operate, or communicate with him as an individual. Therefore, caught between what her social class and lover would deem acceptable, and what her personal views and husband would never allow, she cannot take a *laissez faire* approach to sexuality and must instead fully elope with the unworthy Levison in an attempt to find unconventional domestic bliss. In doing so, she upsets her status in both social classes by allowing her affections to wander in the first place and then by publicly embarrassing her husband. Levison’s subsequent refusal to marry her, even after the birth of their child, causes Isabel’s uncle, the new Lord Mount Severn, to exclaim, ‘You, an earl’s daughter! Oh, Isabel! How utterly you have lost yourself!’, reinforcing the stance that other men’s positions and actions ultimately serve as the foundation for her identity.<sup>304</sup>

Her divorce from Archibald reveals the same patterns of female agency and class mobility. Isabel is utterly absent from the entire divorce proceedings, having fled to the Continent with her lover, and yet is heavily publicised for it, her rank ensuring that news of her private marital and sexual life would be published in *The Times* at the finalisation of her divorce. The action is solely with Archibald, and the news is purposefully kept from her by Levison, so Isabel is denied the ability to change or even to *know* her own status. Further, the divorce indicates not only her social fall, but also the descent of the aristocracy in general. While Lawrence Stone articulates that the breaking up of marriages, usually through abandonment, was generally the province of the poor and the result of the

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, p. 308.

pressures of poverty, obtaining an actual divorce was an expensive and time-consuming endeavour, conditions which once restricted it to (though it rarely undertaken by) the upper class.<sup>305</sup> Archibald's divorce not only indicates the new wealth and leisure of the middle classes, but also reifies middle-class views on marriage as the new Victorian standard: aristocratic promiscuity will not be tolerated in the new hegemonic order.

With Isabel's death at the end of the novel comes the final coding of gender and class signifiers. Isabel reveals her true identity to Archibald and Barbara before dying in their home, which was once Isabel's by right. Elisabeth Jay sees Archibald's decree to bury his first wife anonymously, along with his decree that her name is never to be spoken in his home again, as the final patriarchal denial of female identity.<sup>306</sup> However, this may be read as a redemptive act on Archibald's part, granting his wife the privacy and bodily focus in death that he never allowed her in life. Lewis writes of aristocratic funerals that 'women of the aristocracy continued to have an important public role can be seen by a brief glimpse at the funerals given them, which emphasized their rank above all other considerations'.<sup>307</sup> Isabel's funeral emphasises her body above her rank. While her body is, indeed, separated from her name on her headstone, her initials remain. The signifiers 'I. V.' preserve enough of her identity while separating her from her position as a lady. The modest gravestone indicates purely that there is a body there, whereas the opulent pillar she would have likely received had she been buried under her own name would have called more visual attention to her station and again left her body unconsidered. Further, Archibald allows her to be buried near her father, so her body enjoys the benefit of familial proximity without being branded an 'earl's daughter'. Instead of forever eradicating her selfhood, as some critics would read it, Archibald liberates Isabel from the burden of her title.

However, Wood's final contradiction remains: though Isabel is liberated from certain patriarchal constraints, her final liberation still requires the patriarchy's consent. Though Isabel frees herself from much of the male power and influence in the second half of the text, she could only do so at this last juncture with the aid and power of the patriarchy. Ultimately her body again becomes an object for Archibald to interpret and control, rendering Wood's structuring of female agency and position purposefully mixed.

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<sup>305</sup> Stone, pp. 5-6.

<sup>306</sup> Jay, p. xxv.

<sup>307</sup> J. S. Lewis, *In the Family Way*, p. 13.

### Lady Adelaide's Oath

Wood's 1867 work, *Lady Adelaide's Oath* (republished in 1879 as *Lady Adelaide*), is a sensation novel that continues the tropes of class mobility and its effects on female bodily absence that were developed in *East Lynne*. The novel will be referred to by its 1867 title, since this is the edition from which I work. More significantly, the editions of the novel retitled as *Lady Adelaide* only contain minor changes from the original edition, seemingly none of which are applied to the character of Lady Adelaide. While the novel's new title creates the same surface-versus-substance issues surrounding Lady Isabel in *East Lynne*—with the focus of the new title being on the character's social stature instead of her actions, her oath—the new title over-simplifies Wood's complex rendering of class stature, as will be examined below. Further, the title *Lady Adelaide's Oath* recalls, probably intentionally, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1862 sensation novel *Lady Audley's Secret*. While a comparative examination of *Lady Audley's Secret* would go beyond the confines of this chapter, both novels deal heavily with marriages of convenience, secrecy, stature, and surface appearance in their aristocratic female protagonists; the links between the two novels should be maintained, in this case by referring to Wood's original title, since the analysis of one feeds into the other.

The story recounts the fortunes of the aristocratic Dane family and the murder mystery that unfolds when the son and heir to the barony, Harry Dane, is pushed off a cliff by an unknown assailant and his body swept out to sea. Harry Dane's fiancée, Lady Adelaide, witnesses the attack and makes a false oath to the authorities to protect Herbert Dane, the assailant, her secret lover, and the next in line to the barony. Disgusted with the role she played in Herbert Dane's inheritance of the estate, she ends her relationship with him, makes a mercenary marriage to a wealthy middle-class man, and becomes a leading figure in high society. She all but disappears from the second half of the novel, during which the mystery is unravelled and Harry Dane is discovered to be still alive. Lady Adelaide reappears briefly to regret her past actions and to see Harry Dane reclaim his rightful inheritance.

Like Lady Isabel, when Lady Adelaide is low on the social scale, she enjoys a physical body and a relatively high level of agency; both disappear as she ascends that scale and conforms to the duties and expectations of public visibility. However, the formula established around bodies and class in *East Lynne* is here inverted and problematised largely by Wood's redefinition of what constitutes the upper class. As will

be examined, the trajectory she establishes in *East Lynne* of the bourgeoisie becoming the new nobility is given far greater traction in *Lady Adelaide's Oath*, with Lady Adelaide's wealthy middle-class marriage being presented in the same light as the high society lifestyles seen in the silver fork novels. Conversely, the aristocratic Dane family is represented with the characteristic dignified domesticity typically used in Victorian fiction to epitomise a loving, respectable middle-class family. In this text, the aristocracy and the wealthy middle classes seem to have swapped socioeconomic positions.

Therefore, Lady Adelaide, who begins the story as the daughter of an Earl and the future wife of an aristocrat, is actually at the bottom of the social ladder that she will eventually climb with her lucrative bourgeois marriage. This untraditionally low starting position is due to her poverty, as she is 'the daughter of the deceased Earl of Irkdale, a very poor Scotch peer' and the niece of the seemingly comfortable but modest and private Lord Dane.<sup>308</sup> It is this combination of a lack of money and a surplus of privacy that keeps Lady Adelaide relatively autonomous and away from the expectations of high society. Even her uncle's tenants refer to her in terms starkly different from the way Isabel Vane's father's tenants referred to her. Two tenants of Danesheld say of Lady Adelaide, "Is there not a young lady staying at the castle? [...] I forget her name." "Adelaide Errol [...] A wild Scotch lassie is what Danesheld styles her".<sup>309</sup> That her presence is introduced informally, by her first and last name instead of by her title and as a 'young lady' instead of a 'young Lady', purposefully misleads the reader into classifying Lady Adelaide as middle class. The tenant then unintentionally puns on the notion of 'styling' her, avoiding the typical or expected style of 'Lady' for that of a 'wild Scotch lassie', further surrounding her character with low-born rhetoric. This misrepresentation is allowed to solidify in the reader's mind for several pages while Lady Adelaide is discussed and even appears in text at length; it is only once the entire family is introduced and their collective back-stories and relationships are revealed out of narrative necessity that Wood mentions that Adelaide is an aristocrat.

Wood installs Adelaide in the text as a lower-class character, despite her title, and Adelaide's physicality corresponds accordingly to the pattern introduced in *East Lynne*: she is a less physical character than the men of the novel, but far more so than the only upper-class woman in the text, Lady Dane. Wood writes of Lord and Lady Dane,

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<sup>308</sup> Mrs Henry (Ellen Price) Wood, *Lady Adelaide's Oath* (London: Richard Bentley, 1867), p. 8.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

A group had appeared on the greensward near the chapel, the most prominent object amidst it being an invalid chair, in which was reclined a fine-looking old man, whose grey hair was fast turning to white. It was pushed forward by a man-servant in the Dane livery – purple velvet waistcoat and breeches, and a white coat laced with silver. A tall, fine, very handsome old lady accompanied the chair. Behind came a man of noble features, who might be approaching his fortieth year, upright and stately, slender still, and far above the middle height.<sup>310</sup>

Lord Dane's presence is 'prominent', and his introduction as an invalid not only recalls Lady Isabel's ailing and visceral father in *East Lynne* but also gives his presence an extension through his conspicuous chair. This patriarchal procession is reinforced by the male servant in his bright livery that announces the Dane status, with the procession ended by a focus on the noble physical features of another man. Thrown into the middle of this parade of masculine embodiment is a short sentence introducing Lady Dane. Not only is her introductory sentence so brief that it is easily missed, but it also falls behind and is far less vivid than the description of her servant's uniform, making her a further accessory to the Dane family stature instead of an individual—indeed, she is said to have 'accompanied the chair' instead of 'accompanied her husband' making Lady Dane so unequal to his presence that she is an accessory *to an accessory* of his body.

Lady Adelaide's physical introduction, which occurs immediately afterward, makes an astonishing contrast:

A fair girl of nineteen walked by his side – danced, rather; for now she was before him, now behind him, chattering to him, and putting forth all her attractions, as it was in her nature to do. She had a very brilliant complexion, blue eyes, and a mass of fair hair – a lovely vision undeniably, taken altogether; but the features were not especially good, and the eyes roved about too much for true ones. Behind all, came another footman in the same livery.<sup>311</sup>

Adelaide receives more description than all three of the other characters put together, and her description is notable for its well-roundedness: Wood not only engages with Adelaide's looks, actions, and personality, but also conveys both Lady Adelaide's good traits and flaws in each of those categories. The result is nuanced and vivid portraiture without any trace of passivity or objectification in the character. To juxtapose Lady Dane and Adelaide further, Wood includes another footman in livery after Lady Adelaide, though this footman's is overshadowed instead of overshadowing.

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.



Adelaide is very much physically present in this scene, partially to highlight the significance that her bodily presence has upon the plot. The major transition in the text revolves around Adelaide's personal agency and desire for physical mobility, which leads her to witnessing the attempted murder of her cousin and fiancé, Harry, and her subsequent false denial that she was present at all. Lady Adelaide relishes taking long walks alone, saying, 'I don't know what it is that makes me like this freedom of running out alone, all independent', though her family's light disapproval of such actions and her impending loveless marriage to Harry likely play roles in her assertion of personal agency.<sup>312</sup> Although financially dependent on her uncle and his family, she is not yet part of their aristocratic institution, and thus revels in action not restricted by public gaze or a sense of expectation.

In fact, Adelaide's ubiquitous bodily presence in the early part of the text and its influence on the narrative is really only one half of the structure set up by Wood: the narrative hinges on Lady Dane's *absence* just as much as it hinges on the subject of Adelaide's presence. When Adelaide decides to go for the late-night stroll that leads to her witnessing the crime, she fears that her relatives will attempt to dissuade her. Wood writes, 'She turned and looked at Lady Dane. Yes, there was no impediment there; for her Ladyship was fast asleep in her easy chair'.<sup>313</sup> Lady Dane, much like Lady Isabel, is passive and looked upon, whereas Adelaide is active and the viewer. Further, even the acknowledgement of Lady Dane's bodily presence is not an impediment, since that presence is so absent in its sleep state.

Lady Dane and Adelaide both disappear from the text through their adherence to patriarchal systems, albeit in different ways. As will be explored, Lady Dane, who is already heavily embedded in aristocratic structures when the text opens and fulfils the ideologies surrounding her gender and class, fades away into an almost bodiless death. Adelaide, on the other hand, is so shaken by the knowledge she has gained through her physical presence that she elevates herself through marriage, becomes a highly visual social figure, and thereby neutralises the traitorous body and agency that she once so adored.

Lady Dane's death is strangely ethereal and solely reliant upon male presence, while her husband's death (which happens roughly in tandem with hers) is grounded

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

firmly in his own bodily issues and is the result of his own actions. The ostensible cause of death for both is the shock and grief over the assumed death of their son. However, this shock and grief only enhances the patterns of bodily presence already laid out by Wood. As has been seen, Lord Dane opens the text disabled and enfeebled after he had a ‘dreadful fall with his horse last autumn, when out hunting, and has become paralyzed in the lower limbs. There’s no cure for him’.<sup>314</sup> His ill health is the result of high action and a commitment to expectations of him as an aristocrat in participating in the hunt. While Lord Dane’s body is endlessly reified through its history, action, and suffering, Lady Dane’s body is so infrequently and noncommittally commented upon that the reader must assume she is in perfect health. Despite Lord Dane’s serious physical ailments and Lady Dane’s seemingly perfect physical condition, she is the one upon whom the public gaze is directed. Wood writes, ‘Lord and Lady Dane were bowed to the very earth with grief [...] and whispers went abroad that neither would long survive [...] Upon Lady Dane, especially, the tidings seemed to tell: the servants gazed at her in fear, and said they could see the ‘changes for death’ in her face’.<sup>315</sup> Lady Dane is vaguely marked for death in a visual way, though these visual markings lack any specific bodily analysis and deal more with public expectation than with any biological reality—an expectation that she fulfils by dying before her seriously ill husband, who is described as ‘too feeble to be taken to the funeral; the recent events had greatly increased his bodily illness; he seemed as a man shattered’.<sup>316</sup> Wood emphasises the illogical nature of Lady Dane’s death by saying, ‘*Could* life have been kept in Lady Dane by earthly means, they were not lacking’, indicating that the primary force affecting Lady Dane was not earthly, that she somehow belonged to a different plane of existence.<sup>317</sup> As this chapter had intended to show, the cultural existence of aristocratic women was largely symbolic and visual. Lady Dane’s duty to the Dane family seems to be her only reason for existing and with the death of the heir she produced (and with her age too advanced to produce another), she is untethered from existence and fades away.

The death of Harry Dane creates a much greater change in Adelaide. Where Lady Dane made the short journey from nonentity-ism to complete removal from the text, Adelaide makes the greater journey from full embodiment to nonentity-ism. Her reaction to Harry Dane’s death serves a hyper-physical farewell to her own body before her

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid, p. 80, emphasis original.

transformation. Wood writes, 'You have seen that movement of the body which we call 'writhing;' the head bent and hidden in grief, the body swaying itself backwards and forwards in utter pain. Just so was Adelaide Errol affected'.<sup>318</sup> Adelaide's pain is significant, since it serves as a bittersweet admission of the ability to feel, especially compared to the extreme but empty portrayal of Lady Dane's grief: 'Better, Lady Dane was not; easier, she was: but it was in the relief from pain that mercifully precedes death'.<sup>319</sup> Where the reader is very conscious of Adelaide's pain, the only connection between Lady Dane and pain is to inform the reader that she is free from it. Further, in the portrait of Adelaide's 'writhing' pain, Wood again refers to Adelaide by her full name instead of by her title. This individuality over position reaffirms Adelaide's low social standing, which is about to change dramatically.

Aware that she can no longer sustain romantic feelings for the murderer she has protected, nor can continue to reside at Castle Dane without either marrying him or inciting scandal, Adelaide makes the same paradoxical, mercenary decision as Lady Isabel: she must marry below her station in order to *maintain* her station, and must give up her rights to a body in order to feed and clothe that body. Working in opposition to Lady Isabel's downward social trajectory, however, Adelaide uses her initial agency to climb the ladder: giving up her body and identity through becoming a visual object is very much a choice for Adelaide; in fact, it is her last great choice of the novel. Where Isabel's lack of selfhood is not a choice at the beginning of the narrative, but rather the effect of a patriarchal system forced upon her, Adelaide's lack of identity is a conscious decision made after a trauma which has rendered her sense of self and sense of bodily presence repugnant to her.

The depiction of Adelaide's change in body, portraiture, and identity reinforces that her choice is organic, stemming purely from her own frame of mind in the early stages of transition when she still possessed agency: 'How changed she was since the night that had brought her to such terror, even strangers were beginning to see. Her brilliant colour had faded to paleness, her rounded form had grown thin; her spirits were unequal, her step was languid, her manner subdued'.<sup>320</sup> The metamorphosis is solitary and internal, instead of resulting from external factors or overt changes in material circumstance, as it was with Lady Isabel. Though the narrator shows Adelaide transitioning to the upper-class style of

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

absent femininity discussed in this chapter, Adelaide's body, personality, and actions are all still present in this passage, just as they had been present in her introduction. However present it may be, that body is in a state of reduction, with its form getting smaller and its colour fading. Further, though she has not fully transformed into her upper-class self, the lower-class characters react to her differently. Where they once barely remembered her name but knew her personality to be 'wild', strangers are now able to read and code her body. The phrase 'even strangers were beginning to see' creates a neat microcosm for the reader of the process of upward mobility for women, and the relationship between the viewed and the viewer: she was starting to be *seen*.

Once Adelaide (henceforth called 'Lady Adelaide', since the focus on her character revolves around social stature and position) relinquishes her possession of selfhood, her character's realignment to upper-class female portraiture and rhetoric is swift. Upon accepting the proposal of the deeply middle-class Mr Lester, whose wealth has rendered him a squire figure in local society, Wood writes that Adelaide 'had become the angel of his [Mr Lester's] hopes, the day-star of his existence'.<sup>321</sup> Not only is she now defined in terms of his identity and perspective, but her once visceral and earthy characterisation is here celestial and intangible almost to the point of parody. The transformation is finalised legally with the execution of the late Lord Dane's unsigned will:

Herbert Geoffry, seventeenth Baron Dane, stepped into the honours of his ancestors, inherited and conferred. He set out with an intention to deserve them. The unsigned will of the late Lord Dane he carried out to the letter [...] The Lady Adelaide's name was down in it for fifteen thousand pounds, and that sum was paid over to Mr. Lester'.<sup>322</sup>

Lady Adelaide is referred to as 'The Lady Adelaide', with the definite article reinforcing her status; while her title is not new, her status has most assuredly changed in the patriarchal system, where she is objectified even by the narrator. Further, not only is Lady Adelaide's rightful property shuttled between the two male authority figures in her life, entirely removing her presence and possession from the equation, but she is also now enough of an upper-class woman to be valued as a tool of the patriarchy. Herbert Dane, knowing his inheritance of the title was the result of foul play, attempts to legitimise his patriarchal authority by deferring to the wishes of the baron who came before him. His chivalric treatment of Lady Adelaide is not grounded in any value of her own personal worth (apart from his attraction to her as a former lover) nor out of any specific respect for

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

his late uncle's wishes. Rather, Herbert Dane realises that he and Lady Adelaide have been placed in the public spotlight from relative obscurity and therefore his payment of her inheritance, though he has no legal requirement to do so, will be interpreted as a noble act and thus validate his claim. Lady Adelaide is merely an interpretable device upon which Herbert Dane may act for his own ultimate benefit.

To compound her new bodiless status, the narrative skips over the next ten years during which Lady Adelaide has her first sexual encounters, develops an intimacy with her husband, bears several children, and becomes a prominent socialite. In short, she is revealed to be *established*, with all personal goals or struggles and all major bodily milestones during this period overlooked. She is revealed to care only for material status symbols, with her personal growth stunted, her emotions deadened, and the demands of her body ignored: 'The children, coming on so fast, were no hindrance to the restlessness, the extravagance, of their mother [Lady Adelaide]: there was a temporary seclusion as each little being appeared, and then it was turned over to a hired nurse, and the Lady Adelaide was herself again'.<sup>323</sup> She is again referred to as 'the Lady Adelaide' and, placed in conjunction with her extreme reproductive faculties, follows in the footsteps of aristocratic women in the silver fork novels who were treated as objections of production, be it production of heirs or production of status and reputation. Much as with Lady Isabel's early marriage and childbearing, which Wood also skips, domestic sexual activity and childbirth are mere inconvenience that require 'temporary seclusion' from the world's gaze. Lady Adelaide's body seemingly rebounds so quickly that childbirth is barely a hindrance to her more important work as a social figure.

Most significantly, Wood addresses the idea of identity and its connection to the body with the phrase 'the Lady Adelaide was herself again', which reads as wry on several levels. Firstly, Lady Adelaide is nothing like the version of herself that was introduced to the reader, and will likely never be 'herself' again. Secondly, being introduced by a definite article and thus objectified by her status is incongruous with the idea of selfhood; she is not a 'herself' but an 'itself', not 'Lady Adelaide' but '*the* Lady Adelaide'. Finally, her identity has been so realigned with gendered patriarchal norms that the only time she is not herself (as the world now defines her) is when she is forced into privacy and into the bodily distress of childbirth. Body and public self are utterly disconnected, and her

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid, p. 150.

position urges her to reduce her recovery time and relinquish her periods of embodiment as quickly as possible.

Another paradox of Lady Adelaide's transition up the social scale is that the more she changes and her body reflects her new position, the less she changes physically. Much like the contradiction between how Wood's aristocratic women are physically viewed and how physically present they are, so is the contradiction between Lady Adelaide's bodily evolution and stagnation. When Herbert, Lord Dane, meets Lady Adelaide after a decade apart, he 'could not help thinking how little she was changed', as though her decision to resign her body (except for public viewing) had arrested its evolution.<sup>324</sup> Lady Adelaide appears as a picture of herself: frozen in time, two-dimensional, and ultimately created for the gaze of others. Though Herbert, Lord Dane, sees no physical difference in Lady Adelaide, the reader can see nothing but difference, especially in the language surrounding her. Wood writes of the gap in Lady Adelaide's narrative, 'for the next nine or ten years no particular change occurred that we need to stop to notice [...] Danesheld Hall [Mr Lester's home] was alive with bustling little feet, and merry voices, six children having been born to Lady Adelaide Lester and her husband'.<sup>325</sup> Though Lady Adelaide is explicitly defined by the novel's title as its protagonist, it is remarkable that Wood would skip over the ten years of her life that contained the most personal changes witnessed in the narrative, claim that these years of change contained 'no particular change' at all despite listing those very changes immediately afterward, and then—though Lady Adelaide has just been reintroduced to the text—exclude her from much of the remaining story.

While a great deal of attention is paid to Lady Adelaide's time-resistant non-body, what is less frequently referenced (perhaps intentionally so) is Lady Adelaide's personal goals and happiness. Her body has been so eradicated that selfhood is no longer a consideration. Wood writes, 'Women, as well as men, must have some object in life, whether good or bad, unless they would be hopelessly miserable. Lady Adelaide Lester had none. It seemed that she did not care sufficiently for existence to have one'.<sup>326</sup> She is so bodiless that she fits only into liminal spaces: she is neither good, nor bad; she is not active in attempting to make a happy life, nor is she active in attempting to end her life. Rather, her life is so neutralised that she is impartial to existence. Even this stance,

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid, p. 169.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid, p. 149.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, p. 150.

however, is ambiguous. The narrator expresses uncertainty, saying ‘It *seemed* that she did not care’—again Lady Adelaide’s most personal facets are being viewed and judged by a third party, instead of her opinion being consulted or her allowed to self-define. Finally, Wood makes a clear statement about upper-class structures. The narrator claims that Lady Adelaide has no object in life, though the narrative disproves this through Lady Adelaide’s prioritisation of high society seasons and the events they comprise. Though socialisation and upper-class living is Lady Adelaide’s clear focus, the narrator either ignores this focus (keeping in line with the idea of upper-class absence), or regards it as no real focus at all (continuing the arguments of authors from previous chapters, including some of the silver fork novelists who discredited the rote behaviour of the London season, and G.W.M. Reynolds, who viewed aristocratic excesses as vacuously harmful and at odds with moral and healthy middle- and lower-class work ethics).

Jon Stralton writes in his 1996 work on body theory and society, *The Desirable Body*, that a woman in the nineteenth-century ‘was always experienced by the observer in relation to men: through it, for example, she expressed her husband’s social position [...] In this sense an aristocratic woman’s display was of limited power “in its own right” and could never express general power in society, only her power as a fashion arbiter for women’.<sup>327</sup> This theoretical intersection of class, gender, and the body is exactly what is exemplified through Lady Adelaide’s narrative. Lady Adelaide was always, to some extent, presented in relation to men, but the most power she expressed, and the only power she expressed ‘in its own right’, was as a poor but independent individual. By giving up her claim to individuality for the dual patriarchal structures of marriage and social position, her only recourse is to operate inside those structures and become a woman of high fashion, dedicating her body to serving as a public standard of her husband’s wealth. Lady Adelaide exemplifies not only the differences in lifestyle and rhetoric surrounding women from different class backgrounds, but her social climb also depicts the changing landscape of class power and influence.

### The Surgeon’s Daughters

Wood’s 1887 novella, *The Surgeon’s Daughters*, continues her portrayal of female bodily absence in the aristocracy, though her definition of aristocracy is vastly different than what was presented in either *East Lynne* or in *Lady Adelaide’s Oath*. In her work on high society in Wood’s novels, Tamara S. Wagner views Wood’s representations of the

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<sup>327</sup> John Stralton, *The Desirable Body* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 137-38.

aristocracy in relation to other classes as ‘increasingly complex [and tracing] shifts in the social construction of gentility as a central cultural enterprise in the nineteenth century’, and in this light, the restructuring of class in *The Surgeon’s Daughters* is not so much an intertextual discrepancy but rather a logical end-point of the class trajectory begun in *East Lynne*.<sup>328</sup> In *The Surgeon’s Daughters*, aristocracy is no longer reliant upon title, social influence, or even wealth, but rather upon family history and blood. The idea of aristocracy is still very much present, but its reality is located somewhere in the characters’ pasts, making it a relic whose structures are still felt despite extreme social change.

*The Surgeon’s Daughters* tells the tragic love story of Florence Erskine, a descendant of a minor branch of an aristocratic family and friend to the eponymous surgeon’s daughters, and the middle-class doctor Louis De Courcy. Florence visits a fortune teller who instructs her to obey the Ten Commandments, with an implied emphasis on ‘honour thy father’, or else be fated to die. Florence’s father forbids her romance with De Courcy and orders her away from him. Influenced by the freedom that she sees the middle-class surgeon’s daughters enjoy, Florence disobeys. Her disobedience ends, as predicted, in a violent death, seemingly caused by a higher power, when she is struck by lightning at the end of the narrative.

When it comes to the establishment of class positions, Wood drastically undercuts the Erskine family’s position as aristocrats even more than she undercut Lady Adelaide and the Dane family’s position: the Erskines are shabby-genteel to the point of parody, have no money, no status in high society, no title or estate, and are in all other respects portrayed as a lower- or lower-middle-class family. However, the pride of Captain Erskine, Florence’s father, in his aristocratic lineage is far greater than any self-importance or pretension exhibited by the Earl of Mount Severn in *East Lynne* or any of the Danes in *Lady Adelaide’s Oath*. Wood writes:

In regard to family, he stood on the very loftiest pinnacle; his ancestors had been the highest of the high. They were descended originally from royalty, and in later periods had owned lords and chancellors for cousins [...] That he was of good descent appeared to be fact; but he boasted of it in so ridiculous a manner as to have acquired the name in town, derisively applied, of Gentleman Erskine.<sup>329</sup>

<sup>328</sup> Wagner, “‘Essentially a Lady’”, p. 200.

<sup>329</sup> Mrs Henry (Ellen Price) Wood, *The Surgeon’s Daughters in Lady Grace and Other Stories*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley & Son 1887), III, pp. 45-167 (pp. 72-73).



In this text, social station is no longer a reality, but rather a state of mind. The truth of his claims is unconfirmed, even by the narrator, but his concepts of ownership and entitlement speak vastly to his perception of the aristocracy. The townspeople's nickname of 'Gentleman Erskine', of course, reveals the transition the idea of a gentleman has gone through during the nineteenth century, playing just as heavily on Captain Erskine's poor manners as it plays on his claims of prestige. Wood problematises the notion of 'upper class', pairing heredity (one of the hallmarks of aristocracy) against power and wealth (no longer hallmarks exclusive to the aristocracy). In fact, Wood depicts the aristocracy to have fallen into a social trap in which they cannot escape, for there is no potential for mobility. Captain Erskine and Florence exhibit no social mobility, firstly because they are too low in socioeconomic influence to fall much further, and secondly because Captain Erskine's sense of self-importance will not allow him to rise in the world: work is beneath him and to strive for something better would imply that he was not already at the pinnacle of society.

Wood's portrayal of women's issues again uses the aristocracy as a magnifying glass, showing the extent of oppression and patriarchy through intersectionality. Florence, trapped in the narrow social sphere determined by her father's identity, exhibits no mobility at all; unlike Lady Isabel and Lady Adelaide, the paradoxes that surround Florence keep her in a position of stasis—she is too low to descend the social ladder but too high to attempt to climb. In fact, Captain Erskine is perhaps himself the best reader of the aristocratic system's influence over women, since he so consciously attempts to emulate what he believes are noble ways of behaving and raising his daughter. Captain Erskine is referred to by the narrator as an 'aristocrat' many more times than either the Earl of Mount Severn or Lord Dane, although Captain Erskine has far less right to call himself an aristocrat than the other two characters. Overcompensating for the shakiness of his claim to nobility, Captain Erskine consciously adopts the role of patriarch in ways the other two aristocratic heads of family do not. Erskine is publicly a social superior to his neighbours (a role with which they kindly play along) and is privately the head of a once-great family (which it no longer is); both of these roles, though delusional, lead Captain Erskine to believe it his duty to control his young daughter in body and mind, and to ensure that she is an extension of himself and a representative of his dignity and identity. Therefore, the patriarchy far more *consciously* oppresses Florence than the other two female protagonists examined in this chapter. It is not the reality of the Erskine's social situation that is significant, but rather the duties that Captain Erskine believes are expected

of him and how greatly those duties revolve around the domination and disembodiment of his daughter. The Erskine family completes the triptych on class mobility that this chapter examines, showing the ultimate fall of the aristocracy and the rise of the middle classes. More importantly, however, this three-part transition of hegemonic power in Wood's texts signifies the adaptability of patriarchal systems of oppression. Wood shows how, despite radical social shifts, certain patterns of thought surrounding gender and class are maintained and feed into each other, creating a continuing double despotism over upper-class women and their sense of identity and embodiment.

Since Florence is treated as one of Wood's traditionally absent female protagonists, and since Florence never experiences social mobility, she can only be compared in relation to other females from different backgrounds. This in itself is a crucial realisation, since Florence does not exhibit enough bodily change or presence in the text to compare her to herself, as the other two female protagonists were. Further, Florence, who is so much more purposefully kept in a position of subservience, is not even allowed to link her identity with the title of her own story, unlike Lady Adelaide, and even Lady Isabel whose identity is so heavily tied to the estate of East Lynne. Though Florence is undoubtedly the protagonist, the novella is named after the surgeon's daughters, the heavily embodied secondary and tertiary characters who make up Florence's small circle of friends. They foil Florence's position in that they are from an economically comfortable family, though that family possesses a much less prestigious ancestry than the Erskines'. While being a well-respected surgeon in a small community was not a lower-class or labouring position, and could even be considered a gentlemanly profession, there was still, at least to Captain Erskine, the taint of the surgeon providing a service and being in a trade. The surgeon may be a pillar of his community, but he also operates at the beck and call of others. Less-ambiguous is the surgeon's wife, who was formerly in service as a cook. Their history, paired with their bustling, large, stable domestic life, represents a threat to Captain Erskine of the rise of the lower class—a class of which he is practically a member.

Though Captain Erskine disapproves of Florence's association with the surgeon's daughters, the surgeon graciously allows Florence to sit in on his daughters' lessons for free, since the Erskines cannot afford a governess or tutor. Captain Erskine believes it is worse for his daughter to remain uneducated and unaccomplished than to have unsuitable friends, and allows their friendship to continue by way of payment to the surgeon, further reinforcing not only Captain Erskine's calculated control over his daughter, but also

showing his belief in the power of his personal influence over the power of money: he considers his daughter's friendship valuable enough to be treated as a commodity or currency. Finally, this serves as one of Wood's most radical metaphors of class, demonstrating how the aristocracy is no longer able to maintain itself in dignity and condescends to allow the lower classes to bear the brunt of its living costs.

The surgeon's seven daughters open the story and overwhelm the reader with their numbers and their physicality. Two of the daughters 'were little, fair, slender young women, very near-sighted, with hair remarkably light; whilst [the others] were tall, buxom girls, with dark eyes and arched eyebrows', creating a clear portraiture.<sup>330</sup> Even their mother is described as 'stout now and pretty red, and she *would* dress in bright colours; but her face was comely still', completing the general vivacity of appearance in a family that, while technically has greater social standing and influence than the Erskines, does not consider itself in anyway higher than its traditional lower-class roots.<sup>331</sup> This paradox of higher-but-lower social position is borne out in the daughters' personal parlour, which is both very private and extremely corporeal, a place exclusively for the enjoyment of female embodiment, leisure, and the pursuit of self-fulfilling interests:

You never saw so untidy a place in your life [...] An old piano stood on one side, a key or two missing and a dozen of its wires – it had been the girls' practising piano when they were children; a set of book-shelves rose opposition, piled with books in the greatest confusion; writing-desks lay about, some on the floor, some tumbling off chairs; sheets of music, in all stages of tearing and copying; work-boxes stood open, some without lids, other without bottoms, their contents all entangled together in one appalling mess: pens, pencils, paints, French crayons, palettes, chalks, work, thimbles, keys, notes, and scrap-books were scattered everywhere.<sup>332</sup>

Their messy room signifies the girls' general presence, their enjoyment of privacy, their personal histories as children, and the significance of their class status: while their room is presented in a manner that brings to mind depictions of lower-class squalor, and thereby reifies their lower-class status as children of professionals and domestic servants, the description of their parlour also reinforces their new bourgeois wealth. That the girls have a private parlour of their own at all (especially considering the size of the family and how much that space in their home must be coveted) indicates not only the size of their house, but also that they are being raised as middle-class ladies who have their space segregated

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid, p. 57-58.

from their parents and from the servants.<sup>333</sup> Finally, the space is filled with many consumer products targeted for their entertainment and education, products with which Florence's father is unable to provide her. These products are not treated with reverence, as exemplified by the rough and haphazard state of the room, which signifies both that the surgeon's daughters, in accordance with their lower-class status, live practically and have no time or need for pure ornamentation, and, in accordance with their new social elevation, are capable of affording replacements products and need not be overly fastidious.

The surgeon's daughters' lifestyle and home, and all of its socioeconomic implications, contrasts with Florence's home, which the reader hardly sees. In fact, the reader hardly sees much of Florence for the first half of the novella. Florence first appears briefly, about twenty pages into the narrative, as a guest of the surgeon's daughters and is limply described as 'a very lovely girl [...] with her dark blue eyes, her exquisite complexion, and her raven hair: and though she was young, and slight, and gentle, she had a self-possessed manner and a haughty step'.<sup>334</sup> Her only unusual or strong characteristics, her 'self-possessed manner and a haughty step', are actually not her own traits at all, but are rather markers of class and residues of her father's superior behaviour; the rest of her characterisation focuses on absence (absence of age, absence of size, absence of force), with her brief physical description relating a generic type of beauty that could have just as easily been applied to Lady Isabel, whom Florence resembles. Florence is judged visually, with an emphasis on her aesthetically-pleasing looks, but is not awarded anything deeper than a surface appraisal. As an extension of this surface appraisal, Florence is introduced and largely maintained in a public sphere, and rarely on her own or in her own personal space. She spends most of her time paying visits to the surgeon's daughters or embarking on outings with them, always serving as a demure and valuable public standard for her father's position.

By the time the narrative starts to indicate that Florence, the quiet guest, is actually the novella's protagonist, more than ten pages after her introduction and more than thirty pages into the story, the reader has all but forgotten Florence's initial description which has been lost amongst the overwhelming presence of the surgeon's daughters. The title of the novella has geared readerly expectations in the other direction, with Florence ceding

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<sup>333</sup> For more information, see Andrea Kaston Tange, *Architectural Identities: Domesticity, Literature, and the Victorian Middle Class* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), and Carol Dyhouse's 'Mothers and Daughters in the Middle-Class Home, c. 1870-1914', in *Labour and Love: Women's Experiences of Home and Family, 1850-1940*, ed. by Jane Lewis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 27-47.

<sup>334</sup> Wood, *The Surgeon's Daughters*, p. 63.

her identity in her own narrative to the more embodied newcomers; however, it must be noted that the surgeon's daughters are not immune from their ascent up the social ladder: though they are fully embodied, have distinct personalities, and even have a narrative focal-point (on the youngest sister, Georgiana, who is far more consequential to the plot than any of the other sisters), they are still defined and titled in terms of their father's social position. However slight it may be, the surgeon's daughters are occasionally described in the same patriarchal rhetoric as heroines before them. Though their time for social and narrative focus has not yet come, the reader can sense it approaching.

The most significant incident in the novella relating to class and its effect on women's bodies is when Florence and the surgeon's daughters go to a palm reader to have their fortunes told. The very act of having their bodies read by a stranger places all of them inside the aristocratic structures already established by Wood in her previous texts. The surgeon's daughters encourage Florence to go. Having their bodies read is a novel experience, but for upper-class Florence, it is a tedious and sinister repetition: Florence says, 'when I was a child [...] a woman who pretended to the gift of reading the future, as this man now pretends, foretold that if ever I should have my "fate cast," I should be at the end of my life'.<sup>335</sup> Florence implies that her first reading was unsolicited, reinforcing that her body is coded and will be read regardless of her desires, and in fact if she pursues her desires to understand and have her body read again, it will lead to her death. The first fortune teller enforces at a cosmic level that only unwilling, uncomfortable readings of Florence's body are permitted—Florence's consent and interest in her own body will provoke a downfall of that body.

Doubting the voracity of the fortune teller's skills, the three surgeon's daughters who attend the reading borrow clothing from their maids to disguise their history as much as possible. Wood writes, 'three figures, attired in cottons dresses, faded shawls, and plain straw bonnets [...] in short, looking like decent servant-girls, stole out of Surgeon Juniper's house'.<sup>336</sup> Though Florence is with them, her presence is not mentioned until a few pages later, nor is her dress discussed at all, highlighting her lack of presence even when that presence is vital to the narrative arc. Further, the surgeon's daughters are aware of their mobility and social flux—they are socially lower-class, economically middle-class,

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

passing to the casual observer as lower-class, but ultimately judged by the fortune teller as middle-class. He says to them,

“‘Why did you come to me in disguise? [...] With me it avails not. Take off those clumsy gloves [...] You have adopted them that your lady-hands may be hidden from me: but, until I have examined those hands, I cannot answer you a single question’ [...] Now the wizard would carefully examine the hands, a microscope to his eye’.<sup>337</sup>

The fortune teller is easily able to assess the surgeon’s daughters’ class at a glance, but no more: the embodied-but-unseen surgeon’s daughters require ‘a microscope to his eye’ in order to have their bodies read. There is a further emphasis on their bodies, not only with the first sister presenting her palm to the fortune teller for a close inspection, but also with the physicality of another sister’s hands: ‘Florence had drawn nearer, and she saw, what she had never noticed before, that the inside of Georgiana’s hands, even to the ends of the fingers, were completely covered with lines; small lines, crossed, and re-crossed again. The old man sat looking at them with his glass to his eye’.<sup>338</sup> The fortune teller again requires magnification in reading the body of the surgeon’s daughter, however significantly marked and coded that body may be. Additionally, Florence’s realisation of Georgiana’s physical markings signifies not only that Florence is perhaps unused to reading the bodies of other women, but that perhaps Georgiana was not yet high-ranking enough to merit her body being gazed upon critically.

Conversely, the fortune teller is able to assess Florence’s body with far more ease. Whilst in the middle of reading Georgiana’s palms, before turning his full attention to Florence, he can tell at a glance that Florence will never marry De Courcy. Her body is not needed in his assessment of her life. Florence repeatedly refuses to have her fortune told, and yet the fortune teller (much as with the first one who predicted her future) insists upon it, goading and manipulating her into asking for the results of her palm reading. Her grudging consent to be cognizant of her body and future has fulfilled the original prophecy, and leads her to her death shortly thereafter.

The fortune teller tells her that he does not know the shape her death will take, but if she follows the Ten Commandments, both in spirit and to the letter, then she can avoid her untimely fate. Florence’s agency is therefore restricted by fate and by the exacting rules of religion, both monolithic patriarchal structures guided by a higher power that will brook no deviation on her part. Tellingly, the Commandment she breaks is in dishonouring

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid, pp. 123-24.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid, p. 126.

her father through her disobedience. She goes on another outing with the surgeon's daughters from which her father strictly forbade her, is caught up in a sudden storm, takes shelter in a structure called 'Lady Harcourt's Tower' (which reinforces class issues to the very last), and is there struck by lightning and killed. Despite her violent end, there 'was no perceptible change in her countenance, except that it was white and still'.<sup>339</sup>

While ultimately reinforcing women's obedience to the dictates of the patriarchy, the novella also serves as a criticism of the patriarchy. The text shows how paradoxical and restrictive its decrees for women are, and even shows how heavily engrained and far reaching systems of oppression can be: Florence's body is defined by oppression, shifting class structures find new ways to utilise the same old forms of oppression, and even the future and the weather seem to validate it. Wood's text shows an entire universe conspiring to keep an aristocratic woman disembodied, disenfranchised, and obedient, with seemingly no end to reaches of class- and gender-based domination.

### Conclusion

The trajectory of what constitutes the 'upper class' in Wood's three texts changes radically. Social positions in *East Lynne* are largely fixed and traditional, though the middle classes are depicted to strive for and often to merit greater social hegemony. In *Lady Adelaide's Oath*, positions are far less secure. The aristocracy is portrayed to be more private and domestic than is usually seen in sensation fiction, while the wealthy middle class has now clearly supplanted the aristocracy in terms of high society life. There is still ambiguity in *Lady Adelaide's Oath* surrounding the reading of women's bodies as they relate to class, since the more that Lady Adelaide profits from her middle-class marriage and the higher she climbs on the social ladder, the more she is portrayed like the bodiless Lady Dane, a non-Society aristocrat. *The Surgeon's Daughters* serves as the culmination of Wood's commentary on female bodies and shifting class structures, with the aristocracy having sunk to the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder, and yet maintaining a form of superiority through new methods: aristocracy is no longer about wealth, power, title, or even lineage (for Captain Erskine's heredity is dubious at best), but rather about self-definition and frame of mind.

What links these aristocratic states together is that women have no direct participation in whatever it is which defines 'the upper class' in each text; whether it is title and estate in *East Lynne*, wealth in *Lady Adelaide's Oath*, or self-definition in *The*

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid, p. 157.

*Surgeon's Daughters*, women are portrayed by Wood as perpetually disconnected and on the outside. They serve as placeholders for or extensions of men, but lack agency in their own class institutions. Wood's texts highlight the contradictions and tyranny embedded in these class and gender systems through her representation of aristocratic women as bodiless yet unceasingly viewed, as private and yet public, as overwhelmed with familial and social identity and yet given no identity at all.



## **Chapter 4 – Aristocratic Origins in the *Fin de Siècle* Medieval Revival**

### **Introduction**

In his 1892 work, *Degeneration*, Max Nordau scoffed at the late-nineteenth century attitude he perceived and defined as the ‘vague qualms of a Dusk of the Nations, in which all suns and all stars are gradually waning, and mankind with all its institutions and creations is perishing in the midst of a dying world’.<sup>340</sup> These concerns about the impact of time, history and the impending future on a Victorian present have largely, though sometimes too strongly, become synonymous with modern perceptions of the Victorian *fin de siècle*. Kelly Hurley states in her work on the *fin de siècle* Gothic, ‘a general anxiety about the nature of human identity permeat[ed] late-Victorian and Edwardian culture, an anxiety generated by scientific discourses, biological and sociomedical, which served to dismantle conventional notions of “the human”’.<sup>341</sup> One hesitates to generalise that all Victorians suffered from *fin de siècle* fears, and certainly not at the exclusion of other decades in which the same fears were present; however, one cannot deny the presence of *fin de siècle* anxiety, which was in part sparked from or exacerbated by a deluge of texts concerning human genesis, the body, and humanity’s natural state.<sup>342</sup> While these texts are all hugely important in their cumulative development of *fin de siècle* fears, this chapter focuses on readings of evolution in *fin de siècle* texts and therefore primarily and necessarily utilises the works of Darwin to form the theoretical backbone to its argument. Though other texts may be cited in passing, most focus less on evolutionary biology and more on ethnology, anthropology, archaeology and eugenics, all of which are topics beyond the remit of this chapter.

Part of the response to *fin de siècle* fears was a reinvigoration of the Medieval Revival, which, as Victorian Medievalism critics Holloway and Palmgren classify it, was ‘an anchor in a time of stormy upheaval’.<sup>343</sup> Medievalism as a literary and aesthetic movement had existed since the eighteenth century, albeit under many different names and

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<sup>340</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1892), 7<sup>th</sup> ed., translated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. of the German work (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), p. 2.

<sup>341</sup> Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>342</sup> These texts include Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), ed. by Jim Endersby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), and *The Descent of Man* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1871); Nordau’s *Degeneration* (1892); Francis Galton’s *Inquiries into Human Faculty* (1883) (New York; J.M. Dent, 1919), Edward Burnett Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (London: J. Murray, 1871), and Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890), among just a few.

<sup>343</sup> Lorretta M. Holloway and Jennifer A. Palmgren, ‘Introduction’, in *Beyond Arthurian Romances: The Reach of Victorian Medievalism*, ed. by Lorretta M. Holloway and Jennifer A. Palmgren (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1-8 (p. 2).

guises, and ghosted in and out of vogue for much of the Victorian era, but found further life working with and against the inundation of *fin de siècle* tensions.<sup>344</sup>

The Medieval Revival appeared in many different literary and artistic forms and, as will be examined, served a range of purposes as the Victorians contemplated human origin and calculated what that origin meant for humanity's ultimate destiny. In what Holloway and Palmgren call 'one size fits all medievalism', the Victorians 'allowed him/herself to go beyond or to completely dismiss true historical study of the period to focus on what fit his/her current imagination and taste'.<sup>345</sup> Medievalism was used for comfort and to return to a glorified past; it was used to exploit fears of degeneration; it was used for social commentary, criticism and philosophy; and it was used for a clinical and scientific view about how society had arrived at the contemporary moment from a historical starting-point. Just as the Medieval Revival served diverse purposes, so it explored diverse topics, including a reification of aristocratic bodily portraiture as a literary tool upon which cultural concerns may be projected and through which paradoxes and uncertainties about the aristocracy in general may be voiced. Returning to concepts or constructions of the medieval invariably means investigating concepts or constructions of feudalism; in this way, arguments surrounding the aristocracy and representations of the aristocratic body became inextricable from *many fin de siècle* Medievalist approaches to nostalgia, (d)evolution, civilisation, human nascency, and the future.<sup>346</sup> Historian Norbert Elias posits in his seminal work, *The Civilizing Process*, that modern treatments of the medieval periods and aristocracy tend to be little more than conduits of contemporary feeling:

Whether the medieval warrior came to be seen as the "noble knight" (only the grand, beautiful, adventurous and moving aspects of his life being remembered) or as the "feudal lord", the oppressor of peasants (only the savage, cruel, barbaric aspects of his life being emphasized), the simple

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<sup>344</sup> Kevin L. Morris, *The Image of the Middle Ages in Romantic and Victorian Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>345</sup> Holloway and Palmgren, p. 2.

<sup>346</sup> For an overview of the field of nineteenth-century Medievalism, see K. Morris's *The Image of the Middle Ages*; Elizabeth Fay's *Romantic Medievalism* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Clare A. Simmons's *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); and Holloway and Palmgren's *Beyond Arthurian Romances*, among just a few. Most scholars seem to agree that for the Victorians, Medievalism was embedded in popular culture as, posits Kevin L. Morris, 'part of an agitated quest for a new outlook on life, a new diagnosis of man's ills and a new cure' (p. 1), while still being wildly individualistic and disconnected from the reality of the historical medieval period: Fay recounts how Medievalism was used for the political ends of both Whigs and Tories (p. 1), and Holloway and Palmgren state that 'the Victorians imagined and recreated the Middle Ages for themselves. They could make Arthur up or into anything they wanted or needed, and they did' (p. 1).

picture of the actual life of this class is usually distorted by values and nostalgia from the period of the observer.<sup>347</sup>

The following two sub-chapters examine the ways in which writing about the aristocratic body feeds into concerns about time and history in *fin de siècle* Medievalist texts; one chapter examines depictions of the ‘noble knight’ while the other focuses on the ‘feudal lord’. Elias’s emphasis on a mutual distortion and nostalgia is significant to these chapters, which work in part from his definition of medieval portrayals. Elias both polarises and binds together these representational styles, reaffirming that while these representations of medieval aristocratic bodies seem reactionary and mutually exclusive, they are not the discrete categories they appear to be.

The two seemingly-opposing Medievalist sub-genres here explored are Ruritanian romances, which promulgate a chivalric ideal of the past, and the sub-genre which I have named the Evolutionary Feudal, whose pseudo-Dark Age, post-apocalyptic texts promote a Darwinian perspective in the Medieval Revival. The key difference between these two sub-genres is the ways in which they describe the method of creation of an aristocrat’s body, and whether they see that body as uncaringly carved by nature and elected to power through ‘survival of the fittest’, or as designed by a higher power for altruistic purposes. Thomas Carlyle, in his highly influential 1841 work *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (commonly called and heretofore referred to as *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*), for example, espouses the philosophy that a true leader of men is divinely or cosmically appointed, and we see Carlyle echoed throughout Ruritanian fiction. Not only did one of Carlyle’s contemporaneous reviewers interpret Carlyle’s dogma as the belief that ‘the progression of humanity depend[s] up on the veneration of the Divine in man’, but Carlyle himself created a ‘parody of the visions of science from the early reform era’ in his *Sartor Resartus*, taking a more spiritual approach to the study of the natural world.<sup>348</sup> The Darwinian universe opposes Carlyle and Ruritania: Darwin stated ‘that he had never met anyone less suited to scientific enquiry than Carlyle’ while Busch summarises that while Darwin’s work ‘does not, perhaps, eradicate deity altogether [...] it assuredly removes it from any daily concern with the affairs of humanity’.<sup>349</sup> It is this Darwinian ideology which comes to serve as the ideological hallmark of Evolutionary

<sup>347</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, p.173.

<sup>348</sup> Prof. August Tholuck, ‘Review of *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*’ (March 1847), in *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle’s Major Works*, ed. by D.J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (Greenwood Press: London, 1997), pp. 100-02 (p. 101); James A. Secord, *Visions of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 234.

<sup>349</sup> Secord, *Visions*, p. 234; Justin E.A. Busch, *The Utopian Vision of H.G. Wells* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), p. 3.

Feudal texts, contrasting exactly with the Carlylean approach to history and origin seen in Ruritania.

Using Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* and Carlyle's *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* as the structural foundation for these investigations, these chapters will investigate the ways in which the late Victorian Medieval Revival texts conform to or depart from the theory of a divine leader as expressed by Carlyle and the theory of evolution as laid out by Darwin, and what these conformities or departures therefrom says of each author's view of the aristocracy and his or her prediction of the institution's future. In order to do so both Carlyle and Darwin's works must be examined individually to create context for these arguments.

## Carlyle

Thomas Carlyle was an enormously popular and critically acclaimed philosopher, historian and biographer in the pre-, early- and mid-Victorian era, and his popularity held steady as the century wore on.<sup>350</sup> One of Carlyle's contemporary reviewers said, 'there is no living writer who is more sure of immediate attention from the large circle of readers, or who exercises a greater influence than he'.<sup>351</sup> Many prestigious nineteenth-century authors read and engaged with Carlyle, even long after his publications slowed and ceased; this list includes Charles Dickens, John Ruskin, Robert Browning, George Eliot, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, William Makepeace Thackeray, John Stuart Mill, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Martineau, and, most significantly for this chapter, the three authors whose Ruritanian works are explored: Anthony Hope, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Frances Hodgson Burnett. Sir Graham Balfour's *Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* claims that Stevenson was an enormous fan of Carlyle's. Sir Charles Mallet notes that Hope was a member of the Carlyle Society at Balliol College, though the Society's connection to Carlyle is undefined.<sup>352</sup> Though there is no overt connection between Burnett and Carlyle, her works have been heavily read from a Carlylean perspective by other academics.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> For an overview of Carlyle's life and work, see Chris R. Vanden Bossche's *Carlyle and the Search for Authority* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1991); Simon Heffer's *Moral Desperado: A Life of Thomas Carlyle* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995); William Howie Wylie's *Thomas Carlyle: the man and his books* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909), and D.J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr's *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works* (London: Greenwood Press, 1997).

<sup>351</sup> Margaret Fuller, 'Review of *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*' (July 1841), in *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works*, ed. D.J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (London: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 98-99 (p. 98).

<sup>352</sup> Sir Charles Mallet, *Anthony Hope and His Books* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1935), p. 43.

<sup>353</sup> See Elisabeth Rose Gruner, 'Cinderella, Marie Antoinette, and Sara: Roles and Role Models in *A Little Princess*', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 22:2 (April 1998), pp. 163-87; Jenny Holt, "'Normal' versus

One of Carlyle's primary philosophical topics was the nature of leadership and the desirable qualities of an aristocracy. He criticised modern government for its lack of *true* command, which he defines as a leader's divine placement, utter sincerity, and highest ability of all men. This critique first appeared in his 1831 text *Sartor Resartus*, where Carlyle argues that 'a King rules by divine right. He carries in him an authority from God, or man will never give it him [....H]e who is to be my Ruler, whose will is to be higher than my will, was chosen for me in Heaven'.<sup>354</sup> This was supplemented by his 1837 *French Revolution*, in which he states, 'A king or leader they [the people], as all bodies of men, must have: be their work what it may, there is one man there who, by character, faculty, position, is fittest of all to do it'.<sup>355</sup> This argument was then finally expanded as the thesis of his 1841 lecture-series-turned-book, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*.<sup>356</sup> His views continued to be echoed throughout his 1850 *Latter-Day Pamphlets* and his 1858-1865 *Frederick the Great*. Grierson summarises in his review of Carlyle's work that Carlyle was on a 'quest for good government, a leader or leaders, a true aristocracy' and had 'an increasing impatience with democracy, due mainly to the glaring results of the industrial revolution and the doctrine of *laissez faire* . . . [he had] become convinced that most men are fools and many knaves, neither fit to vote'.<sup>357</sup>

Despite Carlyle's views on leadership being demonstrably stable over his long career and reiterated in many of his works, his argument is not simplistic. While Carlyle believes utterly in the importance of a divinely-appointed leader, he did not believe in the divinity of primogeniture: 'This is the history of all rebellions, French Revolutions, social explosions in ancient or modern times. You have put the too *Unable* Man at the head of affairs! The too ignoble, unvaliant, fatuous man'.<sup>358</sup> Mendilow identifies a further complexity: that 'Carlyle recognized the need to build a social order where greater distributive justice would prevail. He was content, however, to maintain the traditional

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"Deviant" Play in Children's Literature', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 34:1 (January 2010), pp. 34-56; Donald E. Hall, "'We and the World": Juliana Horatia Ewing and Victorian Colonialism for Children', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 16:2 (Summer 1991), pp. 51-55.

<sup>354</sup> Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, p. 188.

<sup>355</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *French Revolution* (1837) 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1885), I, p. 117.

<sup>356</sup> The lecture series Carlyle gave for *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* was an immense success, selling out and drawing in famous attendees. Newspapers were eager to publish the lectures but Carlyle refused and made a larger profit publishing them in book form and a second edition was ordered the following year. Heffer, p. 203; p. 217.

<sup>357</sup> Sir Herbert Grierson, 'The Hero and the Führer' (1940), in *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works*, ed. by D.J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (Greenwood Press: London, 1997), pp.103-07 (p. 105).

<sup>358</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) 2 vols (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1926), II, p. 101.

division of labor between directors and workers'.<sup>359</sup> In addition, Carlyle's satire of the dandiacal body in *Sartor Resartus*, to which he dedicates an entire chapter, separates what he views as true from what was viewed as fashionable: 'Every faculty of his [a dandy's] soul, spirit, purse, and person is *heroically consecrated* to this one object, the wearing of Clothes wisely and well: so that as others dress to live, he lives to dress'.<sup>360</sup> As has been explored in the chapter on Silver Fork fiction, a genre which Carlyle defined in *Sartor Resartus* not only as the Sacred Text of the dandy, but also as unreadable, dandyism was an attitude and lifestyle highly connected to the aristocratic classes.<sup>361</sup> While dandyism was, at the time of publication of *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, still a reasonably desirable mode of masculinity, it is easy to trace the eventual reactionary downfall of that decadent, Hanoverian model in favour of a more middle-class style of aristocrat whose appointment to elitism is perceived by the people to be derived from cosmic grace, attention to duty and conservative sincerity.

Carlyle's long-term popularity and his focus on the connection between time, history, and leadership made him a particularly appropriate and tempting philosopher for Victorian authors to integrate into Medievalist texts. In *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* Carlyle scrutinises the development of the aristocracy from tribal man to his present day, while still divorcing the true leader from time through his or her perpetual election and re-election by a higher power. *How* the true leader is appointed is always the same, but the shape of that leader is decided by the needs of his or her era. Chris R. Vanden Bossche goes so far as to argue that Carlyle 'attempts to escape history' entirely which, as will be examined, makes Carlylean discourse a perfect foundation for Ruritania texts.<sup>362</sup> Robert W. Kusch says of *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* that 'Carlyle seems to be saying that certain ages call for a special kind of hero (and certainly Carlyle sees his own age calling for the "Hero as King," which he treats as a contemporary problem)'.<sup>363</sup> Mendilow expands Kusch's reading, saying that to Carlyle, '[e]very period has its great man who [...] restates the principles underlying the relationship between man and the cosmic creative forces in comprehensible terms expressing the age's imperatives "to do"'.<sup>364</sup> The specific Victorian imperatives 'to do', especially in relation to the aristocracy, are not easily defined.

<sup>359</sup> Jonathan Mendilow, 'Carlyle, Marx & the ILP: Alternative Routes to Socialism', *Polity* 17:2 (Winter 1984), pp. 225-47 (p. 227).

<sup>360</sup> Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, p. 207, emphasis mine.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>362</sup> Vanden Bossche, p. 98.

<sup>363</sup> Robert W. Kusch, 'Pattern and Paradox in *Heroes and Hero-Worship*' (January 1969), in *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works*, ed. by D.J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (Greenwood Press: London, 1997), pp. 108-15 (p. 111).

<sup>364</sup> Mendilow, p. 231.

Looking at the late Victorians as a whole, one must acknowledge the astronomical heterogeneity of such a diffuse group. Therefore, while certain sections of late-Victorian society may have held very clear opinions about the aristocracy, the late Victorians as an aggregate had no unified or easily synthesised opinion. Carlyle and Ruritanian fiction attempt (perhaps unsuccessfully) to chisel out a point of Victorian unity through their models of the hero-aristocrat, as will be investigated later.

## Darwin

Charles Darwin was an English naturalist with a family history embedded in scientific discourse. He wrote what most consider the definitive texts on emerging theories of evolution, the first being his 1859 *On the Origin of Species*, followed by his continuation of the subject in his 1871 *The Descent of Man* (hence referred to as *Origin* and *Descent*). In these texts he espouses the idea that evolution is a product of Natural Selection, which is the ‘preservation of favourable variations and the rejection of injurious variations’ in inheritable traits.<sup>365</sup> Natural Selection comprises two parts, the first being ‘survival of the fittest’. This phrase originated in Herbert Spencer’s 1864 *The Principles of Biology*, and was then later borrowed by Darwin in subsequent editions of *Origin*.<sup>366</sup> ‘Survival of the fittest’, as Darwin employs it and as it will be understood in this dissertation, supposes that organisms with the traits best suited to their environments will survive where others would die out.<sup>367</sup> The second part is ‘sexual selection’, in which organisms which reproduce sexually will choose the mate with the traits best suited to their environment, thereby producing offspring which will stand the highest chance of survival. In this way, natural law determines which species thrive or go extinct, or ascend and descend a hierarchy within nature: it is one’s ability to survive that makes one a leader. Both *Origin* and *Descent* appeared at the tail-end of Carlyle’s career and provided a different explanation for questions about time and history, elitism or ‘natural’ aristocracy, leadership, human bodies, and the needs of man.

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<sup>365</sup> Darwin, *Origin*, p. 71.

<sup>366</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864-67), II, p. 48; p. 53; p. 54; p. 58; p. 60; p. 90, etc.; Mark Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (2007) (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 3; Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought 1860-1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 82; p. 84.

<sup>367</sup> According to Mark Francis, one of the major differences between Spencer and Darwin in how the term ‘survival of the fittest’ was deployed was that Spencer believed an organism would be ‘brought into general fitness with its environment and . . . [u]nlike Darwin’s theories, Spencer’s ideas of growth and adaptation did not have *failure* as a primary focus. Instead they were part of a general belief in *success* measured by the number of adult life forms successfully living in harmony with their surroundings’ (209).

No one can debate the immediate popularity and notoriety of Darwin's texts.<sup>368</sup>

While Darwin was hardly the first to theorise about evolution and the Victorians were already familiar with other major naturalist theories from Lamarck, Lyell, Alfred Russel Wallace, and Robert Chambers, Darwin's texts had a far more profound and wide-ranging impact than any evolutionary theorists before him.<sup>369</sup> In her work on Darwinian impact on Victorian literature and culture, Gillian Beer states that the reason for Darwin's complete absorption into nineteenth-century consciousness was the result of 'a work which included more than the maker of it at the time knew, despite all that he *did* know [...] With varying degrees of self awareness they [Victorian novelists] have tested the extent to which it [Darwinian theory] can provide a determining fiction by which to read the world'.<sup>370</sup> Darwinism transformed from a mere scientific theory to a ubiquitous and versatile perspective through which one could interpret every human experience, including, as will be made apparent, the role of the aristocracy and the interpretation of the physical form. Much like Carlyle, Darwin's works affected far more than their purported realm: the theories in *Origin* and *Descent* far transcended the boundaries of naturalism and biology and became hugely embedded in much of the Victorian psyche, as is exemplified by the sheer proportion of literature which utilises, contradicts, or even brushes against Darwinism. In fact, it is difficult to find a major piece of mid-to-late Victorian literature that *hasn't* been academically appraised from a Darwinist perspective. In Tim Youngs's 2013 *Beastly Journeys*, which contemplates Darwinian transformation and degeneration at the *fin de siècle*, Youngs identifies a great number of Victorian authors who overtly read Darwin, or wrestled with Darwinian elements and concepts in their works.<sup>371</sup>

In *Origin*, Darwin attempts to confine his theories to the animal world and avoids saying much about man or God. However, the inferences were clear to many readers: Jim Endersby argues in his introduction to *Origin* that some 'regard it [*Origin*] as a manifesto for atheism, because it denies that humans were created by God, although it says almost

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<sup>368</sup> Six editions of *Origin* were published in the twelve years after its original release. Within a year of *Descent*'s publication, it was translated into six other languages and went global before sparking, as Patrick H. Armstrong estimates, 'hundreds of editions and printings [...] in about thirty languages' of both publications to date. See Patrick H. Armstrong, *All Things Darwin: An Encyclopedia of Darwin's World*, 2 vols (London: Greenwood Press, 2007), I, p. 144; Michael Ruse, *Mystery of Mysteries: Is Evolution a Social Construction?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 158

<sup>369</sup> James A. Secord writes in *Visions of Science*, "Darwinism", as it was quickly termed, was only the most prominent of the unifying projects that enhanced the explanatory power of science and its global ambitions' (p. 241).

<sup>370</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 4.

<sup>371</sup> His list, though by no means exhaustive, includes: Bram Stoker, Richard Marsh, Robert Louis Stevenson, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, Conan Doyle, H. Rider Haggard and, as will prove to be significant in the upcoming sub-chapter on Evolutionary Feudal texts, Richard Jefferies and H.G. Wells. Tim Youngs, *Beastly Journeys: Travel and Transformation at the fin de siècle* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).



nothing about humans or God—and what it does say is ambiguous’.<sup>372</sup> Eventually Darwin directly addressed ‘man’ as a part of nature in *Descent*, but he remained quiet on his opinion of God’s role in nature. Again the implications of the text come to the forefront from lack of any unequivocal stance from Darwin: ‘God ought to care for every individual life, yet the natural world he created seems extravagantly, cruelly wasteful’.<sup>373</sup> It is this view of a harsh and natural world-organisation instead of a caring and God-driven world-organisation (whether it was Darwin’s intention to propagate this view or not) that the Ruritanian authors opposed and the Evolutionary Feudal authors embraced.

Further, Darwin’s theories brought about fears of the degeneration of the species, which, again, Ruritania worked against and Evolutionary Feudal texts worked with. These fears largely derived from the breaking down of boundaries and hierarchies in Darwin’s texts, showing that race, nationality, class and civilisation were fluid categories as far as nature and survival were concerned, and that progress was not a surety. Darwin writes, ‘we are apt to look at progress as the normal rule in human society; but history refutes this [...] Progress seems to depend on many concurrent favorable conditions’.<sup>374</sup> The fear therefore became that if one could ascend the evolutionary ladder, one might also be able to fall back down it. Darwinism relies primarily on competition, and for a species to succeed, another species *must* fail; there was no guarantee that the *fin de siècle* British ‘species’ would perpetually succeed, ‘[f]or as all the inhabitants of each country are struggling together with nicely balanced forces, extremely slight modifications in the structure or habits of one inhabitant would often give it an advantage over others’.<sup>375</sup>

Darwin’s contemplation of extinction and survival, as well as his connection of modern man to animals, tribes and former ways of life, provided a natural window for late Victorian Medievalists to engage in biological discourse. Further, Victorian authors provided a potential solution for what Jonathan Smith deems to be one of Darwin’s major difficulties: ‘[H]ow was natural selection to be depicted *visually*? How could something that acts at such a leisurely pace on such tiny variations be captured directly?’<sup>376</sup> The aristocracy, with its systematic focus on heredity, breeding, and longevity, proved to be a particularly apt literary subject upon which visual representations of natural selection

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<sup>372</sup> Jim Endersby, ‘Introduction’ in *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin (1859), ed. by Jim Endersby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. ix-lxv (p. ix).

<sup>373</sup> Ibid, p. xl.

<sup>374</sup> Darwin, *Descent*, p. 160.

<sup>375</sup> Darwin, *Origin*, p. 72.

<sup>376</sup> Jonathan Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 9 [emphasis original].

could be projected. As this dissertation has shown, aristocratic bodies were already heavily monitored for evidence of superiority, societal value, failure, degeneration, or any other general physical effects derived from high status and competition with other social classes. Darwinism merely gave the Victorian populace another tool, which one could use or reject, to appraise and classify the aristocratic physical form, and an extension to the coded language used in aristocratic literary portraiture. Darwinism was the means by which some Victorian authors sought the root of aristocratic nature, and the historical location and reasoning from which the British class system had sprung.

### Part 1 – Ruritania, or the Chivalric Feudal

Anthony Hope's 1894 novel, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, is a high-romance adventure story which stemmed not only from *fin de siècle* concerns, but also from the Victorian era's chivalric resurgence and favourable fascination with the pseudo-medieval. Set in the fictional country after which the genre was named, *Zenda* sparked many sequels and imitators.<sup>377</sup> Typically the plot of Ruritanian fiction focuses on a wealthy or aristocratic individual from England or America who stumbles into an unfamiliar Germanic or Balkan principality. He or she is surrounded by monarchs and nobles who react to the rotating set pieces of mistaken identity, court intrigue and a threat to the throne of their country. The protagonist embarks on an ideological rebirth, shrugging off cynicism, ennui and bad behaviour as he or she becomes more embedded in the dignity of the Ruritanian world, creating a heavily derivative and decidedly pro-aristocratic space in late-Victorian and early-Edwardian literature.<sup>378</sup>

Ruritanian fiction celebrates the romantic simplicity of a place and history that never existed, and an origin that must have seemed highly attractive to some late-Victorian middle-class readers. Though most of the texts had a contemporary setting (the earliest being set only 1730, and never in the actual medieval period), there is a purposeful

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<sup>377</sup> Hope's *The Heart of Princess Osra* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896) and *Rupert of Hentzau* (1898) (London: Penguin, 2008), *Zenda's* respective prequel and sequel, and his *Sophy of Kravonia* (1906), G.B. McCutcheon's *Graustark* series (1901-27), and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Lost Prince* (1915) (London: Heinemann, 1966), among just a few.

<sup>378</sup> Anthony Hope, whose works defined the genre, was personally ambiguous in his stance on the aristocracy. He dabbled in liberal politics, but the particular issues he supported or decried were not noted in his autobiography nor his official biography by his friend Sir Charles Mallet. The most he says, in a rather pragmatic and qualified manner, is that it is reasonable to assume 'that in most cases the young aristocrat's future career was likely to be of more public importance than that of the common run of men'. See Anthony Hope, *Memories and Notes* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1927), p. 65. In addition, while Hope was close friends with many aristocrats (including Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland), according to Mallet, Hope hesitated over his own knighthood, only accepting "“after more worrying hesitation than the thing was really worth”" (C. Mallet, p. 233).

vagueness in the writing which allows the reader to get swept up in the fantastical timelessness of Ruritanian countries. This ambiguity of tone allowed authors to depict absolute monarchies in glamorised, revisionist ways by combining nostalgia for pre-industrial society with the mores and morality of the authors' time and generally middle-class perspective. In doing so, Ruritania avoids Norbert Elias's contention that 'If members of present-day Western civilized society were to find themselves suddenly transported into a past epoch of their own society, such as the medieval-feudal period, they would find there much that they esteem "uncivilized" in other societies today'.<sup>379</sup> The ideal monarch is honest, hard-working, respectful, gender-normative, and is easily identifiable as such through bodily physiognomy which is highly visible to his or her subjects; this physiognomy is passed down in perfect facsimile to the monarch's descendants, ignoring any reality of evolution or the natural operations of heredity. The three Ruritanian protagonists analysed below are the three Ruritanian protagonists whose physical forms deal the most heavily with these aristocratic ideals; they happen to all be male. While female aristocrats are present in Ruritanian fiction, occasionally as the protagonist but more typically as the romantic interest, their bodies are characterised in these novels far more in terms of conforming to a 'feminine' ideal rather than an aristocratic one.

As an extension to the positive aristocratic bodies of Ruritanian monarchs, peasants live healthy, merry, agrarian lives under a gentle feudalism which never oppresses them, but rather renders them loyal to their rightful rulers. Politics are non-existent, apart from the occasional plot by a stock villain to steal the throne or coerce a princess into marriage. Lineage must be preserved, and the land and people suffer if the correct bloodline is not on the throne or if that bloodline is corrupted by decadent, weakening influences. Inga Bryden argued that Victorian Medievalism and, by extension, Ruritanian literature 'had two major aspects: naturalism, which equated the past with simpler modes of feeling and heroic codes of action, and feudalism, which regarded earlier social structures as harmonious and stable'.<sup>380</sup> These views, as expressed in a Ruritanian setting, are not a Victorian call for reform but are rather a gently idealistic expression of mores typically seen in fairy tales; the purpose of Ruritanian fiction is not to foster harsh criticism, but to indulge in escapism. Ruritania, as a romantic genre and which is, above all, whimsical and pleasant, enabled a literary escape not only from *fin de siècle* concerns,

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<sup>379</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, p. ix.

<sup>380</sup> Inga Bryden, *Reinventing King Arthur* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 33-34.

but also allowed respite from, or offered variation to, the affairs of daily life, Realist literature, and Darwinism. Though romantic and escapist, this is not to say that Ruritanian works contain no social commentary.

In fact, though generally formulaic in its construction, Ruritanian fiction uses its simplicity to address some intricate Victorian contradictions regarding evolution, time and the aristocracy, and to summarize such complexities succinctly. As was explored in the introductory chapter, the nineteenth century had seen radical shifts in the reality of aristocratic rule, and the members of that class had been celebrated and disparaged equally in popular culture. Ruritanian fiction's attempts to pare down some multifaceted middle-class Victorian views on the nobility: aristocrats are desirable leaders, but only if they conform to middle-class Victorian values, which must be validated by the public gaze, and thereby deserve their position of social and biological governmental supremacy. In Ruritania, one sees the echoes of aristocratic portraiture from all the previous and highly diverse chapters of this dissertation: the glamour and desirability of aristocrats for middle-class consumers in the silver fork novels, the middle-class moral, gender, and body normativity celebrated in Reynolds's work, and the intrinsic and intrusive public gaze seen in Wood's texts. This formula for aristocracy would leave lower class citizens free to venerate the aristocracy without guilt or the desire for reform. This thoroughly unachievable synthesis of desirable aristocratic characteristics is eventually taken further in Ruritania by the genre's suggestion that these aristocrats should strive to remain outside of the evolutionary scheme by producing children as physiognomically indistinguishable from themselves as possible, ensuring that a natural aristocracy remains forever through untainted primogeniture. The genre imagines a utopia where classes exist but class tension does not, where heredity exists but evolution does not. If one could return to the feudal system and perfect it with anachronistic middle-class mores, as this hypothetical world has done, each class would successfully follow through on its duties and thereby erase internal politics and oppression.

Further, in the simple and straightforward Ruritanian environment, physiognomy—or the study of physical traits and their connection to behavioural, moral and medical character, which Sharonna Pearl asserts had 'achieved almost universal penetration into the Victorian consciousness'—is an unquestionable fact.<sup>381</sup> Since one's moral and ancestral features manifest themselves physically, one's character and class

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<sup>381</sup> Sharonna Pearl, *About Faces* (London: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 2

could never be mistaken. In this genre, aristocrats as a whole are able to be classified through external markings. When a leader is no longer capable or virtuous—when he or she is no longer truly *noble*, as Carlyle would consider the term—his or her body reflects it and the entire country becomes united in the opinion that the aristocrat should be replaced with someone more suitable. While physiognomy had long been practised in the Western world and while Victorian medical philosophy often supported the idea that one's morality was physically conspicuous, Ruritanian fiction exaggerates this rhetoric as part of its utopian construction away from realism and Darwinism. In part, this is due to the medieval tradition from which Ruritanian fiction is working: Graeme Tytler, critic of literary physiognomy, writes, 'Physiognomy in medieval literature is generally simple, and is confined mostly to references to family resemblances, nobility of features, pathognomic expressions and gestures, and, occasionally, the deceptiveness of the face', and this is exactly the manner in which physiognomy is treated inside a Ruritanian setting.<sup>382</sup>

This chapter will help to introduce Ruritanian fiction into the realm of critical analysis by exploring the significance of the Ruritanian aristocratic body and, more importantly, what these physiognomic and pro-Carlylean/anti-Darwinian sketches reveal about the Victorian demographics which constructed the genre.<sup>383</sup> The three works of Ruritanian fiction analysed below are Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Prince Otto* (1885), and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Lost Prince* (1915). These three texts approach the genre differently, and yet arrive at the same conclusion which has come to stand as an overt theme in Ruritanian fiction: that subjects of the nobility want to love them, and desire only that the nobility visibly merit that love and ensure that their merit continues unwaveringly into the future. This message resonates heavily with Carlylean rhetoric, as can be seen in *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*:

Society is founded on Hero-worship. All dignities of rank, on which human association rests, are what we may call a *Heroarchy* (Government of Heroes)—or a Hierarchy, for it is 'sacred' enough withal! The Duke means *Dux*, Leader. King is *Kön-ning*, *Kan-ning*, Man that *knows* or *cans*,<sup>384</sup>

<sup>382</sup> Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 123.

<sup>383</sup> Despite *Zenda*'s enduring popularity (as evidenced through the book's 30 reprints in the mere two years after its original publication (Jopi Nyman, *Under English Eyes* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2000), p. 42), and its many film and radio adaptations over seven decades), all texts in the Ruritanian genre, including *Zenda*, have been almost completely ignored by critics from soon after their publication to the present. A few exceptions may be found in Vesna Goldsworthy's *Inventing Ruritania* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Nyman's *Under English Eyes*; and Raymond Wallace's 'Cardboard Kingdoms', *San Jose Studies*, 13:2 (1987), pp. 23-26.

<sup>384</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, I, p. 14.

that ‘The Hero is he who lives [...] in the True, Divine and Eternal, which exists always’.<sup>385</sup> This argument is seen in endless variation amongst Ruritanian literature: Stevenson writes in *Prince Otto* that a leader should be ‘a man of a courtly manner, possessed of the double art to ingratiate and to command; receptive, accommodating, seductive’; that, as Burnett argues in *The Lost Prince*, people ‘are impressionable creatures, and they know a leader when they see him’; and, as Hope says in *The Heart of Princess Osra*, that a good aristocrat represents to the people ‘some sweet image under whose name they fondly group all the virtues and the charms’.<sup>386</sup> These quotations are in direct contradiction to the colder and more imprecise theory of Darwin, who writes, ‘Differences [...] between the highest men of the highest races and the lowest savages, are connected by the finest gradations. Therefore it is possible that they might pass and be developed into each other’.<sup>387</sup> There is no divine and unimpeachable class hegemony in Darwinism, and this lack of clear boundaries conflicts with the middle class obsession with hierarchy and status, as was examined in Chapter 1 on Silver Fork fiction. Despite the potential that evolution held for civilisation, society, and even the individual to continually progress and ‘climb the ladder’, there was also the potential for devolution; therefore, Ruritania’s clearly-imposed but benign class boundaries serve as a mode of middle-class wish-fulfilment for upper-class access without the hand-in-hand risk of returning downward to a lower tier of society or humanity.

### **The Prisoner of Zenda**

When exploring how Ruritanian novels portray the aristocratic body, physiognomic portraiture and divine physical inheritance become the two crucial tools for gauging an aristocrat’s suitability to rule. The authors of Ruritanian works grant such authority to these tools that eventually any concept of realistic Darwinian heredity or influence of nature is completely abandoned by the text. An early reviewer of *The Prisoner of Zenda* gushes, ‘That blessed word “Heredity” is likely to occur to the reader of the first few pages [of the novel]; but the thing itself, the pseudo-scientific thing, lifts not its horrid head and multiple issues for a single page to chill the romantic spirit’.<sup>388</sup> Despite heredity and physiognomy’s ubiquity in Ruritanian texts, their use is more Carlylean than scientific—rather than making any scientific claims about heredity or physiognomy, Hope

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid, pg. 50, II.

<sup>386</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Prince Otto* (1885) (London: Chatto & Windus, 1912), p. 42; Burnett, p. 25; Hope, *Osra*, p. 335.

<sup>387</sup> Darwin, *Descent*, p. 34.

<sup>388</sup> ‘Review of *The Prisoner of Zenda*’, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 77:2013, 26 May 1894, pp. 556-57 (p. 556).

and other Ruritanian authors merely used them as familiar, easy methods of illustrating to the reader that a character was cosmically appointed to rule or not. Hope was not challenging or addressing physiognomy directly, but was rather operating inside a literary culture which made frequent use of physiognomic portraiture. Physiognomy does little more in these texts than to bring about empirical proof inside the reality of the narrative of the presence of a divine hero-aristocrat.

*The Prisoner of Zenda*'s protagonist, Rudolf Rassendyll, presents one of the more visually striking manifestations of physiognomic portraiture in the form of red hair and a long nose. Rudolf is the dissolute younger brother of a virtuous earl, both of whom are the descendants of a Ruritanian Crown Prince, Rudolf Elphberg, who had an illicit relationship with a Rassendyll countess on a diplomatic visit to England several generations before. That prince had been 'marked (may be marred, it is not for me to say) by a somewhat unusually long, sharp and straight nose, and a mass of dark-red hair—in fact, the nose and the hair which have stamped the Elphbergs time out of mind'.<sup>389</sup> Starting with Sir Walter Scott's work, nineteenth-century novelists increasingly made 'conscious use of national physiognomies, especially in [...] historical fiction, where references to peculiarly national faces underline the patriotic themes and also serve as symbolic expressions of the entire history of a particular race or people'.<sup>390</sup> In this case, the Elphberg look is not only a representation of a family and a country, but of a time gone by, and of the nostalgia which classifies both person and place. The hair and nose are visible signifiers, indicating even in another country who the Elphbergs, and since that liaison, the Rassendylls, are and what they stand for. Victorian readers were familiar with the literary interpretation of physical attributes. Based on the descriptions of the Elphberg looks one could reasonably assume, from both the serious and satirical works on physiognomy that informed Victorian readerships, that Rudolf's long nose and red hair signified his authority and vitality, even if other characters in *Zenda* erroneously associate his appearance with the aristocratic decadences of an earlier age.<sup>391</sup>

Rudolf's brother Robert, the earl, has escaped this taint by being born with dark hair and shorter nose, and he and his countess express distaste at the tenacity of Elphberg

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<sup>389</sup> Anthony Hope, *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894), ed. by Tony Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.7.

<sup>390</sup> Tytler, p. 235.

<sup>391</sup> Eden Warwick [George Jabet], *Notes on Noses* (1848), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Richard Bentley, 1864), p. 12; 'Physiognomy', *Anthropological Review*, 6:21 (April 1868), pp. 137-54 (p. 143-44); Tytler argues, by way of contradiction, that nineteenth-century novelists preferred to use red hair to signify an evil character (p. 215).

heredity: “‘She [the countess] objects to my doing nothing and having red hair,” said I [Rudolf] [...] “It generally crops out once in a generation,” said my brother [...] “I wish they didn’t crop out”’.<sup>392</sup> That Rudolf automatically pairs his laziness with his hair colour shows a clear perception of appearances’ entanglement with behaviour—a perception which Hope’s text supports, but which is wrongly interpreted in this specific instance. Robert has no contaminating traits particular to any mentioned family history, and his actions are therefore free from predestination. Robert is allowed to be a modern nobleman who ‘rises at seven and works before breakfast’, exhibiting the Protestant work ethic which the middle classes so valued, especially in men.<sup>393</sup> The standard Robert sets for all English aristocrats champions evolution and adaptation, while being the antithesis of Rudolf’s *sprezzatura*, or the natural grace of God. Based on Robert’s attitude, he and his ancestors no doubt practised strict sexual selection in order to distance themselves and their offspring as far from the Elphberg genetics as possible, and yet little dilution has taken place. A greater power overrides nature and evolution, allowing a perfect Elphberg copy to appear ‘once in a generation’ and to keep that generation from ever fully moving forward from the past.<sup>394</sup> This is not to say that Hope is hostile towards evolutionary theory: unglamorous though he may be, Robert is a man who is portrayed as more suitable to Britain’s socio-political climate, while Rudolf is imprisoned by the specific values of the aristocrat in the past whose dissipated actions became Rudolf’s moral and physical genesis. Rudolf acts like a nobleman of a different era, incompatible with the world he lives in, though Hope wishes to reinstate that romantic world in England. Hope merely gives voice to what was, as the popularity of the genre indicates, a prominent pseudo-historical fantasy amongst some of the late-Victorians.<sup>395</sup>

While Robert is as dedicated, abstemious and virtuous a man as one could hope to find in power, his personality is unremarkable to the point of tedium. He is easy to like, but impossible to worship and, according to both Hope and Carlyle’s standards, he is therefore not a real leader. Rudolf has all the potential of being a worthless, parasitic aristocrat, and yet Hope casts him as the protagonist and marks him out through physiognomic composition as a true nobleman. The highly visual cues in Rudolf’s

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<sup>392</sup> Hope, *Zenda*, p. 6.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid, p. 5; Danahay writes that the ‘Male Victorian identity was modelled on the Protestant work ethic’ (7). While I would add that this was not the *only* male identity to be found in the Victorian era and that it is largely a product of its class, I am inclined to agree with him. The works of Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Smiles strongly espoused this ideology and were read and referenced very frequently in the middle classes.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>395</sup> Hope said that when considering the popularity of a book, including royalty in it ‘is always a safe card to play’. Hope, *Memories and Notes*, p. 121.



appearance allow the readers to instantly categorise him as possessing the charisma and skill which imply a 'natural aristocracy', an idea which originated with Aristotle and continued to flourish in Western culture through folk and fairy tales, and eventually chivalric literature and Carlyle. Sophie Gilmartin argues that these story-telling traditions predominantly feature aristocrats as protagonists and 'the reader expects that at birth the hero or heroine will be set apart in some way as unique or superior to others'.<sup>396</sup> Being a chivalric romance, Ruritanian fiction repeatedly brushes against the pseudo-medieval fairy tale tradition and, true to form, Rudolf possesses a superior ability in most things, especially in leadership, just as his physical appearance had predestined.

In order to escape his cynical, useless existence, he leaves England and addresses his origin in Ruritania which, like him, seems to be misplaced in time. He senses, as Virginia Zimmerman says in her influential text on the Victorian understanding of the past, *Excavating the Victorians*, that the mining of history 'revealed the extraordinary power of certain items to endure' even as humanity proved its mutability over time.<sup>397</sup> In sensing this, Rudolf understands that his true identity, which is rooted in history, may still be available to him in the present. Once in Ruritania, Rudolf runs into his distant relation, the new King of Ruritania, and both men discover that the Elphberg genetics have cropped up strongly in them, rendering them almost twins in looks and conduct. Hope reinforces this point by naming them both (as well as their common ancestor) 'Rudolf'. This high level of genetic inheritance takes Darwin's supposition that '[h]abits, moreover, followed during many generations probably tend to be inherited' to an absurd level, to the point where nature is no longer in control, but rather a higher power is.<sup>398</sup> Had Darwin written the story of the Elphberg cousins, he would have designed their looks and personalities to correspond with the level of their genetic proximity, their learned behaviour, and the general probability of inheriting identical traits. Hope ignores all of these scientific provisos in favour of an intrinsic, undiluted and unbreakable physical mirroring and code of conduct between two very distant cousins who have never met.

The new king ignores his responsibilities in the pursuit of pleasure, leaving his people desperate to find something to love in him. When King Rudolf is kidnapped by his younger brother in an attempt to steal the throne, Rudolf Rassendyll secretly takes the king's place while a rescue mission is planned, in order to keep the public from panicking.

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<sup>396</sup> Gilmartin, p. 11.

<sup>397</sup> Virginia Zimmerman, *Excavating Victorians* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 97.

<sup>398</sup> Darwin, *Descent*, p. 157.

When Rudolf is finally put to good use in the correct, historically-tinged environment, his decadent actions are transformed into chivalric, noble ones. He appears publicly as the king and soon has the once-apathetic nation happy to accept such their monarch. He rescues the king, foils the villain and wins the love of the people as he completes his Carlylean transformation in which the embryonic hero reveals his true nature: ‘he must march forward, and quit himself like a man,—trusting imperturbably in the appointment and *choice* of the upper Powers [*i.e.* God]’.<sup>399</sup>

As Rudolf becomes more embedded in his duty to his real homeland, his hair and nose cease to be referenced. In *Zenda*’s sequel, *Rupert of Hentzau*, Rudolf’s appearance is scarcely mentioned at all, and then only as a means to carry out another ‘mistaken identity’ plot. While the traits themselves do not fade, their significance does. In England, his Elphberg appearance marked him out as the descendent of an affair, with all of the moral trappings which go along with such a reminder. In Ruritania, his Elphberg appearance marks him out purely as an Elphberg, and as such, he is thought to be a legitimate ruler. Since his bloodline is linked to the land and his traits are now in their correct environment and symbolic time period, he is finally allowed to embody what those traits really mean.

Like the readers themselves, Rudolf is forced to leave Ruritania at the end of *The Prisoner of Zenda* and return to Britain. That he cannot stay in the land which his identity and physicality have gone so deeply into reifying is a commentary on the pleasant but ultimately impractical nature of viewing the medieval period nostalgically. In the novel’s sequel, the Ruritanian royal line ultimately fails and the country is left to suffer the ravages of the modern world. Some of the last words in *Rupert of Hentzau* read, ‘Times change for all of us. The roaring flood of youth goes by, and the stream of life sinks into a quiet flow’.<sup>400</sup> It is this gentle extraction of the reader from the text, and of the Victorians from the past, that illustrate Hope’s understanding that his desired portrait of the modern aristocracy cannot be fulfilled. The time of the Elphbergs, with their perfectly cloned heirs and unimpeachable chivalric physiognomy, is now gone from nature—assuming it ever existed.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, I, p. 39.

<sup>400</sup> Hope, *Hentzau*, p. 306.

<sup>401</sup> Hope admitted in his *Memories and Notes* that he knew little of the medieval period, despite his long-term interest in it. While at university as a young man he, ‘ventured to attempt an essay on “Medieval Warfare” or some such thing, of which I knew nothing and (honestly) could learn nothing’ (78). This conforms perfectly to the Medievalist divorce from Realism seen in his Ruritanian novels.

The few critics who have dealt with the subject of Ruritania at any length tend to analyse the genre in terms of empire and orientalism.<sup>402</sup> I would argue something else entirely: that Ruritania, at least in its origin in *Zenda*, fetishizes history rather than location. Despite Ruritania being a globally-insignificant, non-English-speaking, Catholic absolute monarchy located hundreds of miles from Great Britain, it is easily read as a stand-in for the fantasy of merry old England. Nyman argues that by ‘locating its action on the borders of the West and imaging an Eastern European kingdom named Ruritania it [...] follows the conventions of the truly orientalising adventure narratives by such writers as H. Rider Haggard and G.A. Henty’.<sup>403</sup> While Orientalism may be an element of other Ruritanian fiction, Hope’s Ruritania is not set on the borders of the West, but rather firmly inside it. In addition, Hope does not highlight any foreign exoticism. He pays little attention to the realities and complexities of German states at this time, including the effect of unification, the irregularities of Germanic title inheritance, legacy laws, and the distinction between ‘high-nobility’ and ‘low-nobility’, which were highly confusing and changeable aspects which varied from state to state. All of these items easily could have served as Orientalist markers to distinguish the Continental from the British. Rather, he imposes on Ruritania the clear homogeneity of the English primogeniture system, as well as familiar British values, fashions and habits, allowing Hope to rewrite history and location as thoroughly as he rewrites the mechanisms of heredity and biology. For example, it is not until Rudolf has been in Ruritania for several chapters that Hope even addresses, in the most passing of comments, that Rudolf has been speaking fluent German the whole time. Much like a dream or fantasy, the protagonist is not hindered by the logistics of reality, but instead automatically knows the language and the customs, or at least encounters very few elements that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable. This is because contemporary Ruritania is the fictional past of England. Zimmerman argues that ‘despite the many histories that neatly divide time, no period or epoch is really discrete’, and it is this overlap of ages which Hope uses to such clear effect.<sup>404</sup> Rudolf delves into his own familial and national history, instead of exploring a new world. Caroline Sumpter posits that much like in the fairy tale, Germany and England share a chivalric code which ‘emerged from a shared Teutonic mythology’, so the focus of Ruritania’s glamour is, therefore, not on the exoticism of place which shares too much with England to be truly exotic, but rather on

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<sup>402</sup> Goldsworthy argues that Ruritanian authors ‘exploited the resources of the Balkans [where later Ruritanian fiction was often set] to supply its [Great Britain’s] literary and entertainment industries’ (p. 2). Nyman supplements Goldsworthy’s stance by defining Ruritania (using an early reviewer’s words) as ‘some semi-Oriental kingdom of Europe’ (p. 41).

<sup>403</sup> Nyman, p. 41.

<sup>404</sup> Zimmerman, p. 8.

the exoticism of time.<sup>405</sup> No real person can ever reach Ruritania, since it is a construction of imaginative nostalgia. When Rudolf first arrives there, he chooses to nap in a glade instead of running for his train in a conscious decision to appreciate pastoral history over the modern urban. The land itself rapidly becomes a dreamscape: ‘To remember a train in such a spot would have been rank sacrilege. Instead of that, I fell to dreaming that I was married to the Princess Flavia and dwelt in the Castle of Zenda, and beguiled whole days with my love in the glades of the forest—which made a very pleasant dream’, a dream that will, at least in part, come astonishingly to life during his visit.<sup>406</sup>

This nostalgia, which by its definition imparts a sense of glamour due to its unobtainability, is also what defines Rudolf as a glamorous, Carlylean aristocrat, since his physical bond with Ruritania is so strong.<sup>407</sup> He is capable of physically reaching Ruritania, while the reader is not, and this land to which he truly belongs snaps him into chivalric action, melding his brother Robert’s best characteristics with his own. This makes him the perfect Carlylean aristocrat: duty-bound but enchanting, virtuous but exciting, and loveable but completely inaccessible to his subjects. These fanciful paradoxes are much more sophisticated and enticing aspects for a leader to possess than the lacklustre characteristics of biological leadership presented by Darwin, characteristics which deal primarily with the level of one’s sexual vigour.<sup>408</sup> And while no real Victorian aristocrat could hope to match Rudolf’s level of Carlylean leadership and *sprezzatura* in reality, *The Prisoner of Zenda* helped to characterise precisely which elements of romance and duty the late Victorians could fantasise about in their leaders. *Zenda* and other Ruritanian texts are crucial for understanding how some late Victorian demographics perceived the aristocracy, since it illustrates the nuance of opinion which can be found in British culture over the course of the nineteenth century: Ruritanian fiction promotes neither the anti-aristocracy radicalism of *The Mysteries of the Court of London* nor the middle-class star-struck aspirations of the silver fork novels, but rather an affectionate, fanciful form of constructive criticism of those idyllic characteristics perceived to be missing from the

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<sup>405</sup> Caroline Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 16.

<sup>406</sup> Hope, *Zenda*, p. 21-22.

<sup>407</sup> Rudolf’s ties to the land mimic many of the stories told in Frazer’s anthropological work, *The Golden Bough*, a work which Anthony Hope read and called ‘that mighty and fascinating monument of labour and genius’ (Hope, *Memories and Notes*, p. 138). Frazer identifies ‘kingship’ as the chief facet of cultural elevation (100-01) and indicates that the connection of king to deity is one of the most universal cultural traits. His chapter entitled “Magicians and Kings” lists all of the cultures that believe in the supernatural link of the king’s body with the physical landscape. Frazer, p. 11-12.

<sup>408</sup> Darwin, *Origin*, p. 76.

modern aristocracy, as well as a momentary escape from the perceived harshness of realism and Darwinism.

### Prince Otto

Although Robert Louis Stevenson's 1885 proto-Ruritanian novel, *Prince Otto*, was published almost ten years before *Zenda*, it can be retroactively classified as part of the genre. While *Otto* is less a swashbuckling adventure and more a serious contemplation on leadership, public opinion and the Medieval Revival, it set the groundwork for Ruritania and may be included under the parameters that *Zenda* redrew for the genre. One of the most important elements explored by both Stevenson and Hope was the connection between aristocratic physical appearance and leadership. However, instead of treating the connection as a biological reality like Hope does, Stevenson looks at the connection as a matter of public opinion, not one of divinity, which is a more realistic perspective, but still divorced from Darwin's model of 'survival of the fittest'. That Stevenson depicts the more subjective, interpretive side of physiognomy does not diminish its significance, but underscores the Carlylean need for a leader to exhibit correct behaviour to his or her public in order to earn the right to rule. Carlyle writes, 'We have undertaken to discourse here for a little on Great Men, their manner of appearance in our world's business, how they have shaped themselves in the world's history, what ideas men formed of them, what work they did;—on Heroes, namely, and on their reception and performance', which illustrates that while God is ultimately in control in crafting and placing an aristocratic body in a position of leadership, there is still a public element to that leadership, a 'reception and performance'.<sup>409</sup>

The narrative follows the titular Otto, monarch of the feudal German principality of Grünewald. Otto is a lazy and ineffective ruler much distained by his people; he has spent most of his reign eschewing his duty in favour of a pleasurable life: 'He hunts, and he dresses very prettily—which is a thing to be ashamed of'.<sup>410</sup> He foists all responsibilities on his wife, Princess Seraphina, and his councillor, Gondremark, who is 'the hope of Grünewald [...] he's a downright modern man—a man of the new lights and the progress of the age'.<sup>411</sup> Much like Rudolf's brother, the highly-evolved Robert, in *Zenda*, Gondremark is the champion of progress and the enemy of the nostalgic past. This antagonism of the future is far more clearly delineated in *Prince Otto*, since Gondremark

<sup>409</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, I, p. 1.

<sup>410</sup> Stevenson, *Otto*, p. 12.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

is the undisputed foe of the charming protagonist, as it is rumoured that Seraphina and Gondremark are lovers and that he has designs on the throne. Gondremark is the embodiment of the *fin de siècle*: he is the ultimate ‘New Man’, an unstoppable charge into the future, with equal potential for utopic or catastrophic results. This tension between the old and the new creates an identity vacuum for the people, who are undecided whether they wish to remain in a Ruritanian landscape at all.

A large part of the populace’s wish to leave that Medievalist landscape is due to their uncertainty about their ruler’s physicality. Since Otto lives a private life instead of being a public figurehead, no one can tell whether his body is altruistic and cosmically appointed to the role, or if it is selfish and degenerative. Otto’s subjects are rife with codings of the aristocratic body and indicate their urgent need to ‘read’ and interpret Otto; however, Otto refuses to present himself as a text and his absence forces his subjects to imagine the worst. They theorise about his physical form, speculating that he must be bald and sickly-looking, since those physiognomic traits would explain his poor leadership.<sup>412</sup> The reader, who not only can see Otto, but who is also indoctrinated in the long literary tradition of physiognomic portraiture, interprets Otto’s actual form (which is tall, handsome, healthy, and with a head full of red curls) not as a critique of the inaccurate nature of physiognomy, but rather as a romanticised reinforcement of it: the reader knows that Otto is full of good intentions and untapped potential, based not only on his role as a sympathetic protagonist but also because he is handsome.

In one instance, this exaggerated physiognomic portraiture goes so far as to challenge ideas of Darwinian degeneration. Otto is described, this time by a courtier who has seen him in person, as a man with

hair of a ruddy gold, which naturally curls, and his eyes are dark, a combination which I always regard as the mark of some congenital deficiency, physical or moral [...] His one manly taste is for the chase. In sum, he is but a plexus of weaknesses; the singing chambermaid of the stage, tricked out in man’s apparel, and mounted on a circus horse.<sup>413</sup>

The audience knows from its personal experience with Otto that he is not weak or a ‘singing chambermaid’, and this knowledge discredits the initial claims that Otto is suffering from a deficiency or degeneration.<sup>414</sup> The very mention of such speculations

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid, pp. 64-65.

<sup>414</sup> It must be noted that Otto’s physicality is strikingly similar to the Elphberg look in *Zenda*, and perhaps this passage is where Hope got his idea for the discourse on moral and physical ties.

underscores the unpleasantness of *fin de siècle* degenerative fears, how out-of-place they appear in this novel and its Medievalist setting, and how little those fears deserve to be applied to the protagonist. This is but one manifestation of how, as Menikoff writes, Stevenson ‘explored the matter of faith in an age of evolutionary biology’, in this instance pushing faith in Otto (and by extension, God, for placing Otto on the throne) onto the reader.<sup>415</sup> Stevenson would, of course, go on to write his novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* the following year, which gives voice to explicit fears of degeneration.<sup>416</sup> However, *Prince Otto*, which he subtitled ‘A Romance’, may have been the initial way in which Stevenson addressed *fin de siècle* uneasiness about degeneration, namely by attempting to ignore it in favour of a romanticised model for physical appearance, rather than the degenerative or Darwinian model. Stevenson himself acknowledged (as quoted by a reviewer) that the novel has “‘a wonton [*sic*] air of unreality”’; and he [Stevenson] puts it down to “the difficulty of being ideal in an age of realism”’.<sup>417</sup> The unrealistic model represented in *Prince Otto* is one in which morality perfectly aligns with outward appearance, the only real (d)evolution being in public opinion. The aristocracy may not evolve in this novel, but the public still needs to see a leader in order to be reassured that their faith in said leader is well-placed.

The people are desperate for a hero, for some signifier on which they can construct their Grünewaldian identity. When Otto refuses to become this signifier by staying out of the public gaze, they turn instead to a Republican movement which favours Gondremark as their natural leader and allows for its members to be easily identified through the medals they wear: ‘drawing out a green ribbon that he wore about his neck, he held up [...] a pewter medal bearing the imprint of a Phoenix and the legend *Libertas*’.<sup>418</sup> What is important to this movement is not necessarily the ideology, since there are only two perceived options in the political environment (Otto and thusfar inadequate traditionalism versus Gondremark and probably beneficial change), but rather the method by which the Republicans show their solidarity, through the profound simplicity of what they are wearing. By wearing a mass-produced medal, one carries around one’s hopes, beliefs and prejudices on one’s body, to be easily understood by anyone who recognises it, which, in the case of Grünewald, is a high percentage of the population. The medals are depicted as

<sup>415</sup> Barry Menikoff, ‘Prayers at Sunset’ in *Robert Louis Stevenson Reconsidered*, ed. by William B. Jones, Jr (London: McFarland & Company, 2002), pp. 209–12 (p. 210).

<sup>416</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales* (1886), ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006; reiss. 2008).

<sup>417</sup> Q., ‘Review of *Prince Otto*’, *The Academy*, 1442, 23, December 1899, pp. 750 (p. 750).

<sup>418</sup> Stevenson, *Otto*, p. 34.

an insincere and desperate expression of identity and creed arising from the lack of any alternative, a false physiognomy to fill the void that a true leader's physiognomy would occupy. The medals not only symbolically reinforce the people's need for country-wide physiognomic understanding in the wake of Otto's physical absence, but also for their need for glory and need for a divine leader. A medal is worn as a religious icon or earned through merit, service or heroism; in terms of the former, the people revere Gondremark, a false, non-divine leader they have chosen for themselves; in terms of the latter, the wearer of an *earned* medal is usually entitled to a degree of accolade and, in the public's turn to Republicanism, every citizen becomes his or her own hero with his or her own medal, given freely instead of merited. Instead of building their own national identities around a God-given Carlylean leader or national champion who provides some degree of glory, envy, and aspiration to the masses, every citizen will ultimately have the impossible task of worshipping his or herself, or an erroneous leader. While Stevenson by no means criticises Republicanism, his narrative does support Carlyle's assertion that the people need able and legitimate heroes who can become a standard for others:

He [a king] is practically the summary for us of *all* the various figures of Heroism; Priest, Teacher, whatsoever of earthly or of spiritual dignity we can fancy to reside in a man, embodies itself here, to *command* over us, to furnish us with constant practical teaching, to tell us for the day and hour what we are to *do*. He is called *Rex*, Regneator, *Roi*: our own name is still better; King, *Könning*, which means *Can-ning*, Able-man.<sup>419</sup>

What Stevenson attempts to do is to destigmatise the desire to worship elite members of society. While it was growing more unfashionable to fawn over the aristocracy, Stevenson argues through his text that if middle-class virtue can be exhibited by the nobility and their worth can be proven to the masses, the public will be able to satisfy a very real need without guilt; that what the middle class objects to is not an aristocracy itself, but to weakness and worthlessness in rulers. The lower classes of Grünewald are 'proud of their hard hands, proud of their shrewd ignorance and almost savage lore, [and] looked with an unfeigned contempt on the soft character and manners of the sovereign race'.<sup>420</sup> Otto is unable to provide the necessary model for his people. Public opinion eventually wins and Grünewald is thrown into revolution. Otto and Seraphina reunite, but are forced to escape into exile to live peaceful, private lives at a foreign court.

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<sup>419</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, II, p. 99.

<sup>420</sup> Stevenson, *Otto*, p. 4.



Grünewald is in many ways the anti-Ruritania. It is not a place lost to time, but a place that is catching up with time, yearning to be a modern nation, although modernity is correlated in this context with violence, misunderstanding, and a distinct *fin de siècle* sense of degeneration finally coming to fruition. Modernity is the antagonist in the novel and, in some capacity, the antagonist in all Ruritanian fiction while the doomed feudal days are presented with bucolic, nostalgic poetry. Stevenson punishes the country of Grünewald for modernising and not respecting or reacting to Otto's personal growth: the country forcibly ejects a leader whom the reader knows to be good, having now fully aligned with modern values pleasing to the audience; the violent upheaval is revealed to be ultimately unsuccessful and leads to the total destruction of the nation, since Stevenson introduces the book by saying:

You shall seek in vain upon the map of Europe for the bygone state of Grünewald. An independent principality, an infinitesimal member of the German Empire, she played, for several centuries, her part in the discord of Europe; and, at last, in the *ripeness of time* and at the spiring of several bald diplomatists, vanished like a morning ghost.<sup>421</sup>

Without its leader, which Carlyle states is an 'eternal corner stone, from which they [the people] can begin to build themselves up again', Grünewald ceases to exist, not just in essence or in name, but physically.<sup>422</sup> It is erased from the map, swallowed up by other lands, much like Otto who resides in another nation and has taken ownership of his private and therefore insignificant body and identity. There is no face for Grünewald, and if there is no face, there can be no physiognomy, further tying person to place, and physical nature to physical landscape. Much like Hope's slow extinction of Ruritania at the end of *Rupert of Hentzau*, Otto and Seraphina slowly but happily fade away in another mystical land, leaving their country to face its burgeoning modernity without the guidance of its aristocrats.

### **The Lost Prince**

The Ruritanian text which most clearly correlates the body of the leader with the health of the land is Frances Hodgson Burnett's 1915 children's novel, *The Lost Prince*. This is also the text which is most heavily imbued with the notion of a natural aristocracy, or a human 'emblem of the Godlike, of some God'.<sup>423</sup> While there is a thirty-year gap between *The Lost Prince* and *Prince Otto* and a twenty-year gap between it and *The*

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid, p. 3, emphasis mine.

<sup>422</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, I, p. 18.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

*Prisoner of Zenda*, as well as a difference in intended audiences, Burnett's representations of the aristocratic body are still deeply embedded in discourse from decades previously. These long-standing tropes and views demonstrate, rather aptly, that there was little evolution in the Ruritanian genre.

The story follows Marco Loristan and his father, displaced citizens from the fictional Balkan country of Samavia, who travel the world quietly and keep the secret of the lost Samavian prince. Generations before, a mad Samavian king quarrelled with and stabbed his heir, Prince Ivor, who escaped and was rumoured to still be alive in hiding. The king was deposed and the country withered under the factions who warred repeatedly for the crown: 'From that time, the once splendid little kingdom was like a bone fought for by dogs. Its pastoral peace was forgotten [...] It assassinated kings and created new ones. No man was sure in his youth what ruler his maturity would live under'.<sup>424</sup> The Loristan family's duty is to track and protect the descendants of Prince Ivor and, when the time is right, raise the necessary support to place the hidden, legitimate king on the throne. Much as *Zenda* and *Otto* play with the notions of fairy tale, and through them idealise and glamorise the aristocratic body, so does *The Lost Prince*, which is the closest of all Ruritanian fiction to expressing ancient or primitive class superstitions as a modern reality or desire. Frazer, in his work on the primitive superstitions of the upper classes, writes, 'His [a king's] person is considered [...] as the dynamical centre of the universe, from which lines of force radiate to all quarters of the heaven [*sic*]; so that any motion of his – the turning of his head, the lifting of his hand – instantaneously affects and may seriously disturb some part of nature', and this sentiment is echoed throughout *The Lost Prince*.<sup>425</sup> While Samavia is further removed as a stand-in for Great Britain than Ruritania and Grünewald had been (Samavia being a Balkan state instead of a German one), this legend reinforces the connection to Great Britain through its parallels to the dethroned James II and his exiled heirs.<sup>426</sup> While Burnett is more focused on the optimism surrounding aristocracy rather than with commenting on Great Britain's monarchical history, the connection serves to make Samavia another familiar land which can host the nostalgia for a time gone by through legend and allusions to real historical events.

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<sup>424</sup> Burnett, p. 17.

<sup>425</sup> Frazer, p. 202.

<sup>426</sup> Perhaps the shift of setting from Germany to the Balkans was the result of Germany's modernization and unification, making the forgotten, medieval wonderland of Ruritania no longer applicable to that part of the globe. Or maybe it was simply because the alliances and oppositions formed in WWI, at the time of Burnett's writing, would have made favouring a Germanic setting seem unpatriotic.

Just as *Zenda* had philosophised that certain blood produces certain traits, especially in terms of class-based or national identities, so *The Lost Prince* argues on a greater scale: the land itself manifests certain traits based on the blood of its ruler, and an altruistic body divorced from Darwinism is needed to rule that land effectively. Despite five hundred years of national strife, Marco is taught the simplistic lesson that Samavia is guaranteed to heal only when its true leader returns. The rigid adherence to a system of binaries (good/bad, rightful king/usurper, healthy land/dying land) supports the idea of blood and biology being tied to a place and class, underscoring Ruritanian fiction's repeated discussion regarding aristocratic physicality and the escapism it provides for its readers. In this instance, the complex and horrific politics that emerged from the Baltic states at the time of Burnett's writing are ignored for simple and idealised ones, to accompany the simple and idealised aristocratic body. In *The Lost Prince*, a monarch's body *is* the land, his health and power directly correlating with its health and power. When it comes to absolute monarchies, this is not necessarily an untrue philosophy: Lawrence James argues that '[h]ereditary monarchy has always been hostage to genetic accidents which produced kings who were temperamentally unfit or intellectually deficient and, therefore, a danger to their high office and welfare of their subjects'.<sup>427</sup> Despite Burnett's admission of this danger, seen through the story of the mad king, the text maintains a firm belief in the rightness of rule through heredity, provided that heirs are bred and trained to be exact duplicates of their virtuous parent, again skewing Darwin's theories of heredity and inheritance to such preposterous degrees that the novel's examples of heredity no longer have any place inside of Darwin's arguments, nor in the realm of nature at all.

Burnett hints early on that Marco and his father are really the descendants of Prince Ivor, though the text does not admit it until the end of the novel. Marco might not realise his own status, but the audience in its role as spectator within Ruritania's physiognomic, anti-Darwinian tradition knows what Marco does not. The constant emphasis on how Marco's blood and body perform enlightens the reader: 'When they talked together of its [Samavia's] history, Marco's boy-blood burned and leaped in veins, and he always knew, by the look in his father's eyes, that his blood burned also'.<sup>428</sup> Even the idea of the country sparks a surge of vitality in him, as though the land and the person were two chemicals reacting to each other on a cosmic platform, far closer to the realm of Carlyle than to the realm of Darwin.

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<sup>427</sup> Lawrence James, *Aristocrats*, p. 12.

<sup>428</sup> Burnett, p. 4.

Marco proves to be a natural leader, and is easily identified as such through the eyes of others. The Loristans' servant says of him, 'the young Master must carry himself less finely. It would be well to shuffle a little and slouch as if he were of the common people', though as far as Marco and presumably the reader are aware, he *is* of the 'common people' and has not been raised with any connection to high society.<sup>429</sup> The text assumes that aristocrats are of a different constitution, almost a different species, and it would be impossible for the naked eye to mistake one of their class. The inherent glamour, finely shaped limbs, good posture, attractive features and expression of power and morality are all markings which no person of good lineage, no matter how diluted the blood, can escape, nor which any person of low birth could achieve, that 'all sorts of Heroes are intrinsically of the same material'.<sup>430</sup>

The Loristan markings are not as distinctive as those in *Zenda*, largely because their Balkan lineage would not allow for too much variation in hair or eye colour: like most Balkan residents, they are dark-haired and brown-eyed. While this is likely just a logistical or aesthetic choice for Burnett, it also plays into the physiognomic idea that dark hair and eyes 'frequently belong to the physically or morally strong', which aptly matches both the high-mindedness and physical hardness of the Loristans.<sup>431</sup> What is distinctive about the Loristans, however, is an overwhelming aura of masculinity and maturity. The real aristocrat in Burnett's work is hyper-manly, a component of which is his moral strength and ability to shoulder great responsibility. Where aristocratic markings in *Zenda* were largely gender-irrelevant, here they tie more closely to the masculine and moral ideals of knighthood. Marco 'was the kind of boy people look at a second time [...] he was a very big boy—tall for his years, and with a particularly strong frame. His shoulders were broad and his arms and legs were long and powerful. He was quite used to hearing people say, as they glanced at him, "What a fine, big lad!"'.<sup>432</sup> The representation of his body exemplifies his natural superiority, which is instantly recognised and admired by others, akin to the way that a thoroughbred horse might be recognised and admired as being of superior breeding. Of all the children in the neighbourhood, Marco is the largest for his years, the most well-shaped, and the one whose form most implicitly produces awe in those who see him. He is a miniature version of his father, who 'was a big man with a handsome, dark face [who] looked, somehow, as if he had been born to command armies,

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>430</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, II, p. 1.

<sup>431</sup> Tytler, p. 212.

<sup>432</sup> Burnett, p. 2.

and as if no one would think of disobeying him'.<sup>433</sup> A focus on the Loristans' strong body-type and their ability to command emphasises what Dominic Lieven declares to be 'the aristocracy's traditionally foremost occupation, namely war'.<sup>434</sup> In his expression of love towards his father, Marco exclaims, 'Father [...] I love you! I wish you were a general and I might die in battle for you'.<sup>435</sup> In addition, their strong soldierly bodies reinforce the medieval component of Ruritanian fiction and underline that they are out of time with the rest of the world. They are historical warrior-kings, searching for a lost homeland unreachable to most, and are easily identified as such through their adherence to the knight body-type.<sup>436</sup>

Little reference is made to Marco's absent mother, or to any female in the Loristan history, making each man's genesis appear to be an asexual cloning process during which the bloodline is not diluted, never strays from direct primogeniture inheritance, nor contains any influence apart from the hyper-masculine. Nothing else in Ruritanian literature presents so direct an attack on Darwinism's adherence to sexual selection, or so fanciful an imagining of the capabilities of the aristocratic body. Marco's father repeatedly says with proud regard to his son's upbringing, 'Here grows a man for Samavia', underscoring the notion that his son was grown and cultivated, not born, and that what Samavia needs is the true masculinity of aristocratic influence.<sup>437</sup>

This noble appearance is, as in *Zenda*, not so much a product of Samavia itself but of a happier, feudal age. When recounting the legend of the lost Prince Ivor, Burnett writes of Samavia, 'In those past centuries, its people had been of such great stature, physical beauty, and strength, that they had been like a race of noble giants [...] The simple courtesy of the poorest peasant was as stately as the manner of a noble'.<sup>438</sup> While the correct bloodline was on the throne, nobility and hereditary health were a part of the land and of all its people. The 'race of noble giants', in addition, further ties the in-text lore and the novel itself to the medieval or fairy-tale model and serves to illustrate that degeneration is a modern and urban phenomenon. All other humans in the novel have been

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>434</sup> Lieven, p. xvii.

<sup>435</sup> Burnett, pp. 40-41.

<sup>436</sup> Lawrence James argues in his work on the history of the aristocracy that 'the medieval aristocracy were always depicted as a physical elite and many were in life. A modern autopsy on the skeleton of Sir Bartholomew de Burghersh, who died in 1369 [...] revealed a sturdy man of nearly six foot with strong, muscular limbs. His physique was the result of regular exercise and a diet rich in protein [...] Knights were not just taller and stronger than their inferiors. Popular chivalric romances constantly drew attention to the fine features and fair complexions of noble heroes and heroines. Fiction often reflected reality' (p. 25).

<sup>437</sup> Burnett, p. 5.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

made diminutive except the Loristan men, whose pure blood preserves them from the ravages of evolution and keeps their physical stature within ‘noble giant’ dimensions. There is no evolution in this novel—only devolution and the small capacity to recover from said devolution. The Loristans have a genetic stasis from which everyone else has devolved and to which everyone aspires to return.

The Loristan masculinity is the marker of an older aristocratic archetype, and their non-Englishness is not so much a criticism of England, but of modern, industrialised nations and the ugliness and weakness those nations foster in their people through (d)evolution, as will be seen in the upcoming section on *The Time Machine*. Urban devolution is hardly an unusual deprecation of modern life, given that, as Bryden argues, ‘many medievalist evocations of the past, from Scott onwards, implicitly contrast a glamorous lost world with drab modernity’.<sup>439</sup> Drab modernity is epitomised in Marco’s friend, a young English boy nicknamed ‘Rat’. He, in direct opposition to Marco’s natural aristocracy, is both a lord’s son and a devolved, infirm, animalistic weakling. He spends his days on the streets avoiding his savage drunkard father, and his class is indistinguishable from that of the members of his urchin gang. He constantly reminds the reader that his father is a ‘gentleman [...] I am a gentleman’s son’, though initially the reader can see no characterisation to support that statement.<sup>440</sup> Rat says to Marco ‘I wish I was your size! Are you a gentleman’s son? You look as if you were’, and yet Rat himself does not fit the physiognomic model to which he subscribes.<sup>441</sup> He is not only a small, feeble boy, but also aggressive, close-minded and literally low, since he is disabled and must pull himself around on a small cart. His noble traits have been hidden or eroded by the foulness of modern London, making him unfit to rule anything but his group of waifs. His nickname rather heavy-handedly also stands in as a manifestation of his physiognomic self.<sup>442</sup> He is ‘Rat’, a pestilential vermin associated more with urban cityscapes than with agrarian gentility. The rat, like an industrialised city, is ruthless, opportunistic and dirty. Rat and Marco embody Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska’s theory on the *fin de siècle* masculine body:

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<sup>439</sup> Bryden, p. 80.

<sup>440</sup> Burnett, p. 25.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

<sup>442</sup> As Tytler writes of physiognomy, ‘The tendency to discover similarities between human beings and animals is, of course, practically as old as literature itself, though the animal comparison was, at least until the late eighteenth century, essentially metaphorical or symbolical [...] despite acknowledging the unity of nature and, hence, man’s close kinship with animals, [the comparison] still held for the most part to the idea of the immutability of species as well as the unquestioned superiority of man in the chain of being’ (250).

A beautiful, healthy, and fit male body was identified with hegemonic masculinity whereas countertypes such as the stunted, narrow-chested urban labourer or the obese, flabby businessman signified degeneration. Cultural pessimism about modernity gave rise to growing fears of racial degeneration and biological based rhetoric permeated social policy discourse from the 1880s.<sup>443</sup>

Where in medieval Samavia the purity of the land elevates the peasant to the physiognomic level of the aristocrat, in modern Britain the corruption and ugliness of industrialisation degrades the aristocrat to the level of the beast. Again the blood of the rulers is tied to the land, or at least undergoes a correlating change.

Rat, through his exposure to Marco, is reminded of the superior physicality that an aristocrat should possess, and quickly becomes absorbed in the high-mindedness of Samavia. He quickly re-evolves and becomes Marco's 'aide-de-camp', becoming gentle, selfless and brave.<sup>444</sup> Though he does not revert to using his given name nor regain the use of his legs (both manifestations of his place in the hierarchy under Marco), he insists upon using crutches instead of his cart, picking himself off the floor and developing strength in his other limbs.

When the time for the restoration of the Loristans comes, the physical presence of Marco's father is needed there in order to command the support of the land and its people: 'If they [the Samavian public] could see the man with Ivor's blood in his veins, they'd feel he had come back to them—risen from the dead'.<sup>445</sup> The Loristan body is so fast-acting upon the land that the revolution happens off-screen and almost overnight, indicating the further presence of supernatural or divine help; this is not the behaviour of landscape in nature, nor of societal infrastructure in a normal state of recovery. Though only a few weeks or even days previously '[w]ar and hunger and anguish had left the country stunned and broken', once Marco's father is crowned the country palpably begins to heal: 'food and supplies of all things needed began to cross the frontier; the aid of the nations was bestowed'.<sup>446</sup> Such is the fantasy of an aristocrat's power that bounty and joy follow in his wake, making him Carlyle's 'Great Man' who is 'by the nature of him a son of Order, not of Disorder', or Frazer's medieval kings who 'possess the same gift of healing by touch'.<sup>447</sup>

<sup>443</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, (Abstract to 'Chapter 1').

<sup>444</sup> Burnett, p. 132.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid, p. 220.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid, p. 198; p. 230.

<sup>447</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, II, p. 108; Frazer, p. 108.

## Part 2 - The Evolutionary Feudal

In complete opposition to the chivalry and sprezzatura considered desirable in the aristocrats of Ruritanian Medievalism, the Medieval Revival also produced literature which contemplated a darker and perhaps more realistic form of medieval aristocracy—that which I have called the Evolutionary Feudal. Often taking place in a futuristic, post-apocalyptic setting, the Evolutionary Feudal opposes the Chivalric Feudal of Ruritania, in that the Evolutionary draws heavily on natural history and Darwinian theory, both of which Ruritania utterly ignores, challenges, or skews; the Evolutionary Feudal's views on aristocracy are as practical as Ruritania's views are fanciful. Though both genres are products of the Victorian Medieval Revival, they approach Medievalism from radically different angles. Where Ruritanian fiction hearkens back to the late medieval and early modern periods, calling on the high-romance traditions from the 12<sup>th</sup>-to-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Evolutionary Feudal delves deeper into Western history. Despite often being set in the future, the class structures and aristocratic portrayals in these texts refer, instead, to a dark age or even prehistoric setting, where 'aristocracy' is depicted as meaning merely tribal chieftainship or the alpha-dominance of the animal world.

Even where Evolutionary Feudal texts do not interact directly with Darwin, although most do, the genre is certainly built on addressing questions regarding human origin and its fate in the natural world—questions which had been percolating in the British consciousness since the eighteenth century and had come to the forefront during the nineteenth century *fin de siècle*.<sup>448</sup> In tracing humanity's roots back to its origin, these texts address that most aspects of modern society—even something as elevated as the concept of divine aristocracy in Ruritanian fiction—were actually merely relics from a more barbarous time, and could perhaps lead to that barbarous time again. The organised, caring universe found in Ruritania is replaced by a harsh and indifferent system of nature; and while nature is structured and its developments are not arbitrary, there is no higher power or greater organisation than it.

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<sup>448</sup> For an overview of Victorian approaches to Darwinism, history, and the natural world, see Zimmerman's *Excavating Victorians*; John Batchelor's *H.G. Wells* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Nordau's *Degeneration*; Bernard Bergonzi's *The Early H.G. Wells* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961); Steven McLean's *The Early Fiction of H.G. Wells* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Frank McConnell's *The Science Fiction of H.G. Wells* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Busch's *Utopian Vision*; Michael Draper's *H.G. Wells* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987); Desmond Morris's *The Human Zoo* (London: Jonathan Cape LTD, 1969); Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots*; Ruses' *Mystery of Mysteries*; and Joan DeJean's *Ancients Against Moderns* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).



The two Evolutionary Feudal texts analysed in this chapter are Richard Jefferies's *After London* and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. Both overtly contrast the Ruritanian model of Medievalism, are popular and ground-breaking examples of their genre at *the fin de siècle*, and also provide a wide enough literary range to illustrate the disparateness of that genre. Since the former was written in 1885 and the latter written in 1895, the texts align perfectly with the onset of Ruritanian fiction's popularity and, indeed, helped spark a popular sub-genre of their own: post-apocalyptic science fiction novels.<sup>449</sup> It is remarkable that Medievalism bifurcated into two such divergent literary styles at the same time, both of them very popular. It speaks not only to the magnitude of Victorian preoccupation with historicity and origin-seeking, but also to the Victorians' fascination with aristocracy and *its* origins; for if there is one quality both Ruritanian and Evolutionary Feudal texts share, beyond their allusions to Great Britain's pre-modern history, it is a commentary on class and expectations about the aristocratic body. However, the Evolutionary Feudal texts diverge from Ruritania in their view that the aristocratic body is a product of its natural environment. These texts suggest that societal expectations of that body are the direct result of evolutionary forces on that body. In short, social expectations of the body are formed in accordance with how that body develops and performs in nature over long periods of time. The aristocratic body is therefore no better or worse, no more virtuous or sinful, no more glamorous or commonplace than a lower class body. Bodies, and our expectations or readings of them, merely stem from the long effects of sexual and natural selection. These texts assert that appearance and bodily performance in nature are, over time, coded in the cultural consciousness, often to the point where the origin of these cultural codings is lost. In opposition to the perfect, physiognomic morality of the Ruritanian aristocrat's body, which does not evolve and is divorced from time, the bodies of the Evolutionary Feudal are all just that: merely bodies. Zimmerman says of Victorian attitudes of archaeology and its resonating reflection of human impermanence, that 'the proximity of human remains to extinct faunal remains made the implications of geology for humanity very clear: people and their cultures are no more resistant to the passage of time than are bivalves or dinosaurs'.<sup>450</sup> Zimmerman is, of course, working from Gillian Beer's seminal reading of the nineteenth-century evolutionary theory in which Beer argues that 'Darwinian theory [...] suggested that man was not fully equipped to

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<sup>449</sup> Fowles discusses the considerable vogue for post-apocalyptic fiction around this time: John Fowles, 'Introduction', in *After London* by Richard Jefferies (1885) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. vii-xxi (p. vii).

<sup>450</sup> Zimmerman, p. 3.

understand the history of life on earth and that he might not be central to that history'.<sup>451</sup> Beer, in turn, echoes Frank McConnell's work on Victorian readings of H.G. Wells, in which he writes, 'If everything can be explained as an accidental development of life evolved just to preserve its own blind struggle for existence—everything *including* humanity—then what do morality or civilization finally mean [...]?'.<sup>452</sup> The Victorian search for human and societal origin is not only the search for a record of our change, or even for a forecast of our future, but also a search for meaning.

The Evolutionary Feudal both fundamentally opposes and mirrors its sister-genre, the Chivalric Feudal. Remarkably, Carlyle's *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* may still be used as a philosophical framework, for though Carlyle assures us that the true hero-aristocrat is divinely elected and that humanity will always need a leader, he also insists that the aristocratic institution is not infallible, that our need for a leader is merely an animal response. Carlyle states that when aristocrats become unsuitable 'there have to come revolutions then' and they must be replaced with new and real elite heroes.<sup>453</sup> The Evolutionary Feudal also mirrors Ruritania through its adherence to using the aristocratic body as a literary tool to discuss anxieties, as a way of illustrating the continuing discomfort or uncertainty about aristocrats in relation to other class groups, and as a means of qualifying the moral and functional state of the aristocratic institution. Further, and perhaps surprisingly, the Evolutionary Feudal mirrors Ruritania by presenting the aristocratic body in a reasonable and even favourable light, although it is by no means as favourably portrayed as in Ruritanian texts. The aristocrat is viewed as a part of the animal kingdom, instead of being part of a divinely-inspired and unchanging order of physiognomy. In the Evolutionary Feudal, leadership and class systems are subject to all of the crude, practical, and haphazard measures of that animal world. Aristocrats become aristocrats out of a natural aristocracy, in its most literal interpretation; the institution survives, or not, to the degree that aristocrats are the 'best', or, to place it in Darwinian terminology, 'the fittest'.

The second intention of this chapter is to explore the nuances of *After London* and *The Time Machine* in relation to their genre, for Evolutionary Feudal texts are by no means as homogenous a group as Ruritanian fiction is. Although both texts place class systems in the hands of bodily, biological evolution, *After London* favours evolution,

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<sup>451</sup> Beer, p. 19.

<sup>452</sup> McConnell, p. 59.

<sup>453</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, I, p. 15.

optimism, and circular system that is always forward-looking even in the face of total societal setback. *The Time Machine* instead employs more pessimistic views of progress, focusing on the inevitability of human degeneration; where *After London* has a clean reset of human culture that always aims towards progress, *The Time Machine* depicts human development as a series of messy peaks and valleys: the apex of cultural and evolutionary achievement is only possible after a slow upward climb, and can only result in a slow downward spiral. Further, though both texts tie the concept of class to that of human origin in the animal kingdom, *After London* suggests that the shift from aristocratic hegemony to middle class hegemony is an inevitability of societal evolution, while *The Time Machine* views the notion of the middle class as false and its formation and influence merely societal delusions.

### **After London**

*After London* was written in 1885 by popular nature writer, Richard Jefferies.<sup>454</sup> Jefferies as an author is difficult to classify since his name, as contextualised by Jefferies's preeminent biographer, W.J. Keith, 'is often to be found on the periphery of the English literary scene in that indistinct no-man's-land that skirts the boundaries of creative literature, natural history, and rural sociology'.<sup>455</sup> Jefferies came to literary prominence as a nature essayist, but his short novel *After London* became one of his best known works of fiction—popular enough to be one of a few of his texts still in print today—and introduced his work to a wider demographic, being extensively read and reviewed in literary circles.<sup>456</sup> Jefferies's views on class are likewise difficult to classify, since he was notoriously nonpartisan.<sup>457</sup> Even his clear hypothesis in *After London* on the origin and, indeed, the evolutionary necessity of aristocracy in early human culture is undone by his depictions of aristocratic confusion and failure in later evolutionary stages of civilization.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Jefferies' work remains woefully under-explored in academia, and criticism which examines his texts' relationship to class is almost nonexistent. For a few comprehensive overviews of Jefferies' work, see Fowles's 'Introduction' to *After London*, W.J. Keith's *Richard Jefferies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), and Julian Wolfreys and William Baker's *Literary Theories* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

<sup>455</sup> Keith, p. 15.

<sup>456</sup> David Blomfield, 'A Biography of Jefferies and a Note on the Manuscript', in *Literary Theories*, ed. by Julian Wolfreys and William Baker (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 30-38 (p. 35); Fowles, p. ix.

<sup>457</sup> Keith, p. 31.

<sup>458</sup> To place *After London* in the greater context of Jefferies's writing, his nature writing evidences little-to-no authorial opinion of class or political issues; the only role that class plays in his nature writing is to show all the facets of agricultural life, displaying even-handed portrayals of both large landowners and the lower

*After London* depicts the aftermath of an unnamed cataclysmic event which has transformed England of the future into England of the early middle ages. Aristocrats once again dominate disconnected petty kingdoms in which serf-slaves labour. Much of the collective knowledge has been lost in the generations since the apocalypse, since ‘the richer and upper classes made use of their money to escape [and t]hose left behind were mainly the lower and most ignorant, so far as the arts were concerned’.<sup>459</sup> With no one left to understand it, all post-Renaissance technology has faded from memory; education of any sort is restricted to the aristocracy; cities have fallen into disrepair and have been reclaimed by nature; many weaker species have become extinct and a man’s social worth is in direct proportion to his physical strength. In short, nature and society have been reset, and Jefferies indicates that the development of a feudal aristocracy is society’s primal setting, its roots coming from the animal kingdom.

The premise of *After London* works overtly in the confines of Darwin’s insistence that natural selection may be best understood ‘by taking the case of a country undergoing some physical change, for instance, of climate. The proportional numbers of its inhabitants would almost immediately undergo a change, and some species might become extinct’.<sup>460</sup> While Jefferies believed in evolution, and had certainly read and agreed with some of Darwin’s theories, he was not a strict Darwinist.<sup>461</sup> Blomfield goes so far as to say that Jefferies ‘promulgates anti-Darwinian discourses, and Peterson says ‘his intention is anti-scientific (or a warning against too much science)’.<sup>462</sup> However, Jefferies’ work in *After London* overlaps significantly enough with Darwin’s theories to merit using *Origin* and *Descent* as a basic foundation for analysis of this work. The novel’s first section is revealingly titled ‘The Relapse into Barbarism’ and spends nearly one-fourth of the novel’s length discussing the status of the natural world: how the topography of England has changed, which plants have proved to be the most dominant, which animals have become extinct and, finally, a brief anthropological and epidemiological view of the structure of human life remaining. That so much emphasis is instantly placed on the

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classes labourers. Two of his books, *The Gamekeeper at Home* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1878) and *The Amateur Poacher* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1879) are told from the points-of-view of the titular natural enemies: the servant of the aristocracy who protects their land and game, and the lower-class agrarian poacher who steals that game. Both avoid class commentary and stick to the logistics and experiences of spending their lives largely in nature.

<sup>459</sup> Richard Jefferies, *After London, or Wild England* (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1885, repr. 1886), pp. 28-29.

<sup>460</sup> Darwin, *Origin*, p. 71.

<sup>461</sup> Linda H. Peterson, ‘Writing Nature at the Fin de Siècle: Grant Allen, Alice Maynell, and the Split Legacy of Gilbert White’, *Victorian Review*, 36:2 (Fall 2010), pp. 80-91 (pp. 82-83).

<sup>462</sup> Blomfield, p. 35; Peterson, p. 82.

natural world underscores Jefferies' constant message that all systems, be they human, plant, or animal, are products of nature. The characters and plot are merely incidental to the greater story of the world. Civilisations and social structures may forget the roots and paths of their evolution, but the act of forgetting does not negate the origin. Jefferies even ends the novel *in medias res* to confirm the smallness of individual characters in the scheme of natural history.

The reader enters human society a few generations since the apocalypse, and in that time it has just transitioned from animal packs and early-man tribes into organised classes, where Carlyle's system of the natural aristocrat is already on the wane through the introduction of primogeniture and its corresponding lack of meritocracy. Jefferies's setting is the bridging state between the prehistoric and the modern. The narrative follows Felix Aquila, eldest son and heir to a minor baron. Through Felix we see the human element on the greater stage of nature, and begin to understand the socio-Darwinian complexities of a culture in flux. At this time, the aristocratic idea is rooted in nature. Only a few generations previously, at the time of the apocalypse, the only aristocrat was a natural aristocrat. The wisest and strongest men were elected the leaders, and eventually 'assumed higher authority as the past was forgotten, and the original equality of all men lost in antiquity. The small enclosed farms of their fathers became enlarged to estates, the estates became towns, and thus, by degrees, the order of the nobility was formed'.<sup>463</sup> This definition of aristocracy is crucial to Jefferies for two reasons. It firstly answers the Victorian question of aristocratic origin. It secondly speaks to the quality of human ego and how humanity will inevitably perceive itself as ascending over nature: the reader witnesses how a single man's power over the landscape can grow over time until he is no longer a component of or a resident on the land, but its owner who can force it to bend to his will—forgetting entirely that he and his descendants must bend to the will of nature in return.

This is not to say that Jefferies is, in any capacity, an anti-aristocracy reformer.<sup>464</sup> His texts depict feudalism as one stage of many in society's unstoppable evolution. In fact, he portrays aristocracy as a relatively positive and completely inescapable stage, in that it springs unbidden from the basic structures of the world; when the apocalypse returns humanity to barbarism, humanity retraces its exact footsteps in history. Keith writes of

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<sup>463</sup> Jefferies, *After London*, p. 60.

<sup>464</sup> 'It is worth noting that Jefferies himself was continually emphasizing his own [political] impartiality. He may have been deceived in this belief, but it is clear enough that he did not look upon himself as a conscious propagandist' (Keith, p. 31)

*After London* society, ‘we see a new struggling civilization making the same tragic mistakes and blunders as the old. It is a vision (and this is crucial) not of evil but of ignorance’.<sup>465</sup> Keith’s view is accurate only insofar as one would view children and adolescents as ‘ignorant’; humanity has returned to an earlier phase of development, and this stage, with its adherence to feudal aristocracy, is portrayed by Jefferies as a necessary phase in human evolution, or at least Western evolution.<sup>466</sup> Carlyle states that, no matter what revolutions take place in (presumably Western) society, the identification of a hero and the election of an aristocracy is inevitable: ‘Hero-worship never dies, nor can die. Loyalty and Sovereignty are everlasting in the world’.<sup>467</sup> In a way, Jefferies is optimistic in his view of the human race. He sets his humans backwards at least a thousand years, and they carry on progressing and evolving as nature dictates. In his New Historicist reading of Jefferies’ work, Brannigan writes, ‘The crisis which haunts Jefferies [...] is of the imminent danger of society collapsing back into barbarism, and as such it shares its anxieties with other texts of the late Victorian era, most notably H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*’.<sup>468</sup> While Jefferies was certainly ambivalent about the effects of technology, Jefferies’s texts work largely against fears of human degeneration, by virtue that his humans seem so resistant to barbarism and that the reader can witness *After London* society rebuilding itself.<sup>469</sup> His texts reflect and undo a common fear/comfort paradox which plagued Victorians as they gazed into the past: ‘Faced with geological and archaeological ruin, nineteenth-century observers felt they witnessed at once the decay of the past and a preview of their own eventual ruin, yet paradoxically they also saw the persistence of the past, and therein lay hope for the future’.<sup>470</sup> Jefferies counters this ‘decay of the past’ through rhetoric which focuses on the endurance of the past and through his illustrations of the trends and patterns which observably repeat throughout

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<sup>465</sup> Keith, p. 118.

<sup>466</sup> It must be acknowledged that concepts of primitive and ‘child-like’ cultures are complicated through their connections to rhetoric on race, imperialism, and Orientalism. However, Jefferies’s depiction of human development is not as universal as the text would have its readers believe; while purporting to illustrate a microcosm of the world in general, the narrative and characters are actually deeply Western-centric and perhaps even specific to Great Britain itself. There are few to no references to race in this text at all, ultimately nullifying any discussion about primitive society and race in the text.

<sup>467</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, II, p. 15.

<sup>468</sup> John Brannigan, ‘A New Historicist Reading of “Snowed Up”’, in *Literary Theories*, ed. by Julian Wolfreys and William Baker (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 157-76 (p. 167).

<sup>469</sup> Daniel P. Shea correlates Jefferies’ leisurely plots as a manifestation of Jefferies’ desire to slow down time and to keep his fictional England from progressing (34-35). Though a discussion on Jefferies’ views of technology is too large for the scope of this chapter, there is no question that Jefferies detested utilitarianism and the race for new technology (Blomfield 35; Fowles, p. vii; Jessica Maynard, ‘Agriculture and Anarchy: A Marxist Reading of “Snowed Up”’, in *Literary Theories*, ed. by Julian Wolfreys and William Baker (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 129-56, p. 133)). However, my analysis of *After London* shows that he held no such views about the progression of the natural world, of which man is a part.

<sup>470</sup> Zimmerman, p. 15.

history. These trends are also used by Jefferies not just to show his impressions of nature's mechanics, but also to provide comfort to those late-Victorian readers who feared the (d)evolution of the human race; Zimmerman expounds that the history of nature shows the history of change as well as the history of repetitions or stagnations. Jefferies depicts mankind as evolving, but in positive, predictable and set ways. As will be examined, Jefferies presents evidence of the evolution which has taken place in a few short generations and shows the social confusion and cultural ripples as humans move away from the roots of the aristocracy's origin toward the middle-class values present in his readers. Through his examination of class and bodily expectations, he presents a clear linear path from where human thought and ideology have been, to where they are headed.

As with any society in any time, certain physical and physiological traits grow to be preferred in the society of *After London*, especially in rulers. The body is, to some extent, policed by others for its success or failure in adhering to that ideal. Where in Ruritania the ideal male ruler was strong and masculine, but gentlemanly, high-minded and temperate, in *After London*, un-evolved masculinity is the mode of the day. In an unusual depiction of the aristocratic ideal, the brutish, animalistic man is favoured by the populace. Hairiness and thick muscles become the only gauge of a man's worth, to the point where 'No slaves were allowed to wear the moustache', since they did not qualify as men, and most assuredly not as leaders.<sup>471</sup> This also speaks to society's progression from the natural aristocracy/natural slave ethos—it is not that slaves cannot grow moustaches, but are rather not allowed to grow them. Masculinity becomes the sole property of the ruling class as cultural decisions take the place of natural properties and eventually replace them.

Felix does not conform to this ideal and is therefore an outsider, a shy scholar depicted as 'rather dainty', scorned by the other aggressively masculine alpha-males of his class.<sup>472</sup> The implication is clear: Felix appears too weak to survive in a harsh environment, too fragile to participate in war, and too effeminate to produce children. When he is called 'so slender a stripling', it not only conjures up an unfortunate phallic allusion, but also to the idea of competition and survival of the fittest; Felix is a small tree in the shade of greater trees, and he will die in his ineffectual struggle to reach the light.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Jefferies, *After London*, p. 286.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

In Felix's younger brother, Oliver, we see *After London*'s ideal aristocratic manhood embodied:

Oliver's whole delight was in exercise and sport. The boldest rider, the best swimmer, the best at leaping, at hurling the dart or the heavy hammer, ever ready for tilt or tournament, his whole life was spent with horse, sword, and lance. A year younger than Felix, he was at least ten years physically older [with] massive shoulders and immense arms, brown and hairy [...] every inch a natural king of men. That very physical preponderance and animal beauty was perhaps his bane, for his comrades were so many, and his love adventures so innumerable, that they left him no time for serious ambition.<sup>474</sup>

Oliver's conformity to the animal world, even down to his excessive hairiness, indicates his suitability to be a leader in the political reality of the text; his stage in evolution matches society's stage. That he is 'every inch a natural king of men' indicates the priorities of this early-middle-age community: a pre-primogeniture leader was placed the role of leadership because of his ability to protect and lead his community. In a time where war, famine and predators are commonplace, physical hardiness is depicted as a common-sense prerequisite for leadership, so an overtly physical presence and obvious physical interests, like Oliver's, are reassuring characteristics for subjects to observe in *After London* leaders.

Oliver does not actually lead or, in fact, do anything of value for his community, but his body is celebrated as both a figurehead of cherished ideas and in a minor capacity as a 'pet'. He is put on display through competition, much like a prized horse or dog, and, like those two animals, is little more than the sum of his two parts: the amiable companionship he provides and his fine muscles. Competition becomes the key word in this rhetoric: Oliver's tilts, tournaments and feats of strength serve as an example of Darwinism becoming clouded by advancing society, turning survival of the fittest into a spectator sport to reassure those watching and judging. Survival and competition are still understandable elements in leadership at this time, but the meaning is gradually being eroded.

Oliver's style of masculinity and leadership is what *After London* society understands; Felix's style is not. And yet the reader is set up to prefer Felix, not only because he is the sympathetic protagonist or because he mirrors many of the Victorian reader's mores in an otherwise unfamiliar and severe world, but rather because Felix is represented as the foil to tyranny, which appears to be rampant in this time of cultural

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid, pp. 100-02.



evolution and confusion. Jefferies writes, ‘The principal tyrant [*i.e.* the king] is supported by the nobles, that they in their turn may tyrannise over the merchants, and they again over all the workmen of their shops and bazaars’.<sup>475</sup> Oliver is depicted as a content member of this society from which he deeply benefits and in which he comfortably fits. That Oliver would continue the chain of petty tyranny is evident, for he has no strength of character nor social imperative to break the cycle. By representing society as a strict hierarchy of oppression and then placing its effective, progressive protagonist uneasily in the confines of that hierarchy, Jefferies defines Felix as an heroic underdog for modern times, and Oliver as the regressive and problematic darling of his own time.

Tension results from the fact that this society has already developed a sense of lineage and inheritance but is no longer able to rely on natural aristocracy. The England of *After London* is firmly rooted in the laws of primogeniture, and Felix, as the eldest son, is therefore an unwanted, unsuitable and yet inescapable leader. Indeed, Jefferies, Carlyle and Darwin all agree that the socio-physical excellence of one generation is not is hereditarily guaranteed in the next, and that rule by primogeniture could be a doomed practice, subjected to endless rebellion by its own faulty logic.<sup>476</sup> The disparateness of who is able to rule and who has the legal right to rule comes to the foreground in this evolutionary step in society, a step which shows how natural law and English law began to separate. Carlyle says of a true leader, ‘Find in any country the Ablest Man that exists there; raise *him* to the supreme place, and loyally reverence him: you have a perfect government for that country [revolutions only come when y]ou have put the too *Unable* Man at the head of affairs!’.<sup>477</sup> And of course while many Victorian readers may have judged gentle Felix as the most ‘Able Man’ who is preferable to the crude Oliver, both Jefferies and Carlyle depict that definitions of ability fluctuate over time. For his time, Oliver was the most Able, but the nonsensical system of primogeniture denied him his hero-leader status.

Darwin supports the Felix/Oliver situation perfectly, and it is likely that Jefferies was working from, or at least aware of, this section in Darwin’s work. Darwin writes:

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<sup>475</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>476</sup> Primogeniture and systems of legal inheritance had been highly and publicly debated in Great Britain since at least the 1820s and were still being debated by the time of *After London*’s publication. In 1837 an anonymous author wrote in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, ‘The tendency of primogeniture, like injustice of all kinds, is to check the wholesome and natural competition of individuals for pre-eminence and station, and to convert society from a clear stream of running water, to a stagnant pool’. ‘The Right of Primogeniture – Mr. Ewart’s motion’, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 8:4 (March 1837), pp. 159-62 (p. 162).

<sup>477</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, II, pp. 100-01.

Primogeniture with entailed estates is a more direct evil [for Natural Selection], though it may formerly have been a great advantage by the creation of a dominant class [....] The eldest sons, though they may be weak in body or mind, generally marry, while younger sons, however superior in these respects, do not so generally marry. Nor can worthless eldest sons with entailed estates squander their wealth [and thereby leave power].<sup>478</sup>

Darwin, Carlyle and Jefferies all lament the lack of flexibility and mobility in primogeniture cultures, though they do treat the *origins* of primogeniture with respect, as part of society's natural adolescence. Jefferies especially, who was working in an era heavily influenced by Carlylean and Darwinian modes of thinking, found that primogeniture was illogical. He says of the grand Prince who rules the territory in which Felix resides, '[he] was not a cruel man, nor a benevolent, neither clever nor foolish, neither strong nor weak; simply an ordinary, a very ordinary being, who chanced to sit upon a throne because his ancestors did'.<sup>479</sup> This portrait of the Prince is tempered and balanced and betrays no Radicalism. It finds reasonable fault in the aristocratic system, but in a clinical and detached manner, and admits to no personal stakes as he examines aristocratic bodies heading into the evolutionary future.

At *After London*'s point in human history, most of the aristocrats are, indeed, strong, handsome, fertile and reasonable intelligent. Being the sons and grandsons of the natural aristocracy that was elected immediately after the apocalypse, their physicality still gives evidence that their ancestors were once the 'fittest'. However, Jefferies depicts the weak foothold a natural aristocracy has in primogeniture by showing those masculine bodily ideals in the midst of transition:

As they [nobles] intermarried only among themselves, they preserved a certain individuality. At this day a noble is at once known, no matter how coarsely he may be dressed, or how brutal his habits, by his delicacy of feature, his air of command, even by his softness of skin and fineness of hair.<sup>480</sup>

While the narrator is an unnamed character making a roughly contemporary recounting of events (at some unspecified date in the future, which mirrors the early Middle Ages), the narrator could, at the particular moment, be Jefferies himself repeating common Victorian expectations of aristocratic daintiness and effeminacy through the feminising stereotypes of 'delicacy', 'softness' and 'fineness'.<sup>481</sup> Further, if the brutal habits the narrator speaks of are suddenly the antithesis of what an aristocrat should be, the trend is heading away

<sup>478</sup> Darwin, *Descent*, p. 163.

<sup>479</sup> Jefferies, *After London*, p. 126.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

<sup>481</sup> See Chapter 2 on Reynolds's *Mysteries of the Court of London*.

from brutality instead of towards it. Jefferies also undoes the notion, which was so prevalent in Ruritanian fiction, that an aristocrat is unmistakable, by his assertion that all nobility can be ‘at once known’ by their visual cues. In Ruritania, these cues are God-given; the body becomes coded by a higher power to assert its right to rule on earth and to illuminate the highest physiognomic complexities. Jefferies does not deny that the aristocratic demographic might be recognisable, but he takes their physical conspicuousness from the hands of God and returns it to the physical animal world: it is mere inbreeding that brings about such homogeneity, as is illustrated by Jefferies in the above quotation. Not only does primogeniture therefore keep the ‘Ablest’ man from moving upwards to a place of leadership, but it also recycles negative characteristics (in this case, delicacy) through heredity in a closed-off and exclusive group without the chance of introducing fresh characteristics. Darwin argues that, in almost every instance in every species, ‘*close* interbreeding diminishes vigour and fertility’.<sup>482</sup> This will not stop masculine hardness from being the favoured bodily ideal of the aristocracy, but it will mean that this expectation will be disappointed more and more often, to the point where the expectation of frailty and physical failure becomes the norm.

Through the evolution of these bodily codes, one can see how society has gone from glorification of Oliver’s body to the glorification of Rudolf’s in *The Prisoner of Zenda*. After enough frustrated attempts, a new definition of the ideal body must be reached; the Victorian aristocracy might never again produce a brutal Oliver warlord, but it *could* produce the gentlemanly athleticism of the chivalric Rudolf. Jefferies excavates the historical basis of social expectation of aristocrats—males in particular—and leads it to its present state.<sup>483</sup>

Therefore, if an aristocratic institution is society’s natural, necessary adolescent setting but primogeniture complicates this institution to the point where it will not work, Jefferies shows that the natural ‘adulthood’ of society is the development of the middle class. Felix is easily identified as a stand-in for Victorian middle class ideology. His primary struggle in the text is due to his desire for mobility. He fits in neither with the serf-slaves nor the aristocrats, but is stuck somewhere in the middle. Jefferies writes of the

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<sup>482</sup> Darwin, *Origin*, p. 82.

<sup>483</sup> Aurora, who will be discussed below, is *After London*’s only single female character of note. Although she is an aristocrat, she does not have middle- or lower-class female characters upon which comparisons of class and body may be drawn. Further, her depiction as Felix’s potential romantic ‘prize’ places her body more in terms of constructed femininity and less in terms of class position.

society, 'As men were born so they lived; they could not advance', which is precisely what Felix rallies against.<sup>484</sup>

Felix wants to marry Aurora, the much-coveted daughter of a powerful noble, and settle with her into the type of quiet, private domestic space seen to characterise specifically middle-class families in Chapter 3, reinforcing Felix's conformity to middle-class values and ideology. Aurora seemingly senses that Felix has appropriate (Victorian) traits to pass to their children and selects him above other men, for he complements her own evolutionary stage; she also covets the quiet domestic space and the intellectual study which Jefferies depicts as at odds with feudal aristocratic duties and modes.<sup>485</sup> Again society overrides nature as Aurora's sexual selection is negated and pantomimed by her father, who 'looked higher for Lady Aurora'.<sup>486</sup> He decrees that Felix is not an appropriate mate for his daughter, since, heir or not, Felix does not possess the requisite aristocratic qualities. In doing so, Aurora's father perhaps indicates his own lack of synchronisation with cultural evolution: he is either deeply out-dated and conforms to the earliest incarnations of aristocracy, acquired through physical merit, or, like Felix and Aurora, is more highly evolved than the rest of society at its current point, and sees little value in the principle of primogeniture. While Aurora's father is hardly seen in the narrative and provides little evidence for the reader to locate his point on the evolutionary scale, he presents Felix with the hurdle of proving his worth. To do so, Felix decides to travel through unmapped territory and found his own castle-city over which he can rule, and to which he can bring Aurora; here we see the transition of ideology from aristocratic mores to middle-class mores—Felix, who is legally entitled to inherit an estate prefers, instead, to earn his own. In this way, the middle class allows for a natural aristocracy, where the aristocracy does not, and through 'survival of the fittest' will come to supplant the aristocracy's cultural hegemony in the future. As Felix carves his own boat to set forth on his adventure, Jefferies writes, 'He could easily have ordered half-a-dozen men to throw the tree, and they would have obeyed immediately; but [u]nless he did it himself its importance and value to him would have been diminished'.<sup>487</sup> This is a clear rejection of the power to which he is entitled as the son of a baron, and is Felix's personal Darwinian test to see if he is worthy both of Aurora and of survival. He even intends to present Aurora with some 'peacock's feathers [which are] rare and difficult to get' in order to best

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<sup>484</sup> Jefferies, *After London*, p. 210.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

attract her.<sup>488</sup> The bright peacock feathers used by humans for ornamentation are strictly from male peacocks, used primarily for courting—depicted by Darwin as a perfect example of sexual selection—and Felix plans to use the feathers as a surrogate body part to help him stand above other men, though the prized body part is not *his*.<sup>489</sup> He is presenting, instead, his own middle-class ingenuity at procuring a rarity, and thus showing the wonderful capacity for Darwinian flexibility in the middle class, and a more inventive way to declare himself an alpha-male. The natural state of humanity, according to Jefferies, is that ‘Men for ever [*sic*] trample upon men, each pushing to the front’.<sup>490</sup> Where this was once the basis for entrance to the aristocracy, it now becomes the sole province of the middle-classes, which makes room for such competitive manoeuvring.

Felix continues to embody a sort of proto-Victorian middle class identity through his status as the unidentifiable Other in the feudal system. Felix is a mass of contradictions: he does not fit the body type of either the serf-slaves nor the aristocrats; he is the rightful heir by law, but not by societal values; he rejects power in order to gain it; he is both superior and inferior to Oliver; he makes his fellow characters uncomfortable, but exhibits only positive and familiar traits for the reader; he could never be defined as a hero in his society, but is the hero of the text. The reader and presumably the narrator, who are older, wiser, and more evolved than the characters of the novel, perceive that these contradictions can only be unravelled and rectified through a massive reshuffling of society. Felix is the option that society has not yet realised. And while little is known about the narrator, except that he or she is writing at least three generations after the apocalypse and at some point after Felix’s narrative, the implication of that narration is that society will, and must, follow in Felix’s footsteps. Firstly, a new narrative indicates that Felix is no longer the only avid reader and writer in the text; there is at least one other scholar who has come after him, continuing his middle-class, thought-based mode of living; while the narrator says of Felix’s time that reading and writing are ‘arts which are now the special mark of nobility’, it is more the ability to read and write that marks out one’s status, not the enjoyment of reading and writing.<sup>491</sup> This enjoyment seems to be the domain of Felix alone, and his scholarship is treated by other nobles as a mark against his suitability for leadership. Secondly, for a narrative to be written about Felix at all implies his eventual cultural significance, perhaps even succeeding in his quest for leadership.

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>489</sup> Darwin, *Descent*, p. 61.

<sup>490</sup> Jefferies, *After London*, p. 47.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

Thirdly, even assuming that Felix's narrative is entirely manufactured by the post-apocalyptic narrator to serve as a parable or exemplum, that parable or exemplum warns against the darkness and ignorance of the animalistic feudal world. Warning against an unevolved feudalism signifies, in the narrator's time, a greater cultural movement away from the types of feudal ideology manifested in Oliver.

Felix, as the brother closest to adulthood, has had more time to grow and learn than Oliver has, and their personal stages of maturity mirror their phases of class evolution. Felix's growth manifests itself mostly through modesty and conservatism, an elevated education, and the desire to invent—several characteristics which could easily be defined by nineteenth-century middle-class readers as their own values, especially when juxtaposed with their perception of other classes' values. Felix exhibits the Protestant work ethic so prized by the Victorian middle classes (as has been examined in the chapters on silver fork fiction and *The Mysteries of the Court of London*), which Jefferies shows to far outstrip any mere raw physicality. While Oliver would have explored the new territory faster and been able to defend himself better than Felix, it is unlikely he would have had the intelligence to survive the many unfamiliar situations in which Felix found himself; what's more, Oliver likely would have returned to the creature comforts of home where he was already socially an alpha-male, instead of pushing forward to the journey's successful conclusion to create his own space and new identity.

Felix's technological advances are but one more example of Felix's superior evolution, as defined by Darwin. Darwin says:

We can see that, in the rudest state of society, the individuals who were the most sagacious, who invented and used the best weapons and traps, and who were best able to defend themselves, would rear the greatest number of offspring. The tribes which included the largest number of men thus endowed would increase in number and supplant other tribes.<sup>492</sup>

The connection of invention to sexual selection indicates that demonstrable intelligence is a trait much prized in mating, as well as showing that the tribes who could protect and provide for themselves with the greatest ease would, of course, have larger numbers of surviving children and supersede disadvantaged tribes. The problem, once again, with Felix's middle-class technological ambition is that it is far too evolved for his time, and his inventions are so advanced that they are perceived to either be jokes or threats to the establishment. Jefferies writes that there is an 'unutterable distance [...] between him

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<sup>492</sup> Darwin, *Descent*, p. 153.

[Felix] and other men' that is not difficult for the reader to believe.<sup>493</sup> When Felix encounters a warring king and asks to be taken on his council, the king is at first fascinated by Felix's refinement of a cross-bow trigger. But when Felix swears he 'could make a machine which would knock the walls yonder to pieces' (likely a primitive trebuchet or catapult), the king thinks Felix is making him out to be a fool and orders him 'Beat him out of camp'.<sup>494</sup> The reinforcement of the physical in the face of the intellectual speaks to the king's fears of being replaced, for all of his bluster that Felix must be joking. He asserts his own natural dominance by having Felix abused out of his military realm, where the weak but dangerously intelligent boy has no place. The sense of natural competition is still keen enough in society for the king to destroy a potential rival while his rival is weakened. Felix is currently solitary, the first of his kind, amidst the human pack-society that Jefferies depicts. Though he may be the most evolved man, his solitary presence is not enough to outweigh the dominance of strength. Felix is a harbinger of new style of manhood which will come in greater and greater numbers in generations to come, a trend perhaps catalysed through the passing down of these traits by his own future sons.

Felix's brief adventure is cut short when he founds his own city and sets back home to claim Aurora; his success or failure in this final venture is unknown. While initially an unsatisfying ending, it is but one further way in which Jefferies inculcates the smallness of mankind. Felix's personal growth is irrelevant—if his mission is stymied, nature will carry on without him; the middle class has already begun, and it is now the fate for everyone.

The reader is harkened back to the beginning of *After London*, which entered into Felix's story just as abruptly as it exited it. The vast length of text Jefferies spent on England's landscape and species before beginning the human narrative suddenly makes sense. There were initially two types of animals and plants: those that survived and those that didn't; those that were the fittest, and those that were dominated and subsumed; the aristocrats and the serfs. As nature calmed and fell into a rhythm, suddenly the remaining species segregated into groups of three. There are three types of wild dog, three types of wild pig, three types of sheep, three types of roe deer, and now, after the narrative, three types of human. None interbreed, but rather 'keep entirely separate from each other'.<sup>495</sup> The abrupt dismissal of Felix's narrative is to jar the reader back into the original

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<sup>493</sup> Jefferies, *After London*, p. 226.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid*, p. 337; p. 339.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

chronicle of the world; Felix's story was merely another anecdote, longer than the ones for the other animals, but little different, illustrating the schisms of evolution and the patterns which repeat themselves in the natural world.

### **The Time Machine**<sup>496</sup>

While it is hardly ground-breaking to view H.G. Wells's 1895 novel *The Time Machine* as a commentary on social division, no exploration of Darwinist or class-conflict literature would be complete without it. The novel tells the story of the Time Traveller, a prosperous Victorian scientist, who invents a time machine and travels forward to the year 802,701, where a vague, post-apocalyptic dark age has reclaimed England. He observes, to his astonishment, that the human race has degenerated into two separate species: the weak, beautiful, lordly, surface-dwelling Eloi and the brutish, ugly, servile, subterranean Morlocks. England of the future initially appears to be a utopian feudalism in which all conflict and hardship have been eradicated and the merry lords are served by the complicit servants. In reality, as will be discussed later, the relationship between the two classes is more realistically feudal and akin to *After London* than previously supposed, in that there remains a grim, nature-driven symbiosis: each group fulfills a survival need for the other. The Time Traveller returns to the nineteenth century to tell his story, and eventually travels forward even further in time to watch the end of Earth; he is never heard from in his own age again.

Unlike the narration of *After London*, which contains a structural optimism about the future of the human race, the narration of *The Time Machine* reinforces the negative outlook of the text. Where the unknown narrator of *After London* could only look backwards upon human history, and seemed to do so with relief at evolving out of it, the narrators of *The Time Machine* have the dubious luxury of looking both backwards and forwards in time. Where the former could infer that his or her own time was a necessary, if bleak, stepping stone to a potentially brighter future, the latter knows that his own time was the apex of civilization, leading to an assuredly darker future. The Time Traveller vocalizes most of the story, which is then retold to the reader through the first-person narration of a guest at the Time Traveller's home. In this way, the future is relayed through three sets of contemporary eyes, the Time Traveller, his guest, and then the reader,

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<sup>496</sup> Unlike many of the other authors examined in this dissertation, Wells has been amply and continually examined in academia. For comprehensive overviews of Wells's life and early works, see: Bergonzi's *The Early H.G. Wells*, McConnell's *Science Fiction*, McLean's *Early Fiction*, Busch's *Utopian Vision*, Draper's *H.G. Wells*, and Batchelor's *H.G. Wells*.



with each relay accumulating the anxiety of the others. Further, this string of narration serves to mimic time itself: the reader is divorced from first-hand knowledge of the future by two degrees of narration, and yet is still connected to it. The knowledge of what is to come, without direct experience of it, only serves to heighten anxiety Darwinian and (d)evolutionary modes of thought. Gillian Beer connects literary form to evolutionary content by arguing that '[b]ecause of its preoccupation with time and with change evolutionary theory has inherent affinities with the problems and process of narrative'.<sup>497</sup> The relay-narration utilised in *The Time Machine*, which is both linear and non-linear, can therefore be read as a clear manifestation of *fin de siècle* anxieties in literary form.

Both Wells and his text take manifestly pro-Darwinian stances. Wells held an early degree in zoology and was trained by biologist T.H. Huxley, famously known as 'Darwin's bulldog', whom Wells deeply admired.<sup>498</sup> While it is difficult to deny or ignore Wells's adherence to the Darwinian model of evolution, his application of that model to class schisms is a far richer and more nebulous area of examination.<sup>499</sup> Wells had a complicated relationship with class: his mother was a lady's maid, who considered herself socially superior to Wells's gardener-turned-shopkeeper father, and brought up Wells with the hopes of his becoming a gentleman.<sup>500</sup> Class-consciousness was as a prominent part of his childhood as Darwinian theory was a part of his young adulthood; both would continuously inform his adult life and his writing.<sup>501</sup> It is unclear to what degree, if any, his family history and political views biased him against the upper class. What is more certain and more strongly evidenced in *The Time Machine* is Wells's grim fear of class tensions in general and how they would play out on a long-term evolutionary basis:

*The Time Machine* can be read, as we shall see, as a prophecy of the effects of rampant industrialization on that class conflict which was already, in the nineteenth century, a social powder keg. Disraeli had warned—and Marx had demonstrated—that the industrialized state was in danger of becoming two nations, the rich and the poor; but the real horror, Wells warns, is that

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<sup>497</sup> Beer, p. 7.

<sup>498</sup> McLean, p. 1; Adrian J. Desmond, 'Thomas Henry Huxley' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Online Academic Edition (2014) <<http://www.britannica.com/EDchecked/topic/277746/Thomas-Henry-Huxley>> [Accessed 21 January 2014]; Patrick Parrinder, 'Wells, Herbert George (1866-1946)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Online ed., ed. by Lawrence Goldman (January 2011). doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/36831.

<sup>499</sup> McConnell writes, 'Without Darwin there may literally not have been an "H.G. Wells" [...] evolutionary theory profoundly informed almost every aspect of his [Wells's] thought' (p. 53).

<sup>500</sup> Batchelor, p. 1.

<sup>501</sup> McConnell, pp. 18-19.

they might become two races, mutually uncomprehending and murderously divided.<sup>502</sup>

Not all critics agree upon the intended root of the species split between the Eloi and the Morlocks. Some read the text as a split between the Aesthetes and the Utilitarians.<sup>503</sup> Others believe it is the upper class splitting from the middle and labouring classes, or the upper and middle classes splitting from the labouring class, or rural-dwellers splitting from the city-dwellers, or the Communists splitting from the Capitalists.<sup>504</sup> It is unlikely that even Wells himself had defined this split absolutely: 'in an earlier version of *The Time Machine* the Eloi were descendants of 1890s aesthetes, and the Morlocks were the descendants of the aesthetes' natural enemies, the middle class materialists', but Wells eradicates this distinction in later drafts, purposely making the social or class origins of each group more ambiguous.<sup>505</sup>

Wells's one clear demarcation of the split, as voiced by the Time Traveller, states: 'above ground you must have the Haves, pursuing pleasure and comfort and beauty, and below ground the Have-nots, the Workers getting continually adapted to the conditions of their labour'.<sup>506</sup> From this statement and from his absolute social and biological alienation of the 'Haves' from the 'Have-nots', Wells' text argues a Darwinian discourse in direct opposition to Jefferies: instead of theorising that feudalism is mankind's embryonic setting and that rise of the middle class is an evolutionary inevitability, Wells avers that feudalism is mankind's *only* setting and that the rise of the middle-class is a lie and the stagnation of the class system will lead to human degeneration.

In a continuation of both Jefferies's and Carlyle's rhetoric, Wells asserts through the model of Have and Have-nots that there will always be an elite: there will always be some who possess wealth and are served, while there will always be some who lack wealth and serve. Further, 'Having' or 'Having-not' and 'the Served' or 'the Serving' are inheritable traits subject to the ravages of time and evolution; just as with the 'fitness' of bodies leading to primogeniture, these traits have social roots so long that they are often forgotten by modern society. Wells confounds the Victorian preoccupation with time by construing to his readers that the past never leaves, it only evolves; therefore, the Victorian

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<sup>502</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>503</sup> Bergonzi, p. 50.

<sup>504</sup> Batchelor, pp. 12-13; Anne-Julia Zwierlein, 'The Biology of Social Class', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 10:2 (June 2012), pp. 335-60 (p. 352); McLean, p. 27; Matthew Beaumont, 'Red Sphinx: Mechanics of the Uncanny in *The Time Machine*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 33:2 (July 2006), pp. 230-50 (p. 236).

<sup>505</sup> Batchelor, p. 8.

<sup>506</sup> H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895) ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 48.

exploration of human antecedents and genesis is ultimately as futile as the Time Traveller's sojourn into the future, or as futile as struggling against the current of evolution. In short, the comfortable middle-class Victorian background from which the Time Traveller originates is nothing more than a camouflaged medieval feudalism as extreme as that of the Eloi and Morlocks, or of *After London*. If the world is divided only between 'Haves' and 'Have-nots' who serve or are served, as Wells so strongly classifies it, then the feudal system was never truly eradicated and the parameters of the hegemonic ruling classes merely expanded to include more members, where 'affluence' replaced 'titles' as an entrance prerequisite. This new definition may not be as devastating to the elitist boundaries of the traditional upper class as one may think: affluence is still proportionally rare in a population, highly inheritable, and can produce a level of cultural and genetic homogeny through its intermarriage of members.

The 'Haves', no matter what their purported origin, align deeply with Victorian tropes surrounding the upper classes: the Victorian 'Haves', who develop into the futuristic Eloi, are born into comfortable lives of leisure, where a lack of hardship makes room for a preoccupation with the aesthetic, where material goods are readily available, and where vast quantities of land are reserved for them alone. Current critical approaches take a narrower view of the Eloi's origin by reading it as aristocratic, aesthetic, rural, or capitalist: these origins are all valid and may all be synthesised into a group of people who are comfortable, who *have* and who are served. These are the two qualifiers of Wells's definition of modern aristocracy, a definition which includes a great number of middle-class people as well as the more traditional aristocracy. Even the name 'Eloi' 'carries several obvious associations, suggesting not only their *elfin* looks, but also *éloigné*, and their apparent status as an *élite*'.<sup>507</sup> Despite the Time Traveller's initial view of the Eloi as a distinctly alien race, his quick acclimation to them reveals the Eloi's distinct kinship with the Victorian upper classes (of which the Time Traveller is, himself, a part), heuristically revealing that the Eloi are the logical result of aristocratic and upper-middle class devolution.<sup>508</sup> The Eloi's physical bodies are aristocratic to the point of caricature, hearkening back to the same tropes and physical qualifiers of the nobility that were examined in previous chapters. The Time Traveller says:

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<sup>507</sup> Bergonzi, p. 48.

<sup>508</sup> Martin Willis reads the Time Traveller as an aristocratic figure, whose laboratory conditions and scientific endeavours are tied to older, aristocratic models of science as a private hobby, as opposed to the more modern and professional laboratory conditions of the eponymous Dr Moreau in Wells's later novel. Martin Willis, *Mesmerists, Monsters, & Machines* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press), p. 206.

I saw a group of figures clad in rich soft robes [...] One of these emerged in a pathway [...] He was a slight creature—perhaps four feet high—clad in a purple tunic, girdled at the waist with a leather belt [...] He struck me as being a very beautiful and graceful creature, but indescribably frail. His flushed faced reminded me of the more beautiful kind of consumptive—that hectic beauty of which we used to hear so much. At the sight of him I suddenly regained my confidence.<sup>509</sup>

The first thing the Traveller reveals to the reader is the decadence of the Eloi's dress, even before commenting on their extreme shortness, which would certainly be more noticeable; this elucidates not only that wealth can be physically manifested, but that it is the most important element in visual judgment. This is compounded two sentences later by the revelation that the leader is dressed in purple, which has long associations to royalty.

That the male Eloi is graceful and frail, which are words often reserved in Victorian literature to describe female beauty, looks back to gender critiques of the aristocracy which were amply present in Chapters 1, 2, and 3; Wells disorients the linear structure of time by reaching into society's past and projecting its devices and representations of aristocrats onto the literary present which depicts the ultimate future. These gender issues are only heightened by the Time Traveller's later assertion that the Eloi 'all had the same form of costume, the same soft hairless visage, and the same girlish rotundity of limb' and that, due to their leisurely lifestyle, the 'the specialization of the sexes with reference to their children's needs disappears'.<sup>510</sup> Not only are the Eloi still the effete nobles of the past, but they are also stuck in a physical pre-pubescence where the distinguishing characteristics of each sex are not immediately apparent. The 'Haves' have become so inured to comfort, while wealth and primogeniture have so eradicated all need for 'survival of the fittest', that only feeble, effete children remain of the upper and middle classes. The perceived effeminacy of the Eloi recall the upper-class dandyism and decadence of the early-nineteenth century, as seen in Chapters 1 and 2. The effeminacy of the Eloi is not used in this context specifically to denote any notion of homosexuality, but rather 'in its older, traditional sense, to refer to a male person or institution weakened by luxury or inactivity'.<sup>511</sup>

That the reader is allowed to view the Eloi's bodies *at all* is a further signifier of their aristocratic status. In fact, the Time Traveller insists upon narrating at length about their costumes and physicality, using the lexis of their bodies, as he comprehends and

<sup>509</sup> Wells, *Time Machine*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid, pp. 29-30.

<sup>511</sup> Adams, p. 98.

interprets them, as the first indicator of the time and place in which he has landed, tying the Eloi to the land as firmly as any aristocrat in Ruritania or as any chieftain in *The Golden Bough*. The Morlocks, on the other hand, are hardly glimpsed at all and the little that is seen of them is deemed to be so hideous and inhuman by the Time Traveller that it is better one does not have to see them at all. A Morlock is a ‘bleached, obscene, nocturnal Thing’, a description which obliterates all humanity that the Morlocks could claim in the eyes of a modern reader, though they are evolutionarily just as close to Victorian *homo sapiens* as the Eloi.<sup>512</sup> The Morlocks are an underground species, not worthy of attention or vision; their purpose is functional, not decorative. It is not surprising when the Time Traveller infers, based solely on his contemporary judgments of class appearance, that the Morlocks are the servants of the Eloi, who:

might once have been the favoured aristocracy, and the Morlocks their mechanical servants [...] The Eloi, like the Carlovingian kings, had decayed to a mere beautiful futility [...] The Morlocks made their garments, I inferred, and maintained them in their habitual needs, perhaps through the survival of an old habit of service.<sup>513</sup>

It is not difficult to see elements of the Morlocks in the labourers and servants of Wells’s time. Despite the Time Traveller maintaining a wealthy Victorian home, ringing the bell for servants and hosting a large party for his friends, neither he nor the reader is ever alerted to a servant’s presence. His wishes are obeyed and his food served by the same invisible, subterranean force. The sole service-workers that the Time Traveller addresses are Mrs Watchett and Hillyer, presumably his housekeeper and butler or valet, who are both highly-enough ranked to deserve names and bodies. Despite Mrs Watchett and Hillyer’s social respectability, they are still servants and ‘Have-nots’, whom the Time Traveller is forced to notice only after his class-riddled adventure with the Eloi and Morlocks, as he returns to the past. His servants speed past him, untouchable as time rewinds, before disappearing to their work in the recesses of the house. Despite his now-devoted attention to social issues, he still only sees his servants in the briefest and shallowest of terms. (D)evolution and habit are too deeply embedded for circumstances to change.

While the Morlocks serve the Eloi out of millennia of habit, they have also evolved to tend to their masters for the secondary (or perhaps primary) purpose of eating them. ‘These Eloi were mere fatted cattle, which the ant-like Morlocks preserved and preyed

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<sup>512</sup> Wells, *Time Machine*, p. 46.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid, pp. 57-58.

upon—probably saw to the breeding of’.<sup>514</sup> Through this revelation, Wells combines class tension and degenerative tension in a single horrifying moment in which the Time Traveller first considers civilisation to be fully and abhorrently collapsed.<sup>515</sup> The origin of this cannibalism is apparent in that the labourers of the Victorian era are so dehumanised through their work and social status over the centuries that they become feral and return to humanity’s animalistic origins akin to ‘our cannibal ancestors of three or four thousand years ago’, where they lose any moralistic qualms about consuming their sister-species.<sup>516</sup> The eating of the Eloi is a purely pragmatic practice; there is little other food present, the Morlocks grow increasingly feral as they serve the Eloi, and the Eloi grow weaker from this feudalism until they no longer possess strength or survival instinct, adapting into the perfect prey. The Time Traveller says of them, ‘I never met people more indolent or more easily fatigued’.<sup>517</sup> That the Eloi provide food for the Morlocks is a parody of early feudalism roles in which aristocrats provided the welfare of their subjects in return for service, and where an aristocratic body was tied to the land and could serve as an idol or scapegoat in respective times of feast or famine. In Wells’s model of humanity (a pessimistic inversion of Jefferies’s model), the dual-class schism where the ‘Have-nots’ serve the ‘Haves’ while the ‘Haves’ provide for the ‘Have-nots’ is revealed to be a self-sustaining and unbreakable system, even as it serves to be humanity’s downfall.

The Time Traveller’s supposition that the Morlocks see ‘to the breeding of’ the Eloi further exemplifies his naiveté of the past, present and future, while reinforcing Wells’s own adherence to the Darwinian model of sexual selection. The Time Traveller’s rash judgments about the future, which he often later admits to be wrong (‘This, I must remind you, was my speculation at the time. Later, I was to appreciate how far it fell short of the reality’), trains the reader to be suspicious of the Traveller’s instant and uninformed conjectures, to the point where the reader can often infer that the truth lies in the opposite of his claims.<sup>518</sup> In this instance, the Time Traveller’s narrative has already disproved own his belief that the Morlocks are responsible for organising the Eloi’s breeding practices. The Time Traveller states several chapters before his discovery of the Morlock’s cannibalism that the Eloi ‘spent all their time in playing gently, in bathing in the river, [and] in making love in a half-playful fashion’, and that their social and recreational

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>515</sup> Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* argues that one of the most defining characteristics of any society or civilisation is in the people’s attitudes towards meat eating (p. 100).

<sup>516</sup> Wells, *Time Machine*, p. 62.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

practices, as far as he observes, are in no way impeded by the Morlocks who prefer predatory stealth and subterranean safety over explicit surface-power.<sup>519</sup>

Realising, therefore, that the Morlocks have nothing to do with the Eloi's breeding habits, Wells sheds further, though not explicit, social commentary on the Eloi's feeble physicality and how the system has spiraled into an evolutionary self-destruction from which it has no exit. Representations of the Eloi illustrate how aristocratic bodily ideals change as an aristocrat's evolutionary purpose alters. In the case of the Eloi, a paradigm shift in physical preference happened somewhere after their species-wide enervation and the Morlock's modification into cannibals. Where once an aristocrat was Jefferies's natural aristocrat whose purpose was to survive conflict and hardship for the people, or Ruritania's chivalric aristocrat whose purpose was to be a figurehead for the people, now an aristocrat's purpose is to remain lazy and grow just large enough to be *eaten* by the people.<sup>520</sup>

It logically follows that if all Eloi are easy prey and there is no need to pick off the weakest members, then a hunting Morlock will choose the most tempting meal, *i.e.* the Eloi with the most meat on his or her body. In terms of sexual selection, the Eloi females should therefore choose weakest and sickliest males with whom to father children, in the hope of making offspring as un-tempting as possible for the Morlocks and, perversely, ensure their offspring's greatest chance of survival in a predatory context through its dubious chance of survival in a normal context: 'that individuals having any advantage, however slight, over others, would have the best chance of surviving and of procreating their kind' and 'those which are best fitted for their places in nature, will leave most progeny'.<sup>521</sup> Bodily ideals have gone from 'survival of the fittest' to 'survival of the least fit', which will perpetuate a system of increasingly weakening aristocrats and toughening labourers until one can no longer sustain the other, and both species die out entirely. The Time Traveller, as the reader becomes aware, gives the Morlocks far too much credit in assuming that the Eloi's breeding pattern is a conscious decision and calculated effort on the part of the predators. Nature, not the Morlocks, is the ultimate clinical organiser of

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>520</sup> Here Wells shows his understanding not only of recent literary trends, but also of the very nature of aristocracy. The Eloi conform perfectly to the rules of feudal aristocracy, completing a dark triptych with Ruritania and *After London*. All the fictional models of the upper classes in these texts follow the same projected rules of aristocracy: they satisfy a need for the populace, and are idolised and 'consumed' by the lower classes.

<sup>521</sup> Darwin, *Origin*, pp. 70-71; p.76.

evolutionary systems, and Wells portrays that the one constant trait of humanity is its animalistic desire for preservation.

### Conclusion

Evolutionary Feudal texts foil Ruritanian ones by removing primogeniture from its divinely-appointed pedestal and by denoting that elitism is not engendered or sustained through the grace of God, but rather through the functioning of nature. At the same time, the Evolutionary Feudal is both a companion to and reflection of Ruritania, in that the texts all satisfy or complicate the Victorian thirst for history, examine the role that an aristocrat's body serves for its subjects in reality and in literature, and imply that an aristocracy is a primal need of society, or at least is an institution that society cannot avoid.

Further, all texts reveal a fatalism circling the topic of the aristocracy which is not exclusively the product of *fin de siècle* despondency. The culmination and synthesis of all bodily expectations throughout the Victorian era, especially with the onset of Darwinian thought, created a sense of impending finality surrounding all aristocratic mechanisms, a finality that overshadowed even the optimism and whimsy of Ruritania. Whether the aristocrats should be lauded or vilified was no longer the question; the question, more sharply than ever, became: would aristocrats survive? In this, Wells is surprisingly more confident (however grimly so) about the longevity and evolutionary permutations of elite groups than either Ruritania, *After London*, or any other text examined here. Yet some form of extinction or negative modification of the upper class seemed inevitable, as evidenced by the aristocrats' continually self-imposed small population in light of Darwin's theories. Darwin writes, 'Rarity, as geology tells us, is the precursor to extinction [and] rare species will be less quickly modified or improved within any given period, and they will consequently be beaten in the race for life by the modified descendants of the commoner species'.<sup>522</sup> Undeniably, the aristocracy is the rarest of classes and with its history of political overthrow, defunct male lines, and the recreation or reinstatement of titles, the aristocracy seemed in these texts to be trapped in a problematic, liminal state under the constant threat of extinction and the constant hope of rebirth.

With the onset of the 'future' at the end of the nineteenth century, which brought a feeling of death, impending peril or drastic change that Nordau described as the 'idea that the century is a kind of living being [...] passing through all the stages of existence [...] declining after blooming childhood, joyous youth, and vigorous maturity, to die with the

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<sup>522</sup> Darwin, *Origin*, p. 92.



expiration of the hundredth year, after being afflicted in its last decade with all the infirmities of mournful senility', it was only reasonable that late-Victorian society looked to the pseudo-medieval.<sup>523</sup> Working from the long traditions of Medievalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, the *fin de siècle* Medieval Revival could provide the comfort of nostalgia or could aid in the search for expectations of the future. In both instances, the aristocracy would naturally play an enormous role in the construction of either locus. Admirers and detractors alike could not deny that the aristocracy was a massive apparatus directing much of the history of western society: it influenced, for better or worse, law, the arts, medical discourse, military action, economics, philosophy, politics, and cultural values, customs and superstitions. For many who engaged with the medieval, especially in Ruritania's loose sense of the word, the existence of an aristocracy was one of the few certainties in a vague, fanciful or ignorant conception of the past.

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<sup>523</sup> Nordau, p. 1.

## Conclusion

Norbert Elias, in *The Court Society* (1969), expounds at length about one of the major traps of studying class: that a discussion of systems often easily transforms into praise or censure of rulers.<sup>524</sup> While this praise or censure has certainly been evidenced in both criticism and literature, an equally easy and potentially more harmful pitfall is the assumption that praise or censure is inevitable; this assumption seems to have created lacunae in the scholarship of class systems by ensuring that the aristocracy is rarely studied, even as it relates to other elements of class systems. Secondly, it is a false dichotomy to assume that praise and censure are the only two potential outcomes of academic commentary on the aristocracy. As this dissertation has aimed to show, the aristocratic body in general serves as a highly-visible textual object which frequently operates in literature as an expression of cultural anxieties, desires, and expectations; more specifically, the literary figure of the aristocrat is a rich and critical palimpsestic canvas upon which endless interpretations and readings may be cast, and on which paradoxes may be untangled or further complicated. Representations and interpretations of aristocracy not only serve to reveal what various class and social groups believe to be true of the ‘elite’, but also, in doing so, what these class and social groups believe to be true about themselves and the world in which they live.

Literary portraiture of aristocratic bodies is, in a large part, an exercise in subtle self-definition through the overt definition of others; as such, the arguments about and readings of aristocrats in each chapter of this dissertation overlap with each other very little, both inherently and by my design. While each chapter does illustrate some minor overlapping patterns and tropes in the portraiture of the aristocracy—it would be difficult for any demographic heavily represented in literature not to develop some common portrayals and clichés which bleed into even the most disparate of texts—each chapter also approaches the subject of class in a different historical moment, through a new genre, with unrepeated authors from a variety of backgrounds, for slightly divergent intended readerships, and from distinct points of social anxiety, popular culture, and critical disciplines. One major assertion of this research was not only to problematise Elias’s above contention that examinations of the aristocracy often evolve into either praise or derision, but also to work against Len Platt’s argument which, as discussed in the Introduction, posits that for a majority of the Victorian era, the aristocracy in literature was

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<sup>524</sup> Elias, *The Court Society*, p. 26.

‘caricatured and stereotyped’ and that the ‘aristocracy was used in standard and often limited ways. In many novels the world of landed privilege was not much more than a glamorous playground, to which often “dangerous” passions could be safely removed and indulged’.<sup>525</sup> While one could not deny the literary tradition of coupling high status with vice, this dissertation has sought to break down this trope and shown that the Victorian portrayal and interpretation of the aristocracy is as *limitless* as the authors, readers, and theoretical approaches that create those portrayals and interpretations. The outcome of this research was not the revelation that literary aristocrats were portrayed with any sort of homogeneity across the Victorian period. Rather, this research has, in some small part, unearthed the significance and diversity of aristocratic representation in Victorian literature, and the significance *of* that diversity cannot be overstated.

In Chapter 1 on the silver fork novels, the textual aristocratic body was commodified and represented as an object of middle-class desire. The transformation of the aristocratic body into a consumer good served as an expression of complex socio-economic shifts seen in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and the ways in which various classes attempted to locate themselves within those shifts. More significantly, though the aristocratic body in the silver fork novels revealed certain interclass desires, it also betrayed certain paradoxes and uncertainties of the class system itself: aristocrats became labourers by turning themselves into luxury products through the representations of themselves as discerning consumers. Their ambiguous relationship to money, social hegemony, and the market is further convoluted when juxtaposed with the role of the middle classes as burgeoning consumers and arbiters of taste: the more the middle classes attempted to emulate the aristocracy, the further they got from it.

In Chapter 2, G.W.M. Reynolds makes the aristocratic male body the centre for his moralistic politics, where the represented reproductive failure and non-gender-normative physiology of aristocrats give pseudo-medical authority to his Republican values. In this instance, the aristocratic body is not only a complex space where gender, morality, medicine, and politics intersect and inform each other, but also a place of contradiction. Both the aristocratic body and the aristocratic system are portrayed as victimising themselves, even as they victimise others; and despite Reynolds’s many-pronged argument against the aristocracy, he rewards those lower- and middle-class characters in possession

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<sup>525</sup> Platt, p. xiv; p. 26.

of virtuous bodies with aristocratic titles, making the aristocratic body simultaneously an object of disgust and an object of desire.

In Chapter 3, the sensation fiction of Mrs Henry Wood utilises the female aristocratic body as a tool to exaggerate and emphasise the confutations of mid-century feminine ideologies. Female aristocratic bodies are represented as absent and ethereal, and yet are constantly gazed at, illustrating the impossibility of inhabiting a body that is constructed as both public and private, both an object for consumption and an object to be concealed, and both weakly sinful and a bastion of inherent virtue. The aristocratic body in this chapter becomes a canvas upon which tensions surrounding the ‘Woman Question’ and various domestic ideals can be played out, if not fully resolved.

In Chapter 4, the late-Medieval Revival sister-genres, Ruritanian fiction and Evolutionary Feudal fiction support and serve as foils for each other as they use the aristocratic body to come to terms with *fin de siècle* anxieties about evolution, the past, and the future. Both use concepts of the history of the aristocracy to predict the future of the class and, by extension, the fate of humanity. In Ruritanian fiction, the aristocratic body is one of stability, located outside evolution, and used as an escapist rebuttal of Darwinian fears of degeneration; paradoxically, even in its escapist fantasy and glamour the genre portrays the impossibility of such a non-evolutionary model of leadership and the ultimate un-sustainability of such a desirable model. In Evolutionary Feudal fiction, the aristocratic body becomes the site of grim pragmatism regarding the development of class systems. Despite using the bleakness of aristocratic bodily evolution to embrace Darwinism, the genre ultimately complements and inverts the Ruritanian model: Evolutionary Feudal fiction proposes that inherited leadership is not necessarily a doomed endeavour, but rather a fundamental stage in cyclical or vacillating development of class systems.

The arguments made in this dissertation could be continued in a number of directions. Explorations of aristocratic portraiture in genre- and popular fiction have by no means been exhausted by this study; extending the scope to include other literature (popular, genre, or otherwise) could only serve to enrich the material here explored. In particular, there is a large amount of work to be done on the aristocratic body in Gothic and realist fiction, both of which are genres or modes too large and amorphous to be included in this dissertation. There are two smaller, more specific, and perhaps more logical places to develop this research: the first is Victorian fairy tale and children’s

literature, where such texts as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) place a particular emphasis on aristocratic bodies and would feed into the research on Ruritanian fiction. The second genre is Aesthetic literature, particularly that with a pornographic, homoerotic, or 'yellow' content. Aubrey Beardsely's *Under the Hill* (1896-98), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and *Salome* (1891), and Max Beerbohm's *The Happy Hypocrite* (1897) all contain class commentary on the body and morality, providing an excellent juxtaposition to Reynolds's commentary from a different class perspective in *The Mysteries of the Court of London*. These genres were not included in this dissertation, as their inclusion would sacrifice breadth by creating multiple chapters which dealt too closely with the same cultural anxieties and expectations. Instead, these genres were omitted in favour of under-explored genres with similar themes (*i.e.* Ruritania instead of children's fiction, and Reynolds's radical fiction instead of Aesthetic literature), not *only* because these genres are academically under-explored, but also because they present slightly richer or more dynamic representations of both the aristocracy and the body.

The realm of genre- and popular fiction could be opened considerably further by extending the analysis of literature outside of the Victorian era, particularly the early novels of the eighteenth century, for example. In the other chronological direction, analysis of the aristocratic body in literature could be extended through the entirety of twentieth- and twenty-first century literature, with an especial emphasis on Neo-Victorianism. Twentieth- and twenty-first century representations can illustrate the trajectories of cultural representations that began in the Victorian era, or even earlier and help to root current portrayals in a longer literary tradition. Of course, these further explorations would necessitate a change in the parameters set out by this dissertation: analysis of the early novel would require sacrificing some notions of genre- and popular fiction, as the concept here defined would be anachronistic; further, the inclusion of Neo-Victorianism would complicate the notion of Victorian genre fiction, as Neo-Victorianism in many ways boils down the entire era into a genre of its own and redefines the concept of 'Victorian'.

Expansion of this research would help establish studies of the aristocracy in literature more firmly as a discipline, and would provide a necessary interweaving of this topic into larger discussions of the uses and portrayals of class in fiction. More than merely enriching the field of class studies, concepts of gender, economics, material

culture, the medical humanities, and domestic spaces (among many others) get swept up in the understanding of the aristocratic body, creating a trans-media, multi-period, interdisciplinary locus in which to examine class.

What I hope I have achieved in this dissertation is an expansion of the current critical work on the aristocracy in literature, as well as a first step in understanding the many ways in which representations of aristocratic bodies can serve as a textual object upon which cultural concerns, desires, or moments may be projected. Further, by reading representations of aristocratic physical forms through a number of genres, in a number of ways, I hope to have illustrated not only the mutability of the aristocracy body as a codeable locus, but also its significance and pervasiveness as a literary device in Victorian literature.

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