

**Fighting Culture:
Class and the Early English Boxing Novel in Late Victorian Society**

by

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Abstract

The early English boxing novel emerges at a critical point in the wider culture of transition that typifies the later Victorian age in England. Evidencing the emergence of an increasingly populist literature and popular professional sport, the English boxing novel illustrates the increasing influence of the working class on the culture of England. As a reflection of a much wider trend, the English boxing novel serves to exemplify and articulate the latent sociocultural discourses embodied within these larger processes of material history. Building upon the work of contemporary sporting theorists who accentuate the role of narrative in the definition of sporting culture and character, this dissertation asserts that early English boxing narratives, here represented by three iterations of the genre, serve to illustrate not merely the popular sentiments of sporting culture but also the significant role of both sport and literature in the definition of English popular culture at the end of the nineteenth century. Placed within the context of the heavily classed nature of English sport, the ideological preoccupations of the boxing narrative will be forwarded as an iteration of working class identity and desire, an oppositional culture to dominant, upper class English sentiments. Drawing upon dominant discourses of class and English society from prominent Victorian literary presentations of the working class, the dissertation will situate the boxing novel's presentation of working class sentiment within a larger context of dominant Victorian perspectives. With the benefit of this context it becomes possible to view the English

boxing narrative, along with the wider culture of professional sport it embodies, as an effort to creatively reshape latent features of English culture to better meet the needs and desires of the working class. Ultimately, the cultural amalgam that emerges through this process is perhaps best likened to the kind of hybrid cultures that have come to typify postcolonial societies throughout the globe.

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Introduction
Fighting Culture:
Professional Boxing and English Society
in the Later Nineteenth Century

Throughout the nineteenth century Victorian English culture struggled with the grand conundrum of reconciling a conservative social mentalité with the ever present and accelerating progress of material and intellectual history. English responses to this overarching condition certainly covered the spectrum from overt regression to the radically progressive, a holistic desire to retain the conservative social iterations of the past and the drive for new and innovative social reorganization. Although all of these points along the spectrum might be evident in the wider Victorian culture, by and large, dominant Victorian culture wound an identifiable path through the nineteenth century that sought to locate an acceptable middle ground between the two extremes. As this course winds its way through the Victorian era it is possible to see development as Victorianism increasingly accepts the inevitability of progress but doggedly struggles to structure the nature of change. While the early nineteenth century might have looked to the past, the later was certainly focused on the future - but that future was decidedly Victorian. The struggle to come to terms with the past, present, and future of English society through the course of the Victorian age found expression in many aspects of Victorian culture through the course of the nineteenth century - most notably in the realms of literature and sport. Through much of the later nineteenth century these two

forms of cultural production weave eerily similar yet separate paths through the gauntlet of Victorian social culture. While both might accept the inevitability of change, both are also deeply invested in the project of retaining points of continuity.

The later Victorian ethos and iteration of progress evidenced itself very clearly in the realm of sport as Victorians attempted to remake older sporting traditions in the progressive model. Throughout its existence in England, the sport of boxing represented a diverse, deep, and complex culture, a physical practice but also an attendant ideology that served to structure a wide spectrum of social behaviors and attitudes well beyond the ring. Many of the sport's early apologists argued that the widespread culture of boxing defined an aspect of English national character and a way to distinguish an English sociopolitical mentalité from that of other nations. Although often presented as a single all-encompassing topic, English boxing actually found several distinct means expressions in English society over time. These varied boxing practices of boxing's fashioned distinct and differing subcultures within the larger sport. First boxing existed as a widespread individual practice within the English population, a propensity to utilize boxing as a means of self-defense and the preferred method of addressing interpersonal conflict. In this capacity boxing represented a widespread participatory sporting culture, a skill that Englishmen and women should and often did exhibit. But beyond this the culture of boxing also catered to the general English affinity for the spectacle of the fight, a desire to witness and wager upon boxing that led to the creation and promotion of organized and regulated exhibition of the sport. Later, of course, the Victorians would attempt to marry the two cultures through amateur boxing, a form of the sport that promised to offer a blend of both practice and exhibition. These differing forms of the sport act to exemplify

a fact that the English were quick to recognize. Although each of boxing's forms might be tied by a commonality of basic practice, each permutation of that basic form worked to promote a differing social ideology. As the English boxing stretches through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, social discourse concerning the practice would center on these differing forms of the sport and the influence that each was thought to exert over the English population.

Through much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, dominant English culture (i.e. the English upper-class) seemingly found the social pursuit of boxing much more attractive than the professional spectacle. While the reasons and logic of this position may have been complex, the direct result was that boxing's culture was effectively split in the court of public opinion as early as the mid-eighteenth century. Dominant (polite) English culture generally supported boxing's participatory model over professional boxing's emphasis on spectation, wagering, and spectacle. Arguments against professional boxing tended to focus on its corrupting influence on those who participated in or witnessed professional fights as both fighters and spectators were singled out as examples of the sport's detrimental influence. Although the professional sport still garnered a great deal of interest from the English population, dominant English culture sought to eradicate the practice as early as the middle of the eighteenth century. Public support kept professional boxing going through the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but the Victorian age represents a point where efforts to limit the sport began to have some real impact. Victorian pressure increasingly forced the sport into the recesses and margins of English society and by the 1870s and 80s it became virtually impossible to stage large prize-fights on English soil.

When placed within the larger culture of sport in Victorian England, the efforts to eradicate professional boxing were part of a larger remaking of English sporting culture in the nineteenth century that stressed both amateurism and participation in its progressive cultural formulation. Although amateurism held a certain popularity and a sustained presence in English society, it has been widely recognized as an exclusionary and exclusive form of sporting practice that both catered and appealed to the English upper class. But this again was simply part of a much larger progressive movement in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1841 *Punch* would state: [m]odern legislation is chiefly remarkable for its oppressive interference with the elegant amusements of the mob [...] Bartholomew-fair is abolished; bull-baiting, cock-pits, and duck-hunts are put down by act of Parliament; prize-fighting by the New Police [...] The ‘masses’ see no pleasure now” (Boddy 76). When formulated as an argument against the brutality of bare-knuckle boxing or the unruliness of prize-fighting’s audience, there is a clear association between the sport and its lack of propriety, a character of the sport that was indicative of both an outmoded patrician social model and a roguish lower class character. Like other “rough” practices and pastimes, the mentalité of prize-fighting was something that Victorian reformers hoped to leave in the past. What becomes truly interesting in the comments from *Punch* is the sport’s association with the “masses” or mob, that amorphous social grouping representing not merely the lower orders of English society but also the suppressed desires and latent power of that population. Built upon lingering fears concerning the power of the mob and boxing’s potential to incite those energies, Victorian approaches to the sport are devoted to a process of cleansing which serves to separate the professional and the amateur along both class and ideological lines. As the

mid-to-late Victorian age continues, amateur boxing begins to take center stage while professional boxing experiences gradual decline (Boddy 76-90).

Although the Victorians were reasonably successful in suppressing the practice of professional boxing, the sport's presence in England could never be completely erased. History shows that professional boxing eventually won out in the conflict over the practice in the last decade of the nineteenth century and emerges into the twentieth as England's first mass culture sport. Professional boxing's emergence into legitimacy was achieved, at least in part, through an adoption of aspects of Victorian amateur sporting forms to the professional contest. But the prize-ring's alteration cannot be considered a holistic acquiescence to dominant Victorian culture. It is not a simple repackaging of the sport that serves to make it acceptable. The acceptance of professional boxing, and with it the wider social character and ideology the sport represented, marks a significant alteration within English culture itself. After over a century of repression, English society was compelled to accept professional boxing into its midst and this had significant implications for English society moving forward. From this it is equally possible and correct to say that professional boxing had a hand to play in the formation of contemporary English society.

Although noteworthy of its own account, the process of legitimizing professional boxing in the later nineteenth century coincides with a widely recognized period of transformation in English sporting culture more generally, a period in which an emergent professional culture supplants the previously dominant cult of Victorian amateurism. Given the heavily classed nature of English sport in the Victorian era - particularly in boxing - the rise of professional sport represents a clear assertion of popular, working

class sentiment on English culture. As the professionals begin to succeed on the field of play, working class culture makes significant inroads into the English mainstream. Marked perhaps most significantly by the defeat of the Old Etonians by Blackburn Olympic in the FA Cup final of 1883, the rise of professional sport was predicated in other sports by competition between amateurs and professionals - an argument that could find literal expression and resolution on the field of play as well as the court of public opinion. Professional boxing certainly participates in the larger discourse surrounding professionalism, but the sport's road to legitimacy was more difficult and complex. Within boxing there was never any doubt that the professional practitioner was superior to the amateur but a long-standing bifurcation of the practice along class lines prevented contests between the two from taking place. Thus, the example of English boxing complicates simplistic notions concerning the broader transformation of English sport in the later nineteenth century. It was not simply a matter of the working classes beating upper class Victorians at their own game. Winning the contest on the field was but a symbol. The transition to professional sporting culture served to change England's relationship to sport and reflects a much wider alteration of English life.

The Victorian amateur ideal accentuated participation, competitive disinterestedness, and a willingness to uphold the spirit of the rules to a preposterous degree. Professional sporting culture was founded upon the idea of a deeply interested contest, motivated by capital, speculation, profit, and gambling. What is particularly interesting about the amalgamation of features embodied in modern professional sport is that, in substance, the games have retained key aspects of Victorian sporting forms, and yet the meaning, tenor, and social function of sport has been fundamentally altered.

While professional boxing might have come to resemble the amateur, gloved competition of the Victorian age in many respects, the sport's meaning and social function were completely different. Although both Victorian amateurism and older professional cultures might evidence pastoral instincts and desires, the professional model obviously seeks to integrate the pastoral realm more closely with the realities of material existence. Rather than holding sport distant as a pastime or occasional activity separate from the vagaries, self-interest, and potentially corrupting influences of daily life, professional sport seeks to make sporting competition a vehicle of addressing the salient issues of modern life. Sport's emersion into capitalist culture and its role as a spectator activity allows sports such as boxing to enter the daily experience of its adherents on a more meaningful and tangible level, becoming a topic of discourse and a means to symbolize the incipient social issues of modernity. The professional boxing ring and fields of play might remain distinct and sacred spaces, separate from the society that surrounds them, but those spaces are also immersed in that society. They are a part of it and thus offer a greater meaning and utility.

Jean-Paul Sartre's writings on the subject of boxing provide a unique discourse on the social role and utility of fighting that assists in our understanding of the professional boxing's utility and appeal in English working class culture. Beyond its sheer importance within the understanding of the human condition, Sartre ascribes particular social significance to the spectacle of the fight. Professional boxing is able to physically represent those elements of "violent socio-economic struggles by which history becomes intelligible" (Hutchens 25). But the boxing match offers a regulated and moderated violence:

fighters can only contend ... if they agree to accept 'transcendent' rules. In that sense, a boxing match is a 'regulated violence', a 'purified brawl': rules distinguish it from a mere disordered brawl, a 'grotesque calamity' typified by ignorance, and by extension, distinguish unfettered violence from the technical exercise of force. (Sartre quoted by Hutchens 28)

But boxing's social significance is pushed further. In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre asserts that the boxing match engages not merely the fighters but also the audience in a praxiological process through which the nature of conflict and its resolution become intelligible (Sartre 19-47). Within his phenomenological description of the process of witnessing the boxing match, Sartre effectively delineates two kinds of personas within the audience, one that embodies a simplistic and "violently alienated" second person perspective, a persona that experiences the fight as through of one of the antagonists. Aligning him/herself with one of the fighters, this "'inexpert spectator' ... chooses a favorite and adopts his point of view on the other fighter" (29).

But Sartre contends that there exists another, more knowing and knowledgeable manner of viewing action within the ring, a process through which socio-economic violence becomes intelligible. As Hutchens writes:

For this cultivated fighting critic, the singular unity of the fight is transcended by the totality of the synchronic (contemporary) and diachronic (historical) state of the sport of boxing. The fight-event is an 'infinite number of social objects' each of which and the unity of which is wrapped in a network of negations. Each of these social objects 'possesses an objective reality as a constituted product,' a realized and transcended power constantly totalized and re-totalized in a diachronic process that takes place inside and outside the ring. (30)

Ostensibly, through this process the individual fight event enters into a larger realm of knowledge and cognition that allows the knowledgeable viewer to place specific events into a hierarchy of fights and fighters, a means through which more comprehensive and knowing judgments might be formed. "Thus, the knowledgeable boxing aficionado will

be able to discern the process of totalization in boxing, the ‘ensemble of mediations’ (social, economic, normative etc.) by which a bout is intelligible as both a totality and a process of re-totalization” (Hutchens 30). Thus and somewhat simplistically stated, the knowledgeable boxing spectator can view conflict, whether in the ring or the social realm, from a position that transcends the myopic passion of the partisan and the immediacy of the event. As a result, professional spectator sport serves as a vehicle for developing a regulated system of social contestation based upon transcendent, secular, ideological principles and a more complete understanding fostered by totalization. These are intellectual moves that ultimately help to develop an increasingly abstract and rational perspective on social life.

Sartre’s claims of social utility for professional spectator sport have been echoed by a number of recent academic approaches to modern sporting culture. As sociological approaches to sport have developed over the last twenty years the overly deterministic and limiting interpretations of a generation of socio-cultural critics have been superseded by more complex understandings of sport that recognize the wider and more diverse impact of sport. Building upon elements of earlier Marxist critiques of sport by Allen Guttmann, Tony Mason has sought to accentuate features of sporting culture and spectatorship diminished by overly deterministic models of social and cultural theory. Mason's approach serves as a means to match the multi-dimensional material reality of sport and the populations that consume it to the theories which seek to describe its social function. Citing Guttmann in *From Ritual to Record*, Mason would reiterate some of the basic constituents of modern sporting culture that Guttmann claimed as “common features” of all modern sporting cultures including: democratization, secularization,

specialization, rationalization, bureaucratization, quantification and record orientation (345). Indeed, while Mason would recognize that several of these features might serve as a means of social regulation, he also acknowledges Guttman's further argument that sport cannot be reductively simplified into a medium of simple socio-cultural inculcation and control. While it might always contain elements of regularization and inculcation, modern sport's rationality and secular morality always also contain the seeds of emancipation, free expression, and social spontaneity. As Mason would write:

Guttman has argued that far from sport being an alienated institution and in an alienated society there may be less alienation in sport than elsewhere. The achievements of the athlete belong to no one else. They are intelligible to all and win recognition for him or her outside the world of specialist practitioners. Records may come and go but the image and personality of the performer remains in memory and history. (348)

Thus, Mason attempts to reorient our perspective of sport from the producers to consumers and participants, those entities who take the products of culture and utilize them within the context of everyday life and in ways particular to their own socio-cultural contexts. At least in part, Mason and Guttman have signaled a shift in perspectives on sport that seeks to consider its social utility and implications not from the perspective of its producers, but from that of its consumers.

In order to do this, we again draw upon Sartre to see professional boxing and its representation as a means to delineate knowable and acceptable forms of social conflict, a quasi-pastoral realm of contestation where heightened feeling and direct confrontation might take place in a controlled and regulated setting. Within this setting we not only see the basis for fair competition, but also a competition that is open to public view and scrutiny. But beyond this, we must recognize that the ring, and the social conflict it represents are two distinctly different things. The professional boxing contest relies upon

a rarified space along with a tradition of regulation and codification for its ability to restrain conflict and resolve dispute. Outside society demands not merely a mutually intelligible set of rules through which wider social conflict might be conducted, judged, understood and resolved but also a means to psychically recreate the pastoral space within the context of everyday life. Here the work of religious historian Dominic Erdozain's, *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* becomes particularly relevant. Erdozain investigates the secularization of English society over the course of the Victorian era and focuses on sporting culture as a site where this movement was both evident and significant. Through a consideration of overarching sentiments concerning recreation within English religious circles through the course of the Victorian era, Erdozain highlights a gradual movement in religious attitudes concerning sport and recreation that spans the spectrum from outright condemnation early in the nineteenth century to acceptance, co-option, and eventual subsumption by the twentieth. With the YMCA as his primary focus, Erdozain effectively argues that despite the Christian organization's best efforts to package and promote sport as a vehicle of religious conversion and inculcation, sport and recreation not only retained its tendency to promote secular behaviors and values, but also in turn, effectively made the YMCA itself increasingly secular. Thus, the power and efficacy of sport as a means to create, illustrate, and promote a system of secular ethics presents itself as a theme that permeates sport and indeed wider English society at the end of the nineteenth century.

The spread of secular ethics through English society effectively creates a wider social psychology in which replicates the pastoral space and enables substantive social change to occur. Two subjects within the larger history of English sporting traditions

have paved the way to both witness and more closely understand this socio-cultural role of sport and its secular ideology in British society. Within the British Commonwealth, sport served an important and substantive role for the inculcation of British socio-cultural norms, but in subsequent years has been repatriated as a vehicle for the formation of new, local identities, and sporting traditions - as Richard Holt states: “such is the paradox of sport and decolonization” (222). C.L.R. James’ foundational work *Beyond a Boundary* established a tradition of West Indian scholarship that seeks to understand and define the role of cricket in processes of political and social formation within the postcolonial era. Rather than reiterate the redundant incriminations of British (or capitalist) custom and culture embodied within both colonial endeavors and the promotion of English sporting traditions, James would continually celebrate the dual significance of both British sport and culture as the vehicles towards post-colonial emancipation. For James the significance of West Indian cricket was derived not merely from the game, but through a collusion of sporting practice, British culture, and West Indian perspectives. In *Beyond a Boundary* James would ascribe equal significance to each facet of this tripartite system by ascribing the cricket pitch with the same level of significance he gave to the representation of British social culture found in W.M. Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* and the local traditions of the multi-cultural society of his native Trinidad. Sport, in this case and within the context of larger British intellectual perspectives and West Indian social characteristics, was seen to offer a means of expression capable of creating national identities necessary for viable post-colonial communities, but that could only come within the context of a wider and more diverse British cultural backdrop. Cricket, in other

words, did not work on its own. But what is perhaps more crucial in James's work is the twentieth century history that seems to support his assertions.

The work of Hillary Beckles and his concept of Liberation Cricket have built upon James's foundation and inspired a separate field of cultural studies solely devoted to the subject of West Indian cricket culture and the exploration of its role in identity and community formation. A new generation of writers and works exemplified by Clem Seecharam's *Muscular Learning* (2006) and Stevan Riley's 2010 film *Fire in Babylon* have sought not merely to chronicle the rise of West Indian Cricket, but also serve to argue for the utility of cricket culture within the process of forging independent social identities within the post-colonial nations of the West Indies. While cricket and sporting expression remain central facets of these more recent approaches to the subject, Clem Seecharam's work stands out as particularly significant with respect to its wider claims. Within *Muscular Learning* Seecharam attempts to make James's theoretic celebration of British culture materially manifest through an exploration of the wider expression of material history in the West Indies. Whether through neglect, ideology, or necessity, Seecharam argues that the British colonizers allowed the retention of localized identities while local populations were simultaneously arrogating social responsibilities, thus laying the foundation for future political and identity formation. While cricket and the sporting field might remain the most prominent points of expression for both British social ideology and West Indian identities within the twentieth century, Seecharam argues that the tendencies and possibilities evidenced on the wicket were merely part of a larger social system that effectively paved the way for socio-political inclusion with

concomitant localized identity retention. The West Indians could viably and authentically play as British, but would always retain an aspect of the Indies within their game.

Inspired, perhaps, by increasing recognition of the role of sport within the negotiation of race and dispossession through postcolonial populations in the twentieth century, it has been natural to apply these lessons to sport to the social culture within Great Britain itself. Jeffrey Hill has carried the West Indian tradition of cricket writing and adapts the common “Calypso Cricketers” epithet of the West Indies to a study of popular culture in North West England. Hill’s “Jazz Cricketers: The New World in the Popular Culture of North West England, 1890s-1930s” is significant in its ability to identify two sources of sensitivity within the process of socio-cultural modification surrounding the practice of sport and the transition to modernity. Cricket, in this sense, comes to embody Hebdige’s larger processes of “Americanization” and “leveling down” in the formation of England’s mass culture (47). But Hill’s is perhaps an imperfect replication of the West Indian experience simply and ironically because he retains cricket as his sporting focus. Although English cricket may have evidenced many of the same social and cultural tensions found within the West Indies, it is difficult to argue that it held the same socio-cultural position in England as it did in the West Indies. Each of these sociocultural contexts is different in time, place, and culture and the significance of individual sports vary from one location to another. To find an analogous sporting tradition in England, we must return our attention to boxing.

The legitimization and subsequent incorporation of professional boxing into English society in the late Victorian era holds a cultural significance for England that is equal to that of cricket in the West Indies. It is a significance that cannot be completely

understood through the material history of the sport. Just as James draws upon a wider cultural field to discuss and demonstrate the role of cricket in the West Indies, so too must the investigation of English professional boxing. Material history really serves to delineate the sociocultural positioning of boxing, to demonstrate its basic importance to a certain segment of the English population and its disapprobation by another. To understand the reasons why the sport was significant, and why certain segments of English society sought to promote it, it is important to develop a more complex understanding of the sport's representational qualities and how they might connect with other issues in later Victorian culture. For this it is necessary to turn to the larger culture of professional boxing in England as a means to search for points of connection. Here literary culture steps in to assist.

Although boxing makes its way into many Victorian novels as a social practice and amateur pastime, there is no late Victorian Pierce Egan, William Hazlett, or Henry Downes Miles to record the events of the later nineteenth century prize ring or act as the professional sport's grand apologist in England. Into this void came the boxing novel. Marked initially by the publication of George Bernard Shaw's *Cashel Byron's Profession* in 1883 and followed by two Arthur Conan Doyle novels, *Rodney Stone* in 1894 and *The Croxley Master* in 1899, these early English boxing novels illustrate an elevation of professional boxing's culture and a process of cultural redefinition that serves to reflect a wider shift in professional boxing's social meaning and cultural associations through the later Victorian era. Through a narrative process exemplified by these three novels, professional boxing's ideology is redefined from its residual, dominant culture association with the paternalistic, Corinthian culture of the turn of the nineteenth century

to a culture that reflects an emergent, modern, working class perspective evocative of the twentieth century. As these novels emerge from the same temporal context as that of professional boxing's remaking, and reflect the process of the sport's transformation, it is possible to argue that they serve a critical role in establishing the sport's narrative conventions. Ultimately it is those conventions that help to ascribe social meaning to the sport and that process plays a significant role in professional boxing's road to social acceptance. But the emergence of boxing's literature also evidences a wider shift in English literary culture at the end of the nineteenth century.

At a time when English culture was emerging into a more populist era, the English literary market and professional sporting culture reflect the great expansion of the literary culture in England due to the education act of 1870. The boxing novel presents itself as a means to articulate the character of this much wider shift in culture as the English working class find increasing voice within the wider process of defining English national identity at the end of the nineteenth century. Boxing's long standing associations with English social values and issues of class imbue the sport with particular significance not merely as a marker of this transition in sport and literature, but also as a means to successfully integrate working class sentiment into the wider English culture. Indeed, given the timing of the boxing novel's emergence, it is possible to link this isolated occurrence with a much broader transformation in English literary culture

The publication date and brisk length of George Bernard Shaw's *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1883), the first English boxing novel, suggest that the work is indicative of a larger, documented shift in literary form precipitated by a changing readership. Literary scholar Stanley Weintraub offers a succinct description of both impetus and effect within

this period of literary development when he states: “In the 1890’s, the [...] demise of the three-volume novel created an audience in Britain for cheap, one volume fiction accessible to the burgeoning readership created by the Education Act of 1870” (“Reclaiming Late-Victorian Popular Fiction” 171). As literacy spreads through the English population it is supposed that literary production changes to meet the needs of a new readership, a readership that demands an accessible literary product both in terms of length and narrative character. Ostensibly this new reader is one who emerges from outside of what we might have considered traditional literate (elevated) classes in the Victorian era and those lower down on the social spectrum. This emergent, increasingly populist, literary class is in need of new stories and new narratives to reflect their perspectives and their increasing expectations. The emergence of this new literary culture is therefore a reflection of larger socio-political developments, a cultural ripple that not only signals change within literary culture itself, but also within English society at large. Through social and political developments over the course of the nineteenth century England was in the process of creating a wider and more universal national culture, a culture that would at that point necessarily begin to include the lower classes. While through much of the nineteenth century arguments had been made concerning the need to fashion English culture on upper class tastes, the expansion of popular literary culture at the end of the nineteenth century signals that the lower classes would have an equal if not numerically superior say in the culture that emerged in England in the twentieth century.

Turn of the century literary critic Edmund Gosse’s essay “The Influence of Democracy on Literature” in the April 1891 edition of *Contemporary Review* provides some hints as to how we might begin to view the impact of lower class sentiment as a

function of market desire. The shift in English literary production can be seen as an effort to attract new consumers of literary products, and in turn, a means to understand the boxing novel itself as a reflection English lower desire. Edmund Gosse broadly associates the later nineteenth century shift in English literary culture with the general spread of socio-political inclusiveness in England over the course of that same time period. As English literary culture grows, Gosse posits that novel consumption expands in a downwards social trajectory with new readership coming predominantly from outside the upper echelons of English society (35-37). As a result, it is insinuated that the productive elements of English literary culture would be increasingly forced to cater to the demands of new readership whose identity and desires fell outside of the traditional bastions of an elite literary culture indicative of upper and middle class social, cultural, and political tastes in the Victorian age. Regardless of whether this shift in literary culture was for the benefit or detriment of English literary culture in general, Gosse's fears concerning the prospect are significant in their ability to communicate a keen understanding of the potential of the market to significantly influence both the authorship and publication of literary products in England. His characterization of the change in literary culture brought about by democratization indicates an awareness of the larger socio-cultural processes which this shift in literary culture might instigate and eventually inspire. Just as the emergence of professional sport and its ability to supersede the public disapprobation of the Victorian era remains an important example of the exertion of popular sentiment and the incorporation of working class culture into England's national character, so too does this shift in English literary culture. The boxing novel obviously plays some role in the

process of introducing a new, populist perspective to the narrative base that defines Englishness at the turn of the twentieth century.

As an example of an oppositional, working class culture, professional boxing does have antecedents in English history. In his 1991 work *Customs in Common*, E.P. Thompson has argued for a more open acknowledgement of a concurrent and resistant lower class culture distinct from the hegemonic, upper class, structures that surrounded them that had existed in England for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like the culture of professional boxing, this concurrent, lower class culture emerges from conditions of increasingly free labor, a weakened, limited monarchy, and a substitution of law for religious doctrine, a complex set of conditions which allow for the formation of what Thompson terms a “characteristic paradox” of the eighteenth century, the existence of “a *rebellious* traditional culture” within the English lower classes (9). In order to further explain the nature of this rebellious traditional culture and the conditions which lead to its emergence, Thompson draws upon Gramsci’s notion of “two theoretical consciousnesses” within the “man-in-the-mass,” one which necessarily conforms with the status quo, the rules imposed by hegemony, and another which supports the development of a “spontaneous philosophy,” a “common sense” derived from the everyday praxis of individuals within a community (10-11). As Thompson writes within *Customs in Common*, within the eighteenth century this rebellious traditional culture was transmitted more widely through geographic mobility and increasing literacy, forming in essence the foundations for a more universalized sense of lower class behavior and identity formation.

The rebellious traditional culture forwarded by Thompson is argued to have presented itself through a number of practical and symbolic means through the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Mediums such as the bread riot exhibit a lower class “moral economy,” a manifestation of commonly held, local socio-cultural customs or values that stood in opposition to received notions of exchange. Wife sales emerge as a common substitute for legal divorce and rough music a cultural expression standing in stark contrast to dominant cultural norms (8). Thompson defines this system of values embodied within these instances as evidence of a broad “legitimizing notion” and when exerted, this power was founded upon “... a belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community” (188). As an example of this, Thompson would define eighteenth century food riots as cultural and political expressions, not merely the exertion of limited sentiments by limited social communities:

My object of analysis was the mentalité, or, as I would prefer, the political culture, the expectations, traditions, and, indeed, superstitions of the working population most frequently involved in action in the market; and the relations - sometimes negotiations - between crowd and rulers which go under the unsatisfactory term of “riot” (260).

Although the sentiments Thompson describes as the “moral economy” are most evidently expressed within the context and economy of the bread-nexus, Thompson’s wider topics of discussion in *Customs in Common* enable us to see how similar moral sentiments might also manifest themselves in a variety of ways that lie outside the purview of exchange values. When broadened to include these additional manifestations, the moral economy comes to represent a singular expression within a larger concurrent system of social ethics and behavior that stood in opposition to the capital economy and normative, authoritarian English social systems. In these instances, the lower class rebellious

traditional culture stands as a contrary and concurrent system of providing social needs and promoting social values in opposition to formal, established, standards of behavior defined by the upper class or the unchecked competition of capitalism. The lower class sense of ethics or rightness of action that the term “moral economy” references has proven to be a powerful and largely accurate symbol of the social power of the English working class as it manifested itself through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in a class specific sense of ethics opposed to a socio-cultural hegemony increasingly subject to the pervasive force of capital. Indeed, after modification through the socio-political crucible of the early-nineteenth century, a refashioned working class rebellious traditional culture can be viewed as a motivating force behind much of the socio-political development in England over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Like professional boxing, the rebellious traditional culture would find new expressions and limitations in the nineteenth century, a period of dominant culture retrenchment that placed functional limits on the manners in which lower class culture might be expressed and the extent to which it might transgress normative social standards. With the benefit of a wider intellectual and ideological base fostered by the Enlightenment, it is possible to theorize that the rebellious traditional culture manifested itself in political expressions such as the Corresponding Societies and later more organized and cohesive movements such as Chartism and Trade Unionism. In turn, the trepidation that the English ruling classes felt in response to organized political expression manifested itself first through repression at the turn of the nineteenth century and appropriation later on. Both certainly limited the growth of political expression. As a result, this oppositional was forced to find new ways to manifest itself and promote the

kind of social principles that will both reflect and in part lead to a series of social transformations in the later nineteenth century.

The emergence of modern and urban modalities served to offer alternatives to local customs and identities with which older working class cultures might have been familiar. As the nature of English life becomes increasingly uprooted and atomistic over the course of the later eighteenth and nineteenth the pool of experience grows wider for many English men and women. Additionally, as the nineteenth century continued, English government and dominant culture increasingly sought to appropriate the role of both expression and enforcement of social standards within English society and sought to become the main source of a broader and more homogeneous national culture. There are two results of this process that are of particular interest for our present purpose. First, the reform minded socio-political culture of the mid-to-late Victorian era served as a vehicle to transform the working class moral economy from a common class political sentiment into a cultural imperative that was more widely diffused through the English population. Second, while English politics would increasingly seek to instill a moral economy in various spheres of English life, this process was incomplete, contradictory, and left certain aspects of socio-political existence largely untouched. As such, room was left for the re-emergence of a working class rebellious traditional culture that was focused onto those areas of English life that the English government was either unwilling or unable to regulate.

Thus, as England enters into the mid-Victorian period there is a need to establish wider and more universal standards of working class identity and behavior which might fill in the gaps left by cultural hegemony, the social adulteration of capital, and a reform

minded government. K. Theodore Hoppen argues that the gulf between upper and lower classes grew wider as the nineteenth century continues. Despite the best efforts of English upper and middle-class to forge social solidarity within terms such as culture and respectability, “‘good order’ and sobriety were invariably subverted by the fug of tobacco smoke and clatter of glasses created by [working class] members resentful at being told how to behave.” Working class resentment tended to result in upper class retrenchment. As a result, Hoppen notes: “[b]ehind impressive ramparts working-class culture was developing along predominantly self generated lines” (70). The hypocrisy of the English upper classes and the dehumanizing influence of capital became a theme which saw the rise of a working class morality aimed at correcting standards of behavior in the face of a wider and upper-class promoted culture of traditional deference and capital accumulation. In addition to this, nineteenth century formulations of socialism - Fourierists, Owenites, etc. - tended to diminish the latent power and energies of the English working class by presenting them as “hapless victims in need of guidance and not a rising power” (Allison 716). The English working class, therefore, sought new means of expression for a culture that promoted the fitness of working class identities which opposed those of the cultural and economic hegemony surrounding them, what is essentially a modern reiteration of Thompson’s rebellious traditional culture. Given the position of professional boxing in later Victorian England, along with its connection to transcendent ideologies and totalizing rationality, it becomes possible to assert that professional boxing (and professional sport more generally) serve as the modern outlet for these residual sentiments in the English working class.

The wider sociocultural context of professional boxing's rise to social prominence in the context of later nineteenth century exhibits a relationship to these larger forces of change that presents the possibility of developing a greater understanding of a formative era in England's contemporary social development. Although the boxing novels that are covered in this work obviously offer a valuable perspective on the professional sport in the England, it must be admitted that these works only show one side of the cultural argument. The topic of boxing's system of secular ethics, its evocation of a past English society, its propensity to return to the countryside as the site of its most important bouts, its working class associations, and its ability to symbolize the complexities of social interactions, suggest a connection with other literary productions of the later nineteenth century. Here it becomes possible to see both boxing and boxing novels as relevant cultural productions within the larger social discourse surrounding the emergence of an increasingly diverse, secular, self-interested, competitive, and urban English society. Within this larger context, later Victorian portrayals of the pastoral working class will constitute a means to establish the wider literary and cultural context necessary to extend the discussion to a wider class of literary productions. Ultimately it will be argued that the boxing novel represents a resolution of larger inquiries of class and social conflict embodied within the mode of pastoralism in the later Victorian novel.

Modern day Anglo-American sporting culture remains the predominant cultural representation of this model, and yet it is a model that has received little critical attention in this light. The early English boxing novel provides an inroad to this conversation and a means to see sporting culture as both a continuation and culmination of a larger cultural dialog that characterized the later Victorian age and evidenced through the literary mode

of the pastoral. The boxing narrative distills the practical experience of working class existence exemplified by traditional pastoral and reconciles the motif with the material realities of later Victorian society. The trope of the modern boxing tale becomes one in which the corruptive power of capital is placed counter to the altruistic nature of empirical competition, a proposition which holds the viability of both the individual boxer and the sporting system as a whole in its hands. As a result, the modern boxing tale becomes engrossed in the ethical and moral behavior of the boxer as it relates to social competition and capital. The working class model described by boxing, a model that strongly evokes the pastoral formulation, ultimately becomes a grand iteration of contemporary English social culture - traditional, conservative, and yet revolutionary as well. This larger identity described in professional boxing and the later Victorian ideology of the pastoral is one that has come to dominate our current culture in a manner that stretches far beyond the ring, the ropes, and the crowd. It is ultimately a point at which the culture and identity of the working class has become widely operative in larger English society.

Beginning with a discussion of prominent, post-industrial novels that represent literary expressions of working class identity and culture within the mode of pastoralism, a connection will be established between the English boxing novel and the larger literary culture of England during the later Victorian age. The boxing narrative's development of these larger features will be delineated and examined through a course of three boxing novels as a means of understanding how the boxing novel develops these general literary features into a final narrative form that holds great promise for future social development. Chapter one will feature a discussion of George Eliot's novel *Silas Marner* that focuses

on the work's particular presentation of working class identity, its pastoral vision, and its ideological positioning relative to the industrial novel. In some respects *Silas Marner* might be seen as a return to older, pastoral ideologies, but the chapter will argue that Eliot's seeks to modernize pastoral models and reconcile an older tradition of working class identity and social energy to the contexts of the Victorian age. Chapter two will cover two works from the 1880's roughly contiguous with the emergence of the first English boxing novel, Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and George Gissing's *The Unclassed*. The chapter will explore complementary character dichotomies within the two works which seek to find alternate means of representing Eliot's modernized pastoralism within the context of material and social progress, a test of *Silas Marner's* social formulations and class identity with an increasingly modern English reality. Both novels tend to promote both residual and emergent features of working class identity embodied within different characters thus providing differing models for future class identity development and a means to illustrate possible implications. The discourse on literary characters within Hardy and Gissing will establish the literary need for an exploration of professional boxers as a source of representation for the perpetuation of pastoral ideals and the creation of a modern working class identity and social ideology.

Chapter three will offer a transition into discussions of boxing novels themselves through two early examples, George Bernard Shaw's *Cashel Byron's Profession* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *Rodney Stone*. The discussion here will center on the possibilities and limitations of these early iterations of the professional boxer as literary character, the boxing narrative as viable pastoral vehicle, and explore the relationships between characterization and narrative within the creation of boxing literature. Ultimately these

works will be shown to present key features of the literary boxer's identity but within narratives that present the character as an exhausted social representation similar to that employed by Gissing and Hardy. The narrative failure indicates the inability of both professional boxing and English society to find acceptable means of amelioration. Finally, chapter four will discuss what is considered here as the final, conventional form of the literary boxing character and narrative, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Croxley Master*, a form of the boxing novel that achieves a correct and socially appealing representation of working class identity through a particular kind of cultural narrative. Based upon the appropriateness of both characterization and ethical formulations, the chapter will argue that the literary representation found within *The Croxley Master* reflects the assimilation of professional boxing into English society and establishes a lasting and persistent narrative structure that carries on into the twentieth century.

Ultimately it is that persistence and apparent popularity of the form that argues for the boxing narrative's ability to correctly and appropriately address a latent sociocultural need to perpetuate the pastoral ideal within modern contexts and through that perpetuation, the boxing novel creates a literary expression that represents the identity and desires of the English working class as they emerge into the twentieth century. While the persistence of professional boxing itself might attest to the fact that English society eventually found the means to incorporate the practice, the boxing novel in turn provides the means to view that incorporation as a significant statement of sociocultural evolution and a model for the formation of modern working class identities.

Chapter 1

Making the Pastoral Modern:

George Eliot's *Silas Marner* and the Modification of "Traditional Rebellious" Culture Within the Later Nineteenth Century

It is obvious to even the casual reader that *Silas Marner's* approach to the working class differs markedly from earlier nineteenth century literary presentations of the class problem, specifically the conventions of industrial or social problem novels. Within *Silas Marner*, George Eliot attempts to forge a new means through which Victorians might view the concomitant projects of the industrial novel, to express in narrative a desire for social and class betterment fostered by the conditions of the English working class and the prospects for broad social change embodied within their experience. In doing so, Eliot eschews pervasive elements of the Victorian industrial novel and its literary sensibilities by avoiding portrayals of the working class designed to elicit sympathetic responses, a literary mentality that has been termed as a function of narrative protest. As recent literary criticism has argued, such presentations essentially functioned as a means to ultimately circumvent radical revolutionary energies and sentiment, to suppress latent desires for social upheaval through a reiteration of past social formulations. Eliot's purpose in *Silas Marner* is not one of sympathy and despite its temporal setting, not one of pure nostalgia either. Rather, the novel develops a literary perspective of the English lower classes, both working and traditional agrarian, designed

to impart an intellectual understanding of and recognition for the fitness of a distinctive lower class social mentalité.

Like professional boxing, *Silas Marner* seeks to define a means through which working class energies might be productively acknowledged and expressed through progressive social reformation - without cataclysmically altering working class identity or overturning traditional manners of English life. What Eliot ultimately presents in *Silas Marner* might be thought of as a literary intellectualization of social strictures similar in many senses to the basic social ethics promoted by professional boxing. Utilizing a similar subtle, conservative, yet substantive means for projecting individual will that works within the established culture and ethical conventions of dominant English society, *Silas Marner* constructs a working class identity and ethics that effectively counters both the influence of capital and the hegemony of hereditary privilege.

Despite Eliot's overtly conservative narrative tendencies, *Silas Marner* clearly presents a socially transgressive vision of the working class, a class identity with the ability and the fortitude to confront social injustice and effect change. Within *Silas Marner*, Eliot's transgressively employs timeless conventions of the English novel in a manner that argues for an accentuation of the novel's socially defiant content. The novel privileges an emergent working class identity and presents the means through which the working class might productively counter residual values embodied in English class hierarchies. *Silas Marner* accentuates this point through a cross-class narrative that invites its audience to engage in evaluation but also through contestation across class boundaries which serve to upset traditional structures of power and authority. Enlightenment rationality and ethics form the basis for forwarding working class

opposition to a bulwark of assumed hereditary relationships and the emergent relationships of nineteenth century capital. Thus, within *Silas Marner* the working class comes to embody an effective middle ground between the ossified social relationships of a previous age, the unregulated competition of Victorian capitalism, and the anarchic possibilities of open rebellion.

Eliot's basic contention that the English working class possesses a viable means for countering the assumed power of place and privilege is embodied in the novel's closing chapters and the fate of Eppie, a foundling child raised by the novel's eponymous central character. Although raised within modest working class conditions, Eppie's natural father, Squire Godfrey Cass, attempts to reclaim her from Marner's custody and bestow upon her the benefits of socioeconomic place and privilege. Eppie and Marner resist the reclamation through arguments of logic and sentiment (Eliot 162-168). Though Cass has the weight of traditional social conventions on his side - paternity, social authority, and economic power - Marner and Eppie resist these forms of coercion with pleas to the intrinsic appeal of working class life and social bonds empirically developed between the two over time. When faced with Eppie's professed desire to remain with Marner and continue in the life of the working class, Cass is intellectually and emotionally forced to concede the rightness of Eppie's life decision, renounce his claim, and recognize the weaver as the child's rightful father (Eliot 167-168). As Eliot critic Terrance Cave notes, the resolution of Eppie's fate in *Silas Marner* is thematically significant because it draws upon "one of the oldest and most potent kinds of story," and that Eliot's resolution works counter to the conventional assumptions of "generations of readers for whom the claim of 'blood' conforms with 'nature' and must prevail" (Eliot

xxviii). Within *Silas Marner*, Eliot has reversed a traditional resolution of the narrative trope not merely by having Eppie remain in the working class, but also by forwarding the bonds of an empirically based social relationship as a natural law superior to those of blood and birth, a reversal which forwards a new arrangement of social power exercised through intellectual and experiential fitness rather than the supposed rightness of custom or tradition. Beyond its thematic significance, the passage's social significance seems obvious. For Eliot (as well as Marner and Eppie), working class life seems to offer a superior set of conditions for fostering social attachment and individual fulfillment within ethically sound means.

This argument for the superiority of working class life is furthered by Eppie's eventual marriage to Aaron Winthrop, son of the village wheelwright and a free laborer. The marriage represents Eliot's idealized working class persona, a fusion of Eppie's working class identity and experience with that of an older and more traditional English lower class (Eliot 174-176). We might see the marriage as a symbolic representation of the evolution Eliot envisions for the English lower class within the industrial era, an active process of class-culture development which mirrors in many ways the transformative process described by E.P. Thompson in his seminal work, *The Making of the English Working Class*. Eliot portrays this transition as a constructive one, an evolution from lower class lives bound by customary subservience to those delineated by sense, reason, and an increasing level of social power founded on individual worth and egalitarian social ideology. Like the marriage between the eponymous main character and Esther Lyon in Eliot's later novel *Felix Holt*, Eppie and Aaron commit themselves to a life of limited social and economic power, a life bound by work, modesty, and

constrictive realities. The marriage between Eppie and Aaron, like that of Esther Lyon and Felix Holt, might also be seen as a modification of traditional elements of the English novel, and in particular the conventions of the industrial novel. Similar in many respects to the proposed alliance between traditional English nobility and the emergent class of industrial capitalists found in novels such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, Eliot too envisions a future English society that is composed of elements from both old and new. Rather than build on the models forwarded by the upper echelons of English society, however, *Silas Marner* draws on the lives of English common people for its ideal fusion of agrarian and industrial social energies and ideologies. Within *Silas Marner* it is the working class and not the nobility (either social or economic) which becomes the model for social emulation. Through *Silas Marner* Eliot presents working class life as superior to the expansive possibilities represented by upper class privilege or middle class economic acquisitiveness. Although difficult to substantiate within a culture that had traditionally coveted the lives of the upper class and was quickly being consumed by the values of capitalism, the rationality of this conclusion relies upon the narrative of *Silas Marner* itself, a presentation of the milieu of English life in which an idealized form of working class values and identity are argued to be empirically superior to other social mentalities.

Although *Silas Marner* privileges the working class and promotes its ability to challenge traditional English social conventions, it is certainly not a radical novel. Its formulations of class and society are transgressive but not wholly upsetting or necessarily revolutionary. *Silas Marner* can most certainly be seen as a conservative approach to the issues of class in Victorian England. Drawing upon traditional elements of a wider

culture of English pastoral nostalgia, *Silas Marner* attempts to address the social problems previously represented by the factory floor and the urban sphere by returning the narrative gaze to the English countryside. By doing so, Eliot obviously participates in a wider mid-Victorian resurgence of pastoral nostalgia, a particular perspective on the countryside that is distinct from earlier iterations of English rural sentimentality. Sir Robert Peel encapsulates this complex mid-Victorian structure of feeling a statement from 1842 that recognizes an underlying conundrum within the mid-Victorian culture of pastoral nostalgia, a recognition of the inevitability of modernist change while simultaneously privileging England's social past over an anticipated social future. As Peel states:

If you had to constitute new societies, you might on moral and social grounds prefer cornfields to cotton factories, an agricultural to a manufacturing population. But our lot is cast, and we cannot recede (529).

On both "moral and social grounds" Peel shows a clear preference for rural, agricultural, and pre-modern modes of life as compared to those fostered by capitalism, industry, and urbanity. His statement stands as an open acknowledgement of a set of Victorian beliefs that promoted the superiority of a pastoral form of English life while recognizing an inevitable conclusion; by the mid-nineteenth century it was increasingly impossible to envision a holistic return to the past. The pre-modern form of English life for which pastoral nostalgia shows preference was clearly being pushed further into the geographic margins of England and was receding further into the historical memory. England and English society could only move forward.

Raymond Williams offers a more comprehensive discussion of the English culture of pastoral nostalgia in *The Country and the City*. Williams' writings on the subject and our general sense of English culture through the course of the nineteenth century argue

that the species of pastoral nostalgia seen in Peel's statement seek to romanticise a particular kind of rural community and a particular time in English social history. As

Williams writes:

What we find [...] is an idealisation of feudal and immediately post-feudal values: of an order based on settled and reciprocal social and economic relations of an avowedly total kind. [...] a period in which another order - that of capitalist agriculture - was being successfully pioneered. For behind that coincidence is a conflict of values which is still crucial. These celebrations of a feudal or an aristocratic order ... have been widely used, in an idealist retrospect, as a critique of capitalism. The emphases on obligation, on charity, on the open door to the needy neighbour, are contrasted, in a familiar vein of retrospective radicalism, with the capitalist thrust, the utilitarian deduction of all social relationships to a crude moneyed order.

The cultural mentality that Williams describes here, in its most simple expression, ostensibly longs for an idealized and cooperative human society thought to reside in a pre-modern, rural social order. It is a longing that, in turn, can be seen as a nineteenth century response to the plight of English communal ethics within the contexts of industrial capitalism, a direct critique of those human societies and individual human experiences fostered by the self-centered ideology of a "crude moneyed order." The dichotomies of country and city, pastoral south and industrial north, that pervade Victorian social novels utilize these dichotomies (at least simplistically) as forms of both criticism and idealization on a material level, but harbor within them an ideological component, a means of understanding the nature of capitalism's slow spread through English society and the reasoning behind an underlying desire for the perpetuation of rural social forms. If social problems associated with industrial capitalism are particularly concentrated within or emanate from the urbanized, industrialized portions of England, then the English hinterland theoretically embodied in a yet untouched locus in which the modes a pre-industrial social formulations might persist. Thus, it is possible to read the

larger tradition of Victorian pastoral nostalgia as an ideological retrenchment of the English hereditary nobility and an attempt to perpetuate the social forms of a past age.

But we must caution the tendency to oversimplify *Silas Marner's* rural formulations and those of a later era of Victorian rural literary expression which include the novels of Thomas Hardy. *Silas Marner* certainly and obviously utilizes pastoral nostalgia through the narrative's creation of a rarified rural space, the romantic and secluded village of Raveloe, and yet Eliot's novel and its attendant social ideology push the formulations of English pastoral nostalgia further than simple idealization. Eliot's social ideology is not merely dependent on the conditions of rurality but also on a specificity of class, a transposition of the socio-economic critique of geography to that of social hierarchy. Just as the rural community might represent a remove from the forces of capitalism, the English lower class also represent a further, class based, removal from that influence. If industry and capitalism can find their locus in urban and industrialized geographies, then so too their influence might find a social locus of influence, first centered most heavily on the emergent middle class and subsequently spreading to the hereditary nobility. As the influence of capital spreads out across the English classes one can theorize that those lowest on the social order, those whose lives were least involved in the accumulation of capital and were separated most completely from the industrialized urban centers, the rural lower classes, would form a bastion for the continuation of traditional English social values. But, as has been argued, *Silas Marner* asserts that it is not merely distance from the sources of capital that allows the rural lower classes to maintain a pre-modern social formulation. *Silas Marner* argues that material conditions of existence are also critical to the formation of lower class social ideals and

this provides a conduit through which they might be transported to an industrial and capitalist context.

Stemming from Eliot's inquiries concerning the secular-empirical origins of religious belief, *Silas Marner's* social inquiry focuses on the specific issue of formulating an empirically based secular morality (*vis a vis* ethics). By removing morality to the secular space of empiricism, Eliot provides the opportunity to critically distinguish lower class moral traditions from more substantive ethical constructions based on rationally construed individual and social needs. *Silas Marner* asserts that tangible and knowable reasons exist for the formation of certain ethical feelings and as such, those ethical constructions can be abstracted and applied within similar social settings. Such an ethical inquiry would fit well within the context of Eliot's larger intellectual interests. As Cave notes, through much of the author's life, "[Eliot] had nurtured [...] experience with a detailed study of contemporary philosophical enquiries into the nature of belief itself" (Eliot *xii*). From these studies, particularly Comte's theories of positivist religion and Feuerbach's explication of the rational foundations of Christianity, Eliot evidences a rational understanding of belief - be that religious, superstitious, moral - that derives from the naturally manifest experience of human existence within an indifferent world. Within *Silas Marner*, Eliot evidences a further development of this basic premise through a recognition of the relativity of class position and perspective upon the formation of proper responses to the empirical conditions of human life. Within the novel class positioning is seen to foster differing responses to existential phenomena which, in turn, develop into class specific rationalities. Of these class specific rationalities, *Silas Marner* privileges that of the rural lower classes as the least influenced by constructed social and

economic habits and therefore particularly amenable to the modeling of ethically sound rationalities and socially strong communities that might be viable within the context of modern social existence. Beyond the explication of Eliot's rational system of social ethics founded on pre-modern forms of lower class life, *Silas Marner* additionally forwards the idea that working class existence provides an ideal situation through which rational social ethics might manifest themselves in the modern individual and community. Working class life, in short, provides the necessary kind of existence through which free-will, self-interest, and competition, might find balance within a traditional culture of communal ethics.

In its broad thematic construction, *Silas Marner* presents the interworking of three distinct, class-based, realms of human experience: the traditional English lower class, an increasingly capitalist nobility, and the emergent working class. Within each of these three social spheres Eliot further addresses the rational bonds of community, the reasons why individuals come together in groups, the means through which they form collective existence, and the class-based ideologies that might either help or hinder this process. While the elemental features of this socialization process might remain consistent from one class grouping to another, the basic conditions of existence in which those formulations occur causes differences to emerge within class specific material iterations. Those rationalities ultimately lead to the creation of distinct social formations that might be judged for both intent and efficacy. The fundamental elements of community formation within *Silas Marner* are delineated as mutability, enigma, and the means of developing rational sympathy. Together these three forces not only create the need and the means for the initial creation of community but also the intellectual foundations for

the expansion and perpetuation of a community in which individual talent and free will might still find expression within the context of socially cohesive communities. *Silas Marner* contends that the manner in which the modern working class approaches these three elements of experience provides the ideal means through which individual and communal necessities might be effectively met.

Despite the novel's rather obvious interest in issues of class, critical treatment of *Silas Marner* has traditionally avoided serious consideration of the novel within the contexts of class identity and representation. In part this stems from a lingering perception of the novel as less worthy of serious critical attention when compared to Eliot's larger and more conventional works. F.R. Leavis is perhaps partially responsible for this perspective by labeling the novel a "minor masterpiece" and a "moral fable," terms that, in the long run, have proven limiting to the work's broader critical reception (Leavis 41-42). While scholars of the social problem novel might have considered *Silas Marner* for its obvious dealings with class and industrial labor, the work has traditionally not received a great deal of interest in this light presumably because it falls outside of the temporal and thematic purviews ascribed to the industrial or social problem novel. The setting of *Silas Marner* is too early, 1803, and its date of publication, 1861, too late for the work to be considered part of the core of industrial novel production. Further, the novel's literary thrust is not necessarily realist-sentimentalist and its themes and setting predominantly domestic rather than industrial. Despite this, Eliot's interest in working class issues is amply evidenced by novels such as *Adam Bede* and *Felix Holt* and it seems surprising that Eliot's works and their portrayal of working class concerns have not gained more critical attention within the context of the social problem corpus. Both Eliot

scholars and those with an interest in social problem novels have seemingly had difficulty ameliorating the rather odd composition of *Silas Marner* - its length, temporal placement, less than realist contents - with the general tenor and scope of either the social problem novel or Eliot's more traditional literary works.

Despite these past shortcomings in the critical reception of *Silas Marner*, more recent approaches to the work have sought to re-address *Silas Marner's* larger socio-cultural concerns and these efforts have succeeded in raising more serious consideration of its class-culture significance. Recent readings of *Silas Marner* by Srdjan Smajic and John J. Mazaheri have sought to re-explore not only the original moral-fabular conception forwarded by Leavis, but to reconcile that reading with several of the literary and philosophic conundrums evident within it - not merely in *Silas Marner*, but as they relate to the remainder of Eliot's corpus of fiction. Smajic and Mazaheri offer compelling arguments to reconcile fabular/magical elements of *Silas Marner* with a viable conception of nineteenth century realism consistent with prevailing understandings of polyglossic features of the novel. Rather than merely providing a reason to marginalize the work, these fabular elements have been shown to be critical to the novel's project of social representation. Smajic and Mazaheri both argue that fable and superstition are critical to the representation of the lower class and their particular intellectual identity within the complex class society of Raveloe (Mazaheri 239-240, Smajic 12-14). Associated with these perspectives, Courtney Berger has refocused attention on the seeming conflict between morality and realism in Eliot's work, specifically the novel *Adam Bede*, by explaining that the elements represent a reconciliation between Eliot's collective morality and individual will - in essence a rational morality divorced from

religious foundations that fits with Eliot's intellectual investigations of belief and religion (308-309). Thus, it is possible to view *Silas Marner* as an important and integral part within the larger development of Eliot's social philosophy and a sign of a critical social impulse within the larger English society surrounding her.

Beyond critical work addressing *Silas Marner* specifically, recent surveys of Eliot's other fictions have addressed concerns closely aligned to those raised within *Silas Marner* and help to provide reasonable connections between *Silas Marner* and Eliot's more widely recognized novels. Carolyn Lesjak, in a study of *Adam Bede*, has accentuated Eliot's interest in the working class and working class experience as a project of Imperial inclusion that seeks, in the words of Benedict Anderson, "a deep horizontal comradeship" and serves to offer reason for a reading of *Silas Marner* as a socially inclusive literary project that works to create universal identities and ethics within England (81). Mark Allison, additionally, has elaborated upon the the exploration of utopian socialism presented in *Middlemarch* as ultimately a failed project, an idea that the author would leave behind in favor of national and cultural forms of social cohesion in her later fiction (733-734). As such, we may begin to see links between *Silas Marner* and the later works of Eliot's corpus in which *Silas Marner* plays an integral role in defining both real social problems and an abstract intellectual foundation upon which Eliot would base her ongoing search for literary solutions.

There is, of course, reason to assert that George Eliot preferred social rather than political means of addressing social problems and credence to the idea that she utilizes features of rebellious traditional culture in *Silas Marner*. Evan Horowitz has categorized Eliot conservative social formulations as a response to modernity and its alienating

effects. Broadly conceived by Eliot, modernity represented a point of alienation from history - and particularly the English social history that tied its people into cooperative human communities. Through an investigation of Eliot's political themes in *Felix Holt*, Horowitz comments that: [the novel] dramatizes ... the futility of trying to overcome alienation by way of political reform" (9). What is needed instead: "was a new brand of radicalism that eschews mere political reform in favor of something broader." A system that was not only political, "but also social, economic, moral, and spiritual." (9). Eliot also argued for the role of literature in the formation of both individual and communal narratives of existence. Rachel Bowlby has written on Eliot's extended discourse concerning narrative utility and the particular manner in which the author presents the theme in *Adam Bede* contending that the novel argues: "[n]ot only will a life story be formed like a novel's story, but without novelistic shaping there will be no story in real life at all" (421). Beyond this, Eliot seems to argue that the utility of narrative, both in fiction and in life, is determined by the quality of narratives employed. To fit the expectations for one's life into one or the other kind of narrative will certainly have implications upon the possibilities that one might envision for one's self and the decisions that one might make (421).

Thus, for Eliot the narrative takes on particular significance not only for the presentation of lives that might make apt sources of emulation, but also that confront the real problems of the English individuals and society that surrounds her. Ethics again becomes the medium for addressing many of those ills. Nancy Henry, Hina Nazar and Kathleen Slaugh-Sanford have all offered recent readings of Eliot's final novel, *Daniel Deronda*, that have forwarded the novel's ethical subtext as a means for questioning

many of the pervasive readings stemming from Edward Said's influential colonization reading. As Henry has argued: "... Deronda actually presents readers with a complicated picture of British imperialism, one that does not completely condone such practices but is eager to expose them as morally questionable" (113). Slauch-Stanford goes on to argue that the character of Lydia serves to discredit Victorian assumptions of racial superiority/inferiority and serves to question those formulations as a critical argument for the perpetuation of empire (402). Hina Nazar takes the ethnic themes in *Deronda* and seeks to integrate them with Eliot's pervasive interest in both narrative and ethics. Drawing upon Eliot's comments concerning the power of artistic representation to "...[surprise] even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves...", Nazar argues that Eliot's ability to elicit sympathetic engagement with her characters:

... serves as a springboard for a more self-consciously cultivated ethical stance toward others. Eliot's narrators indicate, moreover, that their work of situating the actions of characters in the context of larger life stories enables a less judgmental and more flexible evaluation of them. (438)

What emerges from these critical re-evaluations of Eliot's fiction is an apolitical inquiry of Victorian social ideology that forwards ethics as a medium for overcoming both essentialism and social fracturing. The promotion of narratives that seek to cultivate ethical responses to human experience serves as the catalyst to erode self-reflexive moralizing through a greater acknowledgement of otherness while at the same time presenting a more widely applicable level of social commonality that effectively allows difference while sowing seeds of commonality. This is the narrative proclivity that becomes apparent in *Silas Marner*.

Through a realist abstraction, *nee* a philosophic exploration, *Silas Marner* presents an approach to the problems of class that works to promote not only the fitness but also the rationality of working class culture as a model for future social development and the basis for a universal, national culture in England. The class identity that is created through *Silas Marner* imbues the English working class with cultural capital and social viability, essentially a means of creating a bulwark against the cultural hegemony of the middle and upper classes as it was exerted through the course of the later Victorian age. The working class's unique social and intellectual positioning provides the means to withstand and oppose two pervasive limits on social and moral development in England, tradition and capital. The novel works to provide an intellectual means for envisioning both the rational formulation of working class social ethics and a means to pit working class ethics against lower class custom, high-class culture, traditional social hierarchy, and the influence of capital. Theoretically, as the nineteenth century progresses, this system would act to replace localized iterations of class-based custom eroded by modernity with a wider and more inclusive definition of Englishness that was less hubristic than high class culture and more communally centered than laissez-faire capitalism.

When considered within the context of English social and political history, the timing of *Silas Marner's* emergence fits with larger practical and theoretical issues of class relations within the later Victorian era. Emerging against the backdrop of an early nineteenth century tinged with a lingering fear of class revolution, *Silas Marner* casts English class relations and antagonisms in a manner that seeks to ameliorate the social conflicts that characterized the early nineteenth century to a more traditional English

order of existence. Indeed, *Silas Marner* attempts to tap into a socially transgressive mentality that had existed in England for a long period of time.

Within this historical setting the creative impetus surrounding the production of literary works concerned with the English working class necessarily changed and *Silas Marner* acts as evidence of one iteration of this new literary response. Raymond Williams and Erich Auerbach have both offered influential criticisms of the limitations of the previous generation of literary approaches to the working class, the English social problem novel, and its system of class representation. Auerbach has argued that the limits of bourgeois attitude towards representation of the working class in the social problem novel excludes “everything functionally essential, the people’s work, its position within modern society, the political, social, and moral ferments which are alive in it and which point to the future” (498). Beyond this limited capacity or desire to represent the totality of working class conditions in England, Raymond Williams would critique the common means of resolution in the social problem novel, a result which ultimately displays conflicting concerns. In *Culture and Society* Williams outlines these conflicting bourgeois concerns as, on one hand, a critical response capable of eliciting sympathy for the conditions of the working class while at the same time fearful of any resolution which sought to upset the traditional ordination of English life. The resolutions of many novels of the mid-Victorian era which deal with the working class do not end in a resolution of significant social problems but rather the eradication or inculcation of protagonists which seek to upset English society (99-119). The limitations of this literary approach to the issues of class and social inequity in the social problem novel are not merely limited to social problem novels however but can be seen in a variety of Victorian novels which

feature issues of class. While we might contend that some of these novels that fall out of the specific oeuvre of the social problem novel, they nonetheless attempt to push the representation of the working class into new realms of experience and to focus attention on elements of working class life that are “functionally essential” but they often resist offering socially transformative resolutions. This larger narrative process, in effect, serves to delineate a kind of working class culture and expression that would meet with condemnation, an effective limitation of expression that certainly obviates certain forms of expression but also sets a precedent for the process of searching for socially acceptable alternatives.

The social, literary, and historical space outlined within the previous discussions effectively creates the milieu into which George Eliot would insert *Silas Marner's* portrayal of the lower orders of English society - what is, in effect, a means of searching for socially acceptable forms of working class identity expression and social resistance. *Silas Marner* privileges lower class fitness through a process of class comparison and seeks to avoid formulations of cataclysmic social rupture through individual opposition, a return to effectively normative social systems, and hopes for natural social evolution. In order to foster the means for both individual opposition and social evolution, Eliot initially needs to delineate a valuation of differing modes of life based on social positioning. As the novel opens, Eliot presents a comprehensive portrayal of English life within the rustic village of Raveloe. The larger community of Raveloe represents a transitional class structure in which the residual upper and lower classes exist side by side with emergent classes such as the affluent bourgeois-middle and the working. While the influx of both capital and industry has served to complicate the class hierarchies in

Raveloe, Eliot tends to simplify class differentiation in a manner that recognizes differences between residual and emergent classes, but diminishes those differences through an accentuation of empirical similarities based on shared conditions of existence and social mentalité. In effect, while the emergent working and middle classes might exhibit intellectual or cultural differences from the traditional lower and upper classes in England, positioning within the class scale allows Eliot to identify broad similarities in existential conditions that act as a means of delineating a simplified class structure. Thus, Eliot's portrayal of class tends to accentuate a dichotomy of class rather than a broad class spectrum; working, lower middle and lower classes occupy one side of an empirical divide while affluent middle and upper classes occupy the other. Through the course of the novel, Eliot forwards empirical commonalities as the means through which these diverse social and intellectual classes might find the basis for the creation of a shared identity. The empirical condition that Eliot demarcates as an ideal and the basis for this shared experience consists of a blending of traditional English lower class identity and experience with that of the emergent working class. But in order for such a formulation to emerge, the extant gulfs of reason and experience that separate the English lower and working classes must be understood and exhausted.

To accomplish this goal, the opening chapters of *Silas Marner* present a running critique of three operative social mentalities evident in nineteenth century England. The first is a traditional, customary mentalité represented by the denizens of the novel's rustic setting, the village of Raveloe. Though Raveloe is presented as an idyll of sorts, Eliot's criticism obviates the presentation as a simple expression of pastoral nostalgia. The village's lower class community is both socially and intellectually limited, a condition

that instills an aversion to change and suspicion of outsiders. For the custom bound and insular villagers of Raveloe, the unknown initially presents itself in the form of wandering men who represent outside forces with the potential to upset traditional social and intellectual balance (Eliot 1-7). As Eliot explains in the opening pages:

To peasants of old times, the world outside their own direct experience was a region of vagueness and mystery; to their untravelled thought a state of wandering was a conception as dim as the winter life of the swallows that came back with the spring; and even a settler, if he came from distant parts, hardly ever ceased to be viewed with a remnant of distrust,... (3)

Thus the presence of the alien in these rustic communities represents not merely a more mobile and widely dispersed community established through the rise of capital and commerce, but further a means to illuminate lower class response to that change, a point at which traditional English lower class mentalities contact outside experience that holds the potential of upsetting established modes of rationality. The identity ascribed to the lower class inhabitants of Raveloe is one of ignorance and resistance to anything that might seem antithetical to their traditional and limited intellectual identity:

All cleverness, whether in the rapid use of that difficult instrument the tongue, or in some other art unfamiliar to villagers, was in itself suspicious: honest folks, born and bred in a visible manner, were mostly not overwise of clever [...]; and the process by which rapidity and dexterity of any kind were acquired was so wholly hidden, that they partook of the nature of conjuring (3-4).

The presence of these alien figures in the community of Raveloe is thereby seen to represent not merely a social but also an intellectual challenge, an incorporation of not merely new personalities but also the accommodation of new skills, knowledge, and human capacities. Thus, Eliot represents traditional English society as a community with limited viability, able to contend with that which is constant and typical, but unable to assimilate experience or knowledge that lies outside of its direct purview.

While the villagers of Raveloe might have struggled with an insularity and unfinished collective intellectual capacity, their easy and naturalistic community is presented in contrast to that which Silas Marner occupies before his journey into their midst. Thus, Eliot's second critique is focused on abstract social orders characteristic of common class efforts to construct societies separate from traditional English custom. Marner's history as a wage laborer in the industrial north of England and his involvement in a severe Calvinistic sect (the social group at Lantern Yard) represent two significant and historically pertinent alterations to common class life emblematic of the the impact of modernity on the English lower classes and early nineteenth century responses to the process of change. The development of working class life exhibited by the Lantern Yard sect can be seen as an evolutionary step forward in common class existence but one that came at a particular social and intellectual cost. The northern working class community described by Eliot in *Silas Marner* effectively strips its members of a traditional, individual, lower class identity and replaces it with collective dogmatism divorced from empirical rationality and the values of work and exchange. These economic and intellectual forces represent a replacement of older customs, an inculcation of modern working class existence that effectively bars an intellectual return to empirical forms of residual common class existence. While this dogmatic community might create a more democratic and industrious community that divorces itself from customary socio-cultural limitations, such efforts to abstractly form community through dogmatic rationality is argued to create an absurd and arbitrary social system - a feature highlighted by the community's inability to offer satisfactory resolutions to both conflict and the unknown. While Eliot chooses religion as the dogma of the Lantern Yard sect, the presentation she

provides could easily be ascribed to secular ideologies which sought to remold human existence according to similar doctrinal prescriptions. The presentation of Lantern Yard suggests that an overly constructed rationality effectively removes communities from the concrete sources of empirical knowledge and hence limit their ability to structure human society in way that can contend with the exigencies of lived experience. In the end, the combination of ideology and intellectual discontinuity described within the Lantern Yard community proves easy to manipulate and difficult to meaningfully question or oppose (8-12).

Through these opening portrayals of Raveloe and Lantern Yard, *Silas Marner* effectively delineates two residual approaches to common class existence and identifies their particular social and intellectual weaknesses. The rustic community of Raveloe contains the basic seeds of a viable human community but its rational systems are limited in both geographic and rational human scope. Built upon layers of received local tradition and based upon a limited conception of knowledge, human behavior and identity, the communal system of Raveloe cannot contend with circumstances outside of its direct purview and remains subject to ideological and hegemonic control. Raveloe cannot accept aberrations and cannot encompass human experience outside of its direct locality thus the basis for questioning experience is limited. In contrast, Lantern Yard might represent movement forward as its abstracted community might forge new forms of common class existence, and the possibilities for social standing, but within that abstraction it has lost its tangible connection to lived experience and the source of rational consensus outside of its strict dogmatic purview.

While both Raveloe and Lantern Yard might create unified and effective communities, it is also evident that each community evidences significant practical limitations. For the individual who seeks to differ from their strict locales and ideologies, communal bonds are effectively broken. What remains in their place for the vast majority of English individuals is the pervasive gospel of acquisition and competition fostered by the emergent notions of capitalism. As Marner leaves Lantern Yard, he adopts the values of capitalism as a new means of rationally ordering his life and this forms the basis for Eliot's third critique within *Silas Marner*. Removed from the Lantern Yard community and having lost his faith in both religion and humanity, Marner retreats to Raveloe and subsumes himself in work and the accumulation of capital as an effective replacement for human community (15). His relations with the local community are purely transactional and Marner's substitutes capital for substantive relationships with others. His substantial capital holdings hold no direct use value but instead function as both companion and *raison d'être* (16). In the end, it is capital that forms a levee against contingency which provides Marner with a sense of security and value that allows him to remain outside of the human community surrounding him.

Although manifested within the form of working class experience, *Silas Marner* suggests that Marner's model of existence has also found its way into the capitalized upper class by comparing Marner's culture of accumulation with that exhibited by Raveloe's upper class residents - most specifically the Cass family, Godfrey, Dunsey, and Squire Cass. To provide a connection between these two disparate classes, Eliot again relies upon mentalite as a point of connection. Dunsey Cass and Marner are described by Eliot as possessing dull minds, a result of constant monotony, a life in which individuals

might contact “no new people and [hear] of no new events to keep alive [...] the idea of the unexpected and the changeful.” The dull mind leads to beliefs and assertions which “flatter [...] desires” and serve to make manifest propositions that have no rational foundation (19, 37). *Silas Marner’s* presentation of the upper class seeks to accentuate both the intellectual limitation of the class’s empirical foundations in conjunction with a continued dialogue concerning the influence of capital and its manifestation within that particular class situation. Although Marner’s dull mind has come from a renunciation of human companionship, the dull existence of the upper class has a deeper and more persistent place of origin. The discontent witnessed within the Cass family stems from conditions of laxity and ease: “[t]he lives of those rural forefathers, [...], whose only work was to ride round their land, getting heavier and heavier in their saddles, and who passed the rest of their days in the half-listless gratification of senses dulled by monotony [...]” (29). In a presentation that accentuates self-service and moral laxity, the Cass children are embroiled in intrigues linked to acquisitiveness and botched social relationships while the Squire is diverted by the managing of his estate and consumptive pleasures. Each character exhibits behaviors characteristic of an over-acquisitive nature: Dunstan for capital, Godfrey for love, and the Squire for the trappings and deference according to his social rank . The social interactions fostered by this familial behavior are characterized within the novel as narcissistic, predatory, and exploitative. The Cass home is portrayed as disjointed and out of sync - each member sticking to the narrow confines of their own lives are avoiding contact with the others (21-24).

As the novel opens, Godfrey Cass is consumed with the concomitant projects of securing a marriage to the novel’s eminent beauty and moral compass, Miss Nancy

Lammeter, and the suppression of a previous marriage that has resulted in a child, the knowledge of which he hopes to keep from both Nancy and his father (23). Dunsey, meanwhile, is presented as a profiteer and pleasure seeker whose primary concern centers on securing financial support for his profligate lifestyle, a need which he achieves by extorting proceeds from his father's estate from Godfrey in exchange for silence (24-25). Situated, as he is, within the need-matrices of the family's limited income potential and the cultural mandates of propriety, Godfrey becomes easy prey for Dunsey's extortive machinations. When faced with the stark reality that their social and economic arrangements can no longer be hidden from their father without additional capital, Godfrey and Dunsey arrive at the proposition which precipitates the first of the major events of the narrative - that of compelling Silas Marner to provide his hoard of gold as a means to alleviate their collective capital needs. In an industrial age appropriation that serves to mimic traditional English class relations, Dunsey is tasked with the project of excising Marner's gold through coercion, but when he arrives at Marner's dwelling the weaver is not there, having gone to fetch water and leaving his door unsecured. Dunsey sees this happenstance as a boon to his project and simply steals Marner's gold outright (38). When Marner returns and finds the hoard missing, his loss signifies the pervasive force in the novel which compels individuals to seek community the inevitability of misfortune.

The loss of Marner's gold, a stripping of both capital and security, is the catalyst which initially causes Marner to seek human assistance and interaction. The theft provides the impetus through which Marner begins the slow process of social integration into the Raveloe community and prompts the villagers to acknowledge Marner more

openly. Although this chance misfortune creates a need for community and the foundations for Marner's social integration into Raveloe, the theft of Marner's gold also functions on a deeper intellectual level to describe the manner in which Eliot's idealized community comes to contend with the integration of a new and aberrative member. Mystery and the unknown are constant topics within *Silas Marner* and a central feature of dialog within the Raveloe community. As a prelude to the process through which Marner becomes integrated into Raveloe, Eliot interjects a demonstration of the community's means for contending with the unknown, a process that further serves to strengthen the community. The site for this discourse on mystery is the village's public house, the Rainbow, and the place to which Marner retreats following the discovery that his gold has gone missing.

Unlike the customary, dogmatic or economic communities critiqued by Eliot through the opening of the novel, the community of the Rainbow is both pluralistic and expansive, a locale where diverse members of the community interact and strive to reach consensus. The similarity of need, whether figured in the guise of intoxicating drinks or rationality in the face of an enigmatic and mutable world, forms the basis through which individual difference and conflict might effectively be resolved. The pub's name, the Rainbow, elicits an often remarked allusion to the rightness of the human existence which takes place under the symbol. Extrapolating from this religious reference the secular, philosophic context that Eliot establishes for her inquiry into human behavior, the process of discussion and creation of knowledge that takes place within the Rainbow are to be seen as naturalistic processes of knowing through experience, discourse, and development of consensus, in essence the development of a shared rationality. Through

the course of varied discussions the denizens of the public house present opinions, defer to authoritative knowledge and level bets on their surety of opinion - bets founded on rational, deliberated knowledge. While some disputes are brought to satisfactory conclusion, other points of discussion are never resolved. Despite this, and despite strong feelings, the discourse in the Rainbow is convivial, moderated, and provides the means to come to a collective, rational position on a variety of contentious topics (43-52). This utterly human society is ultimately depicted as a source of lively minds and valuable social knowledge.

But even the community of the Rainbow is tested by the mystery of Marner's theft. The instance of calamity and mystery surrounding the loss of Marner's gold provides the circumstances through which Marner and Raveloe begin their slow process of assimilation, a process through which Marner's "life became blent in a singular manner with the life of his neighbors" but also one in which the Raveloe villagers also find the means for intellectual development (21). Within the process both sides must begin to contend with their relative weaknesses. On a very basic level it creates tangible conditions through which Marner is compelled to seek human assistance and the citizens of Raveloe feel sympathy with his predicament and a means to expand their limited experience through the eventual inculcation of Marner into the community. Within the novel chance and mutability are featured as elemental conditions of existence which create tangible need for human community but a need that can only be felt within particular forms of empirical life. Through extended discourse on the subject, the novel suggests that class position has an impact on how individuals rationalize the influence of chance upon their lives. Within an exchange between Godfrey Cass and his father, Eliot

provides characterization of the upper class as a means to differentiate behaviors and beliefs indicative of upper class conditions of existence from those exhibited by the common inhabitants of Raveloe. The elder Cass is presented as an oafish man convinced through experience of his own superiority. As Eliot writes:

The Squire had been used to parish homage all his life, used to the presupposition that his family, his tankards, and everything that was his, were the oldest and best; and as he never associated with any gentry higher than himself, his opinion was not disturbed by comparison (66).

In contrast to the villagers of Raveloe, Eliot accentuates Squire Cass's solitary opinions and limited field of experience as the source of misrepresentation and intellectual weakness. This myopic point of view is accentuated in the family's social interactions. A conversation between father and son takes on the appearance of a business dispute in which Squire Cass seems willing to disown his son just as an employer might dismiss an underperforming member of his staff. Godfrey's weakness of character and the blustering of his father prevent an open discussion of the issues of the missing rents or missing brothers and Godfrey leaves the interview with little other than briefly forestalling the dispute's seemingly inevitable conclusion. Godfrey's position causes him to simply hope for some favorable resolution to the situation, a position of inaction that Eliot addresses at length.

And in this point of trusting to some throw of fortune's dice, Godfery can hardly be called specially old-fashioned. Favorable Chance, I fancy, is the god of all men who follow their own devices instead of obeying a law they believe in. Let even a polished man of these days get into a position he is ashamed to avow, and his mind will be bent on all the possible issues that may deliver him from the calculable results of that position. [...] Let him forsake a decent craft that he may pursue the gentilities of profession to which nature never called him, and his religion will infallibly be the worship of blessed Chance, which he will believe in as the mighty creator of success (71-72).

Eliot's discussion of the dogma of chance and the manner through which it becomes operative in the lives of individuals obviously smacks of author's hallmark moralizing, but this passage is perhaps more significant for its comparison to the rationalizing of chance within the lives of Raveloe's inhabitants. While betting and gambling seem to be a common occurrence within the lives of Raveloe, Eliot clearly establishes two differing and classed rationalizations of the practice that mirrors wider literary conventions.

Within the context of the upper class, the trope of gambling and its relationship to chance is a common feature in the literature of the later eighteenth and nineteenth century, one that we can see utilized in a disparate array of novels including but certainly not limited to Balzac's *La Rabouilleuse*, Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*, Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon*, and even Eliot's own *Daniel Deronda*. Within novelistic portrayals of these games of chance, characters who exhibit a knack for winning and a profound possession of luck, have generally come by these traits through an ability to manipulate the conditions of the game, i.e. they cheat. This form of gambling and the kind of chance into which Godfrey Cass places his faith, is certainly contrasted with another form of gambling that Eliot features within the pages of *Silas Marner*. The villagers of Raveloe certainly exhibit a propensity to offer bets during the course of their discussions at the Rainbow, an instance of gambling from the opposite side of the class divide (43-52). While these kinds of bets and the forms of gambling entertained by the lower classes may also involve an element of chance, they certainly do not receive the same moralizing as that associated with the gaming table. These bets are somehow different. They rely upon knowledge, talent, and a keenness of mind that allows the betting parties some degree of surety in the outcome even though there is always a possibility of loss. In a world that is

seemingly ruled by chance, Eliot (as well as other novelists of the nineteenth century) seeks to delineate two class derived responses to chance, each with its own implications and each instilling a manner of behavior specific to class. For the lower classes, chance plays a role much more significant than a roll of the dice or spin of the roulette wheel.

The lower class psychology of luck and the concomitant behaviors associated with that psychology are relevant topics within the context of *Silas Marner* and describe the impetus for the development of Marner's relationship with the larger community surrounding him. As Eliot writes:

The repulsion Marner had always created in his neighbors was partly dissipated by the new light in which this misfortune had shown him. Instead of a man who had more cunning than honest folks could come by, [...], it was apparent that Silas had not cunning enough to keep his own (74).

While human sympathy derived from a sense of common feeling and association obviously constitutes the basic motivation within the opening of the Raveloe community to Marner, Eliot's explanation of the basis of that sympathy is certainly telling. Marner's misfortune, ostensibly a result of his lack of luck, not only creates a need for him to seek the company and assistance of others, but in turn allows the Raveloe community to envision him in a more favorable light. Marner's fortune, be that in the form of money or luck, is initially figured as a product of cunning, an illegitimate or manipulative application of intelligence seemingly intended for personal gain at the expense of others. The recognition of Marner's subjectivity to the vagaries of chance provides the means to see a point of commonality between himself and the villagers surrounding him (74-75). Eliot solidifies this point by highlighting Marner's misfortune as not merely a situational catalyst towards sympathy but also the common subject through which the Raveloe villagers begin to develop dialog with Marner following the theft (75). This lower class

sense of luck, or chance, certainly contrasts with the mentalité of luck associated with Godfrey and Dunsey Cass within the novel. For the lower class characters, luck and chance provide the impetus for acknowledging the basic insecurity of the human position within a world that is largely out of their control.

Although the intrinsic lack of security in individual lives might create a basic impetus for community formation in *Silas Marner*, the actual process of forming communities relies on a more complicated and protracted process. At the most basic level, community relies upon a basic level of shared understanding whether concerning luck or a variety of other topics. From Eliot's perspective, class differentiation and the differing conditions of existence demarcated by classed lives create an intellectual gulf that must be bridged in the process of community formation. *Silas Marner* describes this process through the course of dialogues and interactions with between Marner and his neighbors. Through this presentation the novel provides an extended discourse on the nature of life from either side of the empirical divide separating the English lower and working classes. While Marner evidences the means to achieve a better standard of living - a base of technical knowledge and industry instilled through his working class experience - from which the lower classes of Raveloe might benefit, the empirical formulations of emergent working class experience have fostered a pattern of social behavior found to be faulty. The Raveloe villagers, for their own part, attempt to inculcate Marner into a lower class culture whose empirical perspective is commensurate with the development of human bonds of community but is functionally limited by an assumed need for socio-cultural homogeneity and a reliance on custom. Although the circumstance of the theft creates an initial need in Marner for community and engenders

feelings of sympathy within his neighbors, the gulf between the two yawns wide. Marner remains socially and intellectually isolated from the community despite their attempts to reach out to him (77-78). Through the initial social interactions between Marner and the Raveloe villagers, another weakness of the constructed working class empiricism which fostered his identity is shown. Marner is shown to be lacking in socially created ordering principles, bits of knowledge derived from outside himself common to the Raveloe villagers, that might provide greater context and meaning to his life and identity.

For centuries upper class English life tended to be both privileged and fetishized as a source of both desire and instruction. For Eliot, and for the later authors of the English boxing novels, working class experience presented a form of life that might be celebrated in its own right, a life that might effectively promote a broad base of social equality and the empirical conditions necessary for the formation of tangible communal ties. Although Raveloe and its denizens belonged to an age whose class assumptions and behaviors precluded significant social alteration, the arrival of a new generation holds the promise not only for a more complete community in Raveloe but also for a new society in England. The child of a union of upper and lower classes, the disavowed offspring of a union between Godfrey Cass and a barmaid named Molly, comes to represent the promise of that new generation raised within the culture of the Eliot's perfected working class. Godfrey's estranged wife eventually dies of exposure on a wintery night within yards of Marner's small abode and Godfrey's unclaimed child, needing warmth and human comfort, makes her way through the snow to Marner's door and into the weaver's life (107).

The death of Molly, in essence the death of a previous vision of class development in England, provides a watershed moment in the narrative, a point in which the fortunes of the novel's various characters find the means for progressionary development. The product of Godfrey's marriage to Molly, the foundling child that Marner adopts, is provided as the means to envision another road forward in the development of class relations. For Marner, the presence of the child forms the impetus for an awakening of both sense and intellect specifically through his involvement in aspects outside of work. Eppie instills desires and habits quite different than those instilled in his earlier, work-disciplined life.

[Marner's] gold had asked that he should sit weaving longer and longer, deafened and blinded more and more to all things except the monotony of his loom and the repetition of his web; but Eppie called him away from his weaving, and made him think all its pauses a holiday, re-awakening his senses with her fresh life, [...] (124).

As Marner begins to structure his life in ways that provide stimulus outside of work, his intellectual and geographical landscape expands. No longer limited to the industrial confines of his lodging and the stone-pits which lie next to it, Marner takes Eppie for walks in the fields and through the child's inquisitiveness becomes reawakened to the natural world surrounding him. What is interesting in Eliot's description of this process is her dualistic descriptions of the effect of this process on both Eppie and Marner.

As the child's mind was growing into knowledge, his [Marner's] mind was growing into memory: as her life unfolded, his soul, long stupified in a cold narrow prison, was unfolding too, and trembling gradually into full consciousness (124).

Rather than focusing on the means through which this reconnection with memory occurs, Eliot's purpose seems to be one that accentuates the manner in which it was lost. The process of memory formation and the senses which memory might foster are presented as

an empirical process natural to human experience. The life of work and capital and its ability to sever individuals from memory and the natural sentiment associated with it remains most important. Lives wholly consumed in the processes of production and acquisition are ultimately cut off from conduits of experience that Eliot contends are so critical to the formation of the shared sensibility upon which communities are formed.

Through the course of the nineteenth century it was not uncommon for the English to propose characters of combined lineage and identity as a means towards social evolution in England. Indeed, it was common to look upon the working class as a means through which the increasing decadence of upper class English society might be offset by an infusion of lower class vitality and strength. When looking at Eppie and the combination of symbols Eliot applies to her, similarities to this broader tendency in nineteenth century presentations of class might be seen. Readers of mid-nineteenth century novels such as Dinah Murloch Craik's *John Halifax: Gentleman* might be cognizant of the conventions of a previous generation of works devoted to the issues of class and might look for a resolution in which Eppie's upper class heritage would form the basis for a reiteration of dominant social ideology. Regardless of the fact that Eppie's genealogy remains a secret in the context of Raveloe society, the novel's audience is aware of her father's identity and most likely anticipate a conventional resolution to the tale. Marriage and restitution of identity, of course, were the narrative means through which the lower class or those with unknown class origin and superior social morality had been traditionally reasserted as examples of the natural superiority of upper class life and identity. But rather than provide such a resolution, *Silas Marner* accentuates Eppie's empirically formed common class identity rather than her ontologic upper class heritage.

To bring the novel's criticism of the upper class ethics and lower class superstition full circle, *Silas Marner* eventually presents the solution to Marner's missing gold. The gold has not transformed itself into the child nor has it been stolen by a wandering peddler. Indeed it has been within Marner's direct locale through the entire course of the story. Towards the novel's close, Eppie and Marner stand beside the old stone pit near Marner's cottage, a stone pit that has been filled with water for as long as Marner has lived in Raveloe, but which is now being drained to provide more land for cultivation (143). Indicative of the larger processes of enclosure and improvement that had altered English class relations over the course of the latter eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a general symbol of the infusion of Enlightenment improvement on the English countryside and population, the draining of Marner's stone pit holds a similar, enlightening, significance for class relations in Raveloe. As a phenomenon that serves to complicate traditional English class relations through the influence of capital, the process of land improvement signified by the draining of the stone pit represents a phenomenon that often forced English class antagonisms to the surface but in doing so, provided a path towards future development. As the stone pit drains completely, the Raveloe villagers behold the decomposed body of Dunsey Cass and the hoard of gold he had taken from Marner so many years previously (157).

As the improvements of the nineteenth century brought change to the lives of the lower class in Raveloe, so too will the upper class be forced to contend with an increasingly mutable life. What for the lower class has been an extended process of revelation comes to the upper class as instant, percussive shocks. The draining of the stone-pit and the revelation of Dunsey's body at its bottom intercedes upon the lives of

Raveloe's upper class but changes little within the context of their social mentalité.

Inspired by the revelation of his brother's deed, Godfrey chooses to confess his former marriage to Molly and own the product of their union as the child that Marner had raised over the past sixteen years. Rather than presenting this information as the means through which substantive reflection and alteration might occur within the lives of Godfrey and his wife Nancy, their thinking turns the revelation into a means of reclaiming Eppie as their own. The manner in which the decision is forwarded is certainly telling. As Nancy states: "it's your [Godfrey's] duty to acknowledge her and provide for her; and I'll do my part by her, and pray to God Almighty to make her love me" (159). The instantaneous manner in which the idea comes to both Godfrey and Nancy depicts a depth of social habitus within the upper class that cannot be altered simply through class specific machinations of reason and experience. The upper class mode of thinking needs to be challenged directly through the employment of an alternative rationality.

As the narrative of *Silas Marner* progresses towards its denouement Eliot provides an example of the kind of direct, individual and discursive opposition that the novel prescribes as a means of class amelioration. In order to contrast differing class responses to the revelation brought about by the draining of the stone-pit, Eliot begins this section of the novel with a depiction of Marner and Eppie and their response to the return of Marner's gold. Although Marner exhibits some of his former habits, arranging the gold in little heaps as he was used to do, his conscious consideration of the gold within the changed circumstances of his life causes an acknowledgement of the alteration to his former feelings. As Marner states: "[The money] takes no hold of me now [...] I wonder if it ever could again - I doubt it might, if I lost you Eppie. I might come to think

I was forsaken again, and lose the feeling that God was good to me” (160). Thus, the bonds of human companionship have replaced Marner’s material covetousness and a true alteration of his mentality is evidenced. Through the course of his trials and privations Marner has gained true insight and a higher sensibility to the value of human community.

This change in Marner stands in stark contrast to the limited purview displayed by Godfrey and Nancy. In their haste to reclaim Eppie they arrive at Marner’s cottage late in the evening with little save an acknowledgement of the hour to assuage their imposition. To further this self-involved manner of thinking Nancy advises Godfrey to save the revelation of his paternity until a later date, if possible, because “she [Nancy] felt strongly the painful light in which Eppie must inevitably see the relation between her father and mother” (161). Within the discussions of Marner’s circumstances the novel subtly infers a disparity within the rationales of Marner and Godfrey. As they speak of Marner’s life and the context of his misfortune, Marner speaks of his social and psychological condition while Godfrey considers his comments as merely consistent with “bodily wants” (161). The medium of language breaks down in these exchanges as the lexical referents are shown to be relevant to social position. As the discussion over Eppie’s fate begins, the tenor of Godfrey’s approach belies this underlying difference in rationale. Godfrey looks upon the situation as one in which both Marner and Eppie might be led to consent through a presentation based solely upon material needs and desires. He states that Marner cannot work much longer in his life and that despite his returned gold, the small fortune cannot possibly support the two of them for very long. By relieving Marner of the responsibility of the child, Godfrey proposes that he would be doing both of them a favor. Godfrey’s argument, although based upon the material evidence of the world

arranged around him, evidences a class specific rationality and a myopic viewpoint leading to false conclusions.

In order to become meaningfully altered, the novel suggests that Godfrey's rationality must be met through the discursive presentation of an oppositional mentalite, a process that is depicted through the remainder of the discussion. To oppose the dictatorial power embodied in the customary social hierarchies represented by the two classes involved in the dispute, Marner relinquishes his paternal authority and defers the task of decision to Eppie. Eppie refuses. Although not directly effectual to Godfrey, this initial refusal of Eppie's begins the transformative process within Nancy, whose sympathy Eliot describes as being "divided" between Eppie and her husband (164). Godfrey, for his part, remains insensible, fixed upon his appointed object:

he was possessed with all-important feelings, that were to lead to a predetermined course of action which he had fixed on as the right and he was not prepared to enter with lively appreciation into other people's feelings counteracting his virtuous resolves. (164)

The larger representational attributes of Godfrey's stance are noteworthy within the context of nineteenth century social reform and the models of progression utilized by the English upper class. Based, in large part, on assumptions of upward class mobility and an adherence to upper class social standards assumed to be superior, such progressionary movements are criticized by Eliot as limited in their intellectual formulation and as such ultimately doomed to failure.

As the conversation continues, Godfrey renews the contest for Eppie with a declaration of his paternity and a profession of his duty to lead the girl into a more prosperous future. To this reiteration of paternal order Marner responds with a declaration of Godfrey's past failures and the ethical shortcomings of his legacy.

Utilizing the traditional epithets of lower class rationalization Marner declares: “[w]hen a man turns a blessing from his door, it falls to them as take it in” (164). When Godfrey tries to repent and own his mistake, Marner responds: “[y]our coming now and saying ‘I’m her father’ doesn’t alter the feelings inside us. It’s me she’s been calling her father ever since she could say the word” (164). Within these passages Eliot not only criticizes the traditional moral superiority given to the upper classes but also presents an argument for the fitness of a rationale based upon rational experience and the life conditions of the lower class. While Godfrey contends that the relationship between Marner and Eppie should not be greatly altered through the adoption of the girl, Marner contends that their shared experience forms the basis for their relationship. If that experiential base is taken away, it would “cut us [Marner and Eppie] i’ two” (165). This response is described as making Godfrey angry. As Eliot writes: “[i]t seemed to [Godfrey] that the weaver was very selfish (a judgment readily passed by those who have never tested their own power of sacrifice) to oppose what was undoubtedly for Eppie’s welfare” (165). Godfrey then extends his argument to propose that the adoption would lead to betterment for Eppie, a diatribe that reveals class specific prejudice. Godfrey contends that Marner’s own life “is uncertain” and that if left with him Eppie “may marry some low working-man” a condition that would preclude Godfrey’s ability “to make her well-off” (165). Despite his own acknowledgement that such an act will hurt Marner, through a re-exertion of traditional class based power Godfrey contends that it is his duty to “insist on taking care of his own daughter” (165). As this return of traditional patriarchal power makes itself felt within the argument Marner returns to its now familiar counter, he again defers to Eppie’s power of choice. Although she has initially shown some deference to the Cass’s

at her first refusal, such homages to class are no longer evident in this second refusal. She and Marner are shown to be united within a form of life that leads to greater social feeling:

“Eppie did not come forward and curtsy, as she had done before. She held Silas’s hand in hers, and grasped it firmly - it was a weaver’s hand, with a palm and finger-tips that were sensitive to such pressure - while she spoke with colder decision than before.” (167)

As a means to reiterate the importance of empirical conditions of existence within the process of developing such sensitivity, Marner questions Eppie on her decision “to stay among poor folks, and with poor clothes and things, when you might ha’ had everything o’ the very best” (167). In response Eppie argues that the adoption of such a life would separate her from the society of which she is a part and she asks: “[w]hat could *I* care for then?” (167).

The presentation of these arguments, arguments that run contrary to centuries of custom, tradition and received wisdom, provides the intellectual foundation upon which substantive change might occur within the upper class mentalities of Godfrey and Nancy. Eppie’s choice to remain with Marner lays the foundation for her future union with Aaron Winthrop and the productive continuation of Eliot’s working class social rationale within a new generation that seeks to combine the best of both lower and working class cultural values. The end of *Silas Marner* illustrates a social future in which the mentalities of the upper class increasingly give way to the manners and rationalities of more common forms of English existence. Rather than a cataclysmic reversal of the class order, the progress of English society is envisioned as a slow evolution based upon individual actions and intellect, a modifying of the larger culture in which working class sentiment becomes dominant. While the context of material existence might be altered through this

process, the physical contexts of English society, like the empirical conditions of existence, will remain, at least in part, constant. The real source of change comes from an increased sensitivity to universal human conditions and the nature of life dictated by the process of contending with lives that are limited, mutable, and mysterious. As individuals come to reflect an increasingly working class response to those conditions, individual perspectives and responses will necessarily change. It is this individual change in rationality that *Silas Marner* proposes will inexorably lead to substantive collective change in English culture if not also within the social order. Ultimately, if both historical and intellectual processes were allowed to continue, the manner of life for all English men and women will come to resemble that of Eppie and Aaron much more so than that of Godfrey and Nancy. In order for such a transformation to take place the development of working class social mentalities and ethics must be initially founded upon an acknowledgement of the empirical fitness and superiority of working class existence and the rightness of its responses to both hereditary culture and the coercive power of capital. While *Silas Marner* presents a complete and cogent argument for the development of such a position, it must be acknowledged that its narrative faces both literary and ideological limitations that would be tested by both the development of English society and the English novel over the course of the later nineteenth century. As such, the working class identity and ideology presented in *Silas Marner* needed to be tested within the constraints of an English society increasingly giving way to new and modern forms of life and a narrative convention that was increasingly adopting the forms and perspectives of realism. It was becoming inevitable that the forms of past must give way to the constrictions of the future, that the older forms of English lower class identity must

ameliorate to the social standards of the future and that romantic visions of the rural order must give way to the realities of an increasingly modern and urban English existence. For Eliot's social formulations to survive, they too had to adapt.

Silas Marner's approach to the development of modern English society is not a simple lament for the past. The novel doesn't present the working class as downtrodden, a means to illicit sympathy and a reassertion of England's traditional seats of social justice and power. For Eliot, like many English authors before her, the English working class was to be emulated by virtue of their superior sense of social and economic ethics. The trick of course, was to explain how those social ethics might continue to find expression within a more modern English population. The novel seeks to understand how that older sense of life and social justice might reasonably carry over into the expressions of a new age. Within *Silas Marner* Eliot argues that the modern English working class might possess a special hybrid of intellectual and social perspectives fostered by their unique inculcation into England's modern social and intellectual development. If this were indeed the case, the English working class possessed the means to foster a traditional revolutionary culture. Silas Marner, the weaver of Raveloe, can be viewed as Eliot's modern expression of the stalwart Yeoman, a revisioning of English social myth adapted to modern social thinking and conditions. Ultimately, it is possible to see the communal sense of social ethics portrayed in *Silas Marner* as an essential feature of the English lower class rationality embodied within the social logic of boxing. Although Eliot's class vision would not perpetuate into the twentieth century wholly unchanged, *Silas Marner* is certainly indicative of larger shift in narrative approaches to the working class indicative of later nineteenth century literary development. The transition from

novels of social protest to those of social character is indicative not merely of a change in literary

Silas Marner is able to present the modern working class as a possible exemplar of the social ideology that would create a distinctly “English” form of industrial capitalist society, a society that enables a transcendence of traditional social hierarchies while at the same time tempering capitalism’s consumptive individuality with traditional communal perspectives and social impulses from England’s past. This rebellious traditional social ethic, an ethic embodied within and represented by England’s working class, comes to be expressed through the culture and practice of professional boxing and the boxing novel - if not within professional sports more widely in the twentieth century. Thus, professional sports and the professional athlete become the conduit through which both identity and ethics of the traditional rebellious culture might be promoted and exemplified within a modern, capitalist society and find expression within a larger nationalized English culture. The line of intellectual and literary development from *Silas Marner* to the boxing novel is not a straight one however. The working class identity and narrative forwarded by Eliot in *Silas Marner* has many social and intellectual conundrums to negotiate before its eventual embodiment in the modern sporting character. As one moves increasingly and inexorably towards the twentieth century, both the material and cultural landscape of England changes and so does the English working class. As literary culture moves into the later decades of the nineteenth century, inquiries into the working class will increasingly center on issues of class integration and the possibilities for a persistence of Eliot’s rural working class ideal within the constrictions of the later Victorian age.

Chapter 2

From Country to City, Past to Present:

Transporting the Pastoral and “Traditional Rebellious” Culture
to the Later Victorian Era through Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*
and George Gissing’s *The Unclassed*

As illustrated by George Eliot’s *Silas Marner*, literary approaches to the working class over the course of the later nineteenth century evidence a shift in narrative focus from earlier social novels of protest to later inquiries of working class character and identity. Although figured as a shift in narrative purpose from protest to character here, the transition from earlier, industrial or social problem novels to those of later Victorian literary portrayals of the working class is generally shared by a variety of literary critics. The time, place and character of this shift in narrative temperament might differ from one critic to another, certainly, but few seem willing to deny its existence. Raymond Williams famously designates 1848 as a critical year for this shift in literary approaches to the plight of the lower classes and figures the transition as a function of both ideology and readership (“Forms of English Fiction in 1848” 150-165). In *Working Fictions*, Carolyn Lesjak contends that this narrative shift occurs within the context of political and cultural development in England related to the formation of a new, encompassing commonwealth beginning in the 1830’s and progressing to the years surrounding the Second Reform Bill (72-74). Building on the presentation afforded by Lesjak and Williams as a discourse predicated on the impossibility of residual solutions to the English class problem, an

acknowledgement that England could not return to a pre-industrial social past, the formation of a new socio-cultural hegemony becomes the goal. Novels of character participate in the creation of this new hegemonic system through a process of identity exploration and definition tied to the prospect of a full social integration of the working class. While presentations of this particular subject might vary, their cohesive interest in the working class as an object of study serves to draw the corpus together through a shared intellectual goal and allows us to view them in a different light from earlier novels depicting the class problem in wider and more systemic terms. But beyond this, we might also consider the continuing association between working class novels and the conditions of industrial labor as a narrative topic. Like Williams and Lesjak, and in contrast to Catherine Gallagher, we would here like to see narrative inquiries concerning the working class (and labor) as a narrative topic that extends well beyond the direct purview of the industrial novel and the strict depiction of labor. Just as the working class individual might nominally afford a life outside the walls of the factory, so too does the narrative of the working class life necessarily have to consider their character outside of the conditions of labor. The supposition here is also an ideological one. Before the working class might enter English society on terms beyond those of the labor, they must achieve a character through narrative that enables complete social enfranchisement. Thus, whether we see these later working class novels as contiguous with or wholly separate from a previous generation of narrative inquiries concerning the working class, the shift in narrative character and purpose remains evident.

The later Victorian literary approach to the working class can be viewed as a transition in narrative focus and ideological purpose that responds to dominant social

perspectives and material realities within later Victorian society. Within a material and socio-cultural context that had obviated the possibility of returning to the paternalistic social structures of the past, later Victorian England settled on a course of inculcating the working class into a nationalized culture designed to ease future integration of the working class into a Victorian model of English society. As such, the need to explore and understand the implications of working class integration into Victorian culture and its impact on future English society becomes necessary. Within this context, later Victorian narrative presentations of the working class evidence two prominent points of inquiry. First, it was critical to explore the intrinsic features of working class identity and culture, the manner in which their behaviors and mentalité might intrinsically differ from that of the upper and middle classes, and to assert that these features were not wholly the product of paternalist influence. But as the nineteenth century continues, those prevailing definitions of working class character would necessarily need to be applied to the predicted trajectory of English society and the prospect of working class integration into a larger, Victorian social whole. From this, a second point of literary inquiry emerges that seeks to rationalize the possibilities and implications embodied in working class social integration and constriction under the dominant social conventions of later Victorian society¹.

¹ Both Patrick Brantlinger and Carolyn Lesjak place the development of this particular concern within the context of the Second Reform Bill and the possibility for extending enfranchisement to the lower classes (Lesjak 72-73; Brantlinger 239). Generally this emphasis on culture and behavior is viewed by literary and social critics as an imposition of the middle class in response to the possible erosion of their political and cultural hegemony and in turn a suppression of custom in favor of cultivated sensibility. While elements of this reading may indeed be accurate, it seems reductive to imply that middle class hegemony was both wholly unified and inalterable - if not in some cases completely reasonable. While such interpretations might suggest that the middle classes held "culture" as the successful counter to rampant capitalism and competition, a variety of literary productions of the age seem to hold such a suggestion as dubious to say the least. It is suggested here that authors such as Eliot, Hardy, Gissing, and others, sought to find a new

As yet unable to envision alternatives for a viable English social future, works of the later nineteenth century which address the character of the English working class were forced to limit their purview to that of critique. These later Victorian inquiries into the English working class delineate not merely what might be gained but also that which might be lost within a seemingly inevitable erosion of both rurality and residual working class character as both were transformed by both modernity and Victorian social culture. And yet, it is through this process of literary inquiry and criticism that an understanding of modern working class character - and the literary boxer - comes to emerge. As narratives of the English working class enter the second half of the nineteenth century, literary approaches to the working class serve as the means to understand and articulate the implications of the loss of a rural social order and working class character. As a means of critique, the later Victorian working class novel seeks to interrogate dominant middle class models for social advancement and the tendency to alter traditional working class personas in favor of middle class social standards. Given this, Victorian visions of working class progress inevitably lead to an exhaustion of the working class identity through cultural inculcation and/or social advancement.

The limited and specific nature of Victorian visions of the rural social order and in turn their conceptions of pastoral nostalgia presented obvious difficulties when placed within the context of later Victorian material history. The inevitable expansion of modernity through the English countryside over the course of the nineteenth century increasingly obviated the presentation of the pastoral space within realist narratives.

definition of English culture that would seek to preserve elements of traditional custom within the structures of cultivated culture. This in turn suggests the further question concerning the differentiation of custom and culture along class lines. For the middle class, "culture" and cultivation might indeed be thought of in customary terms, while lower class "custom" would require cultivation within the middle class individual.

While authors such as Thackeray and Eliot might utilize historical settings as a means to transport the pastoral ideology into the present era, other authors would not only seek to depict more contemporary social settings, but also question the authenticity of the pastoral nostalgic ideal. The difficulties later Victorian authors faced when attempting to depict a pastoral ideal through the contemporary English working class led to an increasingly pessimistic attitude in their presentations. Given the material contexts of later Victorian culture and society, it was not difficult to begin theorizing about the eventual fate of the English working class in later Victorian England. Although the presence of Naturalism in later nineteenth century English literature has certainly been a contentious topic within literary criticism, those Naturalist tendencies that exist within later Victorian novels seem to stem from this basic narrative impasse between a desire for the pastoral and an increasing inability to realistically depict it. Within these novels we see a literary impetus spurred by a recognition of problems and a lack of answers, an intellectual and narrative limitation instilled by material reality and a constrictive socio-political culture. Although we might witness later nineteenth century novels and novelists that evidence an adeptness for illustrating the inherent problems within the English society through the exhaustion of the pastoral ideal, they seemingly possess little vision for future social development or the means of preserving traditional working class subjects and the pastoral ideologies they represent. Working class characters are constricted not merely by the incongruity between their own empirically derived identities and the expectations of Victorian society, but also by a deeply ingrained social tradition surrounding them that was based upon an upper class model of social progress. As a result, these novels are seemingly unable to offer either true social criticism or

socially upsetting resolutions but instead persist in a narrative tradition that seeks to resolve social issues through traditional, conservative, conventions. As such, these novels are not merely unsatisfying through their failure to offer truly revolutionary social critique, but also in their failure to completely live up to the expectations of naturalism's narrative proclivities. In the end, the novels of Gissing and Hardy share something with a strictly defined literary Naturalism in that they do little to foster hope, in large part depicting individual and social situations that are ultimately untenable. But within this process they do, at least in a backhanded manner and through their deep ideological structures, begin to lay the foundations for the creation of a working class character that might successfully negotiate the problems of both class identity and social mobility within modern English culture. Ultimately, and for the narrative vision of England's social future, the question becomes one of identifying the means through which the identity of the working class and expression of the rebellious traditional culture might be adapted to the constrictive propriety of Victorian culture and folded into the material reality of England's modern and increasingly urban society. For writers such as Thomas Hardy and George Gissing, novelists who characterize this period of working class literary development, the prospects for reconciliation seem bleak and unsatisfactory indeed.

Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and George Gissing's *The Unclassed* stand as representative examples of this period of narrative uncertainty within the larger development of the working class character. Both novels, in their own way, seek to project the romantic possibilities of Eliot's working class social formulations into literary presentations that formulate a more complete and accurate representation of the working

class personality within the context of contemporary, evolving English social forms over the course of the nineteenth century. Like Eliot, Hardy will choose a time and place seemingly distant from the loci of modernity, and yet through his narrative we see Casterbridge as a rural space not wholly removed from modernity and one that increasingly feels the constrictions of material and social progress. Gissing does Hardy one better in this respect by projecting the narrative of *The Unclassed* into contemporary Victorian urban society and addressing problems of class, society and culture as they currently existed within the context of urban realities. Through these presentations it is abundantly obvious that, like English society more generally, traditional features of the English working class persona would undergo a process of adaptation in order to find a more complete and viable expression within the context of later Victorian society. Hardy and Gissing explore the means through which a latent working class persona and its rebellious traditional potential might be shaped by modern social expectations, in effect a narrative testing of the traditional working class's potential limits within the constrictions of modern, Victorian social and material standards. Thus, the pastoral nostalgic working class persona is transported through time and space into the context of a rapidly changing rural England and a rapidly urbanizing English social context. Both novels delineate the aspects of working class identity that might be lost in the transformation from rural past to urban future and, given this loss, what kind of working class persona might persist into a modern English society dictated by the material conditions of modernity and the social standards of the Victorian middle class. The inquiry into assimilation undertaken by Hardy and Gissing can be witnessed most obviously in the construction of their respective narratives and the manner in which those narratives reflect the social and

material realities of later nineteenth century England. Through their narratives, each author seeks to address the limitations of *Silas Marner's* romantic social vision by adapting its ideology to more accurate and complete representations of English life in the later Victorian era, specifically within the context of the spread of modernity and national culture through the English geography and culture. Further, each narrative acknowledges increasingly universalized modern social and cultural assumptions that come to surround their characters and limit the possibilities for the perpetuation of authentic working class ideological representation and identity expression. In terms of setting and narrative geography, both authors present a continuing evolution of the larger cultural dialog of pastoral nostalgia, a process through which the pastoral and its social ideology is increasingly exhausted within the contexts of modern English society.

Although one might simply compare the temporal settings of each of these novels, Eliot (1803), Hardy (1832), Gissing (1880's), to see a progression towards depictions of a more contemporary Victorian society, it is instructive to consider other obvious features of the narrative setting that are emblematic of this overall shift to more modern narrative depictions. Here a consideration of simple geography can be instructive. Although both Eliot and Hardy are known for their historicized presentations of life in the English countryside, Hardy's rural geography takes on a different character from that of Eliot's Raveloe. Hardy is perhaps most well-known for his creation of Wessex, a fictionalized geography of south England that forms the backdrop for *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and several other novels. Generally the invention of Wessex would assume a ruralist tendency within Hardy's literary sensibility by strict definition but such an appellation would

diminish the ideological complexity of Hardy's geographic invention². Although it might be easy to mistake Hardy's Wessex as a reformulation of pastoral nostalgia and a celebration of localized culture, Hardy's fictive geography and the social contexts surrounding his depictions of local space serve to call such assumptions into question. Hardy scholar Ralph Pite contends that readings of Hardy's Wessex have traditionally accentuated a misreading of Hardy's geography dependent upon an association of Hardy's geographic proclivities with a latent nineteenth century English geographic ideology which emphasized local character and custom, a perspective that tied behaviors to the extant conditions of local experience. Indeed, such a perspective might be construed as a constitutive element of pastoral nostalgia. Pite argues that these assumptions have served to brand Hardy's best known fiction as an embodiment of a residual socio-geographic tradition that accentuated a ruralist perspective and linked social character and praxis to specifics of place (2-3, 6). In effect this viewpoint might be seen as an extension or refinement of older country and city dichotomies and a furtherance of the basic recognition of geographic circumstance as contingent within the formulation of social and individual character.

But Pite effectively argues that Hardy's Wessex represents a more complex and overtly evolutionary conception of social geography than that evinced by conservative visions of England's agricultural past or simplistic expressions of pastoral nostalgia³. Pite suggests that Hardy's Wessex should be viewed as an expression of an emergent and expansive geographic understanding that accentuates the interplay between local and

² Raymond Williams would, of course, establish a reading of Hardy's Wessex that accentuated his narratives as belonging "very much to a continuing world" and countered their views of a previous generation who sought to characterize his novels as examples of regional or country writing (197-198).

³ Or, as Pite would contend, Raymond Williams' conception of Wessex as an example of neo-pastoralism (10)

universal, a vision that seeks integration rather than seclusion. Citing the work of later nineteenth century English geographer Archibald Geikie, Pite argues that Hardy's geography should be viewed as a product of liberal geographic thinking which accentuates the interconnectedness of geographic part to whole and associates expansion of geographic perspective with the cultivation of expansive, and unifying, human experience (5-9). For Geikie the process of contemplating the local is used to stimulate thinking and supposition concerning the whole, a notion of geography which seeks not merely to recognize the inherently unique character of the specific, but also to unify the local with the regional, the regional with the national, the national with the universal through their shared commonalities. Thus, while we might acknowledge the local and specific within these formulations, they become examples of universalizing notions that might be seen broadly across human experience and in varied iterations. As Pite contends, these constructions are employed by Hardy to offset ruralist assumptions within his audience and replace them with an alternative thinking concerning geography, culture, and interconnectedness (16). Ultimately this is the kind of thinking that lays the foundations for an increasingly cohesive and culturally diverse social vision that might counter the prevailing notions of Hardy's later nineteenth century audience. As Pite contends:

Hardy's readers employed a set of ruralist assumptions, which derived from the Romantic picturesque and were pervasive in mid-century. These assumptions rendered the countryside and its people idyllic or barbaric according to their degree of cultivation. Overall, therefore, Hardy's writing of Wessex seeks to give a sense of region which avoids becoming regionalist and seeks to present the rural without making it ruralist. His work corresponds to the geography of the 1870's and 1880's, when most of his novels were written (8)

By acknowledging and confronting these geographic assumptions in his audience, Hardy's depiction of rural English society invites the inevitability of a complex

acknowledgement of social assumptions in turn. While Hardy seems to accept the inevitability of loss within the process of social and geographic integration, he invites his audience to question what might be both lost and gained within such a transformation. It is that process of questioning that will ultimately develop the intellectual perspective necessary to envision an integration that might successfully retain intrinsic qualities of the working class persona.

While we might continue to see features of pastoral romance in Hardy's construction of Wessex, it is clear that he utilizes these constructions as a point of critique rather than an ideology in and of themselves. In Hardy's *Casterbridge*, working class identity and attendant ideology will emerge as a conflict of old and new, a battle between a pre-modern rural character and that of the "new" English working class man. Ultimately it is a contest that signals the exhaustion of the rural ideal and the resigned assumption of a new working class identity molded by the necessities of a future, industrialized, English society and the cultural proclivities of the English middle class. Hardy's novel seems to present the persistence of traditional working class character as an impossibility, but one whose failure in narrative works to inspire a reasoned interrogation of England's proposed social future. Although Hardy would acknowledge the necessity of some alteration within the rural English lower classes, his novel subtly argues that English society would be forever worse off for losing that intrinsically lower class mentalité and social perspective.

If the modern and urban is merely encroaching into Hardy's rural world of *Casterbridge*, Gissing's predominant settings evidence the possibility for its eventual demise. Set predominantly in the modern political and cultural heart of England,

Gissing's narratives of London's urban poor further the process of regularizing working class character to the mandates of a national culture that will become more universally expressed in England as the nineteenth century draws to a close. Within *The Unclassed*, as well as Gissing's larger literary oeuvre, it is possible to witness the continued influence of pastoral nostalgia through the author's use of the city/country dichotomy but the urban sphere dominates the author's narrative and ideological perspective. Lewis D. Moore describes this interplay between country and city in many of Gissing's fictions as a continued homage to the value of rural ideologies within the context of an England in which the urban sphere has become increasingly dominant. As Moore states: "...Gissing draws positive cultural and physical portraits of rural environments, but in most instances the modern city ultimately dominates, determining the destinies of people and societies" (146). Within Gissing's larger narrative development, Moore argues further that the author's perspective of the city shows a tendency towards development and change - the novels of the 1880's depicting the city "destroying ... people's lives" while later novels of the 1890's and 1900's show the urban sphere as "a place of energy and life" (153). Although *The Unclassed* is only the second of Gissing's novels and despite Moore's differentiation between Gissing's early depictions of the metropolis and those found within his later works, it is possible to see this dichotomous presentation of the city within an early work such as *The Unclassed*. Gissing's novel portrays a London that seems to be caught between these two perspectives, a portrayal of the metropolis similar in many respects to Hardy's Wessex in that it seeks to combine two seemingly contradictory geographic characters. *The Unclassed* melds the classed social spaces of London's East and West Ends by focusing attention on the loci of shared space

represented by London's central areas - Charing Cross, Leicester Square and Oxford Street - and points of commerce where the classes come together. In *The Unclassed*, Gissing's working class characters occupy and move between several geographic locations in London and through that process contact social entities and ideologies that lie outside of localized class experience. Further, the novel centers much of its narrative on London's urban slums, a place where the classes come together through the cooperative commercial relationships of owner/renter exchange. Like *Silas Marner*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Unclassed* attempts to place the English working class into extended dialog with the social milieu that surrounds it, placing its identity and ethics into points of contestation with those of other English social mentalités. London, like the wider English culture of the later nineteenth century, increasingly offers greater opportunities for both inter-class contact and inter-class movement, a social space in which identities are potentially more fluid, geographic separation is less vast, and opportunity for interaction more likely. This general trajectory from rural to urban settings mirrors in many ways the modernizing tendencies in professional boxing's movement to legitimacy. Although the sport had always maintained a strong connection to London and England's other urban settings, for much of its history the sport had sought to wage major bouts in the English countryside - an obvious effort to achieve the rarefied competitive space of the pastoral ideal. Interestingly, boxing would have to completely embrace the urban sphere and contend with its potentially corrupting influences before it could emerge as a legal practice. Thus, the competitive model of boxing, like the identity of the working class subjects it represents, proved to be sufficiently able to change basic forms without losing its intrinsic identity of ideological utility.

When compared to *Silas Marner*, it is possible to argue that the increasing malleability of class based identities evidenced in *The Unclassed* is mirrored in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* - although both novels tend to establish limits to the possibilities for class transgression and identity change. Both *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Unclassed* intuit limited possibilities for working class identity, an identity that is inexorably shaped by the cultural and socio-economic position from which it arises and is inevitably constricted by the social forces surrounding it. What is interesting, however, is the manner in which these novels resist what we might consider traditional Naturalist resolutions, an expression of the incompleteness of naturalism within predominant English literary expression. Constance D. Harsh provides a reading of *The Unclassed* that we might further carry over, at least in a limited manner, to the narrative proclivities found within *The Mayor of Casterbridge*:

This novel [*The Unclassed*] explores a world in which the conventional hierarchies of English society and thought have proved inadequate, and yet in which the systems that replace them cannot support a coherent narrative. Gissing's solution to his dilemma exemplifies the contradictions English writers faced - he can reach a conclusion only by returning to a discredited traditional scheme. The naturalist impulse proves impossible to reconcile with English fictional exigencies (912).

Although both *The Unclassed*, and to a lesser degree *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, might include socially transgressive working class personalities within their narratives, within both novels the social trajectories of working class personalities are subsumed by the literary expectations of the traditional English cultural milieu. Rather than authentic working class social transgression, each novel presents a resolution that promotes either a return to traditional socio-cultural hierarchies, what ultimately proves to represent the exhaustion of rebellious traditional working class personalities in favor of new, less threatening, identity models.

Although both Hardy and Gissing treat their working class characters with sympathy and a certain sense of celebration for the values of traditional lower class ideologies, each author presents working class identity not as a cohesive and persistent cultural personality but rather as a set of alternative options offered by the realities of an evolutionary English society. Through a dichotomous collection of working class personas, both narratives center on pairings of working class characters who exhibit identities from either side of the socio-temporal divide - on one side we have characters representative of older rustic/barbaric character and on the other those evocative of the new, cultured civilization embodied within Victorian visions of progress. In the case of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the barbaric/civilized dichotomy is represented by Michael Henchard and Donald Farfrae while for *The Unclassed* the pairing is found in Ida Starr and Osmond Waymark. These character pairings serve to both acknowledge a past authentic character of the English underclass and at the same time propose personalities that might represent a model for future class development. Interestingly, the barbaric working class character manifests itself in manners that are evocative of both the formulations of boxing and E.P. Thompson's conception of a rebellious traditional culture and are characterized by actions analogous to behavior patterns associated with both boxing and rebellious traditional culture.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is famously labeled by its author as a "novel of character" and the novel begins with an extended presentation of Michael Henchard's character and his means of social transformation, a relation of experience which successfully represents not merely Henchard's past and future, but his utilization of rebellious traditional means of effecting limited social transcendence. The novel opens

with a presentation of Henchard's original identity and social positioning, an oddly domestic scene of the Henchard family moving across the countryside from one site of agricultural labor to another. Within these descriptions Hardy evokes a Naturalistic tendency of character definition through description of accoutrement that aligns Henchard with a rustic working class identity. Through this presentation Hardy establishes Henchard not as a peasant but rather a skilled agricultural laborer with aspirations of social mobility. As Hardy writes:

[Henchard] wore a short jacket of brown corduroy, newer than the remainder of his suit, which was a fustian waistcoat with white horn buttons, breeches of the same, tanned leggings, and a straw hat overlaid with black glazed canvas. At his back he carried by a looped strap a rush basket, from which protruded at one end the crutch of a hay-knife, a wimble for hay-bonds being also visible in the aperture. His measured springless walk was the walk of the skilled countryman as distinct from the desultory shambling of the general labourer; while in the turn and plant of each foot there was, further a dogged and cynical indifference, personal to himself, showing itself even in the regularly interchanging fustian folds, now in the left leg, now in the right, as he paced along. (5-6)

Henchard is thus portrayed as a man perhaps at odds with his natural station in life, a man who evokes both sides of the transformative divide and whose indifference for his natural station will instill a desire for betterment. That transcendent character is further evinced through Hardy's descriptions of Henchard's family, a contingency that effectively limits his social horizons:

[The family] walked side by side in such a way as to suggest afar off the low, easy, confidential chat of people full of reciprocity; but on closer view it could be discerned that the man was reading, or pretending to read, a ballad sheet which he kept before his eyes with some difficulty by the hand that was passed through the basket strap. Whether this apparent cause were the real cause, or whether it were an assumed one to escape an intercourse that would have been irksome to him, nobody but himself could have said precisely; (6)

Within these descriptions Hardy begins a familiar and constant theme within *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, not merely as it concerns Henchard, but also the character of individuals

more generally. The depiction of Henchard is one that seems to provide an increasingly accurate presentation of the family's true nature only through increasing detail and proximity. In some sense the family represents what one might see from afar, and yet also represents something slightly altered upon closer inspection, a depth of character that precludes simple categorization. That Henchard is a skilled agricultural worker is without question, but similarly his apparent distaste for that life and desire for something better is equally evident. If Henchard is to go on to become the titular mayor of Casterbridge, he must reconcile this contentious identity and necessarily leave something behind, an identity that must be relinquished in order to satisfy another alternative social role. In effect he must reconcile the difference in identity signification that his appearance and demeanor represent. As a means to categorize this identity Hardy employs a description of Henchard's wife:

The chief - almost the only - attraction of the young woman's face was its mobility. When she looked down sideways to the girl she became pretty, and even handsome, particularly that in the action her features caught slantwise the rays of the strongly coloured sun, which made transparencies of her eyelids and nostrils, and set fire on her lips. When she plodded on in the shade of the hedge, silently thinking, she had the hard, half-apatetic expression of one who deems anything possible at the hands of Time and Chance, except, perhaps, fair play. The first phase was the work of Nature, the second probably of civilization (7).

Thus we might begin to see in Hardy's presentation of the Henchard family a characterization of that pre-agrarian mentality celebrated by Eliot in *Silas Marner*, a perspective that acknowledges the perilous nature of life and desires the kind of ethics instilled by wider expression of rebellious traditional culture. Henchard, for his own part, seems desirous of a means of escape, a desire that might be merely an acknowledgement of the changing nature of life surrounding him and the increasing possibility for achieving a more remunerative social position.

The means for Henchard's escape and the opportunity to realize a transcendent identity is precipitated by the family's arrival at Hardy's fictional village of Weydon-Friars, a site which signals the transformative nature of English social life and provides the means for Henchard's own transformation. It is at the Waydon fair that Henchard sells his wife and child thus opening the possibilities for a new life. Drawn from the contemporary culture of England in the nineteenth century, there is a direct correlation between the action of wife-selling and the traditional rebellious culture defined by E.P. Thompson. For Thompson the practice of wife-selling was in and of itself a symbol of the alternative traditional culture evinced by the English lower classes through the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a culture that ran concurrent to but separate from that of polite English culture and social authority. For Hardy the wife-sale becomes the means to signify Henchard's culture of origin, his identity, and his basic character, a character that through the course of the novel Henchard attempts (and ultimately fails) to transcend. The instance of selling his wife becomes not merely a means to initially achieve this end, but a larger narrative symbol of the ultimate futility of his process of transformation. Michael J. Franklin offers a useful reading of the Wessex fair setting as means to see Henchard's wife-sale as an instance of social transformation which incorporates aspects of both England's past and its supposed future:

[...] If Weydon tallied with Weyhill, the date was Michaelmas, specifically Old Michaelmas Day (October 10), a 'moving day' when farmhands would change employment. The harvest was more or less complete, and this fair was being held on one of the quarter days of the English business year; it announced a new cycle of farming, a time of rendering up accounts and of new beginnings... (426-427).

Although Franklin tends to misinterpret the wife-sale as an instance of the misapplication of market ideologies rather than an expression of rebellious traditional culture, his readings of the fair as a site of transformative energies and impulses nonetheless focuses

our attention on Hardy's narrative employment of the wife-sale as a means through which Henchard initiates his process of social transformation and limited social transcendence. Franklin's reading of the wife-sale as a misapplication tends to oversimplify Hardy's portrayal of Henchard and his limitations. Henchard is certainly forwarded by Hardy as a personality evocative of the past, and Hardy's limited employment of Naturalist tendencies within the construction of Henchard intuit that his persona will necessarily be precluded from persistence, but such a reading tends to turn the narrative into a personal rather than systemic critique. That Henchard is a flawed character is without question, but Henchard's limitations are not merely his own but also those that he shares with a larger, residual working class culture. Hardy's treatment of Henchard's working class character is not without sympathy and a continued misgiving concerning the character's passing from larger English society. In effect Hardy's novel becomes a means of acknowledging both the problems of a latent working class character and also the limitations of English society's predominant Victorian model for future working class socio-cultural identity development.

If Hardy exhibits a guarded sympathy for Henchard's rough and tumble working class character, we might see a more pronounced expression of sympathy within the character portrayals of Gissing's *The Unclassed*. Despite this heightened sense of sympathy, the urban constrictions which surround Gissing's working class characters serve to punish their transgressive tendencies more heavily than Hardy's rural culture. While Henchard gains a means for social betterment through the sale of his wife, a transgressive action that might be successfully hidden, at least for a time, the principle working class characters of Gissing's *The Unclassed* cannot so easily escape the social

backlash brought about by their rebellious energies. For both Ida Starr and Osmond Waymark this quality of rebellion takes on a more sinister character by showing itself through violence and within the context of education and the school - a site of cultivated civility and inculcation.

The instance of violence through which the audience of *The Unclassed* is first introduced to Ida Starr comes in stark contrast to the ordered civility of the classroom and the general tenor of the school as a site for the cultural and social inculcation of working class children in Lisson Grove, north-central London (3). If violence is the first means through which Ida Starr's character is evidenced, the circumstances surrounding the instance provide a deep and varied sense of Ida's identity similar in many respects to the portrait of Michael Henchard drawn by Thomas Hardy. Ida's dispute has been precipitated by efforts to protect the integrity of the classroom and the value of her own talents by preventing another girl from cheating from her work (4-5). In response to Ida's refusal to allow her classmate to cheat, the antagonist has insulted Ida's mother by calling her a prostitute; as a response to this insult Ida, strikes the girl with a writing slate (5). The sense of Ida's character that emerges from this episode is conflicted, at once laudatory and condemning. We might celebrate her integrity and desire to protect her family but also question her lack of self-control and propensity for extreme violence. These qualities in addition to a later revelation that Ida's mother is indeed a prostitute are given as grounds to remove her from school.

Between Ida and Henchard it is possible to witness the emergence of a pattern that seems to reflect larger English cultural responses to both the working class and pastoral nostalgia in the later Victorian era. Like the general unease with which England seemed

to accept the inevitability of the spread of modernity, the celebration of the past was also undertaken with a sense of reserve. The rural order and the latent identity of the working class represented character traits that were both good and bad, both worthy of endurance and in need of evolution. The possibilities for transformation seemed limited in the sense that they represented both a relinquishing of the barbarity of the past for an increasingly civilized future, but that civilizing process also seemed capable of removing the ethics, energies, and rebellious nature that were viewed as desirable for a wider English society. Thus we might begin to see the larger character milieu offered by Hardy and Gissing as a means to acknowledge both sides of this identity conundrum. It was clear that the unfinished character of the traditional English working class needed to be transformed in order to find social and material viability within the modern, Victorian society of England, but the alternatives that were most readily available seemed rife with problems as well.

When looking for alternatives to envision the forward progress of the English working class we must turn to the alternative visions of working class characters presented by both *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Unclassed*, working class characters who unlike Henchard and Ida Starr evoke the future rather than the past in their initial characterizations. In the case of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* this character role is fulfilled by Scotsman Donald Farfrae. Farfrae represents a vision of the new working class man, cultivated, educated, and embodying a transgressive vitality that eschews the confrontational impulses embodied by Henchard or Ida Starr. Initially it seems questionable that England might find a place for this new kind of working class persona and Farfrae, at least in his first meeting with Henchard, voices an intention of leaving

England for America and a new social system better able to accommodate and reward his latent energies and talents (65). Hardy's novel suggests that there might be both a place and a use for this personality however. For Henchard this use comes in the form of an ability to make spoiled grain useful again, a technical wizardry in and of itself, but for Henchard evidence of a wider range of talents that might be made use of in Henchard's business endeavors (67-69). Thus, Henchard is able to influence Farfrae to stay in England and join him in his corn factoring business, what ultimately proves to be an uneasy alliance between old and new characters within the larger milieu of working class identities. Both characters possess a common energy and desire for social and economic advancement, and yet that energy is structured through differing characters evocative of both old and new. The manner in which those energies manifest themselves and the possibility for persistence within the emerging modern society of Casterbridge comes to be the main source of conflict.

For *The Unclassed*, Donald Farfrae's role as alternative working class personality is assumed by Osmond Waymark, a working class figure who, like Farfrae, enters the narrative in with a character already formed. Like Farfrae, Waymark too serves as an acknowledgement of the limitations of Victorian society to truly accommodate the transcendent working class personality. Although Waymark might contain the cultural and intellectual capacities of the English upper class, his identity and social sympathies have been shaped by a working class perspective resulting in a desultory persona that strives for a means of expression. Through the course of Waymark's extended introduction, these latent energies find expression in a manner similar to those of Ida Starr, an instance of violence in the classroom. Waymark is a teacher in a school

marketed towards the aspirations of the parents of upper-middle class children⁴. As he enters the narrative Waymark is initially portrayed within the socio-economic and ideological constructions of the profession, a position which entails economic dispossession and demands subservience to headmaster, students, and parents⁵. The turning point in Waymark's teaching career comes through an instance in which two disagreeable students, the children of his headmaster, are abusing a young teacher. Waymark intercedes and punishes the children with several lashes from a broken classroom pointer (76-77). This application of corporal punishment is admonished by the school's administration as not merely an instance of violence directed at their own children, but also as a vestige of a former species of education that the school has attempted to leave in the past. Thus, like Ida Starr, we might begin to see Waymark's actions as a symbolic application of rebellious traditional energies, a use of past social forms to instill and support the perpetuation of civility and the strictures of fair play. Just as with Ida Starr, it is not the sentiment that comes into question but rather the prudence of the actions that becomes the source of character critique. Ultimately Waymark's fortunes are no different than those of Ida Starr's; he loses his position at the school and

⁴ Gissing's initial description of the school is worth note for its rather peculiar presentation. Located in Brixton, the surrounding neighborhood provides a character of middle class respectability and offers "at the choice of parents or guardians, either the solid foundation desirable for those youths predestined to a commercial career, or the more liberal training adapted to minds of a professional bias." And yet, Gissing's presentation must be read as tongue-in-cheek at best. The school's "spacious playground and gymnasium" are alternately described as "a tolerable back-yard" and "a disused coach-house" and its curriculum given a mysterious air by the admission that further information concerning its composition might be afforded by "applying to the headmaster"(55). Thus, while the school clearly aspires to the easy legitimacy of its surroundings, it stands, nonetheless, on shaky ground near the precipice of disrepute.

⁵ Like the school in which he teaches, Osmond Waymark's professional persona is placed on the margins of legitimacy, although less so. His B.A. is "bona fide" but of "London University" rather than Oxford or Cambridge (56). This contrast between teacher and school solidifies our impressions of an aspirational institution and aspirational instructor, yet also two means to reach the same end. Clearly Waymark's persona comes off as more capable and desirable than that of his institution. Ultimately, of course, it is this incongruity of personality that eventually leads to Waymark's departure.

must look for other means of self-support. Interestingly, this is a point where it is possible to see a direct connection with the development of the boxing novel and one of the key conundrums that the narrative must overcome in order to find an acceptable outlet for the energies and ideologies contained within its social formulations. The power and ability of the boxer to lash out at injustice is without question, but like Waymark and Ida Starr, the unreasoned or inappropriate application of force can cause more harm than good. Thus, the energy of the working class subject or boxer must be restrained. The question that remains is whether or not that restraint will diminish either their social energy or character.

Through the course of both *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Unclassed* the pairing of working class identities between Henchard and Farfrae, Starr and Waymark, provide the means to see the implications of a complete repression of working class energies and social perspectives. The paired characters in each narrative provide depictions of both sides of this divide. Through the narratives these characters work to depict both confluence and divergence of these two sides of working class identity and personality, points at which they come together in cooperative endeavor but also points of conflict. The fact that these characters are composed as separate entities reflects each author's sense of their incompatibility and inability to exist within the same identity, but through the points of cooperation and conflict it is possible to theorize an identity that might bring both sides of the working class persona together. Additionally it becomes possible to acknowledge what might be lost in such an endeavor.

The relationship between Farfrae and Henchard initially offers a complementary vision of the working class persona as each provides valuable contributions to the

operations of Henchard's corn factoring business. Henchard's vitality and audacity have of course played a significant role in his development as both businessman and member of the local community. As his business has prospered he has also gained greater social status, but that business has also reached a point where it is no longer viable within the transitional culture in which it exists. Henchard develops his business relationships and transactions on an older traditional model and initially it is Farfrae's insistence upon the institution of contacts and paper records that helps to instill the business with a more modern character. Henchard is at first reluctant to permit such an alteration to his business dealings, but with the assurance of greater economic benefit as an incentive, he begins modernizing his business. As one of the Casterbridge locals notes concerning this transformation:

Where would his business be if it were not for this young fellow? 'Twas verily Fortune sent him to Henchard. His accounts were like a bramblewood when Mr. Farfrae came. He used to reckon his sacks by chalk strokes all in a row like garden-palings, measure his ricks by stretching with his arms, weight his trusses by a lift, judge his hay by a chaw, and settle the price with a curse. But now this accomplished young man does it all by ciphering and mensuration. Then the wheat - that sometimes used to taste so strong o' mice when made into bread that people could fairly tell the breed - Farfrae has a plan for purifying, so that nobody would dream the smallest four-legged beast had walked over it once. O yes, everybody is full of him, and the care Mr. Henchard has to keep him, to be sure!
(146)

But Henchard is quick to recognize the threat that Farfrae represents to his own success and social position: "If [Henchard does keep Farfrae], he'll [Henchard] be honeycombed clean out of all the character and standing that he's built up in these eighteen year!" (146). And this of course is what eventually happens. Through a series of disputes Henchard and Farfrae eventually sever their professional and social relationships and both the disputes themselves and the outcome of their separation provide the means to

further develop Hardy's extended understanding concerning working class identity and its development within modern English society.

To illustrate the development of Henchard and Farfrae's relationship, critic J.B. Thompson points to a scene that marks an initial point of dissolution, a disagreement over how to handle the behavior of one of Henchard's employees "Poor Abel" Whittle, who Henchard forces to go to work without his pants to teach him a lesson in punctuality (83). Thompson points our attention to Hardy's manner of using this scene to represent the larger scope of Henchard and Farfrae's relationship: "Hardy's telling metaphor for this process is that 'the seed that was to lift the foundation' of their rugged manly friendship was 'at that moment taking root in a chink of its structure'" (83). As Thompson goes on to explain, the scene concerning Abel Whittle is one that invites, in a certain respect, a simplified reading in which Farfrae seems to represent a literary and social hero, and yet closer examination suggests that Hardy is forwarding Henchard's approach to the problem as one that should be understood and emulated. As Thompson states: "Indeed the author's depiction of [the conflict] subtly evokes a deep sympathy for the supposedly cruel bully [Henchard] and a lack of sympathy for the two seeming innocents" (83). Thompson convincingly argues that Henchard's approach to Whittle and his punishment for the worker's lateness are appropriate given the larger circumstances surrounding the situation. Henchard has shown himself to be a patient and forgiving employer having put up with Whittle's tardiness for an extended period and having given him several chances to correct the behavior. Within the extended transactions between Henchard and Whittle, the latter has shown himself to be quite adept at stirring the feelings of his fellow workers in his own favor and against his employer through

manipulation. Rather than an unfeeling autocrat, Henchard's unwillingness to allow Whittle to speak evidences a character beholden to truth and justice established through an extended knowledge of both events and characters. Farfrae's reaction to the situation is typified as one of both ignorance and susceptibility to Whittle's powers of "emotional blackmail" (84). Without respect to Henchard's wishes or to the status of the job or other workers, Farfrae sends Whittle home to retrieve his pants lest he "[has his] death standing there" as a result of Henchard's "simple foolishness" (Hardy 136). As Thompson goes on to argue, Farfrae's behavior shows not merely a naivety, but also a contradiction in the application of sympathy. Although evocative of a sympathy to Whittle's situation, Farfrae shows little thought or consideration for Henchard's position or the truth of the situation into which he had entered. Farfrae learns only later that Henchard has shown great care for Whittle and his family, and never seems to consider that his fears concerning Whittle's humiliation have caused him to humiliate Henchard instead (84). Following the dispute over Whittle, Henchard's employees begin to voice opinions that they would prefer Farfrae as their boss over Henchard, an outcome that one might argue Farfrae has manipulated from Henchard as effectively as Whittle has manipulated Farfrae. The social ideologies of Farfrae and Whittle, in a certain sense, have become conflated in the representation. What emerges through this episode is a conflicted perspective, one that perhaps recognizes the rashness of Henchard's actions and yet understands their rationality. In turn while we might indeed agree with Farfrae in his condemnation of Henchard's actions we cannot ignore his own propensity to be undermined and in turn to undermine through manipulation and ignorance. At the end it is difficult to ascertain if, as a society, we would rather have a load of Henchards or

Whittle/Farfraes with which to contend. For Thompson it would seem that Hardy argues the former working class persona is more desirable and that Henchard's approach to Whittle, if abusive, is at least founded on a true understanding of the situation.

Although Farfrae indeed succeeds in turning both Henchard's workers and the larger population of Casterbridge in his own favor, it is again an oversimplification to reduce this aspect of the narrative to a simple statement of approbation on the part of the novel's author. Henchard is most certainly a flawed character, but it is not his flaws that single-handedly cause his demise. It is also a responsibility that falls on the rest of English society - particularly that represented by the upwardly mobile townspeople of Casterbridge - and their inability to rationalize an alternative personality that maintains Henchard's energy and rationality while tempering his rough exterior. In their desire for the new, Hardy seems to suggest that Casterbridge has traded the past for a decidedly less appealing future.

If the dangers of completely subsuming the past in a drive for the future have not been amply illustrated within *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, it is possible to see a parallel narrative approach to this problem in Gissing's *The Unclassed*. Whereas both Henchard and Ida Starr exhibit a course of development through the narratives, a movement through social positions and mentalities, both Farfrae and Waymark enter the narrative as fully realized identities that show only limited progress or development. While both are clearly presented as members of the working class, both are also representative of a new, modern working class character that has been completely removed from the past. As such, both Farfrae and Waymark attempt various means of creating a persona and position in society. While both might exhibit shades of rebellion, their culture is neither

rebellious traditional or barbaric; neither character evokes anything of the pre-modern lower classes in their manner or ideology. For Farfrae this proves to be beneficial, but then he is trying to enter middle class English society on their own terms. Farfrae's trajectory through the society of Casterbridge takes a traditional path, in essence taking the place of Henchard as first corn merchant, then local dignitary. Perhaps the only aspect of Farfrae's life that remains uncertain is the status of his relationships with others. With Henchard there is a protracted competition and with his love life two possible options for matrimony - Henchard's former mistress and later his estranged daughter. What simplifies the process for Farfrae is his lack of complex ideological motivation. Farfrae is a self-interested capitalist and therefore fits into emergent English society quite easily. For a character like Osmond Waymark, a character who continues to exhibit rebellious and ethically sound ideological tendencies, however, the complete break from the past proves as difficult to overcome as the prospect of entering the society of the future.

Osmond Waymark is perhaps best understood as an instance of the Schopenhauerian artist, an intellectually and ideologically developed character who finds life in human society incompatible with artistic vision and idealistic goals (Francis 58-59). His rebellious nature is evidenced not merely through his initial conflict with authority but also his literary aspirations of writing a novel in the naturalistic vein. Both his initial rebellion and artistic aspirations tend to marginalize him further. Placed into a position where he cannot support himself through his artistic production, Waymark makes the decision to enter Victorian capitalist society as an agent provocateur and takes a position as a rent collector for one of the novel's secondary characters Abraham Woodstock (97). It is through this position that Waymark comes into contact with what

we might consider a character analogous to Abel Whittle, Gissing's hobo-esque urban denizen, Slimy. While Slimy and Abel Whittle might evidence obvious differences in their individual persona and character construction, both occupy similar positions within the novels, objects of common sympathy for the modern working class character - Waymark and Farfrae. Slimy is an example of the downtrodden working class which Waymark will ostensibly depict in his novels and for which those novels will eventually argue. Variousy described as "something a philanthropist might perhaps have had the courage to claim as human being" and looking "much like a wild beast," Slimy is evocative of that barbaric nature of the working class transported from the countryside to the urban sphere (66, 100). An itinerant junk salesman, tinkerer, and lay-about, Slimy becomes the object of Waymark's rent collection, variously avoiding Waymark and prevailing on his sympathy for forbearance. In the course of his duties Waymark comes to view his duties as rent collector and his proximity to individuals like Slimy as "rich material...stored up for future use" in his literary portrayals (229). It is Slimy's plight that Waymark seeks to address through artistic representation and from which Waymark himself has ostensibly escaped.

Despite Waymark's artistic interest in individuals like Slimy, it is clear from both his social position and developed culture that Waymark's working class identity is something different altogether. Slimy does not see Waymark as working class but merely the individual who comes to collect his rent, another agent of the larger social system which seeks to malign and exploit him. Waymark might feel a certain level of sympathy for Slimy, but sees within him a Caliban-esque character that fills him with loathing (229). Slimy's animalism and rebellious nature show themselves in their full power one

day as Waymark comes to collect rent. Slimy has conspired to rob Waymark of his collected rents and “pay...no more rent, nor yet [to] no one else, maybe” because he has become “tired o’ payin’ rent” (230). Rent, in this sense, is not merely a common source of lower class resentment and means of upper class exploitation, but also carries a residual character from the annals of English social history that marks the refusal to pay rent as a point of special significance. Within Slimy’s refusal we might not only see the tendencies of open class rebellion, but also the protracted modern relationships of ownership and tenancy that make such refusals possible. Slimy’s individual instance of rebellion may evidence the true danger evident in his lower class character, but so too does Waymark evidence the true weakness of his own upper class pretensions. Rather than struggle with Slimy, a wretched, sickened, individual, Waymark weakly concedes to be tied on the floor and to be relieved of his collected monies. As Gissing describes, it was “[v]ain to think of grappling with the man [Slimy] whose strength Waymark knew to be extraordinary. For a moment, the shock of alarm had deprived him of thought and power of movement...” (231). Waymark “mentally agreed that it was” better to lie down than be knocked down by Slimy’s hand. Gissing contends that Waymark’s “behavior might seem cowardly, but - to say nothing of the loathsomeness of a wrestle with Slimy - he knew very well that any struggle, or a shout for help, would mean his death” (231). Thus, Waymark not only becomes a victim of the very forces that he might ideologically align himself with but his actions bespeak a weakness of body and character commensurate with an identity that identifies itself more completely with the middle or upper classes than that of his supposed working class brethren. While Slimy may not have Waymark’s cultural refinement, Waymark has lost something of the latent energy

and power associated with his own working class identity. In Gissing's anthropology of class these two characteristics seem mutually exclusive.

If we are to begin to see both Waymark and Donald Farfrae for their weaknesses, we must of course not take this as a marker of the supposed superiority of their working class doubles in Michael Henchard or Ida Starr. The fortunes of Henchard and Starr will illustrate problems with the residual working class persona as well. While Waymark and Farfrae might not exhibit a traditional working class perspective which allows them to act rationally, vitally or ethically within social situations, both Ida Starr and Henchard lack the refinement of character which might make their own vitality and social perspectives acceptable within the wider context of English society. Indeed, for both Henchard and Ida, it is their energy and dogged adherence to fair play which prove to be their initial undoing. Both authors seem to argue that such ethical impulses have little place in the new reality of economic competition.

In perhaps the most memorable scene in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* outside of the sale of Henchard's wife, Henchard finally resorts to a wrestling match with Farfrae to settle their differences. Having lost out in both business and society to Donald Farfrae's varied charms and conscious that he possesses a natural advantage, Henchard suggests that the two might even the playing field by tying one of Henchard's arms behind his back (360). The object of the wrestling match is death, for one antagonist to throw the other forty feet to the ground through the open door of a hayloft and so end their struggle for supremacy in Casterbridge once and for all. Although Henchard proves to be the strongest combatant despite his handicap, he cannot ultimately throw Farfrae from the loft. As Henchard states: "God is my witness that no man ever loved another as I did thee

at one time....And now- though I came here to kill 'ee, I cannot hurt thee!" (362). This final testament to human commonality and sentiment is perhaps the truest expression of the working class competitive ethic and the social logic of boxing. It is a competitive ethic that has been instilled in Henchard as deeply as his sense of self. Interestingly, Henchard's sentimental attachment to both Farfrae and the strictures of fair play ultimately pave the way for Farfrae to become the victor in their capitalist endeavors. For Hardy, and within the competitive arena of capitalism, such sentimentality is conflated with the overall sense of his latent working class identity - indeed as great a handicap against socio-economic success as any other aspect of his overly rough and ruralistic identity.

Like Henchard, Ida Starr's prospects are initially limited by her working class identity. Ida Starr's prospects within the context of late Victorian society are constricted by the stigma she carries from her mother's profession, but Ida's story proves to be much more complicated than it first appears in the novel. In an expression of identity that aligns Gissing's presentation of the working class with that of Eliot and the larger English realist tradition, Ida's origins and familial history are actually found within the English middle class. Ida's mother is the daughter of Abraham Woodstock, and thus Ida's identity and social position come to be conferred upon her by circumstance rather than heredity (20). Nonetheless, Ida's working class sense of social justice and fair play is no less stringent than those exhibited by Michael Henchard as evidenced by her initial character presentation in the novel's opening scene. Thus, while we might see evidence of heredity in her comportment, Ida's identity seems to be conferred upon her by existential conditions rather than protracted familial associations. As a means to accentuate this

point, Ida and Waymark's fortunes are initially brought together through a chance meeting in the street where both exhibit a similar sense of social justice and sympathy - such that each contends they are "one out of a thousand" for exhibiting such social feeling (85). Further, Ida's position in the working class is a social fate instilled upon her by the decisions of her mother. Ida's mother was the product of modern social combination in England, the offspring of the wealthy daughter of a publican and the brutal capitalist identity of Woodstock himself (20). Although elevated in social standing by capital gain, both Woodstock and his wife exhibit characteristics evocative of a lower class mentalite that had eschewed lower class social morality in favor of capitalist social elevation. Ida's mother is depicted as lacking sense and morality while Woodstock is primarily characterized by his open aggression and brutality (20). Ultimately Gissing's portrayal implies that these shortcomings emerge from the lack of class-culture foundations and context which result from familial and individual progression outside of the strict confines of working class existence through the means of capital acquisition. The Naturalistic elements of Gissing's fiction find both expression and limitation in the portrayal of this genealogy in that Woodstock's daughter, Lotty, fulfills the hereditary weakness of her parents' character while Ida provides a means of contradiction.

What Ida's genealogy and family history ultimately provide are the means to install Ida into a class specific empirical context, a position of economic want and social marginalization that promotes the development of social ethics and rational sympathy. While she might share an intrinsic working class brutality with her father, Ida's brutality is tempered by connection to wider social sensibilities and ultimately finds expression through common social feeling. Ida's experience of personal deprivation provides

experience not merely of individual want, but also the shared conditions experienced by those around her, the means to discover a direct empathy that Eliot describes as necessary for the development of communal feeling. What brings this ideological component into full relief within the novel is the trajectory of empathy development that Ida shares with her estranged grandfather, Abraham Woodstock. Although both exhibit similar traits of brutality, each develop that trait in vastly differing manners according to the dictates of the society surrounding them and their own personal experiences. The manner in which that brutality develops and expresses itself based on social surroundings runs counter to the prevailing notions of an English culture that seemed bent on eradicating brutality in all its forms. For Woodstock, success in mainstream English capitalism serves to insulate him from the brutality of working class life and seems to reinforce his brutal nature while for Ida, a life amongst the marginalized classes serves to temper and soften the characteristic. Ultimately Woodstock is able to gain a similar perspective on suffering and brutality through his relationship with Ida and Osmond Waymark, an experiential foundation that sets his own transformation into motion (254). By the end of the narrative Woodstock's change of heart allows him to reclaim his relationship to Ida and instill upon her the inheritance of his fortune.

Despite the sympathetic portrayals of Ida Starr and Michael Henchard in *The Unclassed* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, both Gissing and Hardy are forced to acknowledge errors made by both characters. While both authors agree that working class personalities possess a social perspective that is necessary for the development of vitality, social sympathy, and rational ethics, both personalities also evidence a problematic inability to adapt to the evolving social standards of a universal English culture. In the

case of Henchard, Hardy's heavy handed initial portrayal carries over into his attempts to remake himself within an upper class image. Henchard's one concession to substantive change comes in the form of a vow to give up drinking prompted by misgivings concerning the sale of his wife but this vow has a character of duration rather than a direct link to behavior. As time expires on the vow, Henchard gives little thought to the prospect of sobriety and a willingness to immediately go back to alcoholic consumption, evidence of an inability to form causal associations between estranged behaviors (307, 313). Beyond this, in Henchard's rise through Casterbridge society, he evidences a propensity to hold on to vulgar rural social behaviors and evidences the likelihood to commit the same social errors in efforts to erase his questionable past. He enters into a protracted relationship with both a lover, Lucette le Sueur, and a town, Casterbridge, based on lies and an assumed identity as a widower (82, 107). Like Henchard's barbaric nature, the truth concerning his past lies just under the surface and cannot be completely erased. As the narrative develops towards its inevitable denouement, Henchard's estranged wife returns to Casterbridge and the truth concerning her sale is exposed by the woman who ran the furmity tent at Weydon fair so many years before. Although it might seem a simple conclusion to simply label Henchard's downfall as a sign of his inability to evolve beyond his working class character, again, Hardy's novel seeks to dispel such reductions. As Henchard's behavior becomes increasingly known within Casterbridge it is not only the upper class residents who show their disapproval, but the lower class residents as well. Indeed, Hardy utilizes another element of E.P. Thompson's rebellious traditional culture in the form of a charivari to culminate Henchard's fall from social grace (368). It would seem, through the course of the narrative, that condemnation of

Henchard's behaviors cannot be limited by class or simply by social forces. Indeed, the market effects punishment on Henchard as well in response to the imprudent and risky economic behavior he engages in to save his business (250-255). At the end of the day, Henchard embodies a social and economic character that might have been successful in England for a time, but the encroachment of modernity, a more universalized English culture, and the forces of the market obviate its persistence into modern times.

In opposition to Henchard's failure, Gissing's character of Ida Starr offers a means towards social and ethical improvement but here it is not character but narrative that ultimately fails to offer satisfying conclusions. Although seemingly forced into prostitution by circumstance and familial history, Ida does not take on the familiar narrative role of the prostitute fostered by a previous century of literary production. Gissing does not openly condemn prostitution but acknowledges that the prostitute must necessarily occupy a marginalized position within English society - no amount of capital will allow the prostitute to transgress social lines. For Ida to enter mainstream English society she must leave prostitution behind and accept an effectively diminished economic position as a laundress. Within the laundry Ida submits herself not merely to economic limitation, but also the strictures of Victorian society. Within the laundry Ida is surrounded not merely by girls like herself, but also a system of social controls designed to protect them from sexual dalliance and the possibility of entering a life unfit for inclusion in polite society (209). Ultimately her road to social inclusion requires subjection to increased social control. Encouraged by Waymark and the prospects of a life more in order with universal ethics and the strictures of English society, Ida is able to successfully cultivate a persona that retains intrinsic aspects of her working class character but

ameliorates them to the social and ethical constrictions of the society surrounding her. Although economically marginalized, Ida is able to reestablish contact with her grandfather, Abraham Woodstock, but that meeting is also facilitated by a concurrent softening of Woodstock's character as well. But, like Hardy, Gissing exhibits some inability to produce a truly transgressive working class narrative or substantive change in the capitalist persona. Ida's renewed relationship with Abraham Woodstock paves the way for the inheritance of his capital holdings, a turn in the narrative that has a profound impact on Ida's social character. Continually motivated by a sympathy for the working class that surrounds her, Ida's newfound fortune allows a modification of social sympathy from one of self-reliance and encouragement to one of charity and direct social action. In effect Ida adopts the persona of the Victorian middle class, a tourist mentality that seeks to overcome social degradation by washing faces and holding teas in the urban slums.

Osmond Waymark seems to hold more closely to his transgressive ideals through his efforts to produce literature that will correctly communicate the experience of urban poverty to his audiences, and yet his vision too entails serious limitations. The literary project that Waymark engages in is perhaps implicated in Gissing's own criticism of naturalism in that its depictions, while horrifying, do little to engage human efforts for betterment. Drawing from Gissing own writings in "The Hope of Pessimism" Constance D. Harsh draws a connection between Gissing's criticism of Positivism and predominant literary critiques of naturalist art. As Harsh writes:

Gissing is reacting against Positivism rather than Zolaism, but his objection to the immorality produced by the *carpe diem* mentality unwittingly fostered by the Religion of Humanity is familiar. Gissing's rejoinder to this creed is that it fails to provide the two necessities of religion (or philosophy, since for Gissing the two

terms are now interchangeable). "A religion . . . must serve a twofold purpose; it must, on the one hand, supply an explanation of being, on the other, present a guarantee for human morality." For literary critics, naturalist art failed in its religious task by reducing being to the merely material, and promoted immorality by its subject matter and focus on the moment. Similarly, for Gissing, Positivism denies "the metaphysical tendencies of the human mind" and promotes the immorality of universal competition by encouraging hedonism (918).

For Gissing and Waymark, this failing of Victorian society and naturalist literature, its inability to forward and rationally support effective means for social betterment, primarily a viable system of social ethics, becomes its primary failing. As a result both Waymark and *The Unclassed* are forced into an unsatisfactory resolution. Although Ida has committed herself to a residual vision of social activism, Waymark will turn to an even older and more traditional means to resolve his distaste for English society and the acknowledgement of his inability to effect lasting social change. Waymark retreats to the English countryside thus separating his artistic ideals from the English society that, at one point, he so desperately wanted to improve.

Although Gissing might revert to a series of residual conclusions within the lives of his working class characters there is one conclusion that he seems to consciously avoid, the marriage of Osmond Waymark and Ida Starr. Given the narrative context of their extended relationship, there are times in the narrative where it seems that Gissing is laying the groundwork for such a union. Through much of the novel Ida's social and self-improvement, at least in a certain respect, takes on the appearance of an effort to gain Waymark's approval while Waymark continually discounts his professed attraction to Ida based upon her past. Amid continuous overtures to their desires for each other, Gissing hesitates in the face of giving the union full approbation. Although both Waymark and Gissing appear to be Starr's greatest apologists, it would seem that her identity as prostitute composes a transgressive persona that neither could successfully integrate into

the forms of traditional and polite English society. Like Waymark, Gissing ultimately retreats from the possibility of true social or individual transformation.

In many respects the conclusion of *The Unclassed* and the failure of Waymark's relationship with Starr mirrors the eventual end of Michael Henchard. As Henchard's business fails and the secrets of his life are exposed, Henchard's downfall can be characterized more as a return to his former identity. Although he is able to enjoy social elevation for a limited period, this is not a liminal transition but rather a finite period of intrinsic identity suppression and alternate identity adoption. This not only entails a return to the basic socio-economic conditions of the working class but indeed an attempt to return to the precise identity that Henchard embodied before embarking on the process of social advancement. He dons the clothing and identity of the past by returning to his occupation as a hay trusser, and yet that return is both incomplete and unsuccessful. Represented by Henchard's failed attempts to reconnect with his estranged daughter and the untenable idea of returning to a profession that modernity has increasingly made obsolete, Henchard's failed attempt to transform his identity has left him in a position of no return. In order to transgress social boundaries, he has necessarily precluded the idea of return. Ultimately Henchard comes to a point where his identity is expunged and his presence in society ignored. As a character who tries transgress the social boundaries surrounding him and the empirical identity to which he was born, Henchard effectively enters a social purgatory, a position from which he cannot be successfully reconciled to any position within the society that surrounds him. Commonly associated with characters of classic tragedy, Henchard's ultimate downfall is precipitated by his own audacity. Henchard's fate, like that of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, seems to argue against the

possibility for social transcendence or the desirability of a culture that instills or promotes such ideas within its population. For Henchard and Casterbridge generally, things might have been better if he had simply stuck to his assigned station.

Although *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Unclassed* clearly offer differing visions of English society and visions of working class identity, the novels offer similarly pessimistic prospects for the working class within the confines of Victorian society. The latent fear of social upheaval and oppressive culture of propriety have effectively narrowed the means through which the working class might achieve social advancement and yet the expansion of capitalism and modernity seemingly offer greater opportunity and enticement for them to do so. The residual paternalism of the English class system and stultifying propriety of Victorian middle class culture have served to define boundaries for the expression of authentic working class character through sources outside of working class contexts. Ultimately this social milieu dictates a model of social advancement in which the individual must completely disavow their intrinsic identity in favor of a persona dictated by the wider society. Unless this character transformation is effected in a complete manner and the subject inures themselves wholly to the constructed morays of polite English society, individuals who transgress social boundaries are always in danger of being caught out and returned to their previous social condition. This manner of social transcendence, one that is individual and subject to total assimilation, serves merely to reinforce the inherently flawed social system that it attempts to overcome. While such a model might offer limited instances of social mobility, it does little to address wider social problems or lay the foundation for wider social modification. What is needed, given this unsatisfactory social condition, is a

manner of working class social advancement which might allow the retention of intrinsic elements of working class identity. Boxing and its social ideology hold the promise for redirecting working class energies and the sentiments of rebellious traditional character into avenues which hold greater promise for true opposition and the possibility of increased social modification. In order for this to occur, whether in narrative or in lived experience, the working class had to show themselves in a manner that retained authenticity, enabled resistance, and yet quelled wider social fears. As we shall see, the professional boxer represents such an identity.

Although English authors would begin to formulate the professional boxer as a literary character capable of embodying a more vital and authentic vision of lower class character capable of effecting true social transgression, it is evident, at least initially, that these authors share Hardy and Gissing's narrative and intellectual limitations. In the following chapter we will witness the first, imperfect attempts to create a viable professional boxing novel. While these early iterations also evidence an ability to envision and construct the persistent characteristics of the literary boxer, they are still writing within a field of literary and social conventions that seemingly preclude the possibility of constructing the narrative of a conventional, modern boxing novel. For that to happen, both boxing and English society would need to undergo substantive change.

Chapter 3

Exhausting the Pastoral Potential in Professional Sport:

The Failure of “Traditional Rebellious” Culture in the Early Boxing Narratives of

Cashel Byron’s Profession and Rodney Stone

When placed within the wider context of Victorian literary approaches to the subject of class, social integration, and national identity over the course of the later nineteenth century, the English boxing narrative emerges as a significant response to pervasive Victorian attitudes concerning social progress and the condition of the working class. The boxing narrative appears at a critical time of transition in later Victorian sporting and social culture, a time when professional sport was gradually and irrevocably supplanting the amateur traditions of the mid-Victorian age and England was increasingly concerned with issues of social character and national identity⁶. Lying somewhere between these larger phenomena, the boxing narrative illustrates the manner in which popular cultures like sport sought to remake English society by applying traditional English social values as the means to integrate English society within the contexts of the

⁶ Although the transition to professional sport is a protracted process, competition on the field of play certainly provides telling markers of the effective alteration of English sporting culture. The 1883 FA Cup final (Blackburn Olympic vs. Old Etonians) marks the first victory for a professional side and the end of amateur success in Britain’s highest football competition. The late 1880s and early 1890s witnesses the emergence of professional boxing under the Marquis de Queensberry rule through the control of both the Pelican Club and NSA. These individual examples act to represent a much wider transition in sporting culture. Concurrently, scholars such as Krishan Kumar, Philip Dodd, Jose Harris, and Stefan Collini have identified later nineteenth century material history as a catalyst for the creation of an incipient need in Britain for the formation of a cohesive national identity. While England had relied upon its own material legacy (empire, industry, production) to form a basis for national identity through much of the nineteenth century, the later century sees the emergence of “new commercial and imperial rivals” along with other “domestic nationalisms” (Kerr 188). Within this milieu, Kumar sites the emergence of a new English cultural nationalism with a preoccupation upon intangible aspects of English identity such as “English spirit” and a “wide ranging discovery of England” (Kumar 218).

late Victorian class system and ideology. While many aspects of popular culture were involved in these larger processes, the popularity and prominence of sport caused it to become a major site for the negotiation of class anxieties and the amelioration of class antagonisms. The boxing novel acts to articulate the significance of sport in this capacity by demonstrating the potential of professional sport to forward an aggressive working class response to the most significant limitations of Victorian social ideology, primarily the essentialist conception of class identity that limited egalitarian social integration and the development of a unified national identity based upon universal ethics.

Professional sport was ideally suited to contest Victorian preconceptions of class inferiority/superiority and was widely utilized in this context, but did so in traditionally English ways. Professional sport, in and of itself, did not represent cataclysmic social rupture but rather a synthesis of English values and an amalgamation of upper and lower class identity traits. In this respect professional boxing emerges as a sport with particular utility and resonance for the purpose of opposing dominant Victorian values. The culture, history, and social positioning of professional boxing singled the sport out as an obvious vehicle for the representation of working class attitudes through artistic production. Sport served to reflect a variety of middle and upper class anxieties concerning class disparities and open social contestation, and this character was highly exaggerated in boxing. The bifurcation of sporting practice in Victorian England illustrates the quality. Professional boxing's longstanding association with the working class and Victorian efforts to suppress the sport throughout the nineteenth century evidence a heightened sensitivity to its practice and perhaps a recognition of the sport's potent representational qualities. Victorian opposition to professional sport and the common association of professionalism

with working class sporting practice indicate that the rise of professional sport in the late nineteenth century should be viewed as a species of working class opposition. Beyond this, boxing's unique process of practical transformation in the later nineteenth century evidences a purposeful concession to Victorian sensibilities that enables the sport to exemplify the search for common ground within conflicts of class, culture and identity. In this respect it is possible to see professional boxing as a representation of both residual and emergent cultures - on one hand residual through efforts to resuscitate bare-knuckle traditions, and on the other an emergent modern sport that has ameliorated itself to Victorian cultural conventions. But this latter form of the sport should not be considered a simple acquiescence to Victorian ideologies.

While professional sport draws heavily upon and is influenced by dominant Victorian culture, professionalism retains intrinsic ties to working class identity and experience. The individuals to whom professional sport was seemingly most important, those who fought for its legitimacy, the players on the field, the spectators in the stands, were largely identified as members of the working class. Their love of and connection to professional sport suggests a deep and class specific sociocultural significance. Upper class dedication to amateurism and their open opposition to professionalism evidence a Victorian proclivity to utilize sport as a subtle tool for the maintenance of traditional social boundaries and a support for assumptions of upper class superiority (Huggins 54-55). Amateur sporting practice not only limited working class participation, but it also served to provide upper class participants with a competitive advantage through its virtual exclusion of the best working class competitors. This utilization of sport was obviously contradictory to the overarching egalitarian ethics embodied within the practice - fair play

and the ideal of open competition - and this was a prime focus of professional ire. Within this conflict over sport, it is clear that populations who were subject to inculcation through Victorian sporting culture recognized underlying contradictions in its application and through this came to view sport as a vehicle through which aspects of Victorian social ideology and practice might be openly contested.

Victorian essentialism was clearly a stumbling block when it came to addressing the continued divisions in nineteenth century English society - particularly when it came to the subject of the working class. While Victorian culture might have celebrated working class ethics and vitality through the course of the nineteenth century, it also promoted a model of social development that sought to elevate the working class through a progressionary model of cultural inculcation and social development, what amounted to a process of identity erasure. In order to preserve something of their intrinsic identity, the working class was forced to resist dominant Victorian efforts at social integration through identity erasure - but physical strength was not going to carry the day in this argument. Given latent Victorian trepidation concerning the possibility of violent revolution, working class resistance had to be formulated in response to those latent fears. Through examples such as Peterloo, Hyde Park (1866), and the Indian mutiny, the English had shown their willingness to utilize force when faced with the prospect of social upheaval. Working class resistance had to be manifested in ways that not only took this history into consideration but also adhered to the established customs and values of English social relations. While both professional boxing and the working class identity were seemingly unpalatable to the Victorian sensibility, the boxing novel illustrates a sociocultural negotiation which allows both professional boxing and professional boxers to gain

entrance into English culture. While this negotiation does infer an adaptation of both sport and participants, this does not come at the expense of their intrinsic identity. Ultimately both sides in the negotiation are forced to accept change and through this process a new vision of English society emerges. And yet as the process of developing the early English boxing novel illustrates, it is truly the faith that one has in such a society that characterizes artistic and intellectual responses to this model. Here Shaw and Doyle return as useful examples of these characteristic responses. The development of the English boxing novel in the later nineteenth century brings together the fields of sport and literature and provides a unique perspective on the process of cultural transformation that has created modern English society. Beyond the integration of sport and literature, the development of the early English boxing narrative unites two rather unlikely bedfellows from the literary culture of the late Victorian age, George Bernard Shaw and Arthur Conan Doyle, who, despite their obvious ideological differences, had a vested interest in the development of English society beyond the social and ideological limitations of the Victorian era.

Both Shaw and Doyle identified the boxing novel as a vehicle capable of addressing the limitations of English social ideology and the means to foster a new English social identity. Through the course of two novels, Shaw's *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1886), and Doyle's *Rodney Stone* (1894), the two authors successfully delineate the basic features of the modern boxing narrative and explore the social and ideological potential of professional boxing (if not professional sport more generally) to address latent shortcomings within Victorian society. Both authors utilize professional boxing's association with the working class and its representation of social conflict as a

means to confront Victorian attitudes relating to class and the means to achieve social change through constructive rather than destructive mechanisms. In the most obvious sense, the persona of the professional boxer allows the authors to create working class characters who possess the courage and fortitude necessary to willingly confront the inequity of Victorian class relations. At least initially the boxing novel seems limited by the conventions of both professional boxing and Victorian literary culture. The representation of boxing in *Cashel Byron's Profession* and *Rodney Stone* is of the bare-knuckle, eighteenth century variety while their boxing characters are evocative of the pastoral nostalgia that characterized many mid-century portrayals of the working class. Ultimately social conflict in the early iterations of the English boxing novel are largely dissatisfying as both Shaw and Doyle evidence a residual adherence to both the narratives and values of dominant Victorian culture.

Although both George Bernard Shaw and Arthur Conan Doyle draw upon a residual boxing culture for the construction of their boxing narratives and characterization, the later nineteenth century boxing novel diverges from the past in critical ways. The later nineteenth century boxing novel departs from earlier boxing paradigms by shifting its narrative gaze away from the ring and into the wider lives of pugilists and in the process shifts the site of boxing's representation away from the practice to onto its practitioners. This shift in focus is critical in the sense that it seeks to impart the ethics of the ring within the social realm surrounding the competition and counters Victorian criticism of the sport. Common criticism of the eighteenth century prize ring focused on the ease with which outside interference could skew the events within the ring through either influence or disruption and this was commonly used as a

means to indict the practice⁷. The boxing novel seeks to sidestep these assumptions by locating the performance of boxing's ideology more securely into the realm of individual expression and everyday experience rather than simply within the competitive space. As such, the boxing novel is not necessarily characterized by depictions of sport, but rather by its preoccupation with professional boxers and its efforts to portray the professional boxer outside of the ring. Within the boxing novel the professional boxer is considered as a social being who performs the ideology of boxing within the context of lived experience rather than presenting sport as an either an icon or a rarified space removed from of daily life. As such, the literary boxer comes to apply the mentality of the ring to common social situations, the least of which being the gulf that exists between himself and the confines of polite English society. In this manner the later nineteenth century boxing narrative illustrates how the identity, mindset, and values of the professional boxer might be utilized as a practical social response to points of impasse in the Victorian social mindset.

The challenge that the idealized professional boxer represents to Victorian sensibilities is utilized by Shaw and Doyle to illustrate a larger point of intellectual crisis in systems of Victorian thinking. Although this intellectual impasse manifests itself within many aspects of Victorian experience, Victorian approaches to both sport and the working class certainly evidence a pattern of thinking that is classically Victorian. The

⁷ This was, of course, the case with the failure of the Heenan-Sayers bout in 1860 in which the crowd stormed the ring and forced the fight to be suspended. Boxing culture also abounded with stories of upper class backers who would protect both their wagers and fighters by enlisting the help of members of the crowd to interfere at key moments in the fighting contest. As a wider practice and culture, professional boxing was commonly accused not merely of its lack of control, but also its supposed influence in promoting behavior such as this. While boxing's modern form has certainly found ways to exert better control over both crowds and competition, modern boxing has also worked to instill a culture of fair play into its audience and participants, thus creating a cooperative in which individuals and individual action share responsibility with the system to inhibit foul play.

course of our initial chapters have outlined this pattern of thinking within Victorian conceptions of the working class and a resultantly contradictory valuation that celebrated the English working class on one hand, yet seemed utterly incapable of reconciling the working class with predominant conceptions of social progress. While Victorians might have romanticized the working class and argued for an increasingly egalitarian social vision to counter its latent energies, the Victorian mindset remained locked within an essentialist conception of class identity that limited their ability to practically conceive of a progressive society. In the twentieth century, Ford Madox Ford would offer a perspective of this wider impasse in Victorian ideologies and the contradictions that emerge through a dogged continuation of essentialist social valuation in his 1926 novel, *A Man Could Stand Up*. Within the novel Ford presents a brief if telling illustration of the mid-Victorian mindset through the musings of Valentine Wannop concerning her mother's "mid-Victorian" viewpoint on marriage and "irregular unions."

[Valentine's] mother, to be in the van of Mid-Victorian thought, had had to allow virtue to "irregular unions." As long as they were high-minded. But the high-minded do not consummate irregular unions. So all her books had showed you high-minded creatures contracting irregular unions of the mind or of sympathy; but never carrying them to the necessary conclusion. They would have been ethically at liberty to, but they didn't. They ran with the ethical hare, but hunted with the ecclesiastical hounds... (716).

The character of Victorian thinking evident from this passage and the resultant double-blind it dictates seems apropos for summing up a wider and more comprehensive conundrum within the Victorian social ideologies and cultural mentalities. In a society where thinking of this type is rampant, social progress is obviously limited by an inability to close the gulf between ideology and action, belief and practice.

When applied to the subject of class, it was evident that Victorian novelists were well aware of the contradictions in Victorian ideology and sought to counter those

opinions through a species of novel common to the nineteenth century. Works such as Dinah Murloch Craik's *John Halifax Gentleman* sought to counter prevailing notions of the working class by presenting working class characters who embodied not only the culture and civility of their upper class peers, but also a superior sensibility and ethical standard derived from working class experience. These characters acted to confront latent prejudices in the Victorian mindset, yet the novels themselves often fell short of offering truly substantive sociocultural criticism. In a narrative trope common to nineteenth century audiences, the working class characters in these novels would almost invariably find that they were actually the offspring of a noble family and thus might be elevated to their rightful place in society. Although much in these novels might work to satirize Victorian conceptions of class, in the end they often work to both placate Victorian audiences and reinforce dominant assumptions of class and identity. Although plot lines such as these might have become somewhat passé by the later nineteenth century, both Shaw and Doyle utilize this trope within their initial iterations of the boxing narrative, evidence perhaps of the authors' attempts to find an audience for their pugilistic tales.

By the later nineteenth century mid-Victorian efforts at progressive cultural inculcation - sport, education, etc. - certainly created a much larger population of English literary consumers, but it also set the stage for a much wider shift in English culture moving forward. Victorian efforts at social progress had been successful in allowing the working class to adopt many aspects of Victorian culture, but it had failed to completely eradicate the intrinsic character of the English working class. The strictures of Victorian culture provided the English working classes with an increased ability to demand concessions from wider English culture. While sport and literature were simply two of

many Victorian tools of cultural integration, the sporting field and the novel become primary sites where this larger process of cultural negotiation is both embodied and exemplified. The sporting fields of England act as a literal space of social contestation and amelioration and through this process symbolize a model for effecting both social and cultural change on a wider scale. The ultimate form of the English boxing novel seeks to describe changes in the larger society - the representation of modern boxing serving as evidence of this - and disseminate the cultural identity embodied in modern sport into all aspects of English life.

Given what we know about the extended literary careers of Shaw and Doyle, it is easy to insinuate that the two authors might utilize the narrative trope of professional boxing in disparate ways, but both authors hit upon the idea of the boxing novel for similar reasons. As products of a transitional culture, each author experiences similar limitations within the composition of their respective boxing narratives as they struggle against the latent conventions of Victorian literary and sporting cultures. The boxing novel, as a representation of a latent English sporting culture that was itself in transition, is particularly useful in its capacity to illustrate the tensions between residual Victorian culture and the emergence of new cultural forms in the later nineteenth century. Through its protracted development, the shifting form of the boxing novel, as it moves from Shaw to Doyle and through Doyle's own development of the narrative, illuminates Victorian literary and social conventions that inhibit its revolutionary potential. As the respective authors struggle with these limitations, their divergent approaches to the narrative itself indicate differing mentalities between the two authors that in turn represent two pervasive responses to the process of creating new cultural forms with the ability to successfully

counter latent Victorian mentalities. While Shaw would eventually eschew both the boxing narrative and the realist novel as literary forms limited by the burden of Victorian convention, Doyle would continue to work with both boxing and realism, eventually achieving both a narrative vision of professional boxing that successfully revised Victorian forms in traditionally English yet revolutionary ways. Despite the divergent paths Shaw and Doyle tread through the development of the boxing novel, within each author's boxing narratives it is possible to witness a basic recognition of the boxing trope's ability to offer a revolutionary response to the problems of an imbricated series of Victorian sociocultural conventions that limited not merely artistic and sporting expression but also ultimately the development of a future English society. While the finalized form of the English boxing narrative points the way to the formation of a more unified populist culture in England, the divergent approaches to the boxing narrative evidenced by Shaw and Doyle help to illustrate how the class demarcated sociocultural divide of the Victorian age persists to find a new means of expression within the modern age. Ultimately what emerges from this crucible is a more unified English culture - if only through the rise and installation of a more populist iteration of English identity.

Given the rather indefinite nature of English culture during the time of the narrative's emergence and the rather disparate artistic and ideological proclivities of its two authorial progenitors, it becomes difficult to offer an encompassing characterization of the boxing novel that fits within traditional definitions of literary production or the conventional period designations used to define their era of emergence. But beyond this, there is also the issue of the need to overcome the weight of critical assumptions that have developed surrounding the authors of these incepting narratives. George Bernard

Shaw's incepting foray into the boxing narrative, 1882's *Cashel Byron's Profession*, emerges as the fourth of five novels penned by Shaw during the early years of his literary career. Although critical efforts within the twentieth century have helped to develop some interest in Shaw's novels, the author's dramatic productions obviously greatly overshadowed the novels in terms of popular success and critical attention. While Shaw's theatrical persona attempted to accentuate the author's association with modernist political radicalism and avant-garde rabble-rousing, the author has always remained enigmatic. In many ways the product of the transitional culture of the later nineteenth century, Shaw was at once a Victorian relic and elder statesman of modernity; the sheer variety of literary products attributed to him shows the author as at once an avant-garde playwright and popular screenplay writer, an associate of the cultural and artistic elite, but also a friend and associate of professional boxer Gene Tunney. When it came to his novels, Shaw was equally enigmatic - prone to both disparagement and backhanded celebration of those products of his nonage. Shaw's novels obviously show a side of the author that was still deeply influenced by the literary and artistic conventions the later Victorian age but also the radical posture that the author would come to represent more completely in his later career.

The ultimate failure of Shaw's novels might indeed be attributed to their evidence of this rather conflicted authorial persona. Shaw's novels represent an unwieldy attempt to bend conventional literary forms to his divergent sociopolitical sensibilities. What results from this conflict are ungainly and dissatisfying compositions, revolutionary in their character but undercut by an adherence to outdated literary and ideological conventions such as the undercutting marriage plots of the industrial novel or the class

elevating identity twists of Craik. As a result, the realist narrative as employed by Shaw in *Cashel Byron* and his other novels feels incapable of providing a truly revolutionary outcome, burdened, as they are, by conventional Victorian plotting and resolutions. While his characters might represent potentially upsetting ideologies, the plotting inevitably reintegrates them into normative sociocultural presentations. Despite this, both Shaw and his twentieth century critics recognized the Shavian ideology contained within their pages. Stanley Weintraub, Robert Hogan, and Elsie B. Adams supplied the initial arguments in this vein of Shavian criticism in the mid-twentieth century and more recently Rosalie Rahal Haddad has reiterated many of their basic points⁸. Overarchingly these reassessments of Shaw's novels tend to advance Shaw's novels as worthy of the dramatist's later reputation and the capacity of the novels to reflect many of Shaw's basic ideologies. But within the collection of Shaw's early novels *Cashel Byron* stands alone. Of the Shaw's five novels *Cashel Byron* was the only to enjoy any level of popular success within its own time and the story itself showed staying power as Shaw adapted the narrative several times for both stage and film. Within the critical reception, *Cashel Byron* has been seen as perhaps the most conventional of Shaw's early novels and perhaps the least successful in terms of highlighting Shaw's underlying ideological proclivities. Stanley Weintraub's assessment of the novel in his preface to the 1968 Southern Illinois UP edition perhaps sums up its critical shortcomings. Weintraub would categorize the novel as "a collection of absurd Victorian novelistic conventions while

⁸ Elsie B. Adams "The Portrait of the Artist in Bernard Shaw's Novels." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*. 10:3 (1967): 130-149. Stanley Weintraub "The Embryo Playwright in Bernard Shaw's Early Novels." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. 1:3 (1959): 327-355. Robert Hogan "The Novels of Bernard Shaw" *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*. 8:2 (1965): 63-114. Rosalie Rahal Haddad. *Bernard Shaw's Novels: His Drama of Ideas in Embryo*. Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2004

going [Shaw's] own fictional way" (xiii). Despite the novel's obvious adherence to Victorian conventions - not the least of which is its culminating statement concerning the sport of professional boxing's demise - the novel does contain the seeds of Shaw's revolutionary ideology. William Irvine states that the character of Cashel Byron represents "a professional fighter who has learned the principles of Shavianism" and further that Shaw "shows natural skill in making prize fighting, as later he made prostitution and munitions manufacturing, a blind from which to attack more respectable professions" (35-36). The basic assertion that *Cashel Byron's Profession*, like the rest of Shaw's novels, evidence a strange and cumbersome combination of residual and emergent qualities fits within the understanding of Shaw as a product of a transitional point in English sociocultural history and his novels as evidence of the author's attempts to resolve the cultural crises which surrounded their composition while still seeking to court a popular audience.

Cashel Byron's Profession certainly evidences a rather cumbersome adherence to the constrictions of both Victorian literary and intellectual culture. The novel reads as an anti-Victorian polemic but its criticism of dominant Victorian culture should not be mistaken as the sign of a true split from Victorian structures of social thinking. Shaw utilizes his literary boxer to level indictments at conventional Victorian behaviors, but the novel as a whole tends to support dominant Victorian ideologies. Utilizing a pervasive trope of the Victorian novel, Shaw constructs his boxer's identity on an essentialist model; Cashel Byron's heredity is amorphous and yet his character belies an upper class individual who rejected the conventions of upper class society in favor of the working class identity ascribed to the professional boxer. Cashel is fairly complete in his adoption

of boxing's identity as his speech and systems of thought come to be dominated by the pugilist's perspective and yet he is unable to completely erase his intrinsically upper class nature. Throughout the novel he is uniformly identified as a gentleman by the individuals surrounding him. In this respect Shaw's pugilistic protagonist proves useful as a means to level fairly scathing criticism of Victorian society and yet uphold many of the conventions that it promotes. In one of the novel's more memorable passages Cashel regails a salon party with his theories on social progress and his application of the practical wisdom of the ring to the problem. Rather than ascribing to the Victorian theory of setting a good example, Cashel forwards "executive power" and individual action as the force needed to civilize human society. To illustrate the point he uses the example of coming across a woman being beaten in the street.

Suppose you walked along the street and saw a man beating a woman, and setting a bad example to the roughs. Well, you would be bound to set a good example to them; and, if you're men, you'd like to save the woman; but you couldn't do it by merely living; for that would be setting the bad example of passing on and leaving the poor creature to be beaten. What is it that you need to know then, in order to act up to your fine ideas? Why, you want to know how to hit him, when to hit him, and where to hit him; and then you want the nerve to in and do it (Shaw 86-87).

But what becomes truly intriguing about this passage is that Cashel Byron is not merely arguing for the practical utility of physical ability and the courage to utilize it, but also that such courage needs to be paired with a rather elusive concept of "executive power."

As Cashel continues:

When you get [an executive power] you'll have courage in you; and what's more, your courage will be of some use to you. For though you may have courage by nature; still, if you haven't executive power as well, your courage will only lead you to stand up to be beaten by men that have both courage and executive power; and what good does that do you? People say that you're a game fellow; but they won't find the stakes for you unless you can win them (Shaw 88).

As the conversation continues Cashel continues to display an abundance of courage in the process of calling out his Victorian audience on a number of their varied conceits and proves himself a rather overbearing boor. It is this facet of his personality that returns our discussion to Shaw's rather amorphous topic of executive power. Despite his argument for the necessity of a combination of both courage and executive power, Cashel Byron's lack of refinement and social grace shows that he is in possession of the former and perhaps in greater need of the latter. Through the course of *Cashel Byron's Profession* it seems dubious that Cashel will ever successfully incorporate the two. And this shortcoming of Cashel's reflects Shaw's rather convoluted socialist ideologies. Although *Cashel Byron* emerges just prior to Shaw's immersion into socialism, it is possible to detect many of the basic principles that would guide the development of his political ideologies moving forward. Like many socialists of his era, Shaw continued to acknowledge both the energy and inherent correctness of the working class cause, but was losing faith in the working class's ability to effect social modification. In an ideological move that would mirror the wider shift to Marxism-Leninism, Shaw increasingly advocated the need for upper class executive power to shape and channel working class energies in order to bring about social transformation. It was a belief that Shaw would later express through his admiration of the achievements of twentieth century political leaders such as Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin.

Similar in many respects to the topics of courage and executive power, throughout *Cashel Byron's Profession* pugilistic discourse often comes back to the time honored topic of science vs. game, two qualities that the top professionals must possess in order to be successful in the ring. Continually within these discussions Cashel is able to display

his unique insight into the truth of boxing by noting the tendency in connoisseurs to argue back and forth on the existence of lack of science and game in various fighters. One pundit might claim that a fighter has game but not science while the other will argue the opposite. Ultimately the end of these conversations lies in one's ability to explain why one boxer wins and another loses and one must admit that any reasonably successful boxer must possess both qualities in some measure. Rather than seeking to settle the argument of whether science or game might be the most important to fashioning the successful boxer or social individual, Cashel's constant denigration of science/game debate serves as a means to highlight not merely the need for balance, but also a quality that such balance might create - the so-called quality of "executive power." Within the sporting realm, and particularly at the upper echelons of competition, one's ability to rationally explain success and failure through material means is limited. Within the highest levels of sporting competition there exists a common level of material quality - elevated physical ability and skill - between competitors and the ability to explain success or failure enters a realm of speculation. An intangible belief or confidence in one's own abilities, decisions, and instincts often spells the difference between winning and losing. It allows actions to become fluid, unconscious, and natural and exhibits one of the qualities that spectators often describe in athletic performance, effortless. In this respect we might see Cashel's concept of executive power as a belief in the correctness of one's actions and decisions, a deep seated conviction that enables skill and courage to manifest themselves in decisive action and the lack of effort is what Cashel names as the ultimate goal for effective performance.

Though Cashel might evidence this level of courage, executive power, and effortless performance within the boxing ring, his movements through later Victorian society display an awkwardness that belies Shaw's underlying argument against the sport and its working class persona. While *Cashel Byron's Profession* might draw upon sporting experience and ideologies as a means to understand the limitations of Victorian thinking, the novel does not argue that boxing's mentality might be directly applied to process of overcoming those limitations. Although Shaw certainly celebrates boxing to a certain degree in the novel, he also shows an alternate limitation of the mindset it produces. In another telling scene from the novel Cashel Byron encounters his love interest, the equally unconventional but high class Lydia Carew, shortly after his diatribe at the salon party. Within the exchange we see not only the alternate class perspectives of the two, but also the possibility of the ideological synthesis that Shaw seeks to produce through their eventual pairing. The exchange begins with Lydia admonishing Cashel Byron for his oafish behavior and the zealotry with which he has expressed his opinions. As the exchange develops we can see some of the thinking that leads Shaw to eventually adopt the evolutionary tenets of Fabian ideology later in his life. The socialist perspective is certainly evident in Cashel's words, but so is the bitterness and aggression that precludes its ultimate success in England. Cashel rebuffs Lydia's criticism of his behavior as typical Victorian manner of silencing his criticism - the application of the ideals of correct social behavior as a means to marginalize his perspective. He claims that Lydia wants people to be just clever enough to "shew you off - to be worth beating. But you wouldn't like them to beat you." Within these statements Lydia detects the "modern

doctrine of a struggle for existence, and a look on life as a perpetual combat.” To which Cashel responds:

A fight? Just so. What is life but a fight? The curs forfeit or get beaten; the rogues sell the fight and lose the confidence of the backers; the game ones and the clever ones, win the stakes, and have to hand over the lion’s share of them to the loafers; and luck plays the devil with them all in turn. That not the way they describe life in books; but that’s what it is. (Shaw 98)

To which of course Lydia responds: “Is not the world large enough for us all to live peacefully in?” Cashel rebukes such notions as products of hereditary wealth and seclusion from the realities of life, a suggestion of the subjectivity class position places on social outlook. The naïveté of Carew’s position is evident, but then so is the naked aggression of Cashel Byron’s. Shaw’s ideas lie somewhere beyond them both.

Although exchanges such as these are clearly useful in delineating several of the key features of the social utility of sport and its connection to the mentalité of the lower classes, neither Shaw nor *Cashel Byron’s Profession* argue for the sporting culture as a potential answer to England’s social problems. While the passive mentalité of a character such as Lydia Carew might benefit from coming to a greater understanding working class perspectives, that perspective does not provide an ultimate answer. *Cashel Byron’s Profession* argues that working class aggression and bitterness are ultimately counterproductive and lead to a perspective on the working class that simply reinforces the idea that they should be both feared and controlled. This aspect of Shaw’s ideology is exemplified through the novel’s only true fight scene, an exhibition match between Cashel Byron and another professional, William Paradise, staged for a visiting African king. The episode is both deep and telling on several levels through its strange mixture of high and low culture and certainly through the presence of the African dignitary. Beyond this, the description of the fight evidences critical insight into the limitations of Victorian

conceptions of sport. The exhibition arranged for the African king is a mixed variety of martial and gymnastic displays incorporating both amateur and professional boxing. Shaw is able to get in a quick jab at amateur boxing while describing one of the amateur bouts as “dancing and pawing” and the exertion of tremendous effort for very little appreciable effect. The entrance of the professionals, although involved in an “exhibition” brings with it a decided change of atmosphere and through their descriptions Shaw displays an essentialist character in his thinking. William Paradise, the traditional working class pugilist, is described as “a dreadful looking man”:

His face had the surface and colour of blue granite: his protruding haws and retreating forehead were like those of an ourang-outang...The man grinned ferociously....exempting his hideous head and enormous hands and feet, he was a well-made man, with loins and shoulders that shone in the light, and gave him an air of great strength and activity. (159)

Cashel Byron’s physical nobility is contrasted to the simian features of his working class opponent - “[a] god coming down to compete with a gladiator” - and yet Lydia Carew finds the rough exterior of William Paradise less shocking (Shaw 160-63). The fight itself, despite its billing as an exhibition and the use of gloves, takes on a menacing and violent air that quickly distinguishes it from the amateur bouts preceding. The violence of the affair disgusts “the better sort amongst the spectators” but the obvious interest and delight of the African king, who up to that point had seemed unimpressed by the other exhibitions, caused the spectacle to continue (Shaw 162-164).

As the fight continues, the skill and athletic ability of Cashel Byron proves to be too much for William Paradise to contend with and not willing to be beaten, the working class pugilist takes off his gloves to press the attack with bare knuckles. As the decorum of the ring is lost, Cashel Byron descends into base brutality. “[H]is face fully as fierce as Paradise’s,” Cashel resorts to a wrestling throw and a crowd of police, managers, and

umpires rushes the ring. Incensed by the events Cashel “seemed to have no self-control: Paradise, when he came to, behaved better” (Shaw 163). Despite the best efforts of both authorities and the upper class associates of Cashel to calm him, only the eventual admonishment of his lower class trainer, Ned Skene, can pull Cashel out of his rage. Dejected and embarrassed Cashel attempts to make a hasty exit from the exhibition hall but his retreat is blocked by a representative of the African king. The king calls Cashel to the dais where he sits and:

informed him, through an interpreter, that he had been unspeakably gratified by what he had just witnessed; expressed great surprise that Cashel, notwithstanding his prowess, was neither in the army nor in parliament; and finally offered to provide him with three handsome wives if he would come out to Africa in his suite. (Shaw 164)

The African king’s delight at Cashel’s display is Shaw’s coup de grace when it comes to the degenerate influence of professional boxing but there is something within the boxer’s spirit that remains vital to Shaw’s ideology. In this respect it becomes possible to see both the boxing and the African king in a more complex light. They are characters who represent a vital energy and courage that Shaw greatly admires, yet the author also acknowledges an inherent lack of civility that obviates their ability to productively function in the modern, civilized world. What Shaw advocates is a means to combine the two, an elevation of culture and civility that might not wholly erode natural animalistic energies. But Shaw seems forever at a loss when it comes to suggesting how such a resolution might come about. And this reading is supported by the novel’s awkward and conventional ending - the marriage of Cashel Byron and Lydia Carew. Through their marriage Cashel is motivated to relinquish both his profession and his pugilistic character in the process. Cashel enters the life of an upper class gentleman, farming (without success), business, and eventually a seat in Parliament. Despite these endeavors he

remains something of a simpleton and as “the illusion of [Lydia’s] love passed away, Cashel fell in her estimation” (Shaw 226). For Shaw the union of Cashel and Lydia is valued for the offspring it produces, not in the union for its own sake. As his skills and vitality diminish, Cashel fails to provide a meaningful statement of ideology.

Interestingly, although perhaps not surprisingly, *Cashel Byron’s Profession* was the sole work from Shaw’s early endeavors as a novelist that received any measure of popular or critical success. Much to his eventual chagrin the story persisted in both novel and theatrical forms and Shaw would later adapt it for both the stage and Hollywood. In his stage adaptation Shaw re-titles the work “The Admirable Bashville” and shifts focus onto a minor character, Lydia Carew’s butler, who seemed to delight Victorian audiences - Robert Lewis Stevenson amongst them. For Victorians it seemed that Bashville provided a statement of working class identity that fit with both their tastes and aesthetic sensibilities. Like Cashel Byron, Bashville displays both courage and a pugilistic ability, but in a package much more civilized and less threatening. A devoted servant, Bashville is willing to stand up to Cashel Byron in order to defend her and adventurous enough to witness one of Byron’s illegal bouts towards the end of the novel. In a scene that is also utilized to proffer one final dig at the culture of professional boxing, Bashville shows himself to be of a character that differs markedly from Cashel Byron’s. In a decided display of Victorianism, Lydia Carew admonishes Bashville for attending the fight, when she had moments before hidden Cashel Byron and his involvement in the bout from the police. She states: “I must not dictate to you [Bashville] what your amusements shall be; but I do not think you are likely to benefit yourself by copying [Corinthian] tastes.” To which Bashville replies: “I copy no Lord’s tastes....You hid the man that was fighting

Miss Carew. Why do you look down on the man that was only a bystander?" (Shaw 186). Although her dealings with Cashel Byron may have stirred impulses and a change in attitude within her, this exchange with Bashville seems to have the most telling impact. As Shaw writes: "[Lydia's] first impulse was to treat this outburst of rebellion against her authority, and crush it. But her sense of justice withheld her" (186) While Bashville might be raised in Carew's estimation by both his courage and the truth of his argument, this does not establish a level of equivalency between the two. When Bashville professes his love for her, the old class dichotomies show themselves once again. After such a profession both Carew and Bashville are aware that their relationship must come to an end, and Lydia dismisses him with assurances that she shall guarantee both testimony of his honor and security for any endeavor that he might apply himself. Thus, the paternalistic ties are retained and Victorian social ideologies persist.

For both boxing aficionados and literary fans alike there might be much to enjoy in *Cashel Byron's Profession*, yet the narrative and Shaw's odd proclivities as both writer and social visionary lead to an ultimately unsatisfying conclusion. The novel does well in the sense that it offers some worthy and substantive criticism of Victorian mentalities but it seems to sustain many of the most detrimental aspects of the nineteenth century's essentialist social ideology. The novel tends to indict professional boxing as a degenerate activity and promotes a perspective on class and ethnicity that does little to forward the identities of either. With these aspects in mind, it is fair to say that Shaw misses the mark when it comes to properly identifying the social utility of professional sport or its constituent meanings. Beyond this, although Shaw does identify some intriguing topics within sporting culture such as his intriguing notion of "executive power," Shaw seems to

see little difficulty with this concept as long as that power is within the hands of his evolutionary supermen - ostensibly the offspring of Carew and Byron. The Victorians had, of course, used the idea of a union between classes as a solution to the social problems of England for at least half a century, but Shaw takes this idea in a new and potentially dangerous direction. Ultimately what Shaw proposes is a social ideology and a stance on professional sport that is not only elitist, but also overtly un-English.

While Shaw's initial attempt at the boxing narrative would be his last (and perhaps thankfully so), *Cashel Byron's Profession* establishes a narrative foundation for the continuation of the genre, and the novel's relative commercial success acts to indicate the genre's popular potential. As the consummate popular author of the late Victorian age Arthur Conan Doyle was perhaps drawn to the boxing narrative by this recognition of its popular appeal, yet the author's extended use of boxing within his literary creations argues that he also recognized the sport's ideological utility as well. Within his literary presentations of boxing it is possible to witness Doyle's own struggles with the conventions of Victorian literary, sporting, and social culture, but one might also see the author's connection and awareness of the developing populist culture that surrounded him. While Shaw would always evidence a rather uneasy relationship with popular culture, Doyle certainly embraced it and his boxing novels reflect a more intimate relationship with both sport and its professional culture. While Doyle's first boxing production, *Rodney Stone*, would mirror Shaw's in many ways by focusing on an eighteenth century bare-knuckle iteration of its culture, his presentation of the trope evidences key evolutions that lead to the emergence of the sport's modern culture and ideology.

In part Doyle's devotion to the boxing narrative can be seen as evidence of the author's investment in English culture itself. As the consummate apologist for the English identity in the later nineteenth century, Doyle's writings have been largely interpreted as both reiterations of conservative English ideology but also texts heavily invested in the process of creating a unified sense of English national and colonial identity within the culturally indefinite period of the later nineteenth century. Philip Dodd, José Harris, and Stefan Collini have written extensively about both the incipient need and process of formulating a national identity in England over the course of the later nineteenth century by arguing that the period brought about new challenges to English superiority that caused a predominantly outward gaze through the Victorian period to be increasingly focused inward⁹. Krishan Kumar highlights the emergence of a "moment of Englishness" emerging in the later nineteenth century in *The Making of English National Identity*. Kumar argues that through the middle part of the nineteenth century the need for defining English national identity was largely taken up by the products and physical manifestations of Englishness - the Crystal Palace, Empire, industry - but as other nations began to copy these formulations within their own processes of national development and as increasingly these models were questioned by others - particularly the Irish - a need emerges to define the English identity within these products (193). Sports historian Richard Holt has argued that Victorian sport has an important role to play in this process. Clearly sport was used extensively in the British Empire and in England as a means to define and promote a critical set of values and identities that were considered to be

⁹ Philip Dodd. "Englishness and National Culture." *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920*. Eds. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd. London: Croom Helm, 1986: 1-28. José Harris. *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994. Stefan Collini. *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930*. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1991.

intrinsically English – fair play, egalitarian competition, and highly structured, rule-based behaviors – that bound all classes of citizenry. Based upon Doyle’s own interest in sport and the prominence of sport within his literature, Douglas Kerr has argued that Doyle is critical not merely to our understanding of the project of defining English national identity, but also within the process of sport’s utilization as a means to accomplish this goal.

Like *Cashel Byron’s Profession* Arthur Conan Doyle’s first foray into the boxing narrative fights with the conventions of the Victorian novel, but struggles less with those of Victorian social ideology. The novel is composed in the vein of an historical romance told during the middle of the nineteenth century but looking back on the era of Regency Boximania and the Napoleonic Wars. Like the pastoral nostalgic celebration of rusticity from the mid-Victorian era, Doyle’s retrospective acts less as a means to idealize the past and more as a vehicle for criticizing the present late-Victorian society. *Rodney Store* certainly contains evidence of lingering essentialism, but this should more likely be viewed as evidence of the proclivities of his audience as opposed to the overt ideologically motivated continuance which *Cashel Byron’s Profession* seems to argue. Doyle’s criticism of Victorian essentialism is veiled, but the novel’s narrative structure - that of a reminiscence - offers a framework from which the criticism of essentialism works in subtle ways. Within the novel Doyle is not arguing for an upsetting of traditional class structures, but rather a lessening of the assumptions of class that Victorian society seemed to promote. Through the course of the novel ethics and individual behavior is divorced from class and becomes evidence of individual character. Ostensibly boxing comes to embody a practice that might evidence both the best and

worst of human propensities from both sides of the class divide but within the novel criticism is clearly most heavily leveled at the upper classes. In this sense the novel is certainly not revolutionary but does contain a socially critical element.

The novel opens with a short monologue by the work's eponymous narrator Rodney Stone in which he not only places the events of the narrative into their historical context, but also talks about their links with his present day mid-Victorian society. Beyond the anticipated acknowledgement of change that has occurred in the nineteenth century, the opening discussion focuses on the difficulties of translating human experience across time and between individual personalities. Stone states: "...we find that when it is with our children that we talk it is a hard matter to make them understand" and further "...I do not know where they are to read of ourselves, of the folk we were, and the lives we led, and how the world seemed to our eyes when they were young as theirs are now" (Doyle 1). The novel itself, *Rodney Stone*, stands as a literary attempt to produce a book from which those perspectives might be understood and within this context it is particularly significant that sport becomes one of the narrative's primary vehicles. As the introduction continues, Stone develops two key components of his persona. First is his unexceptional nature - or alternately his lack of hubris. Stone asserts that although he has contacted a number of extraordinary personalities through the course of his life, he is an ordinary and unexceptional man. Indeed his only boast-worthy claim is a lack of jealousy that stems from an ability to see things as they are. To this Stone adds a second characteristic stemming from his familial legacy, a common occupation in the Royal Navy and a tradition of naming sons after famous captains. The combination of the two features, humility and heroism, outlines a personality that draws upon many of the most

revered figures of English national culture, and yet manifests that reverence in an utterly unexceptional individual. Rodney Stone thus figures as an ideal composite character - not overtly identified by class affiliation, economic power, or achievement. Rodney becomes this ideal through his varied cross-class influences and the common values that he had derived from them.

Throughout the novel Doyle struggles with the conventions of an essentialist social ideology, and it is difficult to tell if his contradictory stance on identity stems from the conventions of his novel's temporal setting, the expectations of his audience, or the author's own ideological limitations. One of the novel's primary characters, Stone's childhood friend Jim Harrison (Boy Jim) emerges as the novel's most conventional feature and the character most deeply imbued with an essentialist identity. In a highly conventional trope of the Victorian novel of class, Boy Jim is introduced as a rural orphan raised by his uncle, a blacksmith and the former professional boxing champion of England. As the novel progresses there are several instances where the physical features and bearing of Jim show him to be of different stock than his working class uncle and it is eventually revealed that Jim is actually the lost descendent of one of the local nobility. Doyle's use of highly stereotypical portrayals of class identity is pervasive in the narrative and often displayed through physical and behavioral features tied to class identities. But the novel's primary personality, the self-effacing Rodney Stone, and many of the novel's more subtle details cause these elements and their intent to be called into question. The humility evidenced through Rodney Stone's character might in some respects present itself as a hereditary trait, but as the novel's opening continues, an argument is made that his character emerges through circumstance and application rather

than an inborn quality. Born into a family of marginal means and living within the confines of a small village on the outskirts of Brighton, Rodney Stone's upbringing consists of a mixture of influences from across class lines but the pastoral elements of his personality cannot go unnoticed. The village where both Rodney and Boy Jim live, Friar's Oak, lies on the coach line from London to Brighton and the constant traffic of noblemen traveling to the palace on the Brighton shore gives opportunity for the boys and the village to mix with the both urbanity and the upper class. At first Stone's description of this activity takes on a romantic admiration of place and prosperity: "many a summer evening have Boy Jim and I lain upon the grass, watching all these grand folks, and cheering the London coaches as the came roaring through the dust clouds..." (Doyle 5). But rather quickly this coach travel becomes the source of both comparison and conflict. For Stone, both Boy Jim and his uncle Champion Harrison are shown to embody greater points of admiration and this works to promote a latent pastoral ideology within the work.

As Champion Harrison represents the key professional boxing character in Rodney Stone, his narrative and characterization deserve some particular attention. Like many of the characters in Rodney Stone Harrison's character is complex. Although a former professional boxer, for most of the novel he is presented as a retired boxer and distant from the identity he held while in the profession. Coerced into retirement by his wife, his identity as a blacksmith might be likened to an accession to the conventions of his working class position and an acceptance of the limitations such a life imposes in exchange for its security. This difference in the mentalities of the professional boxer and the blacksmith come out in one of the early episodes of the novel used to delineate the persona of both Harrison and the professional boxer more generally, an instance that

Doyle defines as a moment when “Champion Harrison showing me [Rodney] for an instant the sort of man he had been” (8). But the instance itself is perhaps equally telling of the general character of the nobility displayed within the novel as well. The story involves a group of rambunctious noblemen who travel through the village one day in a coach driven by a young Corinthian who, through the profligate and careless use of his whip, happens to catch Harrison on his leather apron with one of the lashes. Harrison calls out the young gentleman at the reins and advises him to be more careful. At this the coach stops and the young man climbs down to confront Harrison, having taken offense at the cheek displayed by a working class individual. He prepares to give Harrison a throttling:

The sporting gentlemen of those days were were very fine boxers for the most part, for it was the mode to take a course of Mendoza, just a few years afterwards there was no man about town who had not had the muffers on with Jackson. Knowing their own prowess, they never refused the chance of a wayside adventure, and it was seldom indeed that the bargee or the navigator had much to boast of after a young blood had taken off his coat to him.

This one swung himself off the box-seat with the alacrity of a man who has no doubts about the upshot of the quarrel, and after hanging his caped coat upon the swingle-bar, he daintily turned up the ruffled cuffs of his white cambric shirt (Doyle 8-9).

That boxing was a fashion amongst the sporting gentlemen was a common practice for both upper and lower classes in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was one of the common arguments for its egalitarian nature. The egalitarian ideal of boxing, when extended to the social realm, was argued to establish a culture in which issues of behavior and honor might be fairly contested between individuals regardless of class, but within Doyle’s descriptions the sport fails to live up to its idealization. As the episode continues the gentleman’s companions recognize Harrison as a former champion and once the identity is established the young Corinthian stands down, but he hasn’t lost any of his

arrogance nor has he exhibited any substantive change in behavior. Climbing back onto the box he tosses a guinea at Boy Jim and Stone and

having turned the laugh in his favour by his merry way of taking it, he cracked his whip, and away they flew to make London under the five hours; while Jack Harrison, with his half-fullered shoe in his hand, went whistling back to the forge (Doyle 9-10).

Doyle's close to this episode is perhaps more telling than the episode itself - "[s]o much for Champion Harrison!" (Doyle 11). Clearly this confrontation between Corinthian and blacksmith is unsatisfying in its irresolution, both parties return to their respective social positions and the mentalities that are ascribed to them - the complacent and dutiful blacksmith and the arrogant self-interested Corinthian simply perpetuate the system that was the source of the initial disagreement.

The pervasive attitudes of the English upper class are further addressed through one of the novel's more colorful characters, Stone's uncle and prominent Corinthian Sir Charles Tregellis. Much of Rodney Stone is consumed with Rodney's travels with his uncle, a tour of England's upper class society through which, as Rodney's mother states, he will "learn to look down upon your poor, simple, old-fashioned mother and father" (56). Through the course of their journeys Rodney is introduced to many of the iconic figures of English culture - the Prince of Wales, Admiral Nelson, and indeed its most notable boxers - but through these experiences Rodney develops a perspective that diminishes rather than supports their iconic stature. The Prince of Wales is portrayed as a petulant child, a welcher, and a hypocrite. Nelson comes off better in terms of his character, but rather diminished as a result of his diminutive stature and down-to-earth bearing. The novel returns to boxing with a grand dinner hosted for sportsmen and boxers alike. As the collection of famous prize fighters collect in the London sporting house for

the dinner, Doyle takes a moment to focus on their conversations which consist of remembrances of past meetings in the ring and discussions of current life situations. As was the convention, many of the former champions had used their fame and winnings to establish public houses of their own and through the course of their discussions the talk of the particular dangers of the profession. While alcoholism and loss of physical form are obvious dangers, one common complaint surprises young Rodney Stone: ““avin the young Corinthians and bloods about town smackin’ you eternally in the face.”

In they [the Corinthians] come of an evenin’ into my bar, with the wine in their heads. ‘Are you Tom Owen the bruiser?’ says one o’ them. ‘At your service sir’ says I. ‘Take that then,’ says he, and its a clip on the nose, or a backhanded slap across the chops as likely as not. Then they can brag all their lives that they had hit Tom Owen (Doyle 102).

Upon hearing these stories Champion Harrison asks if any of the fighters stand up for themselves but learns that they are limited in their ability to do so. As they say “Why, [...], its a common assault, [...], against the body of ‘is Majesty’s leige...” (Doyle 102). While the arrogance of the upper class boxing fans is clearly evident in these passages and reiterates many of the basic features of the story concerning Harrison’s confrontation with the young Corinthian earlier in the novel, we see here an expansion of the discussion to include larger, systemic influences on attitudes and behavior. The arrogance of the young Corinthians is fostered not merely by an essentialist belief in their own favored status, but also by their recognition that the playing field (or boxing ring if one prefers) has been heavily skewed in their favor. Rather than a fair fight, English society has fostered a competition in which the working class individual cannot hit back.

The utilization of boxing as a platform for the criticism of English class relations continues through *Rodney Stone*’s presentation of a prize fight that Sir Charles Tregellis has arranged with another Corinthian, Sir Lothian Hume. Once again the class dynamics

of boxing show themselves in a less than ideal light. Although the fans of professional boxing who come to witness the bout are most interested in the competition between the boxers, Hume and Tregellis seem to take the fight as a proxy competition between themselves where the boxers are merely mercenaries fighting for the honor and profit of their upper class backers. Through his presentation of the bout and its eventual outcome Doyle channels many of the standard arguments Victorians utilized against prize fighting - including the underlying class dichotomies. When envisioned in narrative through its Corinthian form, professional boxing evidences clear problems for both practice and the wider society. Drawing perhaps on the events of the Heenan-Sayers bout of 1860, Doyle depicts the use of outside agents to spoil the competition when Hume's fighter seems sure of losing. As Hume's henchmen incite the crowd to cut the ropes and foul the ring, Doyle's lengthy descriptions of the ceremony and pageantry of the fight's preparations ring hollow. At the close of the bout the attitudes of fighters and backers stand stark in their contrast. With the fight called a draw and evidence of foul play in the air, Sir Charles and Sir Lothian continue the dispute between them while the two boxers compare wounds and congratulate each other on a splendid contest. Within this scene it is very clearly the boxers whose behaviors Doyle would like his audience to emulate and it is their example that both Rodney Stone and Boy Jim follow through the course of their later lives.

The pervasive element of class dependent perspective and the impact of those perspectives on individual action contained within *Rodney Stone* are ultimately fashioned by Doyle into an overarching perspective on the sport of professional boxing. Although *Rodney Stone* is set at a time when prize-fighting was at its height, he is writing the novel

within an age where the prize-ring's future was highly uncertain. His presentation of boxing evokes a nostalgic longing for its ethics, but also a stark recognition of the social structures and attitudes that have sullied both its practice and image. At the close of the novel's fight scene Doyle provides the final epithet to the practice:

And so those two brave-hearted fellows made their way amidst the yelping roughs, like two wounded lions amidst a pack of wolves and jackals. I say again that, if the ring has fallen low, it is not in the main the fault of the men who have done the fighting, but it lies at the door of the vile crew of ring-side parasites and ruffians, who are as far below the honest pugilist as the welsher and the blackleg are below the noble racehorse which serves them as a pretext for their villainies (Doyle 196).

Through Doyle's writings on the subject it is possible to detect not merely the individuals to whom professional boxing owes its demise, but also a species of attitude and action that has served to bring the practice into disrepute. The arrogance of the upper classes finds itself as a common target, but it is this arrogance that eventually leads Sir Lothian to skew the results of competition to avoid taking a loss. If boxing - or sporting competition more widely - was to have meaningful competition, then it presumably could not be modeled upon nor unduly influenced by the inherently unequal English society that surrounded it. If professional boxing was to survive the nineteenth century it could not persist on an eighteenth century model shaped by the self-interest of the upper classes.

While *Rodney Stone's* presentation of professional boxing shares certain aspects with *Cashel Byron's Profession* - namely the novel's assurance that social progress will necessarily involve the demise of its practice - there are obvious points of departure within their presentations of the sport and its culture. Both novels draw upon general Victorian perspectives concerning professional boxing through their criticism and nostalgic celebration of its ideology but the object of their criticism certainly differs. While Shaw might find ideologically viable perspectives within the professional boxer's

experience, he remains dedicated to an upper class vision of social reform. Doyle, however, focuses his criticism on upper class ideologies and attitudes while presenting the working class mentality of the boxer as a model for social progress. In the opening pages of *Rodney Stone*, Doyle provides an explanation of the social meanings and utility that the sport should embody:

These [boxers] were the standard, and their trade carried with it this obvious recommendation, that it is one in which no drunken or foul-living man could long succeed. There were exceptions,..., no doubt...; in the main, I say again that they were honest men, brave and enduring to an incredible degree, and a credit to the country that produced them (7).

If the honest, brave, and enduring fighter is the product of the nation that produced him, then the English identity it represents is obviously forwarded as the ultimate solution to the nation's social difficulties. But like *Cashel Byron's Profession*, *Rodney Stone* seems to present an English social reality that has progressed too far to ever sustain a context where either boxing or its social ideology might persist.

Through the course of *Cashel Byron's Profession* and *Rodney Stone* it is possible to see several levels of continuity within the portrayals of professional boxing, the celebration of its traditional social ethics, and the approach to social problems that the sport seems to engender. While neither of these novels is successful in delineating a manner in which the sport of professional boxing or its iteration of working class identity might persist in English culture, they are successful in terms of identifying its critical limitations and the means through which it might serve to identify critical problems in English society. What is needed to sustain boxing and to make its social criticism more useful is not only a new kind of boxer but also a new understanding of the sport itself. On the grand scale the true significance and importance of *Cashel Byron's Profession* is to find greater expression for a theme that has persisted through Eliot, Hardy, and Gissing, a

reorientation of social criticism from an indictment of the working class to one that focuses on upper class self-interest and social isolation as the source of England's social ills. As that ideology gains greater purchase over the course of the last two decades of the nineteenth century, room will open not only for the wider expression of working class identity, but also for sports such as professional boxing. As England nears the turn of the twentieth century, professional boxing will re-emerge through both sporting practice and literary production to take on the role of defining both ethics and social ideology for the coming century. That system of ethics and ideology will not only forward both boxer and the working class as its exemplar, by doing so it will serve to open up space for greater expression and increasing social legitimacy.

Chapter 4

Finding Room for the Pastoral in the Modern Age:

The Croxley Master as an Expression of “Traditional Rebellious” Culture and Model for Social Progress in Late Victorian England

According to tradition, assumption, and practice, the English professional boxer is predominantly a working class subject who represents a particularly vital and capable iteration of working class identity. The literary boxer is obviously an idealization of the literal form, and within that idealization the boxing novel attempts to achieve a synthesis of both working class and dominant Victorian cultural identities. As such, the literary boxer is more than a proficient athlete. He also possesses an ability for deep sophistication in the conception of social conflict. The literary boxer might physically embody the characteristics of the hulking, brutish, persona that occupied the Victorian nightmare of the working class, but he is able to moderate that menacing potential through cultivation and the ethics of competition. The profession of boxing provides not merely the ability to control aggression but also a specific and peculiar perspective on the world, one that is potentially useful in the negotiation of social and ethical issues in the later Victorian age. Drawing upon J.P. Sartre, it is possible to argue that a sophisticated practice and knowledge of boxing instills a deep and totalizing knowledge of individual conflict that provides practical insight into the processes of broader social conflict. The professional boxer’s knowledge of conflict and strategy, the ability to read his opponents, to strike when it is most advantageous, and to extricate himself when he blunders into

danger, coupled with the courage, audacity and arrogance that goes along with boxing competition allow the literary boxer to negotiate the social milieu of the later nineteenth century with particular skill. His physical conditioning, popularity, and confidence allow him to flaunt social convention with relative ease and impunity. Within the social realm, the literary boxer's combination of physical and mental superiority manifests as a sign of social potential, a means through which the working class boxer might show himself as equal, if not superior, to his upper class peers in ability, intelligence, ethics, and ideology. Although he may be a revolutionary in this respect, the professional boxer does not seek to wholly upset or alter English culture; the professional boxer is, after all, a champion of the English spirit and an embodiment of national ideals. His aim is to counter the Victorian mindset that labels him a criminal and limits his upward mobility. His aim is to make a place in English society for himself, his profession, and the popular identity that he represents.

Through recent work in colonial and post-colonial sporting cultures of the British Commonwealth it has become increasingly clear that subject populations recognized sport not merely as a tool of colonial control, but also as a potential means of liberation. The adoption of English culture and proficiency at English sport might represent a supplication to English superiority, but might also function as both a test and measure of equivalency; one's ability to play the game was but one sign of an ability to function as the English did. Further, the adoption of Englishness was argued to satisfy an association between cultural proficiency and an equal standing in English society. Sport served as one of the primary sites where this ideal was contested, demonstrated, and eventually forced to fruition. And that final point was significant. It was not merely enough to play

the game; colonials had to prove that they could play the game better than their colonial masters, that they could be more English than the English themselves. The colonial experience provides a documented example of the process through which cricket came to be used not merely as a site of social contestation, but additionally as both a representation of and a model for the means to counter hegemonic codes of Victorian essentialism in the West Indies. Cricket displayed civility. The ability to defeat the English at cricket displayed superiority. Public acknowledgement and celebration of both superiority and civility displayed through cricket enabled wider sociocultural transformation. Given the similarities in social and sporting contexts between England and her colonies, there is reason to suggest that sport might be utilized in similar ways between the two locations and cultures. Indeed, the social and sporting contexts in England at the end of the nineteenth century suggest that the English working class utilized professional sports and sporting culture in similar ways to affect similar social transformations. Despite the persistence of class ideologies in contemporary English society, it is impossible to deny that the emergence of the twentieth century represents a significant break from the social and cultural ideologies of the Victorian era. Within the contemporary era the modern English working class have worked through popular cultures to construct a new English social identity that has proven itself capable of accommodating a much broader conception of Englishness and a more complete sense of social inclusion. The process has been both gradual and imperfect, but it has affected real and substantive change. In a very simple sense it can be argued that the emergence of this modern English culture began at a point when subject populations forced Victorian society to live up to the social promise embodied in the culture they promoted. Sport was

instrumental in the process of fostering egalitarian belief and providing the context where ethical-egalitarian arguments might be made.

But the question of literature remains to be addressed. Studies of the literary culture of the Pan-African movement and the cricket culture of the West Indies have helped to develop a greater appreciation for role of literature in the process of sporting liberation. Whether exclusively through sport or literature (or a combination of the two) marginalized colonial populations utilized Victorian culture as a vehicle for the development of identity, a means to demonstrate sociocultural equivalency, and ultimately an argument for equal inclusion in English society. The writings of post-colonial scholars such as C.L.R. James, Clem Seecharan, Hilary Beckles, and Simon Gikandi, have forwarded both sport and literature as primary sites in this larger process of cultural adoption and social integration¹⁰. Twentieth century scholars have focused considerable attention on this aspect of the wider British sporting culture and the manner in which sport helped to foster both emancipation and social integration within nations of the British Commonwealth. C.L.R. James stands out as the most celebrated of these scholars and through his writings West Indian cricket has emerged as a critical site through which the role of sport in social integration has come to be more completely understood. Cricket has been forwarded by West Indians and scholars alike as a vehicle through which West Indians were able to utilize English social ideology as a means of self-assertion and liberation. Most recently Simon Gikandi has offered an articulation and

¹⁰ Clem Seecharan. *Muscular Learning: Cricket and Education in the Making of the British West Indies at the End of the 19th Century*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2006. *Liberation Cricket: West Indies Cricket Culture*. Hilary McD. Beckles and Brian Stoddart eds. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1995. James and Gikandi listed in Works Cited.

furtherance of James' theories to assert that the West Indian utilization of cricket represents a model widely expressed through the Pan-African movement of the twentieth century. Indeed, Gikandi claims that the emergent cultures of the British Commonwealth effect the most dramatic alterations to English life in the twentieth century, changes that have "taken place on the cultural level, sometimes independent of, or detached from, any real structural transformations" and that "[t]he identity of England has been most visibly transformed in those sites of the everyday...that have been colonized by the postcolonial migrant" (187-188). But Gikandi is careful to correct thinking that would view this cultural change as the result of colonial transportation of new, non-English "cultures,...traditions and practices which have turned England upside down" Instead Gikandi claims that Commonwealth cultures actively assimilated English cultural thinking and then "repatriated to Britain the ideals of Englishness and its culture" (189). In effect, the colonial subject becomes a conduit through which the English might contact their culture in ways that illustrate its internal contradictions and perhaps better reflect its ultimate possibilities.

Utilizing examples from the Pan-African movement, Gikandi is able to establish a pattern of cultural appropriation and utilization within British colonial culture that evidences a unique and potentially transformative embodiment of Englishness. C.L.R. James' seminal work, *Beyond a Boundary*, provides Gikandi with the most developed and cohesive description of an individual experience within the British colonial culture but the cultural mechanism described through James' experience remains cryptic and controversial and has required a great deal of further study to truly explain. Drawing from James, Gikandi describes the colonial position as one that lies in a liminal space between

cultures, not entirely British or entirely colonial. Within this position English culture and England itself remain abstract conceptions divorced from both physical location and sociocultural contexts. As England has tended to define its national identity and culture through both internal and external conceptions the colonial subject becomes crucial to the definition of Englishness because of “their ability to engage with Englishness in a liminal space that was not entirely the center or the margin.” From this liminal position the colonial subject:

conceived of Englishness as an incomplete project because...they could not entirely claim to have a natural relation to those aspects of British culture that were considered intrinsic; but they could not negate the institutions and practices - cricket, Shakespeare - which they considered central to their self-fashioning as modern subjects (197).

While for James and many West Indians the cricket ground would become the idealised iteration and site of this liminal colonial inception of Englishness, Gikandi turns to literature as the means to fully articulate the true significance of colonial influence on English culture. While cricket may have occupied the minds of West Indians like C.L.R. James, African colonials adopted Shakespeare as their paragon of English culture and identity. Gikandi writes of twentieth century efforts to translate Shakespeare into African languages shortly after Sir Walter Raleigh asserts the connection between the Elizabethan author and England’s national identity. Given Raleigh’s assertions concerning Shakespeare’s relationship to English identity it might seem easy to assert that the importance African intellectuals placed on translating Shakespeare into African languages was simply a sign of colonial reverence for English culture - a semi-pathetic attempt of the colonial to play at being English or perhaps an adulteration of African culture through colonial inculcation - but Gikandi and African intellectuals argued otherwise. As Gikandi writes:

this [African] belief in Shakespeare as an icon of cultural achievement was underwritten by an equally important assumption, namely, that there was an inherent equivalence between English and African culture; the act of translation was intended to be a manifestation of a cultural equivalence that colonialism had sought to negate (197).

From this, it would ultimately seem that colonial subjects came to view English culture in a vastly different light than did their colonial masters. While Victorians had forwarded English culture as a means to differentiate English identity and retain their position of authority, colonial subjects seemed to interpret the adoption of English culture as both a challenge and as a means to illustrate their own social worth through equivalency.

It is possible to argue that England also demonstrates a similar development in both professional sport and popular literature through the course of the later nineteenth century. The sporting fields and literary productions of later nineteenth century England evidence the emergence of a populist English character that confronts dominant Victorian social ideologies in an attempt to create a new national identity. The English boxing novel, a literary work that emerges from this transitional age of the later nineteenth century and seeks to represent both the spirit and ideology of professional sport, serves to represent a process of social and cultural contestation analogous to that effected by British colonials in Africa and the West Indies. Given the vastly segregated and diminished status of English working class subjects through the course of the nineteenth century and the similarities between Victorian and colonial utilizations of culture, it is possible to see similarities between English working class modes of reaching social equality and those methods used by colonial subjects. Like C.L.R. James, the English working class not only saw the sporting field as a site of social potential, but also utilized the culture of sport to present their own iteration of a unified and equal English culture. Sporting historian Jeffrey Hill has offered a perspective of later nineteenth century

English sport that stresses not merely its wide social connection, but also the means through which sporting experience sought to develop a wider integration of English identities. In Hill's discussion of journalism surrounding the FA Cup final in the later nineteenth century his working premise focuses on the role of the media and popular culture in the process of imbuing sporting practices with meaning - a process that in the nineteenth century was largely taken up by the popular press but might also be seen within the emerging genre of boxing narratives. Through his explorations of sporting press accounts of the FA Cup Final during the later nineteenth century Hill highlights the fact that the press circulated stories centered on the experiences of sporting fans travelling to London to witness their teams in England's premier football competition. Replicating the narrative proclivities of the pilgrimage tale, these accounts accentuate sociocultural differences within the English population as local identities contact through travel. Removed from their localities through the liminal journey to the capital, the fans often exhibit behaviors of excess, the foibles of the traveler in a foreign city, and the eventual re-accentuation of local identity upon their return. There is one particular story that Hill relates that is of particular relevance here. It involves a fan from Burnley who visits the Crystal Palace during his stay in London for the FA Cup Final. As Hill relates:

There was, of course, nothing to compare with [the Crystal Palace] in Burnley, and it was therefore a "must." The visitor, careful (as northerners are) with his money, had initially demurred at paying an additional entrance fee to the Crystal Palace over and above the price of his match ticket. But he was later forced to acknowledge that the price had been worthwhile; the glass structure was certainly an impressive experience. He added, though, as a summation of the whole experience: "By gum, aw wouldn't like to go and mend a brokken pane up their." (124-125)

In his extended musings on this story Hill accentuates the strange mixture of cultural cues and social identities encapsulated within the visitor's experience and utterance. Hill

contends that the visitor “is undoubtedly impressed” by the structure and yet infuses his experience with the consideration of the practical concern of maintenance, a means of expressing his refusal to get carried away by the grandeur of the national symbol. The delivery of the line in dialect is clearly a means to highlight the rustic local identity of the visitor, but also “reminds us that the nation is composed of a variety of people, with different habits, cultures, and speech patterns.” Hill also contends that readers of the story back in Burnley (or ostensibly other regions of the north of England) “would have recognized the irony contained in the sentiments and marked it down as capturing their own mentality.” The remark comes to represent the mentality of the “everyman” and the “relationship between provinces and metropolis.” Finally, and most crucially, Hill questions the origins of the story and the author of the remark, doubting “its literal truth,” and an expression of the “myth of the north.” But despite this, Hill will also contend:

the newspaper reporter who composed that section of the paper no doubt felt that the remark had a ring of truth. His readers would undoubtedly have expected someone to have said something like this, in this particular situation. The pleasure experienced by the reader in the story derived from the way it both presented and confirmed a vision of the self (125).

But the “vision of the self” that the FA Cup fan presents is a complex one, in part an expression of the grandeur of Victorian culture represented in the awe inspiring potential of the Crystal Palace but also evident of the down-to-earth, working class practicality that agonizes over the building’s maintenance. England’s society had always been composed of these two iterations of identity, culture, and perspective but its culture had by and large been determined by and directed towards only one segment of that wider personality. Within iterations of later nineteenth century sporting culture it is possible to witness the emergence of a wider recognition of the populist element of English society, a culture

that viewed and embodied Englishness in ways that remained critically English and yet differed from the sentiments of dominant, upper class culture.

Within Hill's relation of stories surrounding is used as a means to forward a simple proposition also forwarded by Michael Oriard:

that sport is understood, not in any essentialist way but through the various forms through which an idea of sport is mediated to and its meanings negotiated by those interested in it. We must not lose sight of the reader's ability to influence this process. (Oriard; Hill 126)

When speaking of the readers of sport, here we are not merely considering those who witness its events, read its accounts and follow its records, but also those who participate on the field of play. For those various participants in the culture, sport becomes a vehicle, at least in part, of their own making and containing their own meanings. As such, sport comes to exist within the context of a wider sociocultural discourse, a discourse in which divergent meanings might coexist, yet those with the weight of public support might reign supreme. Hill's final assertion that sport is not understood in any essentialist way provides reason to believe that populist iterations of sport in the later nineteenth century represent an effective counter to the dominant definitions based upon Victorian ideals of class and identity.

Within critical discourse concerning both Doyle's sporting works and his wider corpus, the author has obviously been linked with highly traditional aspects of both Britishness and the hegemonic codes of English social control. Since his literary productions are heavily infused with iterations of English manliness there has been a tendency to link Doyle with residual cultural forms and the paternalism English patriarchy such as Muscular Christianity and the evangelical codes of the Soldier-Saint exemplified by figures such as Henry Havelock and General Charles George Gordon,

whose further associations with the Indian mutiny and uprisings in the Sudan help to create a cult of inculcating English manhood linked to the civilizing projects of colonization and the suppression of contradictory identities¹¹. But just as cultural critics have tended to oversimplify the social role of sport into a simple mechanism of inculcation and control, it is possible to contend that Doyle's literary corpus has been similarly oversimplified. Doyle's novels evidence an evolution of the literary use of the boxing trope from overtly Victorian portrayals of social, amateur boxing in *The Stark Munro* letters, to eighteenth-century professional boxing in *Rodney Stone*, and finally modern professional boxing in *The Croxley Master*. In part this development of boxing in Doyle's works might be ascribed to the shifting sensibilities of his audience - certainly the display of boxing in *The Croxley Master* stems from an acknowledgement of boxing's changing practice and social standing in the late nineteenth century. The adoption of the Marquis de Queensberry rules by English professional boxing in the last two decades of the nineteenth century enabled boxing to openly stage competitions again and represents a critical concession to the standards of Victorian society. But it is also critical to acknowledge Doyle's own development of boxing's representation through his portrayal of the sport and its practitioners over the course of his two professional boxing novels. While the specific flavor of boxing in these novels certainly shifts from one to the next, many of the ideological components remain consistent and are simply applied to new contexts. Through this process Doyle is able to begin the process of delineating professional boxing's modern social meaning.

¹¹ James Eli Adams' *Dandies and Desert Saints* argues for the development of this masculine identity and ideology through the course of the nineteenth century. Although Adams does not directly address the works of Arthur Conan Doyle, Douglas Kerr postulates that Sherlock Holmes evidences the paradox of "dandification" evidenced by Carlyle's "self-dramatization as a prophet" (190).

Within *The Croxley Master*, the boxing novel evolves beyond Victorian essentialist conventions and presents an individual and sporting character whose heredity might remain definite but whose possibilities remain anomalous and whose fortune is derived through self and circumstance. While this represents a significant step forward within the development of the boxing novel, it is perhaps more telling as an indication of the expectations of a changing audience created by the expansion of education in the 1870s. Doyle's adaptation of the boxing narrative in *The Croxley Master* evidences a shift in culture that the novel both exploits and perpetuates. By the later nineteenth century mid-Victorian efforts at progressive cultural inculcation created a much larger population of English literary consumers no longer solely tied to the conventions of middle class Victorian readership. Utilizing the connections between sport, literature, and culture forwarded by James and Gikandi, there is reason to suggest that this late nineteenth century collusion of sport and populist literature sets the stage for a much wider shift in English culture moving forward. Victorian efforts at social progress had been successful in allowing the working class to adopt many aspects of Victorian culture, but it had failed to completely eradicate the essentialism that prevented true social integration. If integration were to occur, it necessarily had to be forced from the bottom rather than simply opened from the top. The strictures of Victorian culture provided the English working classes with an increased ability to demand concessions from wider English culture. While sport and literature were simply two of many Victorian tools of cultural integration, the sporting field and the novel become primary sites where this larger process of cultural negotiation is enacted, embodied, and exemplified. The sporting fields of England act as a literal space of social contestation and amelioration and through

this process symbolize a model for effecting both social and cultural change on a wider scale. The ultimate form of the English boxing novel seeks to describe changes in the larger society - the representation of modern boxing serving as evidence of this - and disseminate the cultural identity embodied in modern sport into all aspects of English life.

Within *The Croxley Master* Doyle projects the boxing narrative out of the past and into the future by altering both the identity of the professional boxer and his representation of the sport in critical ways that reflect a more complete understanding of professional sport and modern sporting experience. Rather than presenting the professional boxer in the essentialist vision of the eighteenth century, the indelible identity of an individual literally made for the ring, Doyle chooses a character that perhaps more correctly identifies the manner in which most individuals would enter the profession and the role that it would play in their lives. For Doyle's protagonist in *The Croxley Master*, Mr. Montgomery, professional boxing represents both a choice and an opportunity, a temporary profession that meets immediate needs. While Doyle critic Douglas Kerr identifies this type of character as an "amateur-professional," and a virtual appropriation of professional sport by Victorian sporting ideology, such a classification seems not only contradictory to the novel's anti-Victorian ethic but also incomplete in its expression of the character's social representation (198-200). Mr. Montgomery is very certainly a new type of boxing character evocative of many aspects of the idealized Victorian middle (professional) class, but his identity is one that evokes a populist rather than Victorian sentiment. The idealized Victorian personality, after all, would never stoop to the level of attending a professional boxing contest, much less participate in one. The

line of demarcation between professional and amateur is a liminal border within the Victorian consciousness and involves a transformation that cannot be undone.

Mr. Montgomery, although he fights but one professional bout, should be considered a professional like any other, but his career within professional sport is distilled into a single experience. In this respect Mr. Montgomery's connection to sport is not diminished, but rather comes to accurately reflect the literal experiences of all professional athletes. Ultimately professional boxing, and professional sport in general, is always something of a temporary occupation. At best and in the most sedate of sports, the contemporary professional athlete might hope to enjoy twenty years of occupation. For most however, professional sporting careers might last only a year or two. As such, professional sporting identity loses its essentialist character and becomes just one aspect of a much more diverse personality and a much longer lived experience. The identity and persona of the professional boxer must therefore ameliorate itself to a much wider social experience and the mentality of the ring must adapt itself to apply to a more diverse set of social experiences. Within this adaptation we can witness many of the same social perspectives found in *Cashel Byron's Profession* and *Rodney Stone*, but also a new approach to them. The social setting of *The Croxley Master* replicates the dominant/subservient roles of traditional, paternalistic socioeconomic relationships between the English classes, but Mr. Montgomery's capabilities and individual development allow those situations to take on a different, increasingly civilized character.

The novel begins with an extended passage evocative of the Victorian social problem novel which it reworks into a more modern iteration of individual rather than class perception. Montgomery is a medical assistant who is overtly associated with the

identity of the manual laborer despite his professional pretensions. Montgomery works in the practice of Dr. Oldacre, a man whose name belies his highly traditional social outlook, and the relationship between the two men is utilized by Doyle to represent a more general social dichotomy between workers and their upper class employers. We are first introduced to Montgomery as a man burdened by his work and limited by the social relationships that structure his working identity:

Mr. Robert Montgomery was seated at his desk, his head upon his hands, in a state of the blackest despondency. Before him was the open ledger with the long columns of Dr. Oldacre's prescriptions. At his elbows lay the wooden tray with the labels in various partitions, the cork box, the lumps of twisted sealing-wax, while in front a rank of empty bottles waited to be filled. But his spirits were too low for work. He sat in silence, with his fine shoulders bowed and his head upon his hands. (3)

Through this opening description Montgomery is very obviously associated with labor and the seemingly insurmountable volume of labor is construed as the source of his "despondency." The reference to "his fine shoulders" evokes the physical features of the manual laborer and the rough worker despite his rather rarefied profession.

The association of Montgomery with industrial labor is continued in the succeeding passage, a description of the Northern industrial town where Montgomery lives and works. In a passage reminiscent of Dickens' descriptions of Coketown in *Hard Times*, Doyle writes:

through the grimy surgery window over a foreground of blackened brick and slate, a line of enormous chimneys like Cyclopean pillars upheld the lowering, dun-coloured cloudbank. For six days in the week they spouted smoke, but to-day the furnace fires were banked, for it was Sunday. Sordid and polluting gloom hung over a district blighted and blasted by the greed of man. (3-4)

Although it is possible to see many similarities with Dickens' descriptions of Coketown, there is a refinement and specificity in Doyle's later nineteenth century description that evidences subtle differences in ideology and intent. Dickens describes Coketown's image

as that of the “painted face of a savage” and carries that savage nature over into his descriptions of the contradictory religious sentiment of the community - the preponderance of churches that seem to serve only the upper class (21). While we might see the same inference of hypocrisy in Doyle’s presentation, the source and nature of that hypocrisy is more concretely focused. Rather than applying a general and somewhat ethereal character of savagery to the upper class ideologies that have created the conditions of Coketown, Doyle’s industrial setting is made more specific. The potent Cyclopean reference evokes the industry of forging but also infers something of the Homeric jailer and cannibal Polyphemus whose consumptive and constricting character mirrors the effects of industry on the lives and souls of the working class. There is perhaps another level of comparison might be derived from Dickens’ *Hard Times* when it comes to his discussion of the working class’s desire for relief from the industrial confines in which they exist.

That there was any Fancy in them demanding to be brought into healthy existence instead of struggling on in convulsions? That exactly in the ratio as they worked long and monotonously, the craving grew within them for some physical relief—some relaxation, encouraging good humour and good spirits, and giving them a vent—some recognized holiday, though it were but for an honest dance to a stirring band of music—some occasional light pie in which even M’Choakumchild had no finger—which craving must and would be satisfied aright, or must and would inevitably go wrong, until the laws of the Creation were repealed? (23-24)

Dickens’ employment of the word “Fancy” is obviously circumstantial here, but its relation to the topic of both the “Fancy” of boxing (or sport more generally) is compelling. In the early Victorian mindset of Dickens’ relief from working class conditions is viewed as a temporary invigoration of mind and soul, a momentary infusion of sweetness and light that might break up the monotony of their otherwise drab and uniform existence. Without such release, the specter of revolution hangs heavy.

Although the opening of *The Croxley Master* certainly utilizes many of the same images as Dickens' *Hard Times*, Doyle's conception of working class conditions and salvation represents a significant shift from earlier Victorian ideologies. While Montgomery's despondency might find representation through his physical location, his mood is created by individual circumstance and does not seek a resolution through in momentary cultural release or class-based revolution. In a presentation that serves to transport the personal anguish of rural characters such as Thomas Hardy's *Jude* into the industrial setting, Doyle describes Montgomery's predicament as a limitation on individual desire:

[Montgomery's] trouble was deeper and more personal. The winter session was approaching. He should be back again at the University completing his medical degree; but alas! he had not the money with which to pay his class fees, nor could he imagine how he could procure it. Sixty pounds were wanted to make his career, and it might have been as many thousands for any chance there seemed to be of his obtaining it. (4)

Given the personal nature of his problem, Montgomery decides to attempt a personal solution - asking his employer for a loan of the course fees. It is within this exchange that Doyle levels his opening critique of Victorian hypocrisy. Dr. Oldacre's character is described through both physical and social means to evoke a Victorian persona linked to the culture's ideals of social progress through exemplification. Oldacre is presented as "clean-shaven," "respectable," "prim," and "austere." He has "prospered exceedingly by the support of the local Church interest," and "[h]is appearance and words were always vaguely benevolent." Montgomery decides to "test the reality of his philanthropy" by asking for the course fees. Oldacre's response belies his class based essentialism and the common arguments for avoiding personal involvement in social issues. As Oldacre states:

Your request is unreasonable, Mr. Montgomery. I am surprised that you should have made it. Consider, sire, how many thousands of medical students there are in

this country. No doubt there are many of them who have a difficulty in finding their fees. Am I to provide for them all? Or why should I make an exception in your favour? I am grieved and disappointed, Mr. Montgomery, that you should have put me into the painful position of having to refuse you. (6)

Through this opening it is possible to see Doyle not only openly criticizing Victorian social mentality but also subtly reworking the Victorian conventions of the working class, industrial labor, and social progress. While the relationship between Montgomery and Oldacre might be that of a medical apprentice and physician, the social dichotomy comes to represent a much wider class antagonism. The true point of difference lies not only in the perspectives of Oldacre and Montgomery to the nature of England's social problems - for Oldacre the sentiments of a faceless mob, for Montgomery a deeply personal issue of the individual - but also within their individual desires for and propensities to effect change. These individual perspectives reflect wider socioeconomic conditions which serve to shape their perceptions and self-interests.

Although Oldacre presents his reluctance to help Montgomery as a matter of the individual vs. the weight of society, Doyle develops the idea further and presents an alternate manner of understanding the Dr.'s reluctance to help his assistant. Ultimately Doyle casts it as a matter of classed self-interest:

Montgomery was a valuable assistant - steady, capable, and hard-working - and [Oldacre] could not afford to lose him. Even if he had been prompted to advance those class fees, for which his assistant had appealed, it would have been against his interests to do so, for he did not wish him to qualify, and he desired him to remain in his subordinate position, in which he worked so hard for so small a wage. (31)

While Oldacre's self-interested desires to keep Montgomery in his place evoke the socialist perspectives of the mid-nineteenth century, *The Croxley Master* is not seeking to argue for the dissolution of independent self-interest in either an Arnoldian, Shavian, or revolutionary way. Self-interest is proposed as a natural instinct that can be moderated

through a wider acknowledgement of its existence. Montgomery, for his own part, is shown to be equally self-interested, but he moderates his behavior through an acknowledgement of others.

What ultimately separates Montgomery from Oldacre is his ability to totalize the social situations in which he finds himself and to utilize his wider understanding of the competing identities to structure effective and appropriate negotiations. In some instances these negotiations are violent, others dialectic and this illustrates Montgomery's varied persona and identity. The circumstance which ultimately leads Montgomery to find a solution for his monetary problems perhaps illustrates this quality best. As Montgomery works to prepare Dr. Oldacre's prescriptions, a worker enters the surgery and demands his wife's medicine. Although Montgomery remains in his state of despondency, he handles the exchange with both discretion and understanding. It is also interesting to note the frank clarity of the worker's understanding of the social positioning of Montgomery relative to Dr. Oldacre in the exchange. The worker demands: "Why hast thou not sent t' medicine oop as thy master ordered?" And here Doyle's presentation of Montgomery's response is telling:

Montgomery had become accustomed to the brutal frankness of the Northern worker. At first it had enraged him, but after a time he had grown callous to it, and accepted it as it was meant. But this was something different. It was insolence - brutal overbearing insolence, with physical menace behind it.

"What name" [Montgomery] asked coldly.

"Barton. Happen I may give thee cause to mind that name, yoong man. Mak' oop t' wife's medicine this very moment, look ye, or it will be the worse for thee." (7)

Through this passage it is possible to see Montgomery's recognition of social and cultural difference, but also his ability to correctly read individual social exchanges. The "insolence" (or perhaps merely aggressive self-interest) displayed by Barton might evoke

the same kind of sentiment as the callous self-interest of Dr. Oldacre, and yet the incident with Barton inspires a differing response:

Montgomery smiled. A pleasant sense of relief thrilled softly through him. What blessed safety-valve was this through which his jangled nerves might find some outlet. The provocation was so gross, the insult so provoked, that he could have none of those qualms which take the edge off a man's mettle. (7)

At this Montgomery rises, confronts the miner, and demands that he wait his turn. The miner, Barton, responds with threats to which Montgomery responds in turn. The two lash out at each other, "the blows were almost simultaneous," a "savage swing" from Barton and a "straight drive" from Montgomery which catches "the workman on the chin" (8). Barton drops immediately, crashing his head on a shelf on the way down, and lies insensible on the surgery floor. After a moment of panic Montgomery revives Barton with water and apologizes for hitting the workman "so hard" (9). In fine English fashion Montgomery makes up the workman's prescription and sends him on his way. For his own part, Barton seems "in his rough Northern fashion to bear no grudge..." (9).

The exchange with Barton is critical in the narrative not merely for its role in progressing the story - it is this event that leads to Montgomery's participation in the novel's professional bout - or its evidence of Montgomery's rugged self-interest, or indeed its evidence of Montgomery's developed social intellect and understanding, although it certainly evidences all of these applications. Beyond these aspects, the exchange also illustrates the allure of violent response within socially threatening or limiting situations. When tied to the larger social milieu in which Montgomery operates, it is possible to see a moderation of violent tendencies and a thoughtful application of violence at times when it will be both effective and appropriate. Montgomery's boxing persona does not evidence the blustering bravado of Cashel Byron nor unsophisticated

force of Champion Harrison. Montgomery's violence is measured, accurate and utilized within appropriate contexts. Both Barton and Dr. Oldacre evidence a similar level of insolence in their responses to Montgomery, and one would surmise that violent response might be attractive in either situation, and yet Montgomery is careful in its application. The situation with Barton is clearly different not merely for its class relationship, but also the clear manner in which threats have been issued. From the two situations it is possible to devise a criteria in which violence might be justifiably and appropriately applied. A Victorian sensibility might simply focus on class relationships - Barton as an acceptable target simply because of his similarity in class to Montgomery - but Doyle seems to suggest that class is not the determining factor here, nor is violence simply a characteristic response for Montgomery. The nature of the situation and social exchange are truly critical. Using this logic it might become acceptable for Montgomery to apply a violent response to Dr. Oldacre if a similar level of threat or confrontation was present. Additionally, the exchange with Barton acts to reinforce Montgomery's own class status. Despite his education and somewhat elevated profession, Barton certainly sees something akin between the two men, at least to the degree that he feels free to openly confront and threaten him. One is left to question whether or not he would have employed a similar approach to Dr. Oldacre himself, but it seems unlikely.

As stated above the exchange with Barton ultimately leads to Montgomery's entrance into professional boxing, but the opportunity is purely circumstantial. Barton happens to be the local boxing champion and is scheduled to fight a neighboring champion (the titular Croxley Master) in just a few weeks' time. As Barton has been injured through his tussle with Montgomery, he cannot fight. Since Montgomery was

able to best Barton, he presents himself as a likely candidate for a replacement. Evocative of many of the older assertions that boxing (if not sporting endeavors more generally) served to bring the English classes into closer relations, the three gentlemen that come to solicit Montgomery's participation in the fight evidence a range of English classes. As Doyle writes: "[t]hey were a very singular trio. Each was known to [Montgomery] by sight; but what on earth the three could be doing together, ..., was a most inexplicable problem" (11). The three men are Sorley Wilson, "son of the owner of the Nonpareil Coalpit," Purvis, publican, "owner of the chief beershop, and well known as the local bookmaker," and Fawcett, "the horsebreaker" (11). But despite their varied socioeconomic positions, Doyle describes the men with equanimity and commonality: "[p]ublican, exquisite, and horsebreaker were all three equally silent, equally earnest, and equally critical" (11). The earnest criticism with which they assess Montgomery stems from the same factor that allows the three men to develop such equanimity - all three are involved in putting up the stakes for the proposed bout between Montgomery and The Croxley Master. This joint business venture, the collusion of their varied self-interests into a collective endeavor allows for the development of an equal relationship despite their obvious class differences. Through the course of their discussions Doyle hints at no class privilege that might queer the negotiation. Each man has an equal opinion and consensus must rule the day. Perhaps the only element missing from the conversation is that of Montgomery himself.

It is through the process of persuading Montgomery to undertake the fight that Doyle is able to introduce one of the pervasive themes of *The Croxley Master* beyond that of prize-fighting, the theme of social negotiation. Through the course of negotiating

with Montgomery to take on the fight, Wilson, Purvis, and Fawcett begin with the simple fact that Montgomery's actions have deprived them of their preferred competitor, Barton, and an explanation that the bout will be contested under the Marquis de Queensberry rules. In either case these two modes of argument can be construed as sentiments related to Montgomery's indefinite social placement. He cannot be overtly compelled through simple obligation nor would he be inclined to engage in a bare-knuckle contest, but the new form of professional boxing ostensibly opens competition to all comers. But it is the object of the prize money and his unpaid course fees that ultimately motivates Montgomery to participate and the passage which illustrates this is interesting:

But then there came a sudden revulsion. A hundred pounds! - all he wanted to complete his education what lying there ready to his hand, if only that hand were strong enough to pick it up. He had thought bitterly that morning that there was no market for his strength, but here was one where his muscle might earn more in an hour than his brains in a year. (17)

Doyle's use of the word revulsion in this passage is telling. While it might seem more appropriate to modern audiences to utilize a word such as "revelation" here, Montgomery's revulsion evidences a late Victorian perspective on the practice of prize-fighting. The obvious opportunity represented by the prize money is offset by his understanding of the implications surrounding his involvement. Indeed, Montgomery's key misgiving is the possibility of Dr. Oldacre disapproval. Once that possibility is removed, Montgomery readily assents to the proposition. As Doyle writes: "[t]he adventure and the profit would either of them have attracted Montgomery. The two combined were irresistible" (18). But Montgomery's ready ascension should not be misconstrued as a sign that his participation is a light affair. On the contrary, Montgomery's decision is made with full recognition that he is crossing a definite social and sporting boundary.

Montgomery's boxing skills were honed in the amateur practice as a University athlete but through his contact with the sport he evidences an acknowledgement of the clear differences in the quality of competition between his experience and that of the professional. Doyle writes that Montgomery held little interest in engaging in amateur competition but passing interest in testing himself against a professional opponent, an interest that he indulges by engaging in a fair-booth fight with the prize fighter Hammer Tunstall. Although his experience there provides some confidence that he might stand a chance of victory against The Croxley Master, the social disapprobation that he will receive once his participation becomes known is another matter. As Montgomery returns to Dr. Oldacre's practice following the interview, the two engage in a discussion of the impending prize-fight. Despite the fact that the fight is to utilize the amateur rules and the use of gloves, Dr. Oldacre still views the contest in a less-than-favorable light and implies that citizens of his and Montgomery's status should not be involved in or approve of such ruffianism. Within his diatribe the issue of prize money remains the critical point:

It is a dreadful thing to reflect that the parish takes a great deal more interest in an approaching glove-fight than in their religious duties. ... I believe [a glove fight] to be the correct term. ... I cannot understand why the law does not step in and stop so degrading an exhibition. It is really a prize fight. ... I am informed that a two-ounce glove is an evasion by which they dodge the law, and make it difficult for the police to interfere. They contend for a sum of money. It seems dreadful and almost incredible - does it not? - to think that such scenes can be enacted within a few miles of our peaceful home. (21)

Although there has been some argument amongst sporting historians and critics concerning the adoption of the Marquis de Queensberry rules in professional boxing as an acquiescence to Victorian moral standards and an inculcation of the sport by dominant Victorian culture, Dr. Oldacre's disapproval of the fight in *The Croxley Master* certainly call such assertions into question. The issue was clearly one of amateurism vs.

professionalism and the boundary between the two was and remains to this day, impermeable. As Montgomery would find later in the narrative, the identity of the professional is indelible: “[y]ou [Montgomery] realize that you’re a professional pug from this onwards...” (48-49).

Although Montgomery seems to easily take on the social stigma associated with professional boxing, there are still the issues of the fight itself to contend with, not the least of which is hiding his participation from Dr. Oldacre. As Montgomery prepares himself physically he also informs himself of his opponent and relates that to his knowledge of boxing’s culture and time honored adages. Recalling phrases such as “youth will be served” and “throw away no chance” Montgomery constructs a totalizing knowledge of the contest and his antagonist. Similarly when approaching Dr. Oldacre he utilizes a similar totalized knowledge in order to secure the day for the fight. In a negotiation that comes to mirror the larger social ideologies embodied in boxing and sport more generally, Montgomery relies upon contractual obligation and an English sense of common agreement to free himself from his duties. As the negotiation reads:

“I [Montgomery] should be glad if you could let me have leave for Saturday, Doctor Oldacre.”

“It is very inconvenient upon so busy a day.”

“I should do a double day’s work on Friday so as to leave everything in order. I should hope to be back in the evening.”

“I am afraid I cannot spare you, Mr Montgomery.”

This was a facer. If he could not get leave he would go without it.

“You will remember, Doctor Oldacre, that when I came to you it was understood that I should have a clear day every month. I have never claimed one. But now there are reasons why I wish to have a holiday upon Saturday.”

Dr. Oldacre gave in with very bad grace.

“Of course, if you insist upon your formal right, there is no more to be said, Mr. Montgomery, though I feel that it shows a certain indifference to my comfort and the welfare of the practice. Do you still insist?”

“I do.”

“Very good. Have it your way.” (30-31)

Although Dr. Oldacre is reluctant in giving his leave, it is worth noting that the real weight of Montgomery's argument lies in their contractual obligations and mutual agreement - what Oldacre terms an insistence of rights. This aspect of English social relationships speaks not only to the underlying Englishness that both sport and Arthur Conan Doyle seem to evoke, but also the increasing processes of codification and regularization that characterized the late Victorian age. Organized sport, particularly the modern form of prize-fighting, exemplified the manner in which Victorian efforts at social elevation created systems of social order and regulation that might be exploited as a means to liberation. If boxing had always embodied something of the British spirit of rugged individuality and fair play, the modern boxing contest exemplified those traits in an organized and moderated form fit for the modern age. In a lengthy passage leading up to Montgomery's fight with The Croxley Master, Doyle calls upon these lingering cultural associations with sport and ties them directly to working class experience:

these men [the working class] still gilded their harsh and hopeless lives by their devotion to sport. It was their one relief, the only thing which could distract their mind from sordid surroundings, and give them an interest beyond the blackened circle which enclosed them. Literature, art, science, all these things were beyond the horizon; but the race, the football match, the cricket, the fight, these were things which they could understand, which they could speculate upon in advance and comment upon afterwards. (36)

While Doyle is perhaps unaware of the true significance of his utterance here, it is the conclusion of the passage, the implication that sport forms a topic of discussion for the working class beyond the event itself that forms the basis for its further social significance. That discussion - at least in the opinion of postcolonial critics of sport such as James, Seecharam, Beckles, and Gikandi who view sport as an interest that encompasses all aspects of lived experience - forms the basis for developing a totalizing knowledge and the ability to dissect the complex social constructions in which they exist.

Sport, in short, forms the potential bridge between the “blackened circle” where they exist and that world of literature, art, and science that lies beyond the horizon. Indeed, that is how the boxing match operates for Mr. Montgomery.

The fight scene in *The Croxley Master* represents not only a narrative means for Montgomery to escape from the social structures that seek to limit his advancement but also the reworking of older sporting conventions that viewed professional boxing as a detriment to English society. Within Cashel Byron’s *Profession* and Rodney Stone both Shaw and Doyle rely upon an older tradition of describing fights derived from the bare-knuckle form and conventions established through the chronicle tradition established by Egan and Miles earlier in the nineteenth century. The form and style of competition under boxing’s bare-knuckle structure tended to present the competition in shortened, staccato bursts of activity as round length was dictated by falls and fighting activity was directed at inflicting quick, decisive punishment. The overall length of competition was dictated by the fighters themselves and their ability to “return to the scratch.” As a result each fall took on added significance and a succession of victorious rounds was often taken as a sign of sure victory. Although many styles of fighter and techniques might theoretically earn success in bare-knuckle competition, there was only one road to victory - to inflict enough punishment that your antagonist could no longer continue. Interestingly, this mode of contestation led to narrative presentations that privileged physical results rather than strategy - the emergence of blood or bodily marks and falls - and tended to favor responses from the crowd rather than detailed descriptions of action as the means to characterize fights. As a result, the narrative presentations of bouts in *Cashel Byron’s Profession* and *Rodney Stone* tend to take up very little narrative space while at the same

time focusing attention on both brutality and the crowd as their main objects of interest¹². There is little to really appreciate in these presentations.

The Croxley Master, however, departs drastically from this earlier model owing, at least in part, to its depiction of gloved, Marquis de Queensberry competition rather than the older bare-knuckle form. Gloved boxing and the regularization of competition instilled by the timed rounds and point structure of modern boxing not only enables a more structured presentation of competition, the form also highlights more of the skill and strategy employed by the combatants through the course of the competition. Knockdowns are still a part of the action, but occur with less frequency and are generally more telling when they do. While certain aspects of the competition might lead to a premature end, such as the knockout, there is always the possibility that the competition might go to points, and this engenders less significance to physical manifestations of punishment - which are of course somewhat less frequent with the use of gloves. The narrative possibilities in the modern form of boxing are much more expansive and allow authors to focus on the fight as a continuous rather than incongruous presentation. The time in between rounds is no longer simply a clouded rush to get the fighter back on his feet but rather a time of reflection and as Doyle writes “a delicious minute” in which to form ideas for future action (59). Strategies might be employed through successive rounds and ploys might be more deeply understood and described. The movement and mentalities of the boxers tend to feature more prominently than their base aggression.

But beyond this, and perhaps most tellingly, the crowd features less prominently in the fight depicted in *The Croxley Master*. Doyle employs both the structure of the

¹² The principle boxing scenes take up four of two hundred and twenty-eight pages in *Cashel Byron's Profession* and nine of two hundred and thirty-seven pages in *Rodney Stone*, while in *The Croxley Master* the fight encompasses fifteen of seventy-two pages.

competition - an enclosed arena and raised ring - and the employment of regularizing officials - referees, a police presence - to limit crowd energies and involvement. Indeed, the bout in *The Croxley Master* is such a regulated affair that even “a fair sprinkling of women” are present in the crowd. The role of the referee and the respect with which Doyle imbues the position is highly accentuated in the presentation. As the fighters are introduced, the presence of the referee causes “[a] great hush [to fall] over the huge assembly. Even the dogs stopped yapping; one might have that the monstrous room was empty” (56). Although the crowd in *The Croxley Master* exhibits much of the spirit and activity of the crowds in *Cashel Byron’s Profession* and *Rodney Stone* - reactions and comments upon the action, continual alteration of betting odds, etc. - at times when this activity threatens to adulterate the competition the referee calls for cessation and maintains general order. Through this process the referee serves as a means to classify and characterize modern sporting competition that helps to define its role as an apt representation of visceral, lived experience within a social setting. Although the crowd is allowed certain freedom to form and express opinions, the referee limits the anarchic tendencies that might result in a manifestation of the mob. Beyond this, he reminds the audience that they are witnessing sport rather than theater - an unscripted competition that lies beyond their ability to control or manipulate. This serves not merely to limit the ability of the crowd to impact the competition in the ring, but also to reiterate the primacy of the ring as the critical competitive space and its rules as the final arbiter of justice. Regardless of sentiment or expectation, the contest remains in the hands of the combatants and the audience must resign themselves to the outcome of fair competition.

The dynamic between referee and audience in the fight scene from *The Croxley Master* serves to offer greater definition to the communal process of creating and assigning meaning to sport. While each side in this process – authority and populace – might exert a level of power in the process of determining meanings, both also exist within the context of an altruistically derived ideal of sport's overall purpose and the codified rules which define its performance. Regardless of the specific desires of crowd or referee, the altruistic nature of sport and codification of rules places a definite limit on one or the others ability to manipulate the competition. Ultimately sporting competition exists not to satisfy the particular demands of one partisan over another, but rather as an enactment of the rules that structure its performance. In this sense, the fluid nature of activity and disparate desires of varied participants in the performance find room for expression, but also a check on their ultimate power. Individual desire and performance therefore find criteria of comparison and a definitive means through which they might ultimately be judged and tested.

And this final point is one of the critical features of *The Croxley Master* that tends to persist in the tradition of the modern boxing narrative. While neither fight in *Cashel Byron's Profession* or *Rodney Stone* ends in a definitive conclusion, Doyle utilizes the knockout in Montgomery's fight as a means to conclusively end the contest and heighten the control of the individual in the process of victory. Montgomery is at a practical and physical disadvantage through the course of the fight, but he also maintains the capacity to learn through the course of the competition. His antagonist, Silas Craggs (The Croxley Master), draws upon a career in the ring and the experience he has gained through competition but underestimates Montgomery and fails to adapt as the contest develops.

Montgomery proves to be the more able competitor through his understanding of the contest:

[Montgomery] had learned a lesson from his more experienced rival. Why should he not play his own game upon him? He was spent, but not merely so spent as he pretended. ... [Montgomery] acted his part admirably. The Master felt that there was an easy task before him...and fearing nothing from so weak a man, dropped his hand for an instant, and at that instant Montgomery's right came home. (71)

Montgomery's ultimate victory comes through an exertion of his own, personal energies and intellect, yet it is also secured through the careful application of boxing's rule structure and the mandates of competition designed to ensure fair competition. In another element of the boxing narrative that has become so redundant as to signify a cliché, Montgomery is saved by the bell at a critical juncture within the competition. As this plays out, Doyle's presentation of the referee is worth noting:

The referee looked round with relaxed features and laughing eyes. he loved this rough game, this school for humble heroes, and it was pleasant to him to intervene as a *Deus ex machina* at so dramatic a moment. His chair and his hat were both tilted at an extreme angle; he and the timekeeper smiled at each other. (66)

It is possible to see within the presentation of the referee not only an assurance with his role and a lack of concern for retribution from the crowd, but also a satisfaction in maintaining the strictures of fair play - as defined by the established rules of competition. Similar in many respects to the idealized structures of civil, democratic government, the rules of boxing and other professional sports delineate courses of action intended to sequester competition from the sentiment of the mob and an egalitarian restriction of behavior to ensure common opportunity. Professional sport does not imply absolute freedom of action or expression, but rather a carefully structured system in which contestation might find the means of true open and fair competition.

That Doyle's protagonist, Montgomery, prevails in his contest with the Master of Croxley is perhaps another cliché of the boxing genre, but Doyle's narrative insistence on a definitive conclusion to the bout marks a significant development in the boxing narrative. The means through which Montgomery prevails, part physical ability, part intelligence, part circumstance, and part regulation of the contest, matches the modern conception of social success that would come to pervade in the modern era. Although England provides a more complex social development as a result of her deep seated class history, within nations of the Commonwealth and former English colonies that enjoyed a less burdened history, these values of open competition have found more complete expression. For England's working class the structures of class privilege and systems of class inequality would persist, but the ideologies of professional sport offer a means of escape. For this, a return to the topic of Montgomery's relationship with Dr. Oldacre provides explanation. Through the course of the *The Croxley Master* Doyle levels many of the ethical criticisms that he leveled on the Victorian upper classes within Rodney Stone upon Dr. Oldacre. Although Oldacre presents himself as a disinterested adherent of Arnoldian cultural exemplification, Montgomery recognizes not only the hypocrisy in his application of moral standards, but also the control that such application enables him to exert over others¹³ (21-22). The opportunity for social and economic advancement offered by Montgomery's participation in professional sport works to upset the traditional arrangement of English class and labor. Although the boxing match represents a risk,

¹³ Here, of course, we are dealing with the topic of reference and the social approbation that workers needed to move from one situation of employment to another. Although Montgomery seems little worried about this prospect when it comes to his involvement in the fight, he is certainly concerned about the implications of his fight with Ted Bardon at the beginning of the narrative: "...[Montgomery would irrevocably lose his position if the facts [of the fight] came out. It was not much of a situation, but he could not get another without a reference, and Oldacre might refuse him one" (9).

Montgomery is not only willing to take that risk, but also relishes the freedom that the risk represents. He finds a means to exert his formal rights despite their potential to upset his employer and puts himself in a position where his involvement in the fight is sure to come to his employer's knowledge. In the novel's final scene this exertion of acceptable working class resistance finds its most complete and resonant expression. Upon his return to Dr. Oldacre's, the doctor questions Montgomery concerning the marks on his face and the medical assistant cleverly insinuates his involvement in the fight. As the truth comes out, Dr. Oldacre's reaction is predictable, but as he lambasts Montgomery, his diatribe is interrupted by a scene reminiscent of the eighteenth century:

“Mr. Montgomery, in such a practice as mine, intimately associated as it is with the highest and most progressive elements of our small community, it is impossible-”

But just then the tentative bray of a cornet-player searching for his keynote jarred upon their ears, and an instant later the Wilson Colliery brass band was in full cry with “See the Conquering Hero Comes,” outside the surgery window. There was a banner waving, and a shouting crowd of miners. (75-76)

Dr. Oldacre's cry in response is a telling as it is comical: “What is it? What does it mean?” It is up to Montgomery to explain:

“It means, sir, that I have, in the only way which was open to me, earned the money which is necessary for my education. It is my duty,..., to warn you that I am about to return to the University, and that you should lose no time in appointing my successor.” (76)

Doyle's employment of the working class mob, its use of music and banners so evocative of the charivari, coupled with Dr. Oldacre's evident alarm and confusion, and Montgomery's use of the term “warn” in the proffering of his resignation, give the scene a special gravity. The conquering hero, in this case, is not merely a champion of the prize-ring, but also a symbol of the energies and desires of the working class more broadly. Although Montgomery's actions fit within the constrictions of English social

traditions as indicated by the assistant's use of the term "duty," his actions nonetheless constitute a revolution in microcosm while the sporting culture and situations provide the setting where the working class might release collective sentiment without fear of upsetting the wider social system. Placed within a social culture that was itself in transition, these features in the culminating lines of the novel harken to the future of both sport and English society more broadly. Sport, in this sense, should be considered a modern social formulation.

Toril Moi has offered a useful means of redefining the literary period from 1870-1914 in her recent work *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* in which she delineates the era as one characterized by a crisis within Victorian idealism rather than the conventional transition from realism to modernism. As she writes:

I see [the aesthetically confusing period from 1870-1914] as a moment marked by a great number of different, highly self-conscious aesthetic attempts to *negate idealism*. In this respect this period can be understood as what Thomas Kuhn would call a period of *crisis*, a transitional period in which one paradigm has broken down and another has not yet become dominant. Kuhn writes that new theories usually emerge "only after a pronounced failure in the normal problem-solving activity." The aesthetic failure of idealism, its incapacity to deal with modern life and modern problems, became increasingly obvious as the century wore on. (4-5)

Like Ibsen and many authors that bridge the period of transition between the Victorian and the modern, Shaw and Doyle exhibit not merely a continuation of the realist form but also an acute awareness of the impending exhaustion of Victorian mentalities. The incipient necessity of delineating a new social and cultural horizon infuses their work as each searches for the means to delineate the values, identities, and ideologies that will characterize a new, modern age in England. And yet like their later Victorian contemporaries, Shaw and Doyle existed within an English society still deeply infused with the mentalities of the Victorian age and amongst a morass of seemingly disparate

and competing ideologies. Within this difficult and amorphous context, both authors come upon the boxing narrative through a basic recognition of the narrative's representational utility as a productive expression of anti-Victorian (or idealist) sentiment.

As Toril Moi acknowledges in *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism*, the new definition of modernism as an anti-idealist movement holds the potential to reorder conventional thinking on the issue of aesthetic modernism and our traditional classification of later nineteenth century art and artists. The boxing novel emerges a critical point of transition within English sporting and literary culture. Evocative of both the expansion of the literary marketplace the rise of professional sport over the course of the later nineteenth century, the boxing novel's preoccupation with the professional boxer reflects the gradual yet inexorable process through which the English working class came to exert increasing influence within the later Victorian age. Ultimately the products of mid-Victorian progressivism, the boxing novel, popular literary culture, and professional sport are the creation of cultural inculcation projects fostered within the mid-nineteenth century. Clearly in some respects the mid-Victorian projects of education and sport had succeeded in structuring an emergent working class capable of entering both the literary marketplace and the sporting field on a more or less equal footing with their middle and aristocratic class contemporaries, and yet the sporting and literary creations that came to represent this emergent working class were not exact copies of the Victorian models to which they had been introduced. Working class popular literature and professional iterations of sport might remain evocative of the Victorian models on which they were based, yet both diverged to a point where they stood in decided opposition to the

idealized models of their Victorian progenitors. The modern popular novel did not provide a Victorian narrative and professional sport did not foster the same kind of competition as its Victorian amateur predecessor. Within the process of emergence, working class iterations of Victorian cultural productions produced differing meanings and served different social purposes. The carefully defined conventions of Victorian sport and literature viewed these adulterations of the ideology as an abomination and sought through various means to eradicate them. Despite their best efforts, by the close of the nineteenth century there was little Victorian society could do to combat a groundswell of popular support for both popular literature and professional sport. By the turn of the twentieth century the proverbial die had been cast.

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