The Imagination of Class

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Notes to Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


Notes to Chapter One

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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


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

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

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

18. Quoted in Schultz, p. 29.


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

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

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

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

24. See Terry Lovell, Consuming Fiction and N. N. Feltes, Modes of Production of Victorian Novels.
through a commitment to the ascetic rigors of scientific pursuits. George Levine has recently written about two others—Karl Pearson and Walter Pater—in a similar light.

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

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

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


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


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


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

13. Meacham 12. See also Briggs and Macartney.

14. Quoted in Meacham 38.

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

16. See Bowlby.

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

18. See Birkin and Bowlby.


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

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

Notes to Chapter Three


2. While we recognize that Mean Streets is a collection of short stories, and shares with the late nineteenth century short story in general its Chekhovian and Maupassantian restraint and relative absence of dramatic modulation, nonetheless, we would argue that the subject matter of many of the late nineteenth century English short stories affects the form. For another instance in which the refusal to treat the heroine as an auratic object of commodity desire dictates the style, we would point to Dorothy Richardson’s Pilgrimage.

3. For a particularly lurid critique of naturalism, see Arthur Symons’ essay, “A Note on Zola’s Method,” pp. 154–64. See also Henry James, “Nana,” 1880, pp. 84–96.

4. See Bowlby for an account of the fascination of the naturalist writers with the department store.

5. New Review, 16, no. 94 (March 1897), 329.


7. Gertrude Himmelfarb takes this one step further in the late twentieth century when she argues that contemporary historians are victims of the illusion that the Victorian middle and working classes lived by different values. See De-Moralization.


10. See Bowlby chapters 6 and 7.

11. It is ironic to read of the failure of Jane’s education in light of Jonathan Rose’s contention that such a course of reading was seen by many working class people as a liberating way out of the small-minded, quotidian concerns that grinding poverty imposed. Gissing’s view is clearly darker, and closer to that of Charles Masterman, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

12. See John Lester, Journey Through Despair 1880–1914, and David Daiches, Some Late Victorian Attitudes.
13. This helps account for the particular style, the dead classicism, that Jameson says characterizes Gissing’s writing, for it is in itself a symptom of the particular culturalism of the alienated late nineteenth century intellectual. By contrast, classicism has a very different role—more vital—in the emergence of Aestheticism and the construction of homosexual identity among the middle and upper middle classes at the end of the century. See Linda Dowling’s *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*.

Notes to Chapter Four

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

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

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


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

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

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


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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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