MEN BEHAVING BADLY:
Humour and the (re)presentation of masculinities in late Victorian British popular culture, 1885 – 1895.

by
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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues humour was a valuable cultural expression that mediated power-relationships in late nineteenth-century Britain. I focus on the intersection of class and gender to demonstrate how humour subverted and reinforced dominant ideas governing manly behaviour and class distinctions. This study utilises a selection of visual and textual sources from popularly circulated comic publications. I emphasise throughout that visual and textual sources are equal communicators in (re)presenting cultural meanings, and in so doing, challenge the textist approach to the study of Victorian society. While historians recognise the importance of visual sources, images are too often given secondary consideration. Similarly, although historians use comic sources few consider how humour functioned in historical periods. By considering the convergence of class, gender, and humour in cartoons and satire, this thesis uniquely contributes to the study of Victorian popular culture and demonstrates the validity of humour in the studying of the past.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1929, Stephen Leacock introduced his essay on the future of Anglo-American humour with the following passage:

> Other more gifted pens than mine will be turned ... to the larger issues of the future. The progress – or decline – of civilisation, the advance of invention, the changes in manners and of morals, the future triumphs of science, the further conquests of medicine will invite the minds of the thoughtful to these attractive pages.
>
> No such problems fall within my scope. Mine is only the humble task of discussing the past and future ... of humour.[1]

Leacock argued in his essay that, despite appearing inauspicious, humour was key to understanding the past and future of societies and civilisations. From national, cultural, and political expressions of humour, the scholar could understand the characteristics of a society and, in doing so, better understand the structures and institutions created by these people. Humour was also the mark of creativity and genius in a culture and society, an expression of truth where the scholar could glimpse the essential values and beliefs at the foundation of a society. For Leacock, the mechanisation, modernisation and mass-culture of modern Anglo-American culture was eroding the foundation of society and culture, reflected in the deterioration in the quality of Anglo-American popular cultural expressions of humour. "We live in the age of the mimic and the buffoon, the prize fighter and bathing

[1] Steven Leacock, "The Future of American Humor" in *Drift of Civilization* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1929), 227.

beauty," lamented Leacock, "we want sudden amusement, explosive comedy, thrilling climax and overwhelming disaster."[2] The modernisation of Anglo-American culture removed twentieth-century British and American societies from a golden age of humour – late nineteenth-century. "It is likely" continued Leacock "that with the forward movement of time [the Victorian era] will rise in perspective over the sinking landscape."[3]

Leacock's discussion of Anglo-American humour introduced several important ideas about the study of humour as a means of accessing and understanding the past. As Leacock satirically argued in his introduction, expressions of humour are often given secondary consideration by historians, used as amusing diversions in scholarly tracts considering issues more serious and therefore more important topics. Similarly this thesis argues and tries to demonstrate that the critical consideration of cultural expressions of humour can be a useful way to explore historical time periods and societies. As Leacock demonstrated in his essay, humour can reveal much about shifts in cultural values, structures, institutions, and anxieties. Studying the humour of the past can be a meaningful approach to understanding larger cultural and social transformations and evolutions; it also reveals the consistency of cultural/social boundaries and values. For social and cultural historians, investigating humour can be important in accessing meaning in seemingly alien and mundane expressions. Considering popular cultural expressions of humour in Victorian Britain, this thesis will argue, is an instructive and illuminating way to approach the study of the past.

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[2] Ibid., 233.
[3] Ibid., 230.

Humour and the Victorians

Leacock's essay highlights the Victorian period as the golden age of humour in popular culture. From Leacock's essay it would appear that British and American society was ever marching forward in genius and creativity through to the Great War, reaching a pinnacle development in the late nineteenth-century. For the modern sceptic Leacock's assurances that the Victorian period represented the cultural climax in the production and understanding of humour may appear as personal bias and a romanticization of pre-Great War America and Europe, and at its worst his comments could be dismissed as Whiggish and uncritical. Certainly it is a debatable accusation that American and British humour went to hell-in-a-hand-basket following the Great War; however, Leacock's essay does introduce an argument about the Victorian period that many nineteenth-century Britons would have accepted and appreciated. Historians who have considered the intellectual history of humour in Britain and America have suggested that, while other preceding cultures would have laughed and produced comic material, these cultures articulated what modern society terms as "humour" differently. In early modern England, Daniel Wickberg argues, "humour" was one of many different components of the amusing and only one of many methods to provoke thought and laughter. Early modern society placed emphasis on "banter," "raillery," "irony," "the grotesque," and "wit." Philosophers of eighteenth-century society understood a "humorist" to be a silly person who demonstrated a lack of rationality or seriousness. To be humorous was a negative quality and suggested that a person was wanting in intelligence, social graces, and propriety.[4]

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[4] Daniel Wickberg, *The Sense of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America* (Ithca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1-65.

By the late nineteenth-century, however, humour was considered a "comedy of character" whereas wit was the "comedy of intellect and ideas." Humour was an inclusive term for expressions of the comic and amusing and, now, subsumed categories previously understood to be separate and distinct social expressions. Wit remained a separate category and numerous Victorian social commentators debated and reinforced the distinction between humour and wit. Wit was an elite expression and one could be accused of demonstrating arrogance if he/she professed preference for it. Wit was a literary form, part of high and elite popular culture, whereas humour was an expression for and of "the people."[5] Wickberg has suggested that for the Victorians, "humour was a realm of rich, full, natural, growth, alive in all its particularity and diversity; wit on the other hand, was a barren landscape of dry and dying abstractions. One referred to the progressive world of a burgeoning capitalist middle-class, the other to the decaying world of idle and useless post feudal elites."[6] Accordingly, both historians Robert Bernard Martin and Wickberg have argued, humour better reflected the bourgeois culture of late Victorian period. "Humour" Wickberg posits, "became identified less with an objective state of being, and more with a subjective way of seeing, it was abstracted from character and moved to the discourse by which characters were represented."[7]

Humour as "the comedy of character" was understood to be something a person could develop, cultivate, or possess as part of their construction of selfhood. Wickberg has demonstrated that it was not until the late Victorian period that Anglo-American society understood humour to be: (a) a dominant form of personal and cultural expression, and (b) a positive personality trait that one should consciously attempt to cultivate and display.

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[5] Robert Martin, *The Triumph of Wit: A study of Victorian comic theory* (Oxford: Clarendon PRess, 1974), 36-41.
[6] Wickberg, *The Sense of Humour*, 61.

For both Martin and Wickberg, the nineteenth-century writer Leslie Stephen's observation in 1876 exemplifies the shift within late Victorian culture toward an understanding of humour: "A fashion has sprung up of late years regarding the sense of humour as one of the cardinal virtues,"[8] Stephens suggested. If having a sense of humour was a "cardinal virtue" then lacking a sense of humour was an unforgivable character flaw. In 1902, Max Beerbohm, a caricaturist and writer, posited:

> Perhaps the most effective means of disparaging an enemy is to [praise his virtues in every capacity]... and then to say what a pity it is that he has no sense of humour ... And what weapon could match for deadliness the imputation of being without a "sense of humour"? To say that a man lacks that sense is to strike him with one blow to a level with the beasts of the field – to kick him, once and for all, outside the human pale.[9]

According to Joseph Meisel's work, one such Victorian constantly attacked for lacking a sense of humour was William Gladstone. Lytton Strachey, in a long list of criticisms levied against Gladstone, included that "he had no sense of humour."[10] Strachey's accusation could have been rooted in personal bias against everything Victorian, but it reflected a popular perception of the politician echoed by many other observers of Gladstone in public and private. Writer Harold Nicolson went so far as to say, "In all the rich and varied literature of English invective the first public figure to be accused of possessing no sense of humour was Mr. Gladstone."[11] Without a doubt earlier public figures must have been accused of being dull or lacking an appreciation for the comic, but Gladstone's inability to appreciate the amusing and comic was a character flaw in that Victorians society defined and then placed value upon having a "sense of humour."

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[7] Ibid., 35.
[8] Martin, *The Triumph of Wit*, 6; and Wickberg, *The Sense of Humour*, 84.
[9] Wickberg, *The Sense of Humour*, 85.
[10] Joseph S. Meisel, "The Importance of being Serious: the unexplored connection between Gladstone and humour" in *History*, Vol. 84, No. 274 (1999), 278.
[11] Ibid., 279.

That the Victorians debated Gladstone's humourlessness offers further evidence to the argument that humour was of vital importance in British culture by the late nineteenth-century, so much so that having or not having that personality trait was comment worthy.

Although Martin,[12] Wickberg,[13] and Meisel[14] have gathered significant evidence that suggests the social and cultural value placed on humour by the Victorians as a personal, social, and cultural expression, there has been very little investigation by historians into what was considered comic, humorous, or amusing during this period in history, and there has even less consideration of what humour can illuminate about Victorian society and culture.

The historiography on the study of Victorian humour is sparse but it does serve to underscore the importance placed on "humour" and a "sense of humour" by late nineteenth-century culture. The few studies aforementioned that consider Victorian humour, moreover, explore ideas *about* humour rather than the material deemed humorous by segments and persons who collectively make up the "Victorian." This is not intended

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[12] Martin's work focuses on debates in Victorian periodicals where amateur writers argued over the definition of, morals and ethics of, and the appropriateness of humour. Martin demostrates that these men of letters believed in the superiority of wit over humour. The "Triumph of Wit" was only momentary and by the late Victorian period writers elevated humour as the superior expression. The authors studied by Martin are not humorists nor does the he consider examples of Victorian wit or humour.

[13] Wickberg is also silent about what Victorians in either America or Britain produced and consumed by way of the comic or humorous. This is an intentional neglect by Wickberg who is interested in understanding language, ideas, and perceptions about humour. Wickberg traces the terms "humour" and "sense of humour" from the early modern period in Britain through to modern American definitions about these same terms. In doing so, Wickberg offers compelling evidence to demonstrate how Anglo- American meanings attached to "humour" ebbed and flowed with changing definitions about the individual and self. Fundamental in his analysis is the shift from early modern ideas about the self where humour was "a mode of being" to a construction where humour was a "mode of seeing," a way of approaching the world. This change, Wickberg argues, reflects changing definitions about personhood, identity, and selfhood.

[14] Meisel's article on Gladstone's lack of humour reinforces an understanding of Victorian British society where humour was understood as an important characteristic of the public man. Meisel's article reveals the importance of wit, humour, and irony in the political culture of Victorian England. While Gladstone notoriously lacked a sense of humour, he was at times able to demonstrate a certain amount of irony and sarcasm in his speeches, although often humour was a means used by the opposition and political critics to shift power and sway public opinion. Meisel does offer some instances of public humour targeting Gladstone, but these are minimal and are used to further his argument that, for Victorians, Gladstone's lack of humour was a defining characteristic trait that set him apart from his political rivals.

as a critical comment about these works, for Martin, Wickberg, and Meisel have made significant contributions about Victorian culture(s) and understanding(s) about selfhood and identities.

What is surprising is, if late Victorian society understood "humour" as a way of seeing and approaching the world, and deemed a "sense of humour" as a "cardinal virtue," what was it that one was supposed to demonstrate an appreciation for? If humour in the Victorian context was a way of seeing the world, what can the historian "see" when studying Victorian humour? What was humorous, to whom, and why? If wit is "elite" and humour is "of the people" what does humour in Victorian popular culture communicate to the modern historian? This thesis undertakes the task of looking at expressions of humour in Victorian popular culture in an attempt to ascertain what can be illuminated about Victorian popular culture through a study of the content in comic publications.

Humour and History

Historians of nineteenth-century Britain are not alone in their neglect of humour as a topic of historical inquiry; there are very few studies that actively consider the comic, grotesque, or humorous as the focus of analysis. While many historians do use such sources in the study of other issues, humour is very seldom posited as the research query. Perhaps, the sceptic will say, it is because humour is not an effective way of exploring the past as it is too ephemeral to be considered effectively. While there are obvious difficulties in studying humour as a cultural or personal expression, there are comic sources that survive and/or sources that speak about the comic and humorous that can be used by historians as a window into forgotten cultures and societies.

Robert Darnton demonstrated how humour could be used in accessing the past in his 1984 work *The Great Cat Massacre.* When confronted with the story of how early modern workers killed cats and found humour in the death and destruction of cats, the modern reader, Darnton notes, is repulsed by both the action and the reaction of these historical characters. What could possibly be funny about the death and destruction of animal life? His conclusions for this study are considered elsewhere in this thesis, and here it is important to consider Darnton's arguments about using humour in his study of French popular culture and protest. Darnton argued:

> Our own inability to get the joke is an indication of the distance that separates us from the workers of pre-industrial Europe. The perspective of that resistance may serve as the starting point of investigation, for ... the best starting points of entry in an attempt to penetrate an alien culture can be those where it seems to be most opaque. When you realise that you are not getting something – a joke, a proverb, a ceremony – that is particularly meaningful to the natives, you can see where to grasp a foreign system of meaning in order to unravel it. By getting the joke of the great cat massacre, it may be possible to "get" a basic ingredient of artisanal culture under the Old regime.[15]

Humour for Darnton is important for the study of history because of the difficulties in decoding the meanings contained in these cultural expressions. The decoding of these expressions offers unique insights, allowing the modern reader to understand the cultural meanings otherwise lost to the historian.

In his study of Italian practical jokes (*beffa*), Peter Burke builds on Darnton's assertion that the study of humour in the past can reveal hidden meanings in cultural expressions. Burke proposed that the comic (a term he prefers over humour) is an effective way of understanding the "limits, boundaries, [and] frontiers" of society. It can bring us closer, Burke argues in reference to Robert Darnton, to "capturing otherness," of

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[15] Robert Darton, *The Great Cat Massacre and other episodes in French cultural history.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 78.

looking "at the alien in the past and making it intelligible."[16] For Burke, humour/the comic is important in understanding popular culture because ideas "of transgression are essential to the comic" but the "limits or boundaries transgressed are always unstable, varying with local, region, moment, period, and social group involved."[17]

Both Darnton and Burke's[18] studies demonstrate that "what is funny and why" are important questions for historians to consider. Although humour/comic/absurd expressions appear as bizarre cultural artefacts, it is precisely the seemingly impenetrable nature of these cultural expressions that make the study so important and fruitful. Darnton and Burke acknowledge that, similar to most if not all historical studies, the historian will be unable to identify all areas of the comic or all meanings contained within a cultural narrative/expression; nonetheless, there are many important meanings that can be accessed through the study of humour and therefore the historian should undertake the exercise.

There has been a substantial body of literature produced by historians of early modern popular culture who have considered the carnival and laughter. Other historians who attempt to study humour in popular cultures of later and early periods ignore the care with which historians such as Burke, Darnton, and Bahktin took in constructing

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[16] Peter Burke, "Frontiers of the Comic in Early Modern Italy: c 1350-1750" in *A Cultural history: from antiquity to the present day,* ed., Jan Bremmer and Herman Rooedenbur (Cambridge, Mass: Polity Press, 1997), 61.

[17] Ibid., 62.

[18] Darnton and Burke build off of the work of historian/anthropologist Mikhail Bakhtin's work on laughter and carnival. In his influential work *Rabelais and his world* Bakhtin argued that one way seventeenth-century-century culture differed from medieval culture was through a different understandings about the role of serious and comic expressions. Laughter in the late medieval period held "deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole ..." and as such, "... certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter." [Bakhtin 66]. Laughter was a universalising cultural expression, available to all sectors of society as an expression of truths and beliefs. By the seventeenth century, however, truth was only accessible through the serious. As such, laughter was understood as "a light amusement or a form of salutary social punishment of corrupt and low persons." [Bakhtin, 67]. The ritual laughter of carnival enabled and empowered voices of "the people" with meaning and provided a forum for them to express discontent with the social order. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world,* trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 4-14, 57-101.

historicised theories of laughter. The few other historians who have considered history and humour too often rely on theories developed by social scientists who in turn make use of ahistoric philosophical ideas of laughter, and from there, decide that theories of laughter can stand in the place of theories on humour. Thus, the study of humour has been reductionist, providing little insight into larger power, cultural, and social relationships.

The study of humour: problems and limitations

"With honourable exceptions," quipped Leacock, "books on humour are written by people who haven't any. The work is left to writers on philosophy and psychology, and it is amazing how dull scientific people can be when they try."[19] It is perplexing that works on humour tend toward the pedantic with writers determined to make the subject as uninteresting as possible. Works on humour demonstrate the perversity of the modernist/empiricist's curious desire to quantify humour, jokes, and laughter in order to create charts and graphs to demonstrate the importance of the subject. Furthermore, while there is merit in understanding the psychological and physiological implications of laughter, humour is a cultural expression that is rooted in rituals, signs, and symbols that communicate ideas particular in meaning to societies and cultures. This is not to downplay consistencies between time periods or cultures; it is to argue that purely structuralist and non-dynamic approaches will not satisfy a full and subtle understanding of humour's historical role. What is particularly interesting about humour is how it represents both the divergences and consistencies between locale/historical spaces. Yet, with very few exceptions, scholars who study humour are surprisingly silent about the cultural

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[19] Stephen Leacock, *Humour and Humanity: an introduction to the study of humor* (New York: H. Holton and Company, 1938),12.

implications of humour, laughing and smiling. Current approaches to humour limit the historian's ability to consider the embedded social and cultural *contents* in humour. It is imperative that historians interested in humour as cultural expressions consider alternatives to the study of humour based in the social rather than the scientific. This section will first visit the current state of study of humour and briefly overview the field of humour studies. From this review I will outline an alternative definition of humour, one more conducive to cultural history, that has provided the conceptual framework for this thesis.

The most often cited philosophers on humour are Aristotle, Hobbes, Schopenhauer, and Freud. For each, laughter represented a metaphysical conception of humanity, consciousness, and the individual's relationship to the world. Aristotle built from Plato's arguments that laughter was a contemptuous activity arising from recognition of others' failings. Plato recognised that laughter mirrored power relationships: "Those who are weak and unable to retaliate when they are laughed at may rightly be called ridiculous; those who are strong and can defend themselves may be more truly called formidable and hateful."[20] Therefore, laughter mixed both pleasure and pain, finding amusement in the misfortune of others. Both Aristotle and Plato are cited because both believed that laughter was a product of superiority, an idea further developed more fully by Hobbes.

Hobbes argued that laughter was produced when the individual in "sudden glory" realised his/her superiority over another person/thing. Laughter reflected an individual's confidence in him/herself; the assessment of infirmities in other's and in one's own past, and laughter confirmed that one had triumphed over the inferior in him/herself and others. Laughter always reflected superiority. Historian David Heyd has convincingly argued that scholars who use Hobbes' theory of laughter misrepresent this philosopher's ideas, for

Hobbes was not interested in laughter in itself, he was concerned with emotions and human nature.[21] Hobbes' theories of laughter, Heyd argues, reflected his larger argument that human nature was a social construction.[22]

The tracts of Plato, Aristotle and Hobbes combined are frequently cited because these three philosophers represent the framework for one of the most recurring theories on humour: superiority. Those who laugh demonstrate their superior position at the subversion of others. Schopenhauer's theory of laughter built upon these philosophical ideas and insisted that laughter responded to incongruity "between a concept and the real objects that had been thought through in some relation ... All laughter therefore is occasioned by a paradoxical, and hence unexpected, subsumption ..."[23] Ronald Atkinson suggests that Schopenhauer's study of humour is part of his exploration of ideas of truth and reason. He writes: "Schopenhauer seems to think that concepts can get out of line with objects in two ways: either the concept demands too much of the object or the object is too much for the concept."[24] Therefore, those who use wit consciously make misalignments between objects and concepts, manipulating truth and reason to demonstrate the actuality of the world. Laughter can demonstrate that one recognises the irrationality, or incongruity, of an organisation between object and concept.

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[20] Plato, 48-50, in *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humour*, ed., John Morreall (Elbany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 12.
Aristotle digressed slightly from Plato and argued that the "ugliness" that inspired laughter was a specific type of deformity that did not cause pain. "The comic mask," he wrote, "is unseemly and distorted but does not cause pain."[21] Similar to Plato, Aristotle believed that too much laughter was a sign of a weak mind, a "buffoon." Men of character and intelligence would laugh "with tact" and in moderation. From Aristotle, in *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humour*, 198

[21] David Heyd. "The Place of Laughter in Hobbes's Theory of Emotions" in *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 43 No. 2 (1982): 285.

[22] According to Heyd, Hobbes was interested in ideas of laughter because laughing was linked with passions; laughter was the bodily manifestation of the psychological/emotional condition called "glory." As such, a philosophical tract on laughter allowed Hobbes to explore "a materialistic assumption which reductively connects emotions as mental phenomena with their physical source." Ibid., 286,290.

[23] Ronald Atkinson, "Humour in Philosophy" in *Humour and History*, ed. Keith Cameron (Oxford: Intellect, 1993), 16.

Freud's theory of jokes provides the philosophical/theoretical structure for the third and final approach to the "study of humour" so often relied upon by scholars who study laughter and jokes (and therefore claim to study humour.) Freud believed that jokes functioned similar to the dream: they allowed one to express desires and beliefs that can not be given vent in other socially acceptable ways – thus enabling the individual to trick the repressive super ego.[25] Freud argued that the suppressed desires expressed in the joke were either sexual or aggressive.[26] Laughter, like dreams, allowed the discharge of "energy" stored from the repressed action/thought/or emotion.[27]

While in certain philosophical and theoretical debates, theories of laughter may be interesting; if considered in their historical contexts these tracts could be used to explore ideas of self, politics, consciousness, sexuality, gender, and language, to name only a few. Interestingly, with the exception of Freud who studied deviations of humour (jokes and laughter), none of these philosophers discussed "humour" in their analysis. That scholars rely on these theories is problematic on three levels: First, such an approach assumes an ahistoric human condition. Second it confuses the physical/psychological action of laughing with the cultural/social expression of humour.

Darnton and Burke have demonstrated that if the historian tries to understand what people were laughing at (the object and not laughter itself) and the ritual purpose this played, then the history of laughing can be instructive. Rather than applying ahistorical "humour" these scholars chose the vocabulary and meanings assigned by the cultures studied. But when (social) scientists wish to understand laughter in a scientific framework,

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[24] Ibid., 17.
[25] Atkinson, "Humour in Philosophy," 18.
[26] Elliott Oring, *Jokes and their relation* (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1992), 1.
[27] Sigmund Freud, in *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humour,* ed., John Morreall (Elbany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 111-116.

they use humorous (in the modern understanding of the word) expressions produced within the culture as a stimulus for laughter, but we are no closer to understanding humour through this action.

Third, these theories do not enhance our ability to access the content in humour because the scholar is fixated on such things as laughter – a physical consequence of humour/ludicrous/comic. If the Victorian reader of *Punch* felt "superior" to the figures depicted in any particular cartoon and therefore laughed, so what? When readers of the comic paper *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday* laughed because it allowed them to "release" anxieties about sex, so what? If the words of fictional Mr. Pooter in *The Diary of a Nobody* represent an incongruity between his word and reality, the reader recognised this, and laughed, so what? And are we sure that this is why the reader laughed? Similar to Darnton's arguments in *The Great Cat Massacre,* we know that a large Victorian audience understood *Punch, Fun, The Diary of A Nobody,* and *Ally Sloper's Half Holidays* as comic and therefore, in the Victorian understanding of the word, expressions of humour (not wit) - what does *this* tell us? If our study "finds" that Victorian reader's laugh because they feel superior, recognise a deformity, release tension, or express aggression, we are in danger of minimising our sources and their significance to the historical figures we attempt to understand. But, if we are able to read these sources to understand the meanings attached to these expressions by the culture that produced and consumed them, we should, as Burke argued, begin to see both the limitations and frontiers of this culture.

Not only are the social science theoretical approaches to the study of humour limiting to the historian, but so too are the methodologies. Without acknowledging the cultural specificity of "humour," scholars in the social sciences attempt to study "humour"

as a universal in societies and cultures. Humour studies has become a catch phrase for the study of laughter, jokes, and joking relationships, while humour, which is something more profound and encompassing, is precisely what remains outside the confines of these studies.

In *Handbook of Humour Research* anthropologist Machadev Apte argued that the study of humour in anthropology is not the analysis of humour, but rather its relationship to other aspects of culture; the same can be said of sociological research approaches to humour. Anthropological studies tend to focus on three research topics: joking relationships, defined as playful behaviour between kin (in non-industrial societies) or social bonds (in industrial ones); or the study of incongruity of rituals, particularly in religious ceremonies; and, lastly, through a consideration of "tricksters" in folk lore, myths, legends, and stories.[28] Anthropologists do not offer explanations about the verbal/non verbal components of humour, the nuances of humour (symbolic or metaphoric), nor the relevance of humour in specific cultures. Thus, anthropologists study laughter and joking relationships/jokes; they do not study humour.

Sociologists have borrowed liberally from the anthropological approaches to the study of humour and/or use established sociological approaches to the study of society. Yet they have not considered the specificity of humour to cultures, societies, regions, or locations. The focus in sociology is the study of joking relationships, performance, ethnomethodolgocial studies of humour and laughter, reference group theories, humour

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[28] Because the goal in anthropological approaches to humour is to understand its relevance to other cultural relationships, scholars have not developed different approaches to humour and have instead relied upon established methodological paradigms in their field. They often use participation observation and informants as sources. They may use audio/visual equipment to record interactions where the anthropologist is not present, or do comparative studies between cultures. See Mahadev L. Apte, , "Humor Research, Methodology, and Theory in Anthropology" in *Handbook of Humor Research,* ed., Paul E. McGhee and Jeffrey H. Goldstein (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983), 180-212.

and ethnic group relations, and humour and social control.[29] Most often, scholars in sociology use the philosophical arguments of either Hobbes or Freud as the philosophical premise to shape their analyses.

The current approaches in sociology and anthropology serve specific purposes within the larger agendas in their respective fields, but these approaches do not allow the scholar to understand or appreciate the social or cultural importance of humour, nor is there any assumption that there might be non-humorous societies. These studies are of jokes and laughter, not humour. Furthermore, for reasons of modern empirical bias, there is an insistence in these studies to parse discrete ethnographic and other examples of humour into small, microcosmic, monadic events that deny a larger social aggregate and the dynamic of time. Anthropological and sociological studies deny the larger historical contexts, the social specificity of these expressions, in favour of static structural cultural definitions that serve to study human relationships, not cultural expressions.

Humour expresses something larger than jocularity; its intent is more and other than to evoke mere laughter. Humour is *a conscious, intentional mode of expression* articulated within particular social and cultural paradigms understood by conveyor and recipient. It is the *intent* within the production of humour that makes it adept at revealing the complexities of a given society. Moreover, this intentional construction/expression emerges out of cultural and social signs and signifiers reflecting the society in which the expression is conjured. This conscious manipulation within a given social milieu will illuminate the anxieties, complexities, and incongruities of a society. It must be stated clearly that laughter or other emotional reactions may accompany a conscious, intentional

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[29] Gary Alan Fine, "Research, Sociological Approaches to the Study of Humor" in *Handbook of Humor Research*, ed. Paul E. McGhee and Jeffrey H. Goldstein (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983), 159-181.

expression denoted by the culture (or segments of that culture) as humorous, and yet expressions of humour do not rely explicitly on any reaction in order to be categorised as such. Rather, cultures, collectively or individually, denote certain social expression and gestures as humour, and it is these conscious constructions and articulations within and by the society that render humour useful to the historian. Historians who study humour must think of what necessary components can be found in the historical specific cultural/personal expressions we would codify as "humour." Thus "humour" to the Victorians is radically different than the meanings ascribed to the word by early modern peoples; yet, both Victorians and sixteenth-century Britons would have used and experienced something recognised by the modern historian to be within the category of "humour."

Historical definitions of humour must enforce and indeed build upon scholarship that recognises the changing nature of language, behaviour, and identities, therein questioning static models of human behaviour. It is imperative to recognise that humour is not a static model of social interaction that transcends time and space. Humour (or rather modes of humour) emerge out of social and cultural signs and signifiers, and each society categorises, defines and gives meanings to their own modes of humour; this is not to insist, however, that there are no shared similarities or functions between societies, time periods, and cultures. This loose definition of humour, though, does not release the historian from the problem of the ahistoric elements and connotations of "humour." Yet, a flexible definition of humour that insists upon cultural particularities can serve as a short hand for inquiries into how cultures expressed a variation of modern "humour" and allow for scholars to build a historiography on history and humour that reflects these similarities and differences.

To summarise, the study of humour must be aware of cultural, social, and historic specifics. While it might not be always appropriate to talk about "humour" as defined by the modern scholars who approach the subject, there are aspects of "humour" that can be studied in various cultures and societies in historical periods. In order for the study to access all of the subtleties and nuances of such cultural expressions, the historian must recognise how that culture understood and valued certain expressions now subsumed under the category of "humour." Furthermore, humour as an expression that relies on cultural/social signs and signifiers must be separated from theories of laughter, an emotional responses produced by various interactions, only one of which is pertinent to humour.

A cultural approach to Victorian Humour.

One way that humour functioned in Victorian society was in the navigation of power relationships. Historians of late-nineteenth-century British society have long been preoccupied by the important role that class played in defining identities. In studying Victorian comics and cartoons, class re-emerges as an important aspect of humour. This thesis considers the role of humour in Victorian hegemonic culture and how humour functioned as an important medium through which power relationships were mediated, defined, challenged, and reinforced. The structure of this thesis derives from the exploration of the various ways humour was used by the dominant and subdominant classes.

Chapter one considers how the dominant class used humour to force and manufacture consensus. Here, humour required that the Victorian reader share certain fundamental values with a larger reading audience in order to appreciate and understand

the humour. There were defined behaviour, conduct, politics, sexuality, class, race, and gender hierarchies that must be accepted as normative. *Punch* and *Fun* are examples of how humour could be used to reinforce the norm by suggestion that all deviations were absurd, ridiculous, and therefore humorous. These deviations, however, are not distant "others" whose race, gender, or class made them ridiculous (although these cartoons exist in *Punch* and *Fun* as well). Rather, chapter one focuses on how humour forced consensus within the dominant ruling class about *their own* behaviour, actions, and appetites. Those who are objects of humour are members of the ruling class who have momentarily fallen outside of the narrow confines of hegemonic construction. Humour reinforces within the dominant group and reaffirms to these readers that their world view is normative and shared by many. If one wished to hold power, one had to conform to the norm.

Chapter two considers another way humour functioned within a hegemonic culture: to ridicule opposing articulations. The example of humour for this chapter took on a vicious class form by mocking and ridiculing the lower middle class. This attack of a subdominant class functioned to reaffirm the dominance and supremacy of the ruling middle class. By delineating those of another class into the realm of the absurd, humorous expressions by the dominant class assured their monopoly of power – expressed as "respectability" and "authenticity." Humour (re)established fundamental values of the middle class, insisting that alternative world views were ludicrous, ridiculous, and absurd. It also reaffirmed that only members of the dominant class could claim legitimate authority and power within society. Thus, humour could strip "others" of authority, legitimacy, and deny the "other's" access to power and prestige.

The final chapter considers how subdominant class could use humour within limited and confined spaces to ridicule the dominant world view. Such deviations were

only allowed within agreed upon (carnivalesque) limitations. The cartoons considered in chapter three required that the reader understand hegemonic constructions in order to find the humour in the deviation from the norm. Humour could ridicule dominant constructions and definitions and posit an alternative world view as normative but only if the dominant power structures were not seriously threatened. Thus, patriarchy and class, while manipulated, were reinforced as normative. When the world was "right side up," class power and patriarchal power were intact. Although humour allowed for momentary inversions of power and allowed the subdominant groups to ridicule the dominant culture's constructions, to thumb their noses at the ruling group, the humour still required at least a recognition of the hegemonic construction. Ultimately, humour reinforced fundamental hierarchies within Victorian society.

Humour in these popularly circulated publications allowed for dominant and subdominate groups to subvert "others" and to posit assumptions about how the world should be ordered. The study of humour in these publications allows the historian to understand an important form of cultural expression where norms were asserted and "others" made absurd. Humour enables the scholar of Victorian Britain to understand what aspects of hegemonic culture could be mocked and ridiculed, but also where the cultural boundaries stood rigid. It also allows historians to understand where consensus was achieved and where subdominant groups were able, and desired, to posit alternative views on behaviours and identities.

Visual Culture

Visual cultural critics and art historians have accused historians of ignoring visual material and privileging text sources. In recent years, historians have more frequently made use of imagery/visual sources but these primary documents are still (with notable exceptions) given secondary importance to texts. To demonstrate this prejudice, one needs only to look at the arguments of art historian Leo Steinberg in an essay responding to the work of historian Caroline Bynum. In his critique Steinberg accuses historians of "textism," of creating a hierarchy of material where visual sources rank lower than written. "The textist valuation of art" he argues, "would have images follow, not lead. They are seen as intrinsically subordinate."[30] Bynum's essay "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages" is to Steinberg an example of "a committed word-immersed scholar exploiting the muteness of pictures to make them testify against themselves." He continues:

> Not that this exploitation comes with intent to deceive; it follows from a habit of mind that cannot see pictures but in the way one reads words and phrases, i.e., sequentially, bits at a time and available for extracted quotation. To such a mindset, the continuity of the optical field, the integrity of the visual image, even anatomical wholeness are inaccessible.[31]

Bynum's work is an example of "non-visual thinking," and she is not alone. Her misuse of visual material is a fault that Steinberg believes is shared by many within the historical profession. Bynum takes the *metaphoric* language of fantasy and imagination and claims that these words reflect a way of *seeing* and *representing* although her illustrations do not reflect these readings. According to Steingberg, this misuse of images is the result of the scholar's failure to immerse themselves in other visual artefacts from the period and to focus exclusively on a selection of images. For Steinberg, the historian's tendency to parser the image and the resulting misrepresentation of the image comes "with no sense of

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[30] Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion*, 2nd ed., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 386.

loss, because what is being ousted is merely visual, and visual things come, like illegal immigrants, without papers."[32] Images are "not looked at but thought of – as if they had no competence other than to subserve textual sources."[33]

Steinberg's argument does not exclude the use of text, but he does require a different ordering of sources in the study of visual images. Images should be treated as equal communicators of ideas and cultural meanings, not as illustrations of text sources. Steinberg effectively demonstrates that, like secondary sources used in researching the past, text sources (primary or secondary) can provide the necessary background to decode the images. When using images, text sources serve a fundamental purpose of further contextualizing the historian's eye in order to understand the overt meanings and the hidden transcripts of visual sources. The historian should be able to understand the importance of the visual source within the culture that produced/observed the image, but the scholar can also read other unintended layers of cultural/social meaning communicated to the historian via the image.

This thesis makes extensive use of visual representations of humour in the form of cartoons and comics, and these sources are treated as equal communicators of cultural meanings similar but different to texts.[34] Although the comic papers used in this study also

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[31] Ibid., 383.

[32] Bynum (and by extension for Steinberg, most historians) "pictures reliably illustrate what she has been reading. Art for her is the escort that trails along ..." Ibid., 381.

[33] Ibid., 385.

[34] In order to contextualise my reading of Victorian cartoons, I have read closely ten years, from 1885 to 1895, from three different publications: *Punch, Fun,* and *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday,* focusing on these publication's cartoons and comics. From each publication, I collected several hundred cartoons that represented men and masculinity in numerous contexts. From these piles of images, I then selected certain dominant themes about masculinity and manliness, choosing those cartoons that best represented these themes. Thus, each cartoon chosen and discussed closely in this thesis could have been substituted by twenty or more cartoons I selected, and a hundred or more if I returned to the primary source. Nevertheless, the arguments made in this thesis are based on analysis and reading of hundreds of cartoons. I have conducted further research on visual imagery, looking at the advertisements, art and photography of male and female bodies. Because of limitations of time and access to archives, much of this research on Victorian visual images has included reading of secondary material, included in the bibliography.

circulated humour through text, I have purposefully excluded the text and privileged the image in order to consider humour as a visual cultural expression. Furthermore, I am interested in the visual culture of Victorians and the role of images in representing and reflecting ideas about nineteenth-century Britain, particularly ideas about masculinity and manliness. While the majority of the thesis is structured around visual sources, I have included one case study where text sources are used to the exclusion of images in an effort to demonstrate that images serve an equal purpose to texts in the study of the past. The comic image and the comic text tell us similar and simultaneously different things about the way Victorians understood, represented, responded to, and approached their world.

The Victorian culture in Britain was a highly visual culture in both representation and in the construction of knowledge. In order to understand Victorian culture historians must understand the role of the visual in the (re)presentation of meanings. Cultural critic Jean - Louis Comolli has argued:

> The second half of the nineteenth century lives in a sort of frenzy of the visible. It is, of course, the effect of the social multiplication of images: ever wider distribution of illustrated papers, waves of print, caricatures, etc. The effect also, however, of something of a geographical extension of the field of the visible and the respectable: journeys, explorations, colonisation's, the whole world becomes visible at the same time that it becomes apporpriatable.[35]

The proliferation of and the increased ease of reproducing the visual image revolutionised the way nineteenth-century Britons represented and approached the world, of communicating, speaking, and constructing meanings about the things, people, and spaces. Images could also be mass-produced, commodified, and commercialised. Indeed, in the burgeoning consumer world, advertisers began developing the art of manufacturing desire

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[35] Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible" as quoted by Anne Friedberg in "Mobilization and Virtual gaze in Modernity," in *The Visual Culture Reader,* ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routedge, 1998), 253.

through images. The popular press was revolutionised so that images could be mass-produced and widely circulated.[36] This created an environment where the reader's/observer's eyes were bombarded with current, topical, poignant, and specific images that both reflected the world they lived in and the world they could only imagine and/or desire. The meanings in these images (re)presenting Victorian culture reflect the moment in which they were created and consumed, and therefore provide the historian with valuable insight into moments captured, created, and reflected that could otherwise be inaccessible.

Visual spectacles such as panoramas were increasingly made available to members of the public for a price. Here foreign places and unknown spaces were reproduced for those who could not travel and witness the world first hand. It would be the camera and photography, however, that would become the hallmark innovation of the Victorian visual culture. Photography and the camera revolutionised the way of approaching, reflecting, speaking of, and imaging the world, and of communicating knowledge, truths, and realities.

The visual was a verifiable form of knowledge and an important method for investigation in nineteenth-century Britain. Visual investigation could be used to ascertain a person's worth and/or authenticity. Victorians understood that the mind, the body, and character were all intrinsically linked; improvements or perversions in the mind/character would manifest itself on the outside person. Consequently, the study of the physical body could communicate the truth about the inner person – Robert Louis Stevenson's *The*

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[36] Cheaper paper, made so through the removal of taxes and innovations in the production of paper, combined with lithography allowed images to be reproduced by a range of printing presses. Printers no longer had to rely on wood carved blocks for cheap illustrations, but they could commission artists and illustrators to produced topical and innovative images readily – and these images could be reproduced at a minimal cost.

Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde most vividly portrayed this fascination with how the body linked with the inner-self. Through vision, the Victorian observer could make logical conclusions regarding the moral and intellectual makeup of the individual where the exterior appearance equated with the inner value. Other sciences relied on the study of the exterior to understand the inner workings of the mind and character. Phrenology could ascertain the intellectual disposition, talents, and attributes of a person simply from the bumps on the skull. Physiognomy could scientifically identify the criminal based on a profiling system because deviance, disease, and perversions all had physical characteristics that could be found on the "other's" body.[37]

The visual was an important way of accessing, approaching, and communicating knowledge about how the world was, should or could be. Yet, visual images from late nineteenth-century Britain have been slow in nudging their way onto the historiographical agenda, and where they do appear they are treated mostly illustratively and seldom privileged in the historian's analysis. Yet, as Steinberg reminds historians, the visual can communicate ideas about past cultures in particular and specific ways. What the image (re)presents to the observer should be read as intentional. When the artist chooses to draw (art) or capture (photography) a certain object or thing he/she must consciously decide the particularities of how to construct the image or which image should be captured and preserved. Because the sources here are cartoons and comics, I will only consider the drawn visual and not the photographic.

When the artist chooses to draw a man, he must decide all of the details of facial features, stature, build, clothing that correlate with the age, occupation, race, and social

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[37] George Mosse, *The Image of Man: the creation of modern masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 25.

standing of the individual created/represented. What the artist emphasises is as important as what he/she decides to exclude. In the text, however, such particularities of body shape, race, stature, and age may go unnoticed simply by omission of comment – but if the legs of a woman are not shown, if she is drawn with curves and in a submissive pose, or when a man is depicted as bald, with a phallic shaped nose, or with animal-like features, these exist as striking features of the visual. The entirety of the human form, the details (or lack thereof) of background, costumes, or objects displayed, can tell the modern scholar particulars that may be left out – and *can* be left out - of texts without notice.

For humour, the visual image can set up a social commentary about gender, race, politics, or sexuality without the need for much description. Images can be more economical than words in transmitting the multitude of assumptions and manipulations necessary to create humour. Moreover, the cartoon can also be more adept at insinuating messages that otherwise could not be written in a text. For example, in "Ally Sloper" cartoons, the artist can with greater ease imply that Sloper engages in sexually perverse acts that, if written, would have moved the comic paper from claiming legitimate if sub-cultural space into the realms of underground pornography. And, often, part of the fun in these images comes from the observer's ability to "get" the humour in the cartoon and to imply the meanings hinted at in the image – to "see" and "imagine" events and ideas that are only hinted at through visual depiction. Furthermore, the combination of mediums – both text and images – can be played against each other and communicate both norms and deviations for the observer/reader to decode.

The cartoon can also initiate a shared sense of audience between the reader/observer and the fictional audience in the cartoon. Characters may appear coy, shocked, surprised, or amused by the actions of other fictional characters who share their

cartoon world and therefore, through the visual, the artist may provide clues to the observer as to how he/she should respond or act. Or, as the case may be, this shared audience can demonstrate how "silly" people would respond to the situation but, because of the critical distance between observer and image, the outside observer can appreciate and respond to the fictional situation with humour.

The benefits of privileging visual images, the primacy and significance of visual imagery in Victorian popular culture, and the value of understanding culturally encoded humour through cartoons, is argued here and throughout the thesis. Visual representations offered here have necessarily been selected for their power of illustration or representativeness.

Victorian masculinities

In the study of Victorian Britain, historians have argued that class and gender are inextricably linked, and that only by considering the intersection of these categories can historians understand power relationships. In *Family Fortunes* Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall established what would become a standard assumption about gender studies: "that gender and class always operate together, that consciousness of class always takes a gendered form."[38] More recently, Thomas Dublin has insisted that historians of nineteenth-century Britain view "class and gender within a unified frame of reference and not as distinct categories or levels of analysis. There is no class analysis which is not at the

[38] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: The Men and Women of English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 13.

same time a gendered analysis, nor an effective gender history which does not take class into account."[39]

The study of the history of masculinity has been a study of power. Historian Elizabeth Foyster has noted that many scholars have assumed that the system of patriarchy has favoured all men. Recent histories of masculinities have questioned this assumption, demonstrating that patriarchy only favoured a small number of men from the dominant classes.[40] Key to understanding masculinity, historians have argued, is how patriarchy has played a substantial role in framing and limiting men's experiences. The legitimate exercise of patriarchy required that a man subscribe to particular codes of conduct designated by the dominant culture as normative. As John Tosh has recently argued: "Through the mounting volume of recent historical work on masculinities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century societies, no theoretical focus has been more illuminating than that of hegemonic masculinity."[41] First defined by sociologist R.W. Connell, hegemonic masculinity encompasses the characteristics best suited to social and cultural control over the "other," be they women, children, or men. Hegemonic masculinity is characterised by the features of the dominant class and imposed upon other masculinities either by coercion or prestige. According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity "embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy."[42]

The essential question framing this thesis is how is humour utilised by diverse segments in a hegemonic society to control power and mediate power-relationships. Since gender, class, and race dictated a Victorian's access to power and place in

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[39] Thomas Dublin, "Gender, Class and Historical Analysis: A commentary," in *Gender and History* Vol. 13 No.1 (April 2001), 21-23.
[40]Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in early modern England: honour, sex and marriage.* (London: Longman, 1999), 4.

social/economic/political relationships, I have chosen to consider three case studies that investigate how men, masculinities, and manliness were represented in popularly circulated comic publications.

A study of how humour mediated power within Victorian popular culture can be used as a prism to understand masculinities and class in Victorian Britain. Concurrently, class and gender constructions can be used to understand how humour was used to construct cultural definitions. Class and gender will illuminate the role of humour; humour will explicate subtleties of class and gender identities. This thesis, therefore, explores how humour in comic popular art and satirical prose (re)presented masculinities to audiences in Victorian Britain. Humour demonstrates that masculinity and manliness were determined by and experienced through class definitions.

Gail Bederman has argued that, although linked, the terms "masculinity" and "manliness" represent specific and differing meanings within Victorian society. This separation between manliness and masculinity takes on new importance within a study of humour and competing articulations of masculine identities.[43] In keeping with Bederman's argument, "manhood" and "manliness" are used in this thesis to denote the ideal Victorian construction of masculine identity, where as "masculinity" is used to signify how members of particular classes assigned codes of conducts and behaviours linked with being biologically male. Manhood was achieved and granted to a man who conformed to the hegemonic definition of behaviour and only then could he claim and exercise patriarchal authority. There were many different types of masculine identity within Victorian Britain,

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[41] John Tosh, *Hegemonic Masculinity,* paper presented as part of the symposium "Masculinity as Practice and Representation" at the 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences, Oslo Norway, 6-13 August 2000.
[42] R.W. Connell. As quoted in Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 4.
[43] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880- 1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 5 –10

and this thesis examines how men of the various social classes attempted to achieve manliness and manhood by articulating different masculine identities, although these constructions are ultimately shown to be outside of the hegemonic masculine ideal.

Those who have studied masculinities in Victorian Britain can have tended to study either the lived experiences of men or the constructions of masculinities through legal, moral, religious, scientific, and medical tracts. This thesis is indebted to these works because this is a study of how ideas about masculinities from official tracts and lived experiences were (re)presented and circulated in popular cultures. This is not a study of official discourses nor is the impossible attempt made to ascertain how comic images of masculinity were internalised by the audiences. I am interested in if and how humour was used to subvert or reinforce dominant assumptions about masculinities and manliness that were constructed via official discourses. I am also interested in how humour was used to communicate ideas about how men *should* and *should not* construct their masculinities – but I do not consider *if* men lived within these frameworks.

In chapter one, "Men behaving badly," I consider visual sources from *Punch* and *Fun* in order to understand how humour was used within the dominant class to construct ideas about normative masculinity. The cartoons from *Punch* and *Fun* illustrate that the visual can be adept at (re)presenting normative body image and in communicating the social behaviours and decorum necessary to be a Man.

Chapter two, "Tories, Yes-men, and Bumsuckers," explores how humour can be used to ridicule those outside the dominate classes. Through the satirical prose of *A Diary of a Nobody* the middle class justified their mockery of the lower-class men whose deviant masculinities threatened to undermine the supremacy of middle class respectability. The

fictional characters of Charles and Lupin Pooter presented unique challenges to ideal manliness because they blurred the distinctions of authenticity/imitation and respectability/fraud, dichotomies essential in maintaining the privileged position of the middle-class in Victorian power structures. By using humour to subvert and attack the London clerk, the middle-class reinforced the absurdity of alternative world views. By excluding images and privileging a text source, this chapter establishes a comparison with the other chapters in order to demonstrate that texts and images are equal communicators.

The last chapter, "Shooting the Gentle Cat," illustrates how humour and sexuality in the cartoons of *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday* were used to subvert dominatant ideas and articulate alternative constructions of manliness, identity, and sexuality. Yet, although humour could subvert, humour also functioned to reinforce certain aspects of hegemonic culture.

In the conclusion I return to the question of how humour can be used to study the past. I also consider what humour can contribute to the history of popular culture. The conclusion also posits questions left unanswered by this thesis in regards to manliness, humour, the visual, and Victorian culture.

CHAPTER ONE

MEN BEHAVING BADLY: HUMOUR AND THE MOMENTARY UNMANLY OTHER

In his journal, Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked unfavourably that "the day's Englishman must have his joke, as duly as his bread."[1] For many decades before and since Emerson's visit to England, the comic publications of *Punch* and *Fun* were constant sources of English humour where upper- and middle-class men and women could weekly find timely expressions of humour to help satisfy their appetite for the amusing. Both comic papers shared a similar format, combining humorous stories and cartoons in a satire of British Society and politics, and both were produced by and for the middle class. *Fun* was slightly more liberal than its counterpart in the depiction of British political culture,[2] but both reflected a similar and mainstream message about gender, identity, and class in cartoons satirising Society and culture. *Punch* was established in 1841 and was a constant cultural icon throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, re-emerging in short revivals throughout mid and late twentieth century. *Fun* came onto the market in 1865 and,

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[1] Daniel Wickberg, *The Sense of Humour: Self and Laughter in Modern America* (Ithca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 125.
[2] Peter Bailey, "'Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday': comic art in the 1880s," In *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 52.

although it never reached the circulation numbers of the rival *Punch,* it too managed to survive throughout the Victorian era and maintain its popularity with the middle and upper classes.

As expressions of English culture and sensibilities, *Punch* and *Fun* are often consulted by historians of late nineteenth-century politics and society who use the political cartoons and comic stories as part of an exploration of Victorian political preoccupations, such as Home Rule, suffragettes, Gladstone, or images of Empire. When browsing through the pages of *Punch* and *Fun,* one is also struck by how many cartoons are of an entirely different nature, where the apolitical, mundane, and trite exchanges of polite society are also mocked and satirised. In these cartoons, the observer is escorted by the artist behind the closed doors of elite society to witnesses the conversations, actions, and private moments of men and women of the middle and upper classes. Too often historians have ignored these cartoons in favour of the overtly political messages of these comic papers, but there are hundreds of cartoons printed each year that focused on social interactions or solitary moments of middle and upper-class men and women in private and public spaces. This study ignores the overtly political cartoon and instead privileges the cartoons of men of polite Society in what are referred to here as "Society cartoons."[3] In focusing analysis on cartoons depicting men within the dominant class, this chapter will investigate how humour functioned in Victorian culture to maintain cultural consensus

[3] This thesis uses a selection from the numerous cartoons available in *Punch* and *Fun*. Each issue of *Punch* covered a six-month period. In Vol. 88 (Jan.-June 1885) the periodical published 57 cartoons, Vol. 98 (Jan-June 1890) there were 48 cartoons, and Vol. 99 (July-Dec 1890) there were 44 cartoons depicting men in social/domestic situations (clubs, at home with wives and children, at work, hunting, sporting events. In collecting material for this thesis, I ignored all overtly political and military cartoons, as well as cartoons that depicted the lower-classes, the Empire, and/or ethnic and racial Humour.) The average was approx. 100 cartoons per year of *Punch*, and each year the magazine published approx. 300-310 pages of material. The numbers from *Fun* are comparable.

within the dominant middle class, reinforcing and communicating a hegemonic masculine ideal to the readers of these comic periodicals.

Historians of late Victorian Britain have studied the hegemonic-masculine-ideal by looking at the lived experiences of those who tried to cultivate the image,[4] and/or by considering how late Victorian structures and institutions constructed the norm and posited an "other,"[5] and/or by considering the representation of popular cultural heroes.[6] This chapter builds from the available secondary literature on Victorian manliness but considers how assumptions about manliness, produced through the official tracts and understood by men and women to be the ideal, were both presented and represented thorough the comic pictorial depictions of unmanliness in *Punch* and *Fun*.

The consistency and frequency with which these comic papers published "Society cartoons" indicates that a large middle and upper-class reading audience found these depictions amusing, further suggesting that there must have been something meaningful to late Victorian Society in these humorous visual expressions. Yet, as Peter Bailey has lamented, historians have been slow to use "vernacular arts of the pictorial and cartoon press, which in this period – with recent and honourable exceptions – seems reduced to the

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[4] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: men and women of thr English Middle Class, 1780 - 1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Lesley Hall, *Hidden Anxieties: Male Sexuality, 1900-1950* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: conflict in nineteenth-century married life* (London: Routledge, 1992); John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the middle-class home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

[5] Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: masculinities, fashion and city life* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Michael Anton Budd, *The Sculpture Machine: physical culture and body politics in the age of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: towards a genealogy of a discourse on male sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1993); John Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect man: the white male body and the challenge of modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Thomas Laquer, *Making Sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[6] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A cultural history of race and gender in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Graham Dawson, *Soldier heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the imaging of masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994); George Mosse, *The Image of Man: the creation of modern masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

merely supplementary parade of cuts from the *Illustrated London News* and *Punch,* or self contained selections from these journals that glorify them as unique and comprehensive mirrors of their age."[7] The popularity of *Punch* and *Fun* cartoons for the dominant classes of late Victorian society and the privileged yet limited use of these images by modern historians creates an interesting historic and historiographical intersection to begin an exploration of humour as a tool for studying the past. In studying the role of humour in (re)presenting Victorian manliness to a middle-class reading audience, what can historians infer from these cartoons about gender and class in late Victorian England?

To historians, these cartoons are important because they communicate both the ideal of and the deviations from Victorian manliness. The space dedicated in these comic papers to the pictorial representations of the unmanly fools suggests that these images served as important cultural currency in middle class circles, feeding the fantasies and imaginations of the dominant classes. The comic representations of men in these middle class papers reinforce the importance of "otherness" in fashioning hegemonic consensus. This thesis digresses from current approaches to the study of masculinity by considering comic depictions of *momentary* unmanly "others."

These cartoons reflect how gender and class were inextricably linked in the Victorian imagination; class was experienced through gender and gender took on a class definition. Power too was defined by one's place in society and depended on the combination of maintaining appropriate actions, appetites, and attitudes ascribed to one's gender and class. The humour of the "Society cartoons" reinforced the rigid confines of Victorian gender and class constructions. The cartoons considered below portray men who claimed membership within the hegemonic culture, but because of momentary failures

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[7] Bailey, "Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday," 50.

such as behaviour, language, dress, or manners, they have become an "other" in the moment, and as such, an object of their peers ridicule and scorn. In considering the construction of dominant masculinity (manliness), these cartoons can be used to construct a character sketch of the unmanly momentary "other."

Hegemonic manliness and the momentary unmanly "other."

In this chapter and in those that follow, the hegemonic masculine ideal loomed as a powerful figure in the Victorian popular imagination. Yet, the ideal man was a changing construction constantly under negotiation throughout the Victorian period. In their foundational work, *Family Fortunes,* Leanore Davidoff and Catherine Hall demonstrated that throughout the Victorian era, British society gradually re-defined hegemonic masculine qualities. British Victorian society emphasized less the importance of "sport and codes of honour derived from military prowess … hunting, riding, drinking and 'wenching" and turned instead to promoting characteristics of "rational," "moral earnestness" and " a sensitivity to the weak and helpless."[8] The cultivation of manliness required that a man develop a character of self-control and self-restraint. He was to be the guardian of dependants – his wife, children, servants, and any other female or under-aged male family member who could not claim another patriarchal figure. He was to stand between the domestic world and the public world and offer himself as protector of domestic virtues. As such, and as John Tosh has demonstrated, the private world was as essential to the public world in the definition of manliness.

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[8] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: the men and women of the English middle class, 1780 - 1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 110-113.

Yet, despite the importance of the domestic to ideas of manliness, the development of a hegemonic masculine identity required that a man spend time with other men in a homosocial world of public schools, clubs, work space, hunting parties, and organised sports. The emphasis on all male associations began early and extended throughout a man's lifetime, as too much time in the domestic space would weaken a man and make him unfit to be/become a Victorian patriarch.

The humorous depictions of the momentary unmanly "other" in *Punch* and *Fun* reinforces that Victorian manliness was a fragile identity construction always at risk and constantly under threat. Small deviations could place a man outside the realms of manliness. Although a man may have claimed wealth, status, education, family, property, and have cultivated appropriate appetites, these were only the basic requirements for middle classness and they did not assure that a man could ever demonstrate the behaviours and physical attributes necessary to be a Man. Manliness was more than the sum of its parts - a man had to cultivate or posses an *essence* of manliness, something unarticulated and undefined that assured his success in demonstrating and acquiring the outward images of manliness. Historians J.A. Mangan and James Walvin argued that manliness "symbolised an attempt at a metaphysical comprehension of the universe ... with an internal coherence and external validity which determined ideals, forged identity, and defined reality."[9] Manliness was clearly not accessible to just anyone born male. As John Tosh has demonstrated, manliness was "very much a middle class possession," and therefore those outside of the dominant class could never hope to attain manliness.[10] For

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[9] J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, ed. *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 3.

[10] John Tosh, "The Old Adam and the New Man: Emerging Themes in the History of English Masculinities, 1750-1850," In *English Masculinities: 1660 – 1800* ed. Tim Hitchock and Michele Cohen (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 236. Tosh continues in this essay to argue that manliness was available to "'the improving' upper enchelons of the lower orders..." Chapter 2 of this thesis, "Tories, Yes-men and

these men who only minutely deviated from the ideal, manliness could be reclaimed, unlike those men so wholly outside the realms of hegemonic masculinity, such as the fraud, the cheat, the drunkard, the homosexual, and men of all other classes.[11] These "others" could never hope to be (re)included into the realms of manliness. As George Mosse has suggested, the ideal hegemonic man was strengthened by the existence of unmanly stereotypes "who in body and soul were its foil, projecting the exact opposite of true masculinity."[12] What is striking about the *Punch* and *Fun* cartoons is the depiction of possible *faux pas* and situations that were obstacles in a middle-class man's pursuit of status, respect, and power. The cartoon characters of *Punch* and *Fun* circulated as anti-heroic popular cultural icons whose failures serve to warn men of the social and cultural pitfalls that could usurp their power and (momentarily) destroy their public masculine image.

Importantly, none of the characters in these Society cartoons are "real" people nor do they depict "actual" events. The humour of these cartoons relies upon the artist's ability to approximate "reality"; the cartoon may not have happened and the people satirized do not exist, but they *could* exist and their interactions *could* have transpired exactly as depicted. Each character is stereotypical, lacking any real identity or definable self and

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bumbsuckers: humour and the representation of the London Clerk," demonstrates that manliness remained a middle-class possession that was beyond the reach of those of the lower- middle class who attempted to construct a masculine image based on an imitation of middle class constructions. At best, lower-middle-class men constructed a masculinity that approximated middle-class manliness, but they were not recognised within the popular cultural imagination of Victorian Britain to be manly. See also James Hammerton, "Pooterism and Partnership? Marriage and Masculine Identity in the Lower Middle Class, 1870-1920," in *Journal of British Studies,* Vol. 38 No. 3 (July 1999): 291-321; Christopher Hosgood "Merchantile Monasteries': Shop, Shop Assistants, and Shop Life in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain," in *Journal of British Studies,*Vol. 38 No. 3 (July 1999): 322-352 and Peter Bailey, "White Collar, Gray Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited," in *Journal of British Studies,* Vol. 38 No. 3 (July 1999), 273-290.

[11] See Angus McLaren , *The Trials of Masculinity: policing sexual boundaries, 1870 – 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[12] George Mosse, *The Image of Man: the creation of modern masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

exists only in the moment of the cartoon. The reader/observer is provided with just enough information about the figure, either through text or image, to understand the particular deficiency that makes that fictional figure the object of humour. Because each cartoon figure remains without a complexly developed identity, the observer is encouraged to imagine "real" people of his/her acquaintance in the comic situations, and one hoped to not find him/herself peering out of the cartoon pages. Through the power of representation and illustration, the reader is invited on a voyeuristic journey through cartoon London, encouraged by editors and artists to live and find pleasure in the triumphs and humiliations of fictional characters and to laugh at the inner thoughts and feelings of unknown figures.

(Re)presenting manliness and the male body image

In the age when sight could verify the worth of a man, the body of a man was a powerful communicator about inner character. George Mosse has suggested that for nineteenth-century European society, "physical appearance would ... assume an importance it did not have earlier; not only comportment but looks mattered. Such an aesthetic of masculinity was crucial to the formation of a stereotype that ... must be based upon visually-oriented perceptions."[13] It was widely held that the exterior self should reflect that the inner man virile, strong, courageous, and powerful. The better man was the bigger man who, by cultivating his muscular outer-shell, would also have cultivated inner strength of will and character. Roberta Park has argued that "one of the most extended debates [for Victorians] concerned the nature of 'mind' and its relationship to the body. It was widely held that 'mind' was the seat of the 'will' and that the 'will' performed a decisive role in the

[13] Ibid., 19.

formation of 'character'."[14] As such, athletics and physical education became institutionalised concerns for Victorian Britain and young boys and men were encouraged to develop a muscular physique. The main focus of physical education programs and literature, Park argues, was the formation of character through bodies because "muscle power became will power."[15] Through these lessons of physical prowess and the importance of physique in the construction and presentation of a manly image, men and boys learned that all aspects of manhood required "serious attention and strenuous effort."[16] Mosse has similarly argued that masculinity required that the "body and soul, outward appearance and inward virtue were supposed to form one harmonious whole, a perfect construction where every part was in its place."[17]

The representation of the male body in cartoon humour was a powerful communicator of hegemonic assumptions about manliness. As such, one of the fundamental questions underpinning the cartoon depiction of middle-class men was, does body image matter? In both height and weight, the cartoon characters on the pages of these publications answered with a resounding - yes! The larger man, the overweight man, the short man, and the tall-burly man were stereotypical characters, each with their own cultural baggage, verbally jousting and contesting each other's claim to hegemonic manliness.

The observer of the comic was asked to infer the inner characteristics of a man based on the depiction of his form and figure. Because the body shape of the man was

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[14] Roberta Park, "Biological Thoughts, Athletics and the formation of a 'man of character': 1830-1900," in J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, ed. *Manliness and Morality: middle-class masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 9.
[15] Ibid., 10-14, 29.
[16] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A cultural history of race and gender in the United States, 1880-1917.*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 172.
[17] Mosse, 5.

vital to his character, many cartoons played with and manipulated assumptions about the interconnectedness of physical and moral manliness. The observer needed to share with the artist the assumptions and beliefs that male physique was linked to character, and in so doing, the observer became apart of an audience that appreciated the artist's use of irony, sarcasm, and ridicule in reinforcing these cultural assumptions. Importantly, the artistic style of these "Society cartoons" was that of cartoons, not of caricatures. And, because these cartoons were intended to approximate reality, the figures in this genre of vernacular art were more often stereotypical and typographical than exaggerations or grotesque.

One of the many cartoons discussing the relationship of size, body shape, and manliness is "Sartorial Euphuisms."[Figure 1.1][18] In this cartoon the observer is privy to the private commercial exchange and interactions between a tailor and customer. The text acts as an apparatus to direct the spectator/reader's interpretation of the image. The artist of the cartoon manipulates popular cultural phrases to provide clues to the reader as to how to interpret the cartoon; in order to be part of the intended audience, the reader had to be in the "know" that Snippe was slang for tailor.[19]

The image and text provide the necessary background information to the reader and they converge as a commentary on male bodily shape, power, and manliness. The conversation (text), the visual construction of the tailor and the customer, the body stances and gazes of each character, direct the attention of the reader to all necessary clues for seeing and interpreting the image.

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[18] "Sartorial Euphuisms," in *Punch,* 30 August 1890, 99.

[19] Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8th edition, ed. Paul Beale (New York: Routledge, 2002), s.v. "snippe."

SARTORIAL EUPHUISMS.

"Measurements about the same as they used to be, Snippe?"
"Yes, Sir. Chest a trifle *lower down*, Sir, that's all!"

Figure 1.1

AN EYE TO EFFECT.

Little Dives. "Oh, by the way, Belairs – Awfully sorry to cut you out, you know 0 but I've just proposed to Lady Barbara, and she's accepted me, and we're to be married in September. And look here, Old Chappie; I want you to be my Best Man. I want to make a good Show at the Alter, you know!"

Figure 1.2

Part of the absurdity in this cartoon is derived by the customer's demanding from the tailor an account as to the state of his own manly image. Snippe's delicate but absurd answer of "chest a trifle lower down, Sir, that's all!" invites the reader to inspect the man's body while also conveying the tailor's findings. Through the text and image, the artist casts the middle-class man as ridiculous. Snippe's wit makes him an accomplice to the artist, leaving the customer as the single object of humour. Because Snippe's is outside of the humour, he is the power-figure in the cartoon who momentarily inverts the class-power relationship between a middle-class gentleman and a tradesman. The momentary inversion of power is recognisable to the outside observer even though it remains unarticulated by the artist and fictional character. Snippe's ability to manipulate his privileged knowledge of ideal male body shape and his awareness of the particularities of the customer's physique reinforces the ideal image of a middle-class man: a broad chest and trim waist.

The figure of the customer, arrogant and self-important in full dress including a lit cigar, communicates the man's sense of pride in his appearance and in his dress. His meticulous wardrobe, however, is a disguise for his failed manliness, represented by his neglect of his physique. His failure to cultivate a manly image also indicates his failure to cultivate a manly character. His (possibly pretended) ignorance of his changed body size makes the tailor's remark much more cutting and the man's humiliation more complete. He stands a few inches taller than the tradesman, feet apart, and head bowed as he inspects the work of his tailor. Although he stands tall, he does not hold his head up among his social inferiors. Instead his drooped head brings attention to his changed body shape. The failures of the upper/middle-class man allows for an inversion of the social power hierarchy, allowing for the socially inferior tradesman to momentarily triumph over the wealthier customer.

In "An eye to effect" [Figure 1.2][20] the body of the man is again a medium to reflect cultural assumptions linking a muscular build to various constructions of masculinity and (un)manliness. Dives, whose name is a popular expression for a wealthy man, is speaking to Belairs, a possible spoof on the popular expression "lairs," meaning a flashily dressed man.[21] The two men in the cartoon are alone, but the absent Lady Barbara is the subject of discussion and controversy. Belairs reflects the image his name suggests: he is well groomed, well dressed, with a chiselled face and powerful, built physique. His companion in comparison is short, bald, and less stylishly dressed, but he has money. In his address to Belairs, Little Dives implies that they have been rivals for the affections of Lady Barbara, but Beliars does not confirm this in expression, action, or language. Lady Barbara is an unknown and one may even wonder if she embodies any of the feminine qualities "Belairs" would want. Yet, because the cartoon is capitalising on assumptions regarding physique and manliness, the observer must understand that the shorter-smaller-built-bald man's has used his money to trump Belairs for this woman's affections. Nonetheless, if Dives is accurate in his understanding that he has won the competition, the observer is asked to appreciate the irony that a man such as Dives could trump a Belaris in any contest of manliness, particularly in courtship, all because of wealth.

The text functions as an apparatus of meaning and assists the observer in decoding the image. The text implies that the two men share an understanding: Belairs is the more attractive and "better show" of manliness than little Dives. Both figures communicate to the observer that Belairs will be the "best man" at the wedding, thus reinforces the preposterousness that little Dives is Lady Barbara's chosen suitor. The humour in this

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[20] "An eye to effect," in *Punch,* 10 August 1895, 71.
[21] *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, s.v. "belairs."

cartoon therefore is achieved with the ironic romantic success of the wealthier shorter, balder man over the well dressed, classically built Belairs.

Victorian assumptions about power, size, age and gender all converge in "Under Control" [Figure 1. 3].[22] Here, a young girl and a man pass in a park. Neither figure takes notice of the other. The girl and her dog walk regal and proud, the tail of the dog is up in the air, ears are cocked, and he is depicted in a pose that would suggest breed, distinction, and obedience. The body of the dog communicates meanings usually assigned to human male physique: he is strong, physically powerful, courageous, and hence, a protector to the little girl. The close proximity of the dog to the girl and the ease with which she walks the dog suggests companionship and mutual awareness, but the leash also conveys dominance of the young girl in the relationship. The dog and girl are under control.

In contrast, the smaller dog walks in front of his owner. The taut leash suggests that this little dog is in command of the situation and it is pet leading the owner. The little dog imitates the image of the larger dog: regal but ridiculous in his false sense of importance. The meanings attached to the small dog's body are juxtaposed with those of his counterpart, indicating the small dog only pretends to be significant. This lap dog suggests luxury, leisure, and frivolity, rather than the protectorate and nobility of the larger animal.

Visually, the artist has constructed an image where the disproportionate size between owner and pet is strikingly absurd. The text, "Under control," can only be applied to the relationship between the (small) girl and her (large) dog. The juxtaposition between the small, young, female figure who exercises mastery over a larger animal and that of a

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[22] "Under Control," in *Punch,* 17 July 1886, 30.

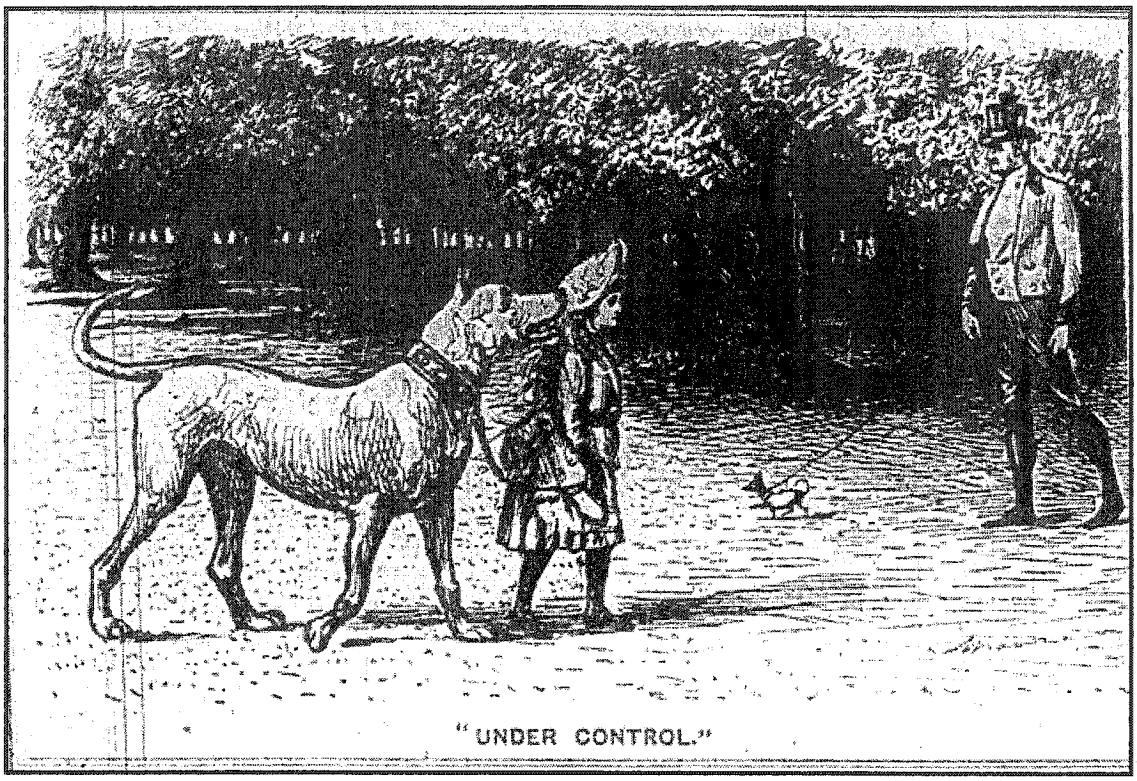

Figure 1.3

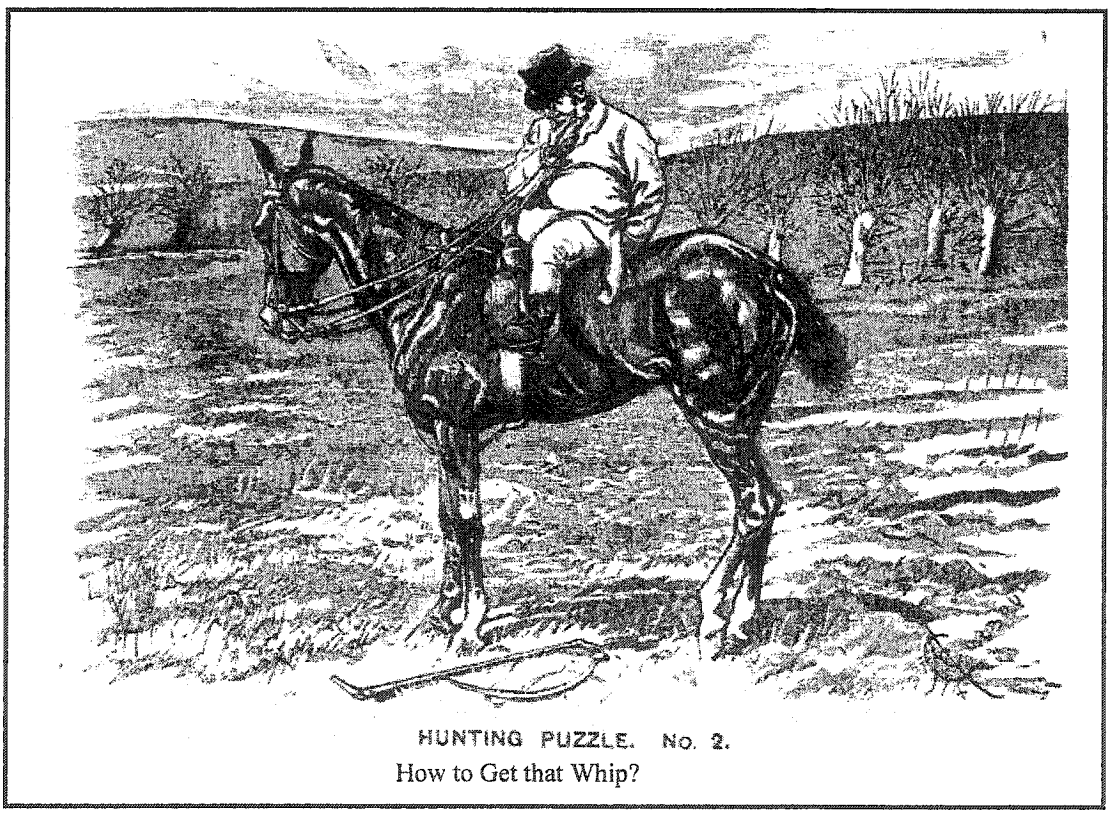

Figure 1.4

tall male figure who can not control the small animal, is suppose to be absurd and ridiculous. To understand the humour in this cartoon as only a commentary about size simplifies a much more complex Victorian assumption concerning the relationship of size, gender, and power. The artist has slighted this man's manliness by suggesting that the man cannot control a small animal purchased for display and luxury rather than for utility and purpose. Furthermore, the body of the dog communicates the opposite message of his master's body and the size of the dog implies that his owner's masculinity is fatally flawed. Yet, and importantly for the humour of the cartoon, the dog and the man are oblivious to the messages they communicate to the passer-by.

In "Hunting Puzzle, No. 2.: How to get that Whip?" [Figure 1.4][23] the observer is privy to the pathetic predicament of a very short and plump man sitting on a horse that is proportionally too large. He has lost his whip, and, were he able to retrieve it, it would also be proportionally too large for the short, unmanly figure.[24] Within the limits of the image there are no objects in the vicinity that could aid the man in retrieving the whip and/or moving off or on his horse. There is no one in sight who can assist, but perhaps given the hilarity of the situation, this is better for the man's dignity. His physique prevents him from taking *action* in the situation; the link between unmanly body shape and inner manliness are therefore confirmed and he can not behave in an appropriate manly fashion.

The text of the above cartoon offers several other clues to help the observer deconstruct the image. The text indicates that this man is out hunting, yet there is not a single gun visible. The reader is supposed to extrapolate, then, that this man is foxhunting,

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[23] "Hunting Puzzle, No. 2. How to get that whip?" in *Punch,* 9 February 1884, 69.
[24] The whip is 4 cm. and the man, from hat to toe, is 4.5 cm.

and as such, there should have been hordes of people and dogs around. With no other figures present, the observer is invited to assume that the unmanly fool's companions have left him behind. Due to his size and his failures at hunting and riding, he is unable to be a man of action, and he now sits in his absurd position, starring at the whip beyond his grasp.

The artist is manipulating and reinforcing the Victorian understanding that manly characteristics were developed and tested by riding and hunting. It was widely believed that hunting forged manly characteristics necessary for the strength of a nation. Hunting, it was believed, "stirs the blood and brings to the top the hardiest and manliest instincts in human nature."[25] It was in the hunt where the innate masculine qualities of British middle-class man was tested and forged, where he built male friendships and tested his abilities for leadership.[26] Hunting strengthened the mind, the intellect, and body. As David Itzkowitz argued in his work on fox hunting, Victorians believed that hunting encouraged a manliness of "hardiness, temperance, coolness, and clearheadedness. It was considered much a mental as a physical trait."[27] For many, fox-hunting was "looked upon as the symbol of the uniquely British manliness that enabled the nation to maintain its world prestige in peace and war."[28] The size of a man, and the preference for a tall military figure, is shown in this cartoon to not only be commonsensical but necessary for a man to properly engage in activities fundamental to his performance of manliness. The figure's current failings at manliness were preceded by his earlier failures to control objects necessary for hunting.

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[25] J.A. Mangan and Callum McKenzie, "Radical Conservatives: Middle-Class Masculinity, the Shikar Club and Big-Game Hunting," in *European Sports History Review,* No. 4 (2002): 190.
[26] Ibid., 190, 197.
[27] David Itzkowitz, *Peculiar Privilege: a social history of English foxhunting 1735-1885* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), 21.
[28] Ibid., 22.

Not only was size a demarcation of manliness, but the cartoons in *Punch* and *Fun* suggests that baldness was also a sign of suspect masculinity. A man's receding hairline, these artists show, could place a man in uncomfortable and compromising situations that threatened his dignity, and thus jeopardise his claims to manliness. There are few (if any) studies of Victorian culture that consider the associations of hair to manliness, or what baldness connoted about a man. There is evidence in these cartoons, however, that suggests that baldness was considered a masculine failing, perhaps suggesting a lack of virility, energy, and vigour. Angus McLaren's study of the law suit against The World's great Marriage Association, that swindled men and woman (mostly from the lower middle class) out of money in false hopes of making advantages marriages, provides another cultural narrative where baldness is associated with suspect manliness. When George Bason took the witness stand it was noted in court and in the papers that he was a short, bald man.

> By Mr. Cook. – You sent your photo to Miss Burford at her request? –Yes.
>
> And it was after receiving it that she ceased to write you? – Yes.
>
> (Laughter.)[29]

Although the defence clearly linked Mr. Bason's baldness to other masculine deficiencies, there is no evidence that suggests *what specifically* balding was suppose to indicate about a man's worth and character. While no specific conclusions can be drawn, it is worth looking at several cartoons that link inner unmanliness with baldness.

In "Of course she meant to be complimentary" [Figure 1.5][30] Sir Brutus and Lady Primrose are objects and figures of humour. Sir Brutus and Lady Primrose, left of centre in the cartoon, have commanded the attention of the entire room. The construction of

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[29] McLaren, 49.
[30] "Of course she meant to be complimentary," in *Fun*, 19 March 1890, 128.

humour in this cartoon relies on the ironic juxtaposition between the verbal exchange between the characters and Sir Brutus' visually evident receding hairline. The embarrassment of Brutus by Lady Primrose is staged in front of an audience of social equals (marked visually by the costumes of each audience member), intensifying Brutus' humiliation. Yet, Lady Primrose's comments could only have been misinterpreted because of a failing on the part of Sir Brutus: his failure to have hair.

The artist of *Fun* used popular expressions in the text to direct the observer's interpretation of the image. It is probably a reflection of the left-leaning politics of *Fun* that the author named the Tory character "Brutus," the same name given the traitorous character in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Furthermore, "Of course she meant to be complimentary" could also imply that it is really no compliment at all to be a Tory with no hint of liberalism. The last name "Baldwin" is an obvious pun on the man's receding hairline. The thoughts of Lady "Primrose," whose name is a popular expression for an alcoholic beverage composed of a mixture of old and bitter ales,[31] "have, somehow, become a little mixed" most likely a result of drink. Her name could also be an intended slight on the Primrose League and a spoof on an assumed feminine failing to understand the complexities of politics.

Lady Primrose's blunder, or accidental pun, "Anyone can see at a glance that there is no sign of a wig (of course she meant "whig") about you, Sir Brutus" draws attention to the man's failings in body image. His physical flaws are used to humiliate him in front of his peers, he loses dignity, and consequently, his female companion momentarily strips him of his manly image. Brutus's humiliation is the subject and he is the object of the observer and fictional audience member's amusement.

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[31] *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English,* s.v. "primrose."

OF COURSE SHE MEANT TO BE COMPLIMENTARY

Sir Brutus Baldwin, Bart – "We Baldwins, My dear Lady Primrose, Have been Tories from the time the title was first invented."

Lady Primrose (whose ideas have, somehow, become a little mixed) – "Oh, Yes – Naturally! –Anyone can see at a glance that there is no sign of a wig *(of course she meant 'Whig')* about you, Sir Brutus."

Figure 1.5

KNOWING WHERE TO STOP.

He "Yes, it was very confusing"

She. "It must have been! Had I been you, I should have blushed to the roots of my – er- eyebrows!"

Figure 1. 6

The two characters in "Knowing where to stop" [Figure 1.6] [32] are victims of a similar blunder. Baldness provides this female character with an opportunity (if accidental) to draw attention to a man's physical defects, further suggesting a flawed inner manliness. His humiliation provides the reader with amusement. As an object of humour, the man in this cartoon loses dignity and therefore is momentarily ridiculous, powerless, and unmanly. Not only is the character unmanly in *this* moment, but he is re-counting to his female companion another incident where he was also embarrassed and humiliated. It is this man's unmanliness earlier that leads this woman into her *faux pas*, creating the next embarrassing moment for this unmanly fool. Furthermore, his unmanliness, both prior and during this exchange, creates an awkward situation for his female companion, adding yet another layer to his failed masculinity. Her blunder is only so because of his failings. His baldness as an image deficiency is shown to equate with the inner self of an unmanly "other."

The next three cartoons explore the how clothing was instrumental in symbolising and communicating gender stereotypes. Men's failures to construct and display the appropriate image through clothing also symbolised internal unmanly deficiency. Although all comic figures are unaware that their behaviour and image are demarcations of failed masculinity, the artist manipulates the observer's belief that certain styles of clothing and over attention to details of attire are emblematic of emasculated men.

In "Imitation the sincerest Flattery" [Figure 1.7][33] the male figures are imitating the dress and appearance of woman, sharing similar styles of clothing and accessories as the two female counterparts. The puffy sleeves, the long-dress-like coats, and the strikingly similar fabric are distorted to the extent that the men appear to be wearing almost

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[32] "Knowing where to stop," in *Punch,* 9 March 1890, 114.
[33] "Imitation the sincerest Flattery," in *Punch,* 5 April 1890, 162.

the identical dress as the women. Christopher Breward has argued that during the late nineteenth-century, fashion critics complained that the dress of suburban men was becoming increasingly effeminate. The suburb was a feminine space dominated by lower and middle-class women and thus the suburb threatened true manliness. The suburban husband was an overly domesticated male, and the shift in clothing fashions mirrored women's control and influence over these emasculated men.[34]

The symmetry of male characters in the foreground and background focuses the gaze of the observer on the fashions of the men and makes the comparison to the female attire obvious. The clothing of the men are even exaggerations of the female clothing, such as the sleeves on each man's clothing, making their imitation that much more apparent. The humour of the cartoon is constructed through situational irony where no one involved is aware of the ludicrousness of their situation, but because of the distance to the situation, the observer is able to identify the absurdity of men dressing like women. The humour of this cartoon relies on the observer/reader's appreciation of the absurdity of the visual image and they must share with the narrator/artist an understanding that these men's clothing is an outward sign of internal flaws and an emasculated self.

The last two cartoons in this section underscore the importance of balance in the construction of a hegemonic masculine identity. The first cartoon depicts men whose vanity and attention to an outward image makes them comic figures. In comparison, the man in the last cartoon has ignored attention to personal details and therefore finds himself in an awkward situation where his respectability and hegemonic manly image is called into question by a social inferior.

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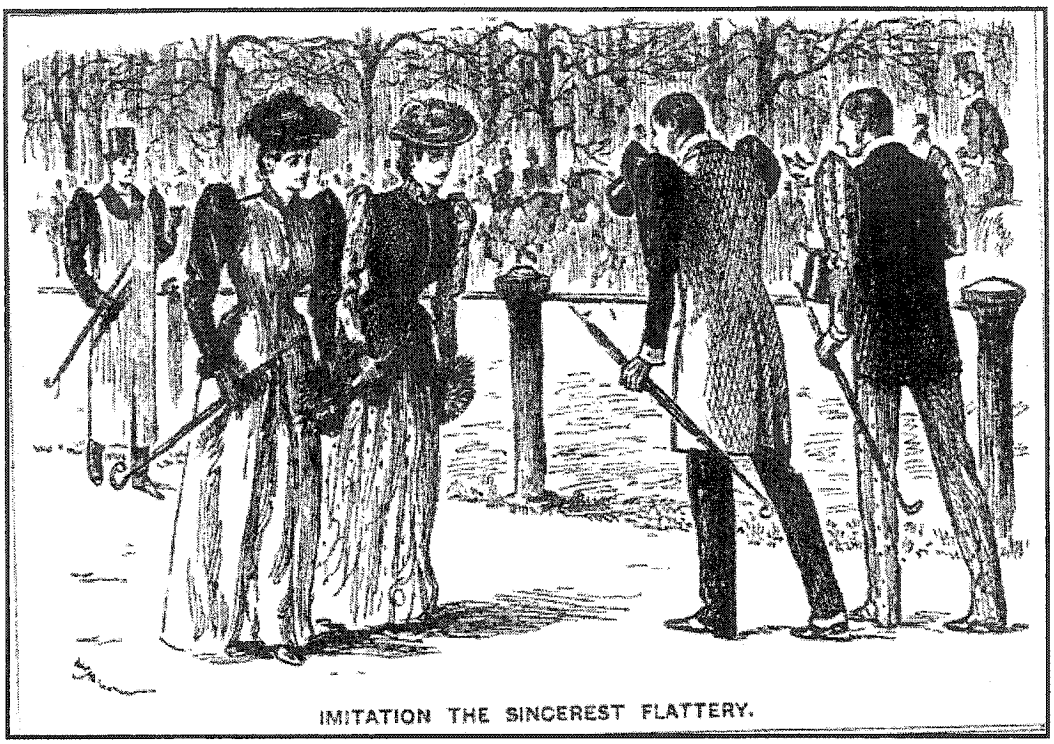
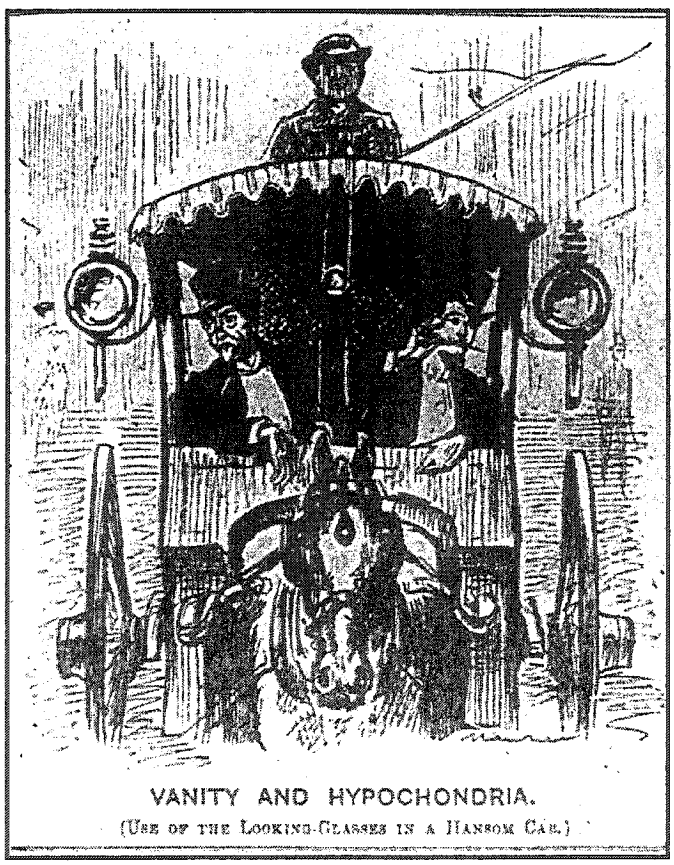
[34] Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: masculinities, fashion and city life* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 190.



IMITATION THE SINCEREST FLATTERY.

Figure 1.7



VANITY AND HYPOCHONDRIA.

(Use of the Looking-Glasses in a Hansom Cab.)

Figure 1.8

The central figures in "Vanity and Hypochondria" [Figure 1.8][35] travel in silence because each prefers gazing at himself in the mirror rather than engaging his companion in conversation. The two men are richly attired and are riding, we are informed, in a "hansom cab." One man is shown tweaking his moustache while his companion is leaning out of the cab in an effort to be closer to the mirror and his own image. The cab driver and horse look straight out of the picture at the observer/reader but neither pays the slightest attention to the figures in the cab.

This cartoon can be read as a commentary suggesting the ridiculousness of men who subscribed to the dandy and idle aristocratic man's brand of masculinity. Christopher Breward has suggested that in the Victorian middle-class accused men of the upper- and aristocratic-class of being obsessed with appearances, fashion, and taste, emblematic of the wasteful and ornate consumption associated with the corruption of the upper classes. The dandy, whose masculinity was constructed on an imitation of the upper-class idle man, was thought to be an equally ridiculous, effeminate, and vain character.[36]

The text provides the observer with information to help interpret the image in the way the artist intended. The artist manipulated the cultural assumption that men who found their own reflections overly fascinating were vain and therefore unmanly. Vanity in men, the artist suggests, comes from an internal anxiety about presenting an image of wealth and sophisticated, hiding the internal imagined flaws – a disease likened here to hypochondria. Thus, vanity in men is not only a character flaw, it is also a mental disorder and illness. There is something internally "wrong" with these men, who live in fear that something might be amiss with their outward appearance because their image masks internal unmanly deficiencies.

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[35] "Vanity and Hypoxchondria," in *Punch,* 7 August 1886, 61.
[36] Breward, 170-174 and 254-5.

The next cartoon shows the opposite problem: here a wealthy man who has invested so little time in cultivating an appropriate appearance is mistaken for a "third-class passenger." [Figure 1.9][37] A dishevelled male figure whose frazzled state is accentuated in the drawing by the need to hold his hat on his head, is shown racing for the train. From the text of the cartoon, the observer/reader learns that this man, of some social importance, routinely neglects his personal appearance. Christopher Breward has suggested that the Victorians identified dirt and dishevelment in attire as an indicator of "low social status and personal esteem."[38] Furthermore, Breward has shown that the Victorians desired a "spick and span" polish in men's attire because it imitated "the military principles of neatness and pride is one's appearance that connoted empire building and discipline."[39]

This comic figure's lack of attention to personal effects suggests that he lacks respectability and is therefore equally unmanly. He may have been born to status and wealth, but he has neglected to pay attention to his image. Wealth cannot compensate for nor hide internal manly failings.

The representations of the male body in these cartoons reaffirm Victorian cultural assumptions that the visual represented character and inner-self. "The development of the male body and the standard to which it was to be held are interrelated," argues historian George Mosse, "for the manner in which the body was developed depended upon the perception of how outward appearance might reflect inner worth."[40]

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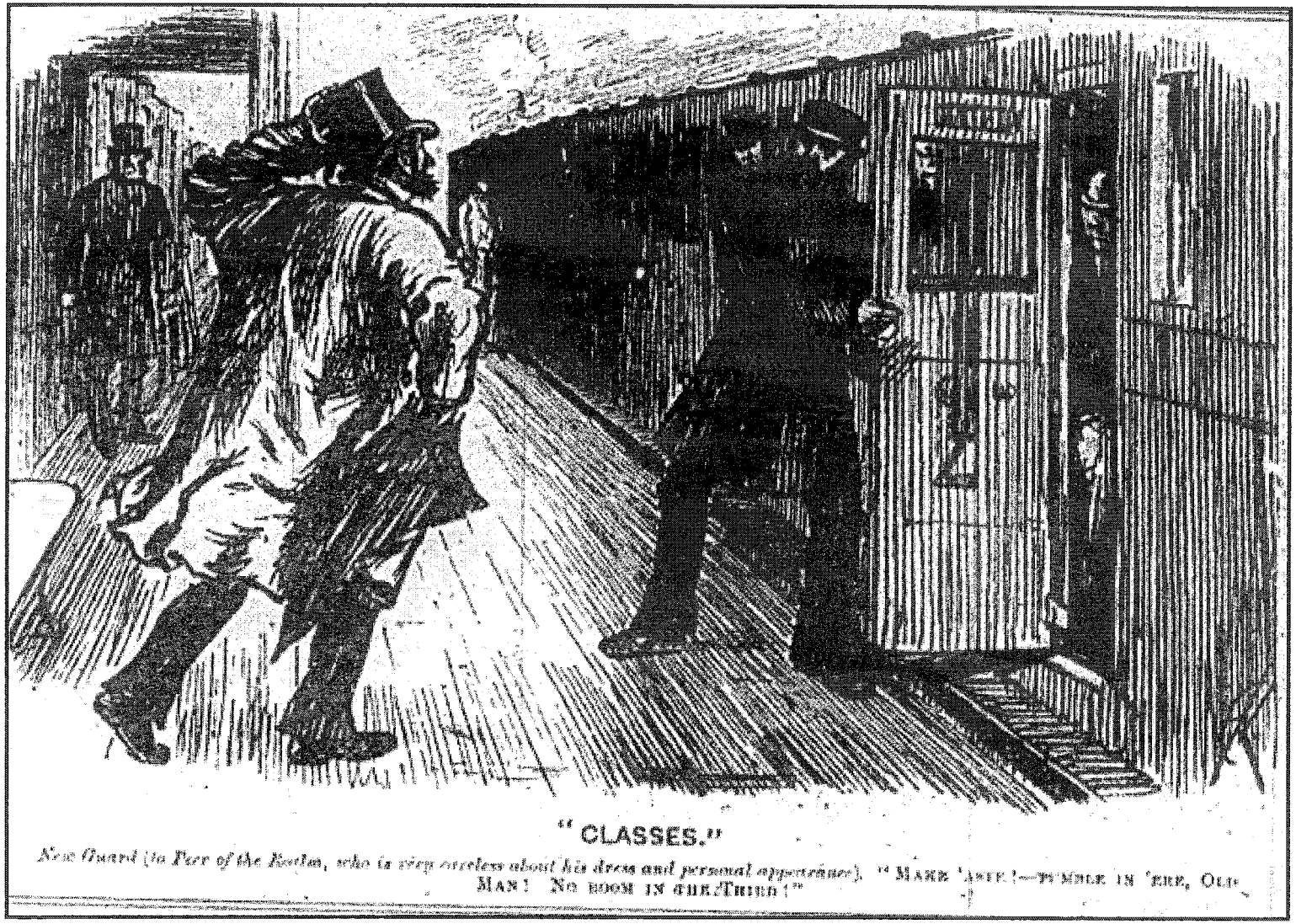
[37] "Classes." in *Punch*, 10 July 1886, 15.
[38] Breward, 90.
[39] Ibid., 180.
[40] Mosse, 28.



"CLASSES."

New Guard (to Peer of the Realm, who is very careless about his dress and personal appearance). "MAKE 'ASTE!—PUMMICE IN 'ERE, OLD MAN! NO ROOM IN OUR THIRD!"

Figure 1.9

Body shape was an important medium men used to communicate to those around them fundamental assumptions about their manliness. For good or ill, a man's body was read to be the symbol of his inner manliness, a problematic situation for men in these cartoons. Bodies could communicate strength, but the body could quickly fail a man in his quest to demonstrate manly authority and dignity.

The male body was also to be adorned in appropriate ways with symbols of his manly inner identity. Clothes made the man, or at least improved his body image. Knowing the appropriate attire was one step, but a man also needed to strike a balance between necessary attention to one's image and vanity. The construction of a male body image, then, required more than just physique and more than just the appropriate clothing, it relied on an inner essence that would allow a man to cultivate and adorn his body image "just so." Knowing the balance was key to communicating, via the body, a respectable inner manliness.

The duel: language and humour in the defence of the image

Once a man had cultivated an exterior manly image, he needed to defend his claims to manliness against people, objects, and/or situations that posed a threat. Many *Punch* and *Fun* representations of masculinity in public spaces depict men actively engaged in the defence of their manly honour. While "duelling" is in part metaphoric for this verbal exchange, there is evidence to suggest that a man's ability to use wit and language to defend and/or contest claims to manliness was essential to his public image.

By the Victorian period in Britain the duel had nearly disappeared but manly honour still relied on public verbal combat. The cartoons in *Punch* and *Fun* (re)present men whose image, language and actions imitated the duel by sword or pistol. In making

this comparison, it is important to consider the role of the duel in continental Europe. George Mosse has argued that the aristocratic practice of duelling had shifted in meaning by the late nineteenth century. The duel was no longer a ritual where one would kill an opponent to *defend* manliness, but it became a form to *demonstrate* and *perform* manliness.[41] As Robert Nye has shown, in France where duelling remained an essential part of the masculine honour systems, other options such as those available to men in Britain were not as available. English men could choose the legal options to settle disputes (as in the Oscar Wilde case), or men could demonstrate manliness through a well-developed tradition of literary sparring in newspapers. But in France, the law did not protect men against written or spoken slander, and in the event that one could prove malicious intent in a court, the financial costs far outstripped anything awarded by the courts.[42] Thus, French men continued to look upon the duel as a way to contest and demonstrate manliness. The duel and sparring were not simply sports, but they were activities where manliness was developed. Mosse wrote, "The duel makes men strong and independent, it takes up the cause of justice the minute the law abandons it, and penalizes scorn and insult that the laws are unable to punish."[43]

John Tosh has argued that the shift in Britain away from the duel coincided with the cultural dominance and emergence of the middle class. This shift "caused the definition of masculinity to be understood in new ways ... With the abandonment of the duel, the growing professionalization of the armed forces, and the reform of policing, the exercise of violence became specialized." Tosh argued further, "The dominant forms of masculinity were becoming increasingly detached from military training and from the

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[41] Ibid., 21.
[42] Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and male codes of honour in modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 175.
[43] Mosse, 21.

expectation of taking up arms."[44] Hunting, boxing, and other similar physical activities measured and tested manliness. In Britain, manliness could also be demonstrated through a duel of language and wit. By the late nineteenth century, Society in London was characterised by contests of wit and language in courts and newspapers. Middle and upper-class men who could afford the leisure time and money to engage in public verbal/written/legal contests of manliness, increasingly found their way to courts and onto the editorial columns of leading London newspapers. James McNeil Whistler (who successfully sued John Ruskin in 1878 for slander) quipped that "One really can't live in London without a lawyer."[45]

There are many cartoons in *Fun* and *Punch* that depict public settings where men participated in verbal duels that tested each participant's claim to manliness. In "Consoling" [Figure 1.10][46] Mr. Dundettor (a pun on the slang term "dun" meaning a creditor who importunately demands the settling of debt)[47] confronts Mr. Neverpart (an obvious pun referring to this man's aversion to parting with his money.) Although the creditor is within his rights to ask the debtor to pay, Mr. Dundettor's inability to command language leaves him vulnerable for a counter-attack where his claim to authority and respect are challenged. Ultimately, his opponent triumphs and Dundettor becomes the object of humour. The visual image contributes to the idea of duelling: The two men stand facing each other, shoulders squared, and eyes locked, one foot slightly ahead of the other. That the artist has chosen to portray each man with his hands in his pocket reinforces that this is a battle of language without an intention by either man to further this contest into a physical joust. Language and humour are the only weapons called upon in this combat.

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[44] Tosh, 222.
[45] Ellen Mores, *The Dandy, Brummell to Beerbohm* (London: Secker & Warvurg, 1960), 293.
[46] "Consoling," in *Fun,* 26 March 1884, 137.
[47] *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English,* s.v. "dun."

CONSOLING

Dundettor. – " Look here, Mr. Neverpart, I'm tirid of asking you to settle my account."

Neverpart. – " Delighted to hear it. Mr. Dundettor. Prospect of your leaving off."

Figure 1.10

AT THE KAFFIR CLUB

Lord Lackbrane. – "The worst of belonging to a literary club, don'tcherknow, is that people take one for a fellow who lives by his – er – wits, don'tcherknow."

Jack Smart. – Nonesense, dear boy. Nobody could ever suspect you of such an impossibility."

Figure 1.11

Erica Rappaport has shown that debt and credit, either incurred by the head of the house or his dependents, threatened a man's claims to manliness. When a man and his dependents purchased on credit, they pledged on a man's name, honour, and reputation that the debt would be repaid.[48] Thus, in terms of manly honour, it is Mr. Neverpart's claim to manliness that is threatened and challenged in this public confrontation by Mr. Dundettor. Because Dundettor loses the duel, the cartoon underscores the importance of language and wit in defence of manliness. Neverpart inverses the power relationship, leaving Mr. Dundettor looking ridiculous and therefore the unmanly figure. Both men are momentarily unmanly, but it is Dundettor who is cast as the humiliated and defeated partner in this spar.

The importance to command language in navigating public space is reiterated in "At the Kaffir club" [Figure 1.11].[49] The cartoon depicts two meticulously dressed men smoking in a club room and the image captures the turn in conversation from chit-chat to duel. Lord Lackbrane's unwittingly exposes his manliness to an attack from his peer, Jack Smart. The fair-haired young man, who is standing tall and erect, cigarette poised between his fingers, distinguished with an eyeglass, suggests an air of over-developed self-importance. Lord Lackbrane's exterior is a cover for his suspect internal defects, and his failures with language made him an easy target for Jack Smart's sarcasm and irony. Smart, whose name is play on a popular slang term for an elegant man about town,[50] uses his superior talent with language to deflate his opponent/companion.

With his arm behind his back, Lackbrane's body language mirrors the vulnerable position he has created regarding his manliness. The wound inflicted by Smart on Lackbrane's interior manliness is also depicted visually as Smart directly touches the chest

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[48] Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: women in the making of London's East End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 48-49, 55-70, 241 n.21.
[49] "At the Kaffir Club," in *Fun*, 16 October 1889, 167.
[50] *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, s.v. "Jack Smart."

of his opponent, focusing the observer's attention to the object, subject, and victim of Smart's humorous attack. Lackbrane's exterior is simply a façade covering an underdeveloped masculinity.

That Lackbrane's defeat is crafted by his peer and transpires in the all-male world of the club, makes his humiliation and Smart's triumph significant. Simon Gunn has argued Victorian men defined "clubland" as a place where rational arguments and debates could flourish. Victorian men believed that rational conversation could only exist with the exclusion of woman, and "the forms of masculinity promulgated were predicated on what might be termed a dialectic of women's absent presence. The codes of gentlemanly conduct that characterised the elite clubs rested on the simultaneous recognition and reassure of the feminine other."[51] Lackbrane's involvement in a literary society and his demonstrated inability to clearly articulate his meaning, combine in this image to communicate his unmanly incompetence. Despite wealth, prestige, and title, Lackbrane has demonstrated that he is not a manly equal to those of his club, so he is relegated momentarily to the realm of effeminacy and unmanliness.

Although "Studies in Repartee" [Figure 1.12][52] explores the relationship of muscular build to manly behaviour, the humour in the cartoon argues that wit and language can be used to defend one's own manliness while simultaneously casting suspicions on an opponent's claim to a manly image. While size is important to a manliness, the smaller Binks is able to use humour to expose Heavyside's exterior as a façade hiding other unmanly defects. It should be noted that Binks is also balding, a symbol used elsewhere in *Punch* and *Fun* to denote the unmanly man. In appearance, Heavyside is presented as the

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[51] Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: ritual and authority and the English Industrial City, 1840-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 98.
[52] "Studies in Repartee," in *Punch*, 18 January 1890, 27.

favourable choice in a contest of manliness, but through a combat of wits, Binks is able to triumph. The two men face each other with their cigars erect (Bink's is notably larger) and directed at their opponent, ready to spar.

Heavyside delivers the first blow in the duel when he inquires as to the physical dimensions of Binks, implying that the smaller man is inferior. When Binks responds, Heavyside quips "Dear Me! You don't look very Big to weigh all that!" Little Binks uses language to combat this attack and jabs at his opponent, taking aim at another component of manliness: Heavyside's occupation and the quality of work. "Epaminondas; Doesn't look very Big - But it's precious Heavy!" In popular cultural slang, heavy (or do it heavy) means to put on airs or affect superiority.[53] For the 19th century reader in "the know," the insult to Heavyside's creativity and authorship is unmistakable. That Heavyside makes his living with words, yet he fails to command language in defence of his image as a man, makes Binks' victory more complete. The humour created by Binks and used for his advantage must necessarily be understood by Heavyside in order to be a successful counter-attack. In the end Binks delivers the winning blow in the duel. Here, humour triumphs over might.

In "A distinction without a difference (in result)" [Figure 1.13][54] Jim's failures at language compound his unmanly behaviour while hunting. Jim is lying on the ground at the feet of his peer, whose manly image is secured by his ability to ride, exercise control over his animal, and keep up with his peers. The fallen man is clearly the centre of attention: the gazes of his companion and the two horses who share the foreground have fixed their gaze on the unmanly figure. The fallen rider's discomfort is represented by his

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[53] *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, s.v. "heavy."
[54] "A distinction with out a difference (in result)," in *Punch*, 8 February 1890, 69.

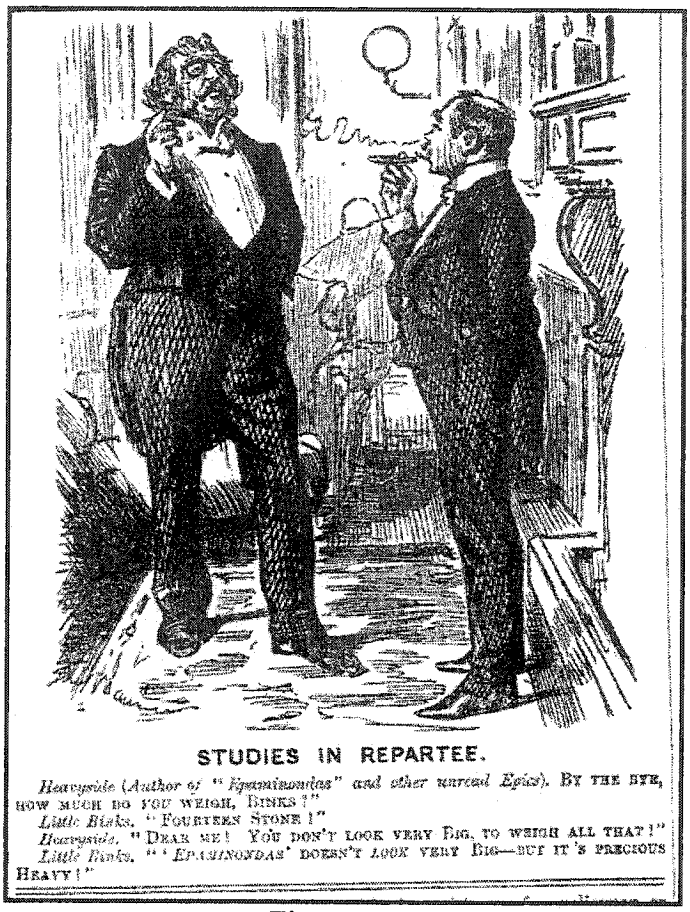
dishevelled attire – his hat now under the feet of his not-so-faithful steed. The artist has used the visual to place Jim as the central object of ridicule, but the text solidifies his image as the failed hunter/ failed man.

When Jim insists that 'the brute bucked!" his companion undermines his claims to manliness and Jim's abilities as a hunter: "Bucked! Nonsense, man she only coughed!" By his actions, Jim has failed to demonstrate his manly character on the hunt, and worse yet, he has failed to defend his unmanly behaviour through a legitimate and reasonable explanation. Jim's disgrace is complete, public, and witnessed by his peers. His companion reinforces Jim's humiliation by openly discrediting his explanation in defence of his shaken manly image. There is no possible way for Jim to recover in this moment and, as such, he is the pathetic figure worthy of the observer/reader's ridicule and laughter.

A man's physical build and clothing were symbols that communicated meanings about inner manliness, but language was a powerful weapon available to all men to defend his claim to manliness and challenge those around him. In the above cartoons, men are competing with each other for power, to be the dominant man in the relationship and to claim to have *the most* manly image. By humiliating and making one's opponent/companion the object of ridicule and humour, a man could thereby affirm his own manliness.

Courtship

Courtship in the later nineteenth century was a social ritual where men found themselves in the uncomfortable situation of having women controlling their fates. Since fathers were largely absent figures from the home during the week, the actual supervision of courtship



STUDIES IN REPARTEE.

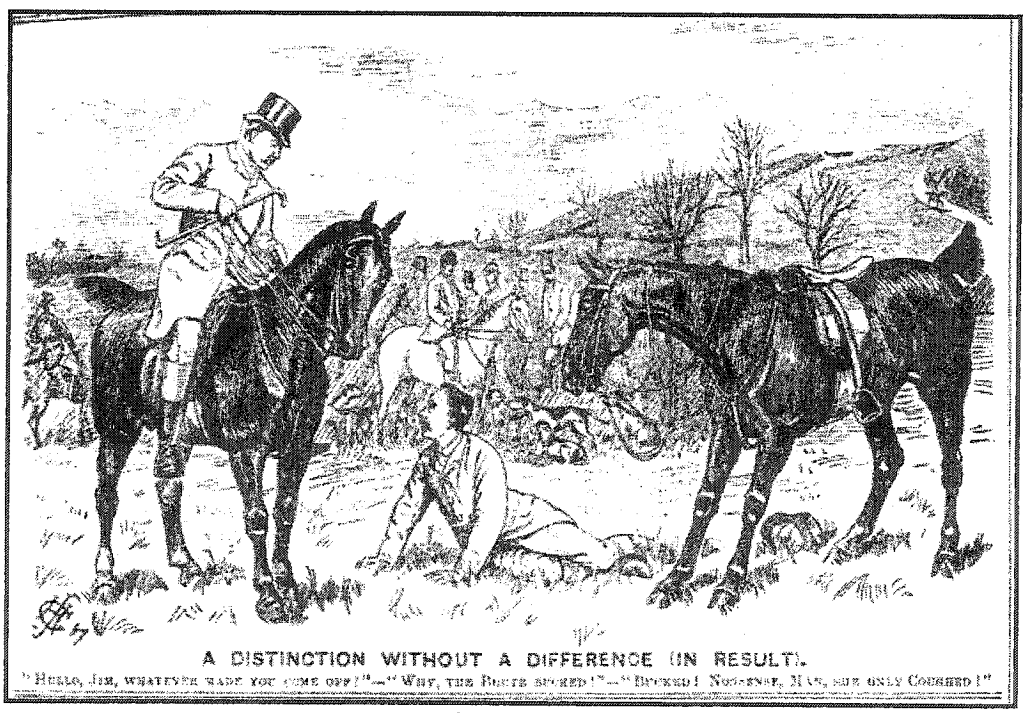
Heavyside (Author of "Epaminondas" and other unread Epics). BY THE BYE, HOW MUCH DO YOU WEIGH, BINKS?"

Little Binks. "FOURTEEN STONE!"

Heavyside. "DEAR ME! YOU DON'T LOOK VERY BIG, TO WEIGH ALL THAT!"

Little Binks. "'EPAMINONDAS' DOESN'T LOOK VERY BIG—BUT IT'S PRECIOUS HEAVY!"

Figure 1.12



A DISTINCTION WITHOUT A DIFFERENCE (IN RESULT).

"HELLO, JIM, WHATEVER MADE YOU COME OFF?"—"WHY, THE BEAST BOLTED!"—"BOLTED! NONSENSE, MAN, HE ONLY COUGHED!"

Figure 1.13

fell to the other women in the homes. The suitor who was used to negotiating the all-male world of work, clubs, and public school, found himself in a situation where the women of the household governed his conduct. The Victorian rituals surrounding courtship, John Gillis argued, "brought men into unfamiliarly, highly femininized territory, subordinating them not only to women's space but to women's time, a position that constituted a threat to their masculinity."[55] E. Anthony Rotundo has similarly argued that:

> Courtship as a social situation had unfamiliar and threatening dimensions for a young male. In particular, the quest for love and marriage presented a man with standards of success that were foreign to him. At work or elsewhere among his own sex, a male was judged largely for what he could *do*. In courtship, on the other hand, a woman judged him largely for who he *was*.[56]

Rotundo also suggests that Victorian men believed that courtship provided women with the opportunity to "thwart men's dreams, frustrate their plans, and leave them feeling unworthy and embarrassed … women could use their attractiveness and their power to say no as a way to make fools of men…" .[57] Such threats of rejection could wound a man's sense of manly authority and pride. Gillis echoes these findings and suggests that courtship and engagement provided women a limited position of power and a short time span to explore their own sense of selves independent of their families but not yet subsumed by the identity of their husbands.[58] *Punch* and *Fun* cartoons reinforce the fears of men, (re)presenting courtship as a time when woman routinely humiliated and embarrassed men who tried to woo them for marriage.

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[55] Italics original. John Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: myth, ritual and the quest for family values* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 144.
[56] Anthony Rotundo, "Boy Culture: Middle-Class Boyhood in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America,* eds. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 111.
[57] Ibid., 111-112.
[58] Gillis, 145.

In "Much too new a way of 'Proposing'" [Figure 1.14][59] the power hierarchy of gender is visually depicted through the position of the two figures. Miss Smythe sits in an attitude of contemplation, communicated to the observer by her hand on her chin, as she gazes *down* upon the man who is sitting on cushions. Jones's face, in turn, is directed *upward* to the woman *above* him, looking at the woman he attempt to attain through persuasive language. Courtship, then, was another social setting where a man must be able to command language in order to navigate successfully the possibly emasculating situations and, ultimately, to triumph as a man by returning the power hierarchy to patriarchy when he claimed the woman as his bride.

The spatial arrangement of these two characters reflects the inner thoughts, hopes, and aspirations of the male figure. The conversation and unspoken thoughts provided by the artists solidifies the power relationship already established by the visual image. Jones, in both spoken and body language, aspires to reach Miss Smythe; in return, Miss Smythe's body communicates the doubts she has about "consent[ing] to marry such a silly." The artistic tone is sarcastic and the narration provided to the observer carries an unmistakable hint of mockery. The observer learns from the artist that Mr. Jones has "expectations, don't you know," a comment appropriate to his financial as well as romantic situation. Jones may have expectations, but these are based on a naiveté about himself and the world. The Miss Smythe, whose position on the sofa mirrors the reality that she is well beyond the reach of this young man, will soon dash his expectations.

In an attempt to display his charm and cleverness, Jones proposes to Miss Smythe by way of a riddle. Miss Smythe, however, uses her dominant position in courtship rituals

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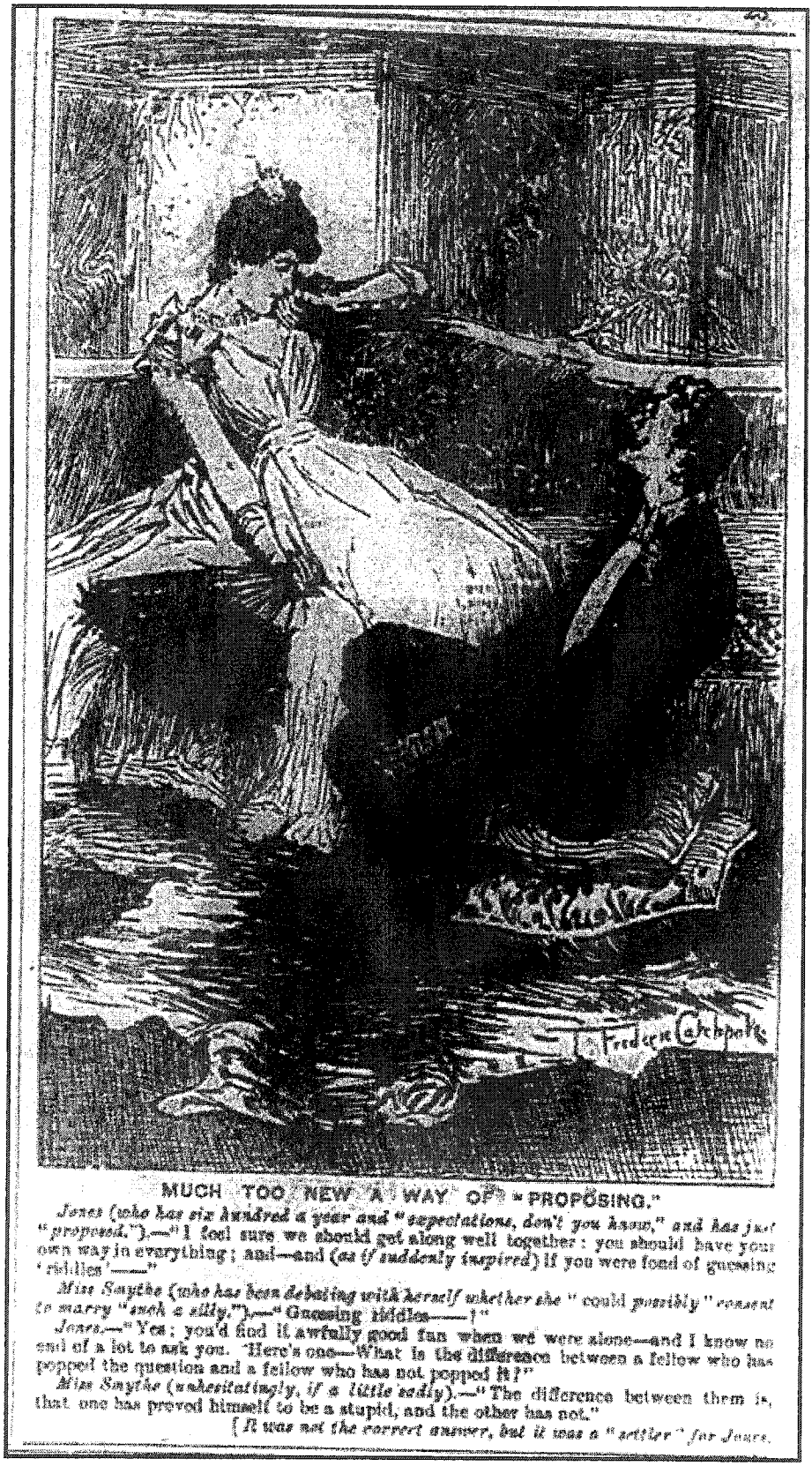
[59] "Much too new a way of proposing," in *Fun,* 15 January 1890, 25.



MUCH TOO NEW A WAY OF "PROPOSING."

Jones (who has six hundred a year and "expectations, don't you know," and has just "proposed.").—"I feel sure we should get along well together: you should have your own way in everything; and—and (*as if suddenly inspired*) if you were fond of guessing 'riddles'——"

Miss Smythe (who has been debating with herself whether she "could possibly" consent to marry "such a silly,").—"Guessing riddles——!"

Jones.—"Yes; you'd find it awfully good fun when we were alone—and I know no end of a lot to ask you. Here's one—What is the difference between a fellow who has popped the question and a fellow who has not popped it?"

Miss Smythe (unhesitatingly, if a little sadly).—"The difference between them is, that one has proved himself to be a stupid, and the other has not."

[*It was not the correct answer, but it was a "settler" for Jones.*

Figure 1.14

and her superior abilities with language and humour to strip Jones of his pride, dignity, and consequently, question his claims to manliness. Jones has failed to demonstrate his manliness on two accounts: he has failed to defend or demonstrate his manliness through language and, as such, he has placed himself in a situation where a woman used language to remove him from the realms of manliness. In this duel, Jones has decidedly lost and Miss Smythe's answer is the "settler" of the match. Jones in this moment looks ridiculous, undignified, and thus the object of the cartoon's humour.

"Not Petruchio" [Figure 1.15][60] is a second cartoon where the gender hierarchy in courtship is represented in the image by the position of the two figures. The title of the cartoon makes reference to Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, implying that this man will never be able to claim patriarchal authority over women, unlike Petruchio who tamed the Shrew.

The man in this cartoon shares the fate of Jones in the above cartoon. He is depicted seated on cushions at the feet of the woman he courts. The two figures look intently at each other, bodies lean towards each other *suggesting* mutual attraction and desire. The woman's body language, however, is meant to tease and mislead the man into the vulnerable position of proposing, thus enabling her to wound and injure his manliness. The woman appears to be seriously contemplating his proposal, striking the stereotypical pose for "thought" with hand on chin. The man is in a position of confession and declaration, kneeling, head lifted towards the woman of his desire, hands covering his heart. In this inversion, he is caught up in passion while she rationally manipulates power over her emotional counterpart.

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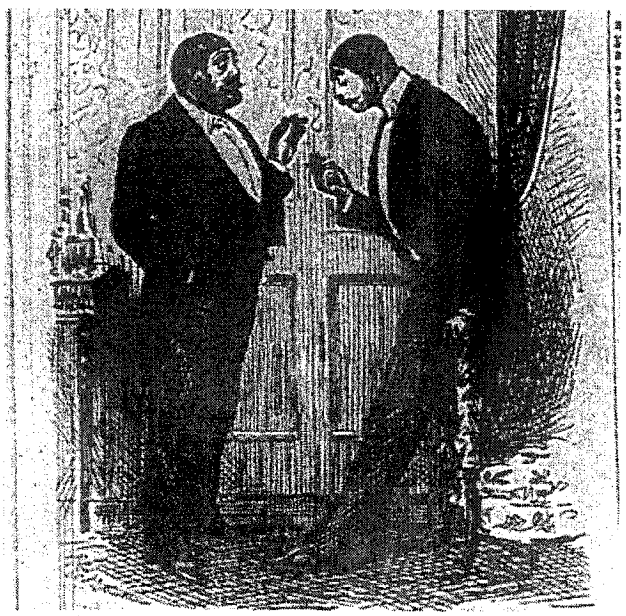
[60] "Not Petruchio," in *Fun*, 29 January 1890, 49.

NOT A PETRUCHIO

He. – " Say, Dearest, Will you be Mine?" *She.*- Will you always let me have my own way?" *He.*- In everything." *She.*- "And let Ma live with us?" *He.* - "Willingly!" *She.*- And give up your latchkey?" *He.*- I'll sink it in the depths of the river." *She.* – "And leave all your clubs?" *He.*- "Every one!" *She.*- And always come home to tea?" *He.*-"Always!" *She.* – Ah, then I'm afraid you'd be a bit too soft for me!"

Figure 1.15



THINGS ONE WOULD RATHER HAVE LEFT UNSAID

"Well, but if you can't bear her, whatever made you propose?"

"Well, we had danced three dances, and I couldn't think of any-thing else to say!"

Figure 1.16

The juxtaposition between the visual representations of mutual desire with the man's ultimate rejection makes his diminished ego the subject of the humour. The message of the text indicates the importance of balance in the construction of manly behaviour: all his answers are submissive (echoing his body language and his position at the feet of the woman.) Furthermore, the woman has chosen "too soft" as her slight to her suitor, thus underscoring the unmanliness of his behaviour.

"Things One would Rather have left Unsaid" [Figure 1.16][61] emphasizes that language is a fundamental piece of arsenal for a man trying to navigate courtship in either public or private settings. This young man has just proposed to a woman he does not even like. There are no clues within the image or the text that would suggest why this woman is so undesirable to the young man. The question that remains unanswered in this cartoon, and therefore adds to the humour of this pathetic man's situation, is - why did he chose to pay attention to an unbearable woman for three dances? His friend asks why he proposed and our pathetic anti-hero claims that "we had danced three dances, and I couldn't think of anything else to say." From the body language of the two figures, the observer can surmise that this unbearable young lady has accepted his proposal. The figure of the young man in the image suggests despondency and disappointment: he does not meet the gaze of his companion but stars at his cigar. Unlike his companion who stands erect and supported by his own strength, the young man's body is limp and enervated. His failures in love and courtship leave him ridiculous, a spectacle, and unable to lift his head up in public. The young woman who accepted his insincere proposal has called his bluff, and he is now obliged to continue with the contract he made in an off-handed manner. He has

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[61] "Things One would Rather have left unsaid," in *Punch,* 12 February 1887, 76.

failed at courtship, at dancing, at conversation, and thus in this moment he is absurd and unmanly.

The above young man was not alone in his comic failures while dancing. *Fun* ran a series of cartoons on ballroom etiquette. The "Ball-room guide Illustrated – Part I"[62] and "Part II"[63] [Figures 1.17, 1.18] juxtaposes a narration that suggests proper ways for gentlemanly conduct with a visual image of opposite behaviour. *Fun* represents the ballroom as a labyrinth where men can loose their dignity and self respect at almost every turn and become comic spectacles.

"Ball-room Guide Illustrated Part I" is full of comic male figures who are so distracted by their own self-absorption and by their attempts to perform manliness that they are all constantly committing social disgraces. The unfortunate woman whose dress is caught under the feet of a gentleman so obviously without "vivacity and good-humour" is also being ignored by her self-important companion. He is equally ridiculous and comical by his total lack of appreciation for his companion's dilemma. Elsewhere, three men are near physical blows over missed steps and injured pride while dancing. Women are either spectators of men's embarrassing behaviour and/ or victims of their insensitivity.

In Part II, women appear as the objects for men to compete over in order to satisfy enormous egos. Again, women are humiliated and embarrassed by these men's self-indulgence, egos, and self-absorption. In all three sections of this cartoon, the men are engaged in hyper competition for woman's affections, duelling in language and threatening physical violence in their attempt to be the alpha male at the dance.

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[62] "A Ball-room Guide Illustrated. – Part I," in *Fun,* 19 January 1887, 21.
[63] "The Ball-room Guide Illustrated. – Part II," in *Fun,* 26 January 1887, 31.

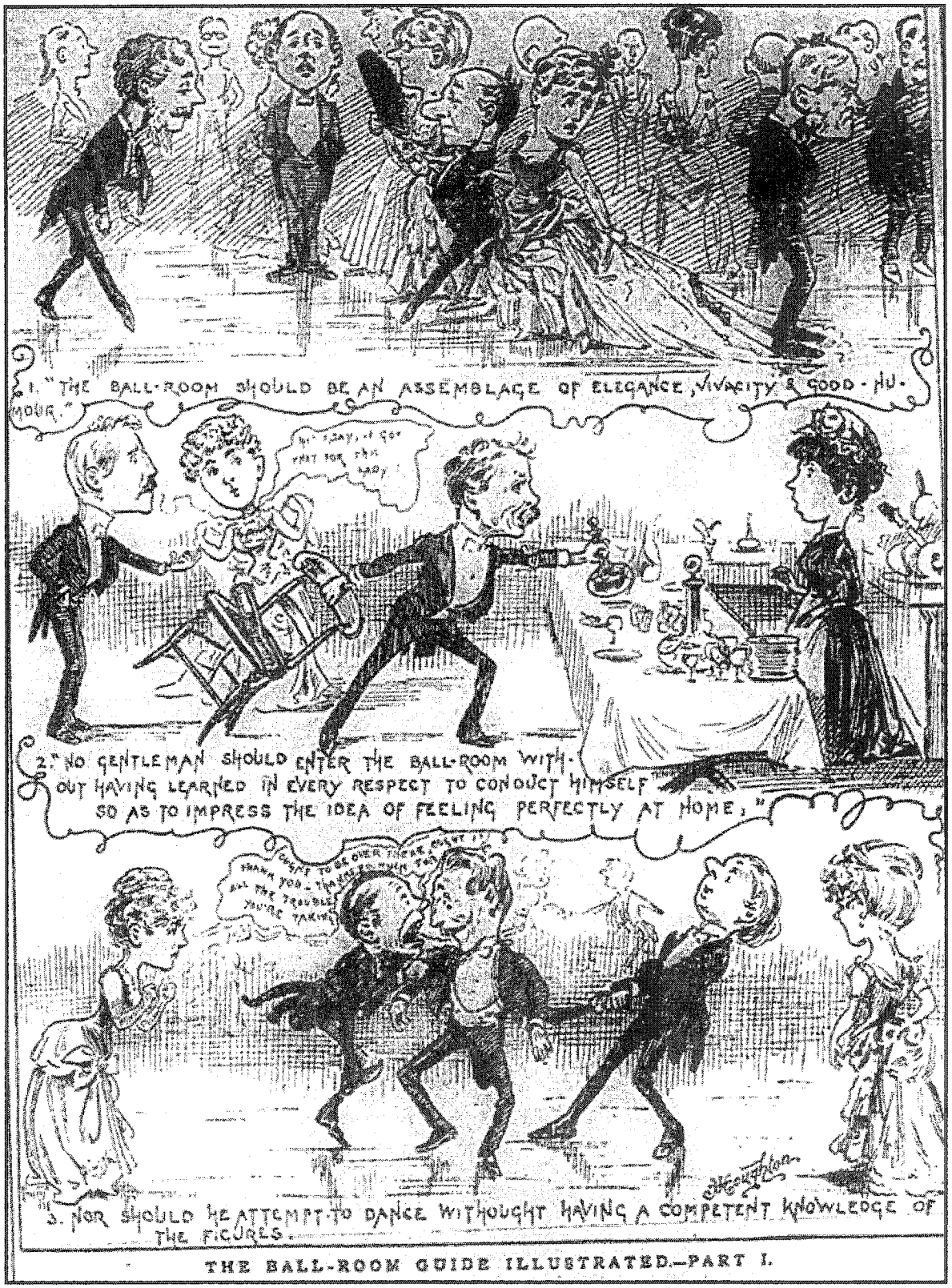
1. "THE BALL-ROOM SHOULD BE AN ASSEMBLAGE OF ELEGANCE, VIVACITY & GOOD-HUMOUR."
2. "NO GENTLEMAN SHOULD ENTER THE BALL-ROOM WITHOUT HAVING LEARNED IN EVERY RESPECT TO CONDUCT HIMSELF SO AS TO IMPRESS THE IDEA OF FEELING PERFECTLY AT HOME."
3. NOR SHOULD HE ATTEMPT TO DANCE WITHOUGHT HAVING A COMPETENT KNOWLEDGE OF THE FIGURES.
THE BALL-ROOM GUIDE ILLUSTRATED.—PART I.

Figure 1.17

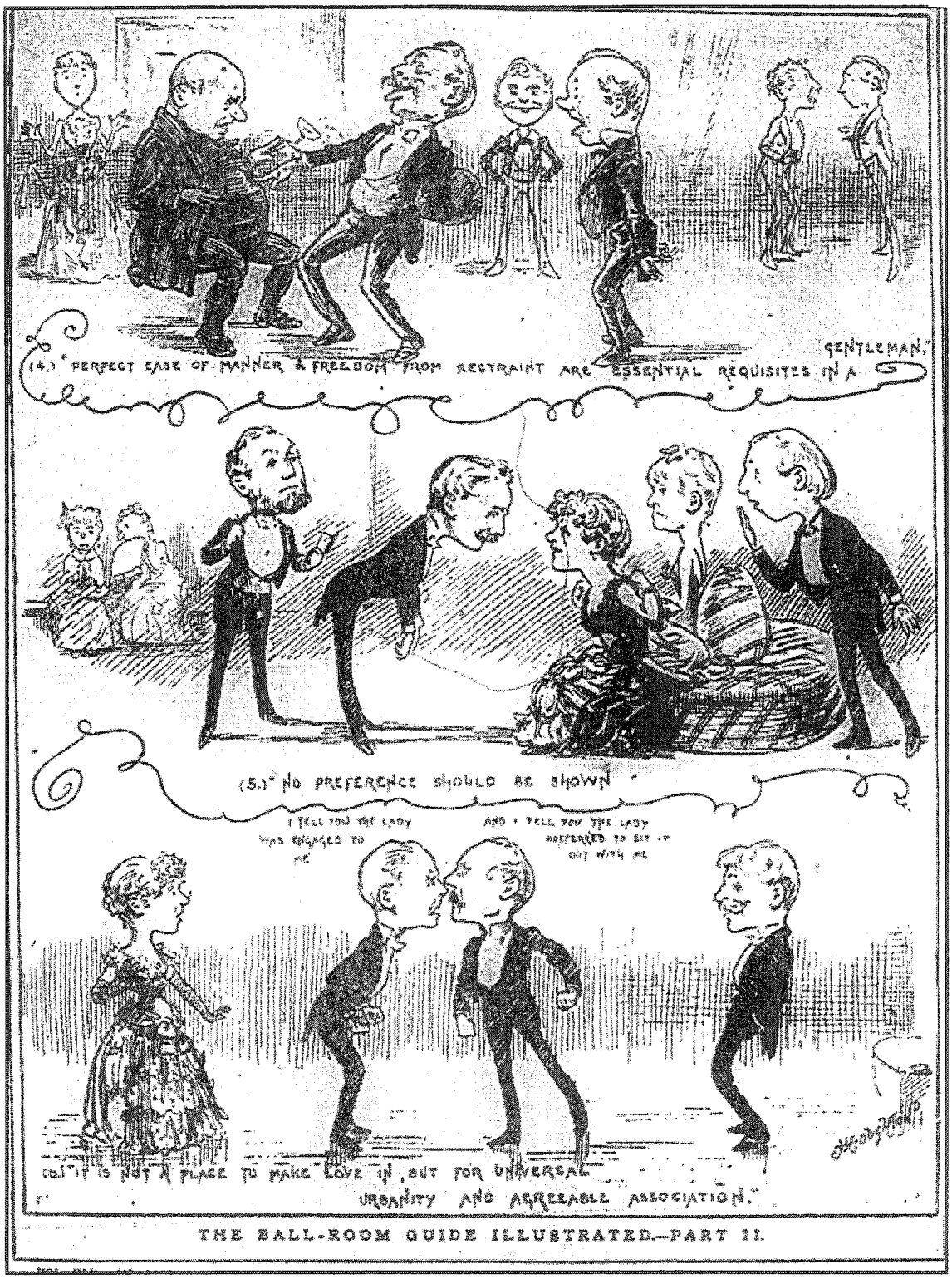
(4.) "PERFECT EASE OF MANNER & FREEDOM FROM RESTRAINT ARE ESSENTIAL REQUISITES IN A GENTLEMAN."
(5.) "NO PREFERENCE SHOULD BE SHOWN"
I TELL YOU THE LADY WAS ENGAGED TO ME
AND I TELL YOU THE LADY PREFERRED TO SIT IT OUT WITH ME
(6.) "IT IS NOT A PLACE TO MAKE LOVE IN, BUT FOR UNIVERSAL URBANITY AND AGREEABLE ASSOCIATION."
THE BALL-ROOM GUIDE ILLUSTRATED.—PART II.

Figure 1.18

Nowhere does the artist depict an alternative reality where men behave cordially to each other and to their female counterparts. The hegemonic masculine ideal exists only as an imagined entity giving advice to these men who are all objects of ridicule and amusement. Each male figure in the ballroom has attempted to perform manliness but they have failed to cultivate the inner essence of manliness that would have assisted them in navigating social spaces.

In "A Careful Man," [Figure 1.19][64] little Johnnie, due to his egotism and his tendency to overrate his eligibility as a desired suitor, creates a situation where he becomes the central object of humour. Johnnie lives up to his name, which is a play on a popular slang term for a fashionable man about town.[65] Johnnie's disposition reflects his inner sense of self: he carries himself with arrogance, hand in one pocket, head up, and cane to the ground. His adult companion Mable is some years his senior and her attire suggests that she is of similar social rank to Johnnie, indicating that she is perhaps his sister. The figure of the adult woman in the background, who is probably Miss Ballasis, has turned her back on the central figures and is now looking in another direction.

Mabel has scolded Johnnie for his rude behaviour: "You hardly raised your cap at all when Miss Bellasis passed, and she is always so nice to you." The humour in the cartoon is achieved through a combination of Johnnie's words and his image. The very young boy suggests that such behaviour is justifiable because if a man "pays" attention to a woman "she begins to think he's serious." Johnnie asks his companion and the observer to assume that Miss Bellasis, an adult woman, would be seriously interested in this young gentleman, so obviously not of courtship age and substantially her junior. The young man

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[64] "A Careful Man," in *Fun,* 29 January 1890, 43.
[65] *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, s.v. "Johnnie."

A CAREFUL MAN.

Mabel.—"Johnnie, how rude of you! You hardly raised your cap at all when Miss Bellaris passed, and she is always so nice to you."

Johnnie.—"That's just where it is, don't you know—when a girl's so partial to a man: if he pays her much attention she begins to think he's serious."

Figure 1.19

has over-rated his own sex appeal. Johnnie's arrogant assumption and his unwavering self-confidence make him a central object of amusement. It is reasonable to assume that Johnnie is spouting off someone else's advice (or what he has learned while eavesdropping on adult male conversation) and as such his comments reflect the assumptions of a real life "Johnnie."

During courtship, men's claims to manliness could be challenged and their public image tarnished by the words and actions of the women they courted. Courtship, then, was a time of power inversion where men were submissive and powerless to the wishes and desires of women. Women could exercise their limited power, lost once they married. Humour reinforces that women dominating men is a momentary power inversion. Yet, women were not the only threat to men during their courtship years; other men could be obstacles, too, as the suitor tried to pursue an appropriate marriage partner. By challenging each other's claims to manliness, and competing with other men for the affections of desired women, men were pitted against men in situations where neither male controlled the rules. And, if men were not careful, their own unmanly failings could create embarrassing situations where the pathetic suitor humiliated himself, making him the objects of ridicule and amusement to the very women he attempted to woo. Courtship was a quagmire and men were constantly at risk of being made momentary unmanly fools.

At home

Men's failures in the domestic sphere were popular themes of *Punch* and *Fun's* depiction of unmanly momentary "others." Notably in cartoons of men in the domestic space, men were most often depicted in the company of their wives and were seldom shown interacting with their children. John Gillis has argued that late Victorian men understood

that theirs was the role of breadwinner in the family and as such, the demands placed on men to oversee matters of business in order to successfully provide for their families required them to be frequently absent from the home. Moreover, although the existence of a home and family was crucial to adult manliness, a man had to find ways to participate in the domestic world, but not in ways that would question his manliness. John Tosh has shown that by the late nineteenth-century, mid Victorian assumptions about the relationship between men and domesticity was being undermined by beliefs that too much domesticity would produce unmanly men.[66] As such, men were cast as husbands, not as fathers, and were only involved in the child rearing as mediated by their wives. Advice literature that had once been directed at fathers was now exclusively aimed at women. Furthermore, "too intimate a relationship with one's children had become unmanly, likely calling into question not only a fellow's masculinity but also his maturity."[67]

Men also sought to satisfy many of their social, intellectual, and emotional needs outside of the home, away from the influences of home and in the more familiar pseudo-public world of the club. Clubs and Societies functioned as an all-male domestic world that, it was believed, better suited a manly character than the feminine-dominated world of the suburb and home.[68] Although there was an understanding that Victorians should contract companionate marriages,[69] late Victorian society was less sure about the compatibility of manliness with domesticity.[70] The lives of men and woman in the late

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[66] Tosh, 170 - 194.
[67] Gillis, 193.
[68] Gillis, 190-195.
[69] James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: conflict in nineteenth-century married life.*(London: Routledge, 1992).
[70] Tosh, 170-194.

Victorian period, Gillis has argued, were "quite unconjugal. Men's lives continued to revolve around an exclusively male work and leisure."[71]

In "touching reciprocity between husband and wife," [Figure 1.20][72] the artist suggests that the gulf between the male and female world is too great for husbands and wives to appropriately assist their spouse. Here is a couple that have offered to carry each other's burdens. His wife struggles with the weight of his belongings while he looks ridiculous using her parasol. The woman is laden with the difficult task of carrying her husband's "masculine" objects and she struggles several feet behind the man of the house. The female body is not fit to carry and support the "masculine" objects she is now burdened with. In her struggle, the women proves that she is the "weaker sex." She is not presented as *masculine* but as a comic figure absurd in her attempt to assist her husband.

Conversely, it is with great ease (perhaps too great) that the husband holds the decorative parasol. He is emasculated less by the fact that he carries the "feminine" object, but more because he finds the parasol useful. While his wife struggles, he stands bold, confident, and assured, almost as though he were conquering territory or making a grand discovery. His stance and demeanour makes his use of a parasol that much more comic and ridiculous. The humour of the cartoon rests in the observer's awareness about what each object carried by the figures connotes about masculinity and femininity, and the absurdity of any suggestion that a reversal could be normative, if even possible. The attempted reciprocity of husbands and wives is comic, leaving women struggling under masculine burdens and men effeminate by their attention to feminine matters.

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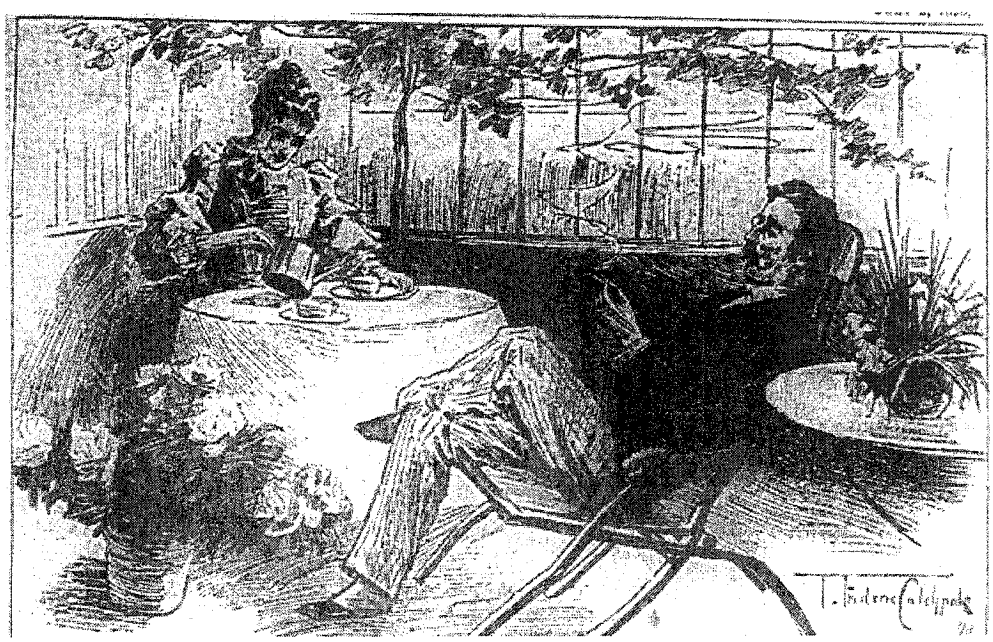
[71] Gillis, 147.
[72] "Touching Reciprocity between husband and wife," in *Punch,* 12 July 1890, 18.

TOUCHING RECIPROCITY BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE.

Figure 1.20



THE NOT TOO GOOD HUSBAND!

Edwin. - "How Pleasant it is here, my dear. Quite cool, and all the rest of it. And You here, Angy dear – sweet little Matrimonial, tea pouring out Here."

Angelina. -"Dear Edwin!"

Edwin. - "Yes. And one can never appreciate thoroughly the blessing of a Happy Home-"

Angelina. - "Dear! Dear!! Dear!!! Edwin."

Edwin- "Until one's away in the Club Smoking Room. Sha'n't be Late, Lovey."

Figure 1.21

On the other hand, Edwin in "The Not too Good Husband!" [Figure 1.21][73] is a too absent figure from his wife's company, and therefore has failed in his role of husband. Between the two men, there is an important lesson to be learned by the observer as to the importance for men to find the balance between public and private pursuits. Edwin is reclined in his chair, smoking, and his position in the open space of the room allows for an easy escape from the domestic space. Conversely, his wife is depicted behind the table, occupied with pouring tea, and her position allows her to blend seamlessly into the image of the domestic. In his speech to his wife, Edwin brings up the idea of balance, for one "can never appreciate thoroughly the blessings of a happy home - until one's away in the club smoking room..." Edwin carefully misleads his wife to assume that he in fact enjoys her company, but in truth Edwin only enjoys the idea of the domestic sphere and all that it represents from a distance. The title attached to the cartoon makes clear the artist's condemnation of Edwin's neglect of his wife and the domestic sphere. Neither Edwin nor the male figure in the above cartoon have acquired the *essence* of manliness that would enable them to find the balance between the domestic and all-male spaces.

"Social Constrast No. 24" [Figure 1.22][74] reiterates that the husband who is too engaged in crafting a manly public world to the neglect of his domestic responsibilities finds his claims to manliness questioned. This comic man, eager to be a popular figure among his social inferiors engages in a performance of "lordly magnificence" by overspending while out in public. His image while in public suggests his popularity among his social inferiors, and in public he *stands* erect, proud and dignified. At home, however, the man is *seated* while he is chastised by his wife (who is now standing and

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[73] "The Not too Good Husband," in *Fun,* 2 July 1890, 10.
[74] "Social Contrasts. – No. 24," in *Fun,* 17 July 1889, 28.

dominants the image). His wife, one suspects, berates her husband for the unmanly neglect of his domestic responsibilities.

Erica Rappaport has suggested that some Victorian women complained that their husbands failed to be appropriate breadwinners and that these men, ignorant of the expenditures necessary to keep house, gave their wives too little household allowances. The result was that often women would run up deficits with creditors, leaving their husbands responsible for repaying the debt. The man's claims to honour and manliness were threatened if the creditors sued for compensation in courts. In Victorian hegemonic culture, the husband who failed to provide effectively provide for his house could find his manly image threatened by his economic and domestic failings.[75]

Fun satirised the problems of negotiating power between husbands and wives in "A Question of the hour – should a Man open his wife's letters?" [Figure 1.23].[76] Importantly, it is the behaviour of the husband, his tone, demeanour, and behaviour that structures each couple's relationship. A husband must find a balance between control and lenience in order to be a respected Victorian patriarch. Each man articulates his behaviour and body stance his approach to being the man-of- the-house. Furthermore, the power relationship is visually communicated through the placement of bodies – the spouse who stands has the power. The text plays with language and popular slang to ridicule the couple, providing each family with an appropriate surname.

The over-bearing husband stands proud and erect and leans over his wife who sits submissive and meek (Mrs. Scrunchmeek) in the corner while he reads what appears to be a rather boring letter from his mother-in-law to his wife. His control is ridiculous because

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[75] Rappaport, 65-70.
[76] "A Question of the hour. – Should A man open his wife's letters?" in *Fun,* 6 April 1887, 141.

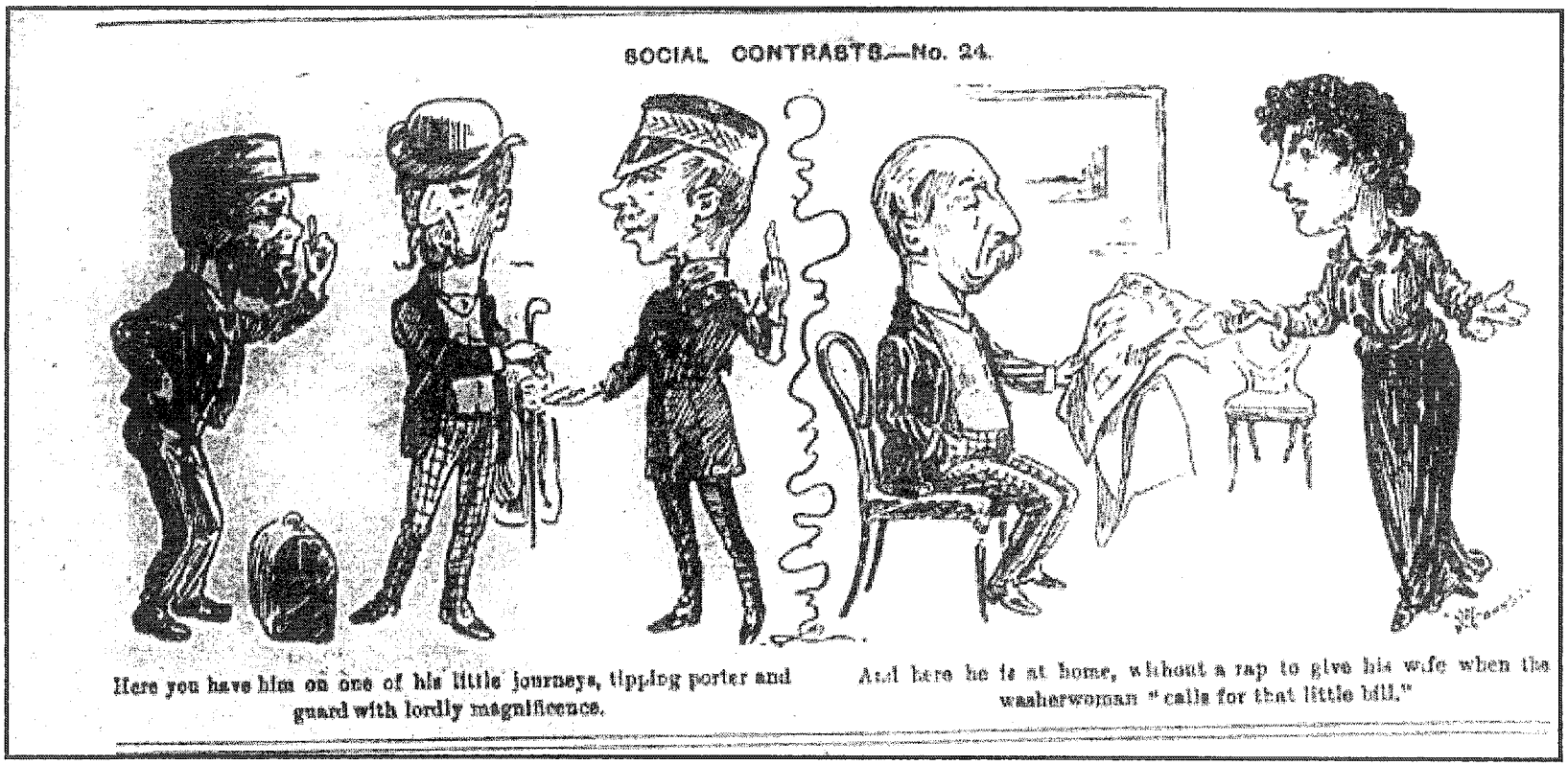
SOCIAL CONTRASTS.—No. 24.
Here you have him on one of his little journeys, tipping porter and guard with lordly magnificence.
And here he is at home, without a rap to give his wife when the washerwoman "calls for that little bill."

Figure 1.22

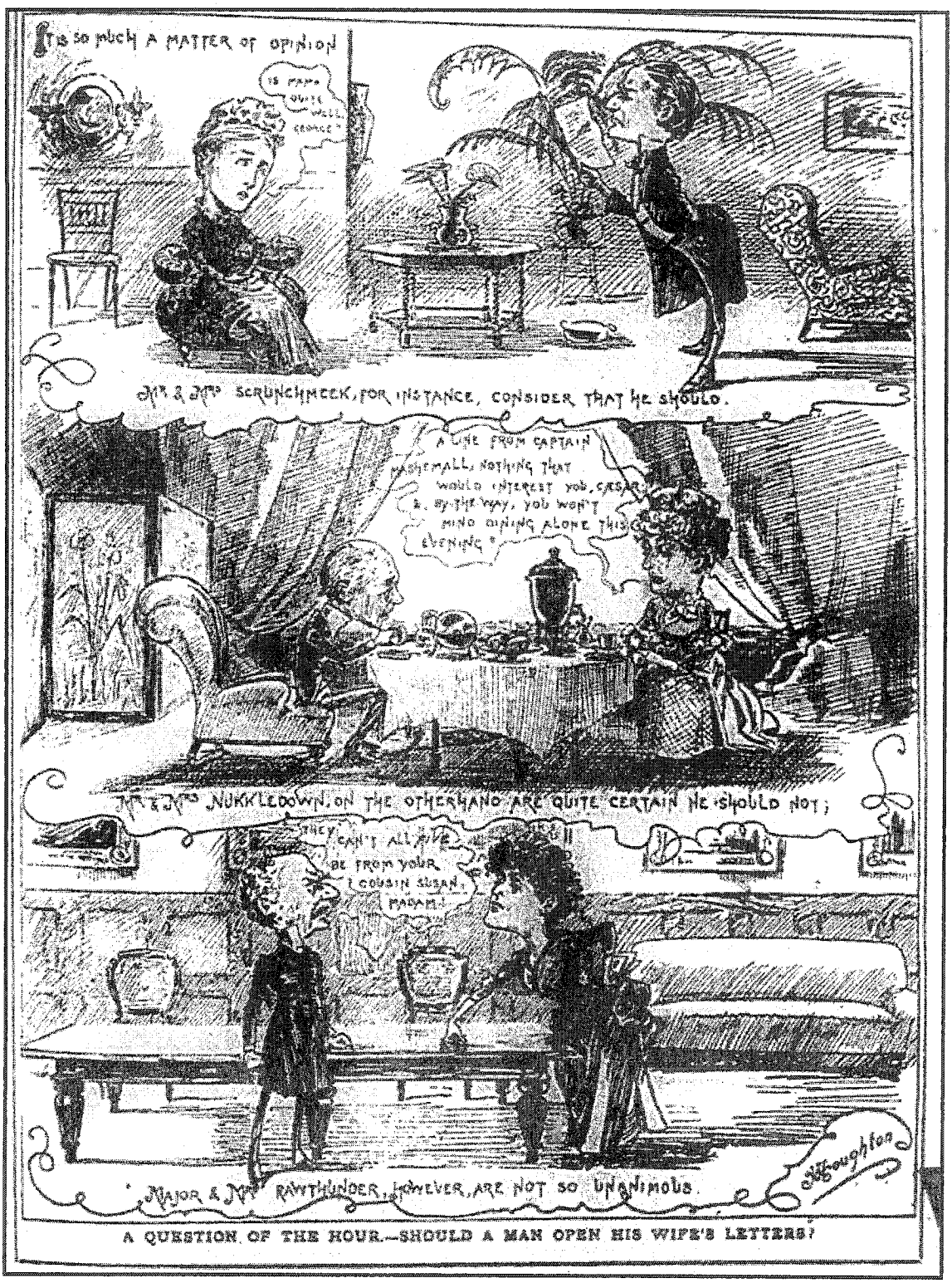
'TIS SO MUCH A MATTER OF OPINION
IS PAPA QUITE WELL, GEORGE?
MR & MRS SCRUNCHNECK, FOR INSTANCE, CONSIDER THAT HE SHOULD.
A LINE FROM CAPTAIN MACSMALL, NOTHING THAT WOULD INTEREST YOU, CAESAR. & BY THE WAY, YOU WON'T MIND MYING ALONE THIS EVENING?
MR & MRS NUKKLEDOWN, ON THE OTHERHAND, ARE QUITE CERTAIN HE SHOULD NOT;
THEY CAN'T ALWAYS BE FROM YOUR COUSIN SUSAN, MADAM!
MAJOR & MRS RAWTHUNDER, HOWEVER, ARE NOT SO UNANIMOUS.
Boughton
A QUESTION OF THE HOUR.—SHOULD A MAN OPEN HIS WIFE'S LETTERS?

Figure 1.23

his wife has nothing to hide. She has been dominated to an absurd extent and he-as-tyrant is unmanly.

The bald, older, cuckolded husband in the middle, whose taller wife glowers across the table at him, is as equally ridiculous figure as the above tyrannical husband. Part of the humour in the cuckold's situation is that his wife is leaving *him* at home while *she dines out* with male companions, an inversion of "normal" domestic relationships. The husband has taken on the role of the neglected-housewife, dinning alone in the suburbs.

The quarrelling couple at the bottom of the page have not yet agreed to the power relationship in their marriage and as such, the two constantly clash making "raw-thunder." The husband stands erect and defiant, furiously demanding to know who has been corresponding with his wife. His wife, whose stance mimics her defiant attitude, challenges her husband's claims to authority. He has all of the appearance of being a patriarch, but in reality he is completely unable to exercise authority and control over his wife. She may or may not be hiding something from him, and she appears to be very amused at his attempts to find out. She has absolute control over her husband, his honour, and his manly image, finding a method for emasculating the would-be head of the house. All men are ridiculous failures as Victorian patriarchs who cannot effectively govern and guide in the domestic sphere. The comic tyrant does not exercise compassion, the cuckold is a fool in everyone's eyes as his wife gallivants in public with male companions, and the last man is ridiculously failing to assert his patriarchal authority over his wife through his rage and anger and his wife jeers at her husband.

The figure in "An Object of Compassion" [Figure 1.24][77] does not have any of the accoutrements necessary for middle-class manliness: he is homeless, clubless, and as such,

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[77] "An Object of Compassion," in *Punch,* 23 August 1890, 86.

AN OBJECT OF COMPASSION.

PITY AN UNFORTUNATE MAN, DETAINED IN LONDON BY UNINTERESTING CIRCUMSTANCES OVER WHICH HE HAS NO CONTROL, WHOSE FAMILY ARE ALL OUT OF TOWN, WHOSE ESTABLISHMENT IS REPRESENTED BY A CARETAKER, AND WHOSE CLUB IS CLOSED FOR ALTERATIONS AND REPAIRS.

Figure 1.24

without an invite for dinner. He is dressed in fashionable clothing including gloves, but his hat, rather than distinguishing him as a man of some importance, is now part of his humiliated image on the street. His receding hairline is also made evident now that he has removed his hat, a further sign of inner suspect manliness. He looks uncomfortable as he sits, rather than stands in public space, and uses a sign rather than language to communicate his desperate circumstances. The text embarrasses the men further- the observer is asked to "pity" the man, rather than respect. His current predicament does not invoke pity, but amusement as the unmanly figure, cloaked in the images of middle-class manly dress, demonstrates an inner incompetence and he is therefore ridiculous, comical, and a spectacle.

These cartoons reflect the importance of both the private and public spaces in the construction of Victorian manliness. The important lesson from the depiction of unmanly momentary "others" while courting and at home was that of balance: The tyrant at home was equally ridiculous as the cuckold and hen-pecked husband; the too eager suitor frequently moved by passion was as comical as the pathetic unattractive bashful man who could not effectively communicate with women. The husband too often at the club was as frequent an object of ridicule as the overly domesticated effeminate man. The maintenance of a hegemonic masculine identity was a tenuous negotiation. Knowing the necessary balance for manliness was of the essence.

CONCLUSION

For the Victorian middle-class audiences that purchased and/or viewed these cartoons, the comic figures illustrated the plight of the unmanly middle class "other" who could not maintain his claims through patriarchy. The private world of home, family, and friends,

the pseudo-public world of the pub, theatre and dinner parties, and the public urban space were depicted as labyrinths where manliness could be threatened at any turn. The cartoons play on the embarrassment, humiliation, and therefore the emasculation of male figures that have not, or in the moment have forgotten, the *essence* of manliness. Although these all comic-figures depicted were men of character and social standing, they communicated their unmanly incompetence through (in)actions, attire, body image and/or decorum.

For the historian, these cartoons reinforce the importance of "otherness" in constructing hegemonic ideals. In these cartoons, humour reinforced the norm by establishing the ridiculousness of those within the class who did not conform their behaviour within the prescribed cultural boundaries. The Social cartoons emphasise that manliness was a middle-class possession, but only within very limited confines: patriarchy was a fragile construction. Furthermore, these visual cartoons reflect that manliness was a performance and the other actors that shared a man's space could effect and determine the success of his display. The images of the unmanly "other" reflected the importance of the visual in presenting a manly exterior. Manliness (and unmanliness) was communicated as much through physique and fashion as it was through language and behaviour. Thus, the cartoon is able to communicate the importance of the visual images and manipulating the cultural assumptions attached to male body image and consumer objects. The Victorian fascination with the physical, the exterior, and the material object and the important intersection of all three in the construction of manliness is emphasised through these visual depictions of (un)manly men.

Even though middle-class men were the objects of amusement, these cartoons (re)present these situations as humorous inversions when the world was "right side up." Middle-class men should demand the respect of social equals and inferiors. In order for the

observer to consider situations where men lacked power to be humorous, there must be an understanding that men held power in public and private spaces. Humour reveals both deviations and normative identity constructions.

Humour in *Punch* and *Fun* cartoons reconfirmed the essential power structures of Victorian hegemonic culture. These cartoons reflect through humour that power, gender, and class were inextricably linked. Power was limited to middle-class men who could maintain command, through appearance and behaviour, the respect of all those who shared their world. Although the cartoons place men as the central object of humour, subverting would-be power figures, they only serve to reaffirm patriarchy and middle-class claims to respectability, not undermine the social structure. In order for the observer/reader to appreciate the humour, they must recognise the absurdity of these comic-unmanly-figures. The humour of *Punch* and *Fun* manufactured and reinforced consensus within the Victorian hegemonic by presenting moments of inversion that conversely reinforced the normalcy of middle-class men having power: middle-class men *did* and *should* have power.

CHAPTER TWO

"TORIES, YES-MEN AND BUMSUCKERS:" HUMOUR AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE LONDON CLERK

A favourite pastime of nineteenth century social commentators was to scorn, mock, and blame the lower-middle-class clerk for the mediocrity of suburbia. The comic caricature of the clerk was constructed from middle-class assumptions that those of the lower middle class were social pretenders who merely imitated the respectability and gentility of the middle class.[1] The cartoonists of both *Punch* and *Fun* found the clerk an easy target for ridicule and mockery and included the emasculated servile clerk in their cast of comic caricatures in cartoon London. Clerks were represented as superficial and acquiescent imitators of middle-class respectability who sought to obscure their suspect social status through respectability steeped in materialism.[2]

Perhaps most famous in this genre of social criticism was George and Weedon Grossmith's *The Diary of A Nobody* in which the ridiculous existence of the fictional London clerk, Mr. Charles Pooter, his wife Carrie, and their son Lupin, was serialized for

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[1] Christopher Hosgood, "Mercantile Monasteries: shop, shop assistants, and shop life in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain" in *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 28 No.3 (July 1999), 323.
[2]Christopher Hosgood, "Mrs. Pooter's Purchase: Lower-Middle-Class Consumerism and the Sales, 1870-1914," in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls, ed. *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: middle-class identity in Britain 1880-1940* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999), 148.

readers of *Punch* from 1888 through 1889. *The Diary* achieved enormous popularity with upper-class readers and the pathetic diary entries of Mr. Pooter were published as a novella, with some additions, in 1892.[3] That E.M. Forster, H.G. Wells, and Arnold Bennett also found room in their novels for the abject lower-middle-class man speaks of the longevity of the imagined emasculated and ridiculous clerk in British popular culture.[4] Such images of the clerk, Christopher Hosgood has argued, reinforced middle-class assumptions that they were the authorities on respectability and thus these descriptions served to expose the shabby pretensions of the lower middle class.[5] James Hammerton reminds readers of *The Diary* that such "cruel banter hints at the penchant of the middle class for putting pretentious Pooters in their place, in part, one suspects, to confirm their own more secure independent identity."[6]

G. L. Anderson suggested that "of all the lower middle class groups which expanded with the structural shift in the late-Victorian economy from manufacturing to services, clerks were by far the most numerous and important."[7] Clerks were employed in banking, insurance, and in the offices of the burgeoning financial and commercial institutions of the late-Victorian economy. Many positions offered only temporary employment at tedious and menial tasks while other clerks could use their station to move into the ranks of the middle class. The most sought after positions were those in corporations where the clerk worked closely with the employer and learned many of the aspects of trade and commerce, thus affording the greatest possibilities for economic and

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[3] A. James Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership? Marriage and masculine identity in the lower middle class, 1870-1920" in *Journal of British Studies* Vol. 38 No. 3 (July 1999), 292.
[4] See Peter Bailey, "White Collar, Gray Lives? The lower middle class revisited," in *Journal of British Studies,* Vol. 38 No. 3 (July 1999), 273; see E.M. Forster, *Howard's End* (London, 1910). For more examples see Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership?," 292.
[5] Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership?," 291.
[6] Ibid., 292.

social possibilities. In between were the majority of routine clerks characterized by the repetitious tasks involving only one aspect of business, whose positions offered security but failed to provide the economic and social advancement to which most clerks aspired. [8]

Historians of the lower middle class have sought to contextualize the middle-class accusations that all clerks were "Tories, yes-men, and bumsuckers"[9] within the social, economic, and gender frameworks of Victorian Britain. In particular, Christopher Hosgood, Peter Bailey, James Hammerton, and Geoffrey Crossick have probed into the historical realities of the lower middle class in order to understand to what extent these caricatures were representative of this social group. Notably their works have suggested that members of the lower middle class were not simply the imitators of their social superiors, but rather that they cultivated particular values and ideologies pertinent to their historical experiences. The more recent literature on the lower middle class is more sympathetic of the plight of this marginal social group who, although on the fringes of respectability, played an essential purpose in the social hierarchy of Victorian London. The diverse social background of the lower middle class where individuals and families could move "up" from the working class or "down" from the middle class, combined with a fierce sense of individualism and competition problematizes the definition of a lower-class consciousness. Because this social group existed in a marginal space as neither middle nor as working class the definition of the lower middle class is ambiguous.

The question that remains unanswered, however, is why make fun of the clerk? What was the social utility of these imagined pathetic emasculated clerks? This chapter

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[7] G.L. Anderson, "The Social Economy of late-Victorian Clerks," in *Lower Middle-Class in Britain*, ed. Geoffrey Crossick (London: Croom Helm Ltd.,1977), 113.
[8] Ibid., 114.
[9] George Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (1939; reprint, Harmondsworth, 1990), 13, as quoted in Peter Bailey, "White Collar Gray Lives?," 274.

will consider Grossmith's classic comic novel in an effort to ascertain how humour was used to fashion identities through ridicule and mockery. Rather than considering how the lower middle class articulated masculinity, this chapter will examine the imagined clerk as invented by the middle-class social critics for their purposes, thereby revealing the complex relationship between humour and the construction of identities in Victorian England. In doing so, this study of *The Diary of a Nobody* will contribute to current debates on the relationship of gender and class but will also serve to demonstrate how the study of humour can explicate the anxieties surrounding competing articulations of identities in Victorian England. By considering Grossmith's novella as an expression of Victorian humour that emerged out of social and cultural forces particular to late-nineteenth-century Britain, and by remembering that this type of humour resonated with the socially dominant middle-class culture, an analysis of *The Diary* will reveal the complex intersection of class, respectability, domesticity, economic success, and manliness

I

In his 1977 introduction to the edited collection *The Lower Middle Class in Britain*, Geoffrey Crossick urged historians to consider the lower middle class within the changing economic and political conditions of late Victorian Britain. Crossick argued that the lower middle class had been overlooked by historians because they had failed "to do anything very striking" and were "not active in the historical stage."[10] He recommended that a more complex analysis of the lower middle class would reveal the principal values and ideologies of this social group. Did the lower middle class develop their own social

[10] Geoffrey Crossick, ed., "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain: A Discussion," in *The Lower Middle Class in Britain,* 11.

worldview or were the middle-class accusations of their being imitators and social climbers accurate?

The contributors in Crossick's collection probed into the economic, religious, and political lives of the lower middle class arguing that this group played a necessary role in the Victorian social hierarchy. The lower middle class, they claimed, was an important divide between the middle and working class, providing an economic and social barrier. Moreover, the clerks, shop owners and semi-professionals (such as schoolteachers) made up the ruling elite in smaller communities, sitting on town councils and school boards.[11] But the lower middle class, Crossick argued, was never united in political or economic organization and instead cultivated values of individualism and economic competition that only served to pit members of this class against each other. Through aspirations of social mobility, consumerism, a quest for respectability, and a pride in their non-manual labour, the lower middle class remained marginal, obscuring any viable class-consciousness. According to Crossick and fellow contributors, the typographic image of a passive lower middle class was largely accurate but there is some evidence hinting at the political and economic ingenuity of small businessmen and shop owners.

In 1995, Crossick returned to the problem of the lower middle class and argued that the petit bourgeoisie should not be included with the rump of white collar labourers, for the shop owners and small businessmen had cultivated a much more independent world view than had hitherto been recognized. According to Crossick's later studies, small shopkeepers and businessmen had, at times, participated in political radicalism up to the

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[11] From Crossick's collection, *The Lower Middle Class,* see particularly Hugh McCleod, "White Collar Values and the Role of Religion," 61-88; Richard N. Price, "Society, Status and Jingoism: The Social Roots of Lower-Middle-class Patriotism, 1870-1900," 89-112; and S. Martin Gaskell, "Housing and the Lower Middle Class, 1870-1914," 159-183.

late Victorian period and therefore should not be included as lower middle class. Because Crossick's argument severed the petit bourgeois from the lower middle class he reinforced the middle-class representation of white-collar workers as passive and pathetic in their lack of political cohesiveness and desperate in their social attempts at 'keeping up appearances.'

Despite Crossick's insistence that the lower middle class be included within historical debates scholars have tended to overlook this group in favour of studies of the middle and working classes. In 1999, Peter Bailey revisited the lower middle class as an historical problem. The challenge of the lower middle class to solicit attention from historians, according to Bailey, was that they failed to be either historical heroes or villains. The British lower middle class could not claim the "bedrock authenticity of working-class lives" but were also "too timid to be evil."[12] Thus, as historical characters they did not attract the attention of labour historians who studied the working class or bourgeois oppressors.[13] In recent years the work of Susan Pennybacker on the London County Council demonstrated that a small yet significant number of government clerks were involved in socialist causes. F.M. L. Thompson has also argued that, despite the absence of lower-middle-class organizations, many joined social improvement societies that advocated for suburban reforms.[14] Much of the work on the lower middle class as social-activists, however, revealed the centrality of shop owners and small businessmen and the (often voluntary) exclusion of the white-collar clerks. In fact, Richard Price's work on the lower middle class and empire only revealed white-collar eagerness for

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[12] Bailey "White Collars, Grey Lives?," 276 – 277.
[13] Ibid., 277.
[14] See Peter Bailey, "White Collars, Grey Lives?," 278. Susan D. Pennybacker, *A Vision for London, 1889-1914: Labour, Everyday Life and the LCC Experiment.*(London, 1995) and F.M.L. Thompson, "Town and City" in The *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950,* ed. F.M.L. Thompson, 3 Vols. (Cambridge, 1990), 1:65-71.

jingoism and their avoidance of any critical or class-conscious political involvement.[15] The historiography, therefore, affirms Crossick's assertion that the "real" lower middle class remained outside of "real" political consciousness throughout the late nineteenth century.

More problematic than their lack of allure as historical characters, argues Bailey, was the failure of the lower-middle-class to construct a cohesive social or political mentalité. "The lower middle class consciousness remained more cellular than either stratified or bifurcated as its members staked out identity in an obsessive pursuit of status and respectability within a highly localized suburban milieu – keeping up with the Joneses, keeping away from the Smiths."[16] In recent years historians of sexuality, gender, and consumerism have probed into the social, cultural, and private lives of the lower middle class to ascertain how this group envisioned themselves. These studies have asked important questions about the articulation, self-identification, and outside representation of lower-middle-class manliness. The recent works of A. James Hammerton, Christopher Hosgood, and Peter Bailey have argued that a more complex reading of lower-middle-class masculinity will illuminate the role of consumerism, respectability, work, and marriage to the lower middle class and help to secure this class within the dynamic Victorian social hierarchy.

"There is nothing on the lower middle class to match the outpouring of work in recent years on middle- and working-class family, gender relations, and masculine and feminine identities" notes Hammerton. "A consequence of this is that the subject of lower-middle-class masculinity has been largely elided or taken for granted as a pale reflection of

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[15] See Price, "Society, Status and Jingoism," 89-112.
[16] Bailey, "White Collars, Gray Lives?," 275.

middle-class identities."[17] Hammerton argued that lower-middle-class men constructed a brand of masculinity based on domestic partnership that, by the mid-twentieth century, was central to British adult manliness. The values of individualism, social mobility, the image of the self-made man, class-status represented through consumption, and domestic partnership were, by the early-twentieth century, hallmark distinctions of the modern man.[18]

Angus McLaren's study of the court trial and subsequent tabloid exposure of the "World's Great Marriage Association of London" swindling of lower-middle-class men epitomizes the type of cultural narratives that gave credence to fictional "Pooters." Lower-middle-class men and women paid large sums of money to advertise in the Association's magazines in an endeavour to lure attractive and wealthy middle-class partners into marriage. When the Association was taken to court for fraud, many lower-middle-class (male) plaintiffs appeared in court hoping to be vindicated. The result, however, was that these clerks and shop owners were jeered at for being fools and dupes and further mocked for their aspirations to marry above themselves.[19] The eagerness of journalists, comic writers, and readers to relish in the mirth of the snivelling- grovelling-pretentious-nobodies that were the lower middle class speaks of the importantance of real and fictional "Pooters" in fashioning definitions of what was *not* masculine or respectable.

Despite their more sympathetic arguments about the difficulties of lower-middle-class realities, the scholarly works aforementioned only reinforce the marginality and hilarity of the lower middle class. In fact, Angus McLaren tells us that the "inept and

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[17] Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership?," 294
[18] Ibid., 317.
[19] Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: policing sexual boundaries, 1870-1930* (Chicago: UP Chicago, 1997), 39-58.

impoverished clerk who unsuccessfully tried to pass himself off as a 'gent' was hooted with derision" from those above and below him in the social ladder.[20]

But why was humour unleashed upon the lower middle class? Why Grossmith's Charles Pooter and not Charles Dicken's Bob Cratchit? Although these cultural narratives of the ridiculous clerk may have been constructed in part from a sense of superiority, the lower middle class did not present a direct threat to the middle class by way of social intrusion;[21] the lower middle class challenged assumptions fundamental to middle class respectability and ideal manliness. Humour was unleashed to construct the London clerk as cultural scapegoat in a tumultuous time when late-nineteenth-century family, gender, consumer, and class norms were being redefined. Although perhaps steeped in some cultural and social realities, the fictional comic figure provided the Grossmith brothers and their audience the possibility to distance themselves from the responsibility of the banality of urban life, the new commercialized leisure, economic recession, and the transforming definitions of masculine identities. The "real" London clerk represented the limitations of the capital system brought on by economic depression that severely restricted social mobility; but the association of the London clerk with failed masculinity left industrialism and capitalism blameless for the economic turn. Furthermore, presenting Mr. Pooter and his like as unmanly distanced the Victorian middle-class reader from the very real failures of patriarchy and paternalism that had long been essential to the construction of manliness. Underlining these social and cultural anxieties surrounding the clerk was the debate over imitation and authenticity where beliefs in the authentic were being undermined by the

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[20] Ibid., 54.

[21] The economic depression from the mid 1870s through the 90s indicates the narrowing of avenues for social mobility. The rigid social structures and the nepotism applied at many well paying firms only confirm that the lower middle class was not threatening to impede on the middle class. The economic contributions to the image of the ludicrous clerk are explored further in this chapter.

mass production of machine made "things" ready for purchase *en masse* at the emerging department store. Grossmith's construction of Mr. Pooter-as-cultural-scapegoat permeates the novel as the reader follows Mr. Pooter around in his home, at work, and out in "society." His son, Lupin, was an equally important cultural caricature constructed as a lower-middle-class "other" who shared in his father's aspirations for mobility, but scorned his parents' desires for imitated respectability. Lupin's character was structured from the banal, material, and vulgar.

II

> I am getting quite accustomed to being snubbed by Lupin, and I do not mind being sat upon by Carrie, because I think she has a certain amount of right to do so; but I do think it hard to be at once snubbed by wife, son, and both my guests.[22]

Many of Mr. Pooter's mishaps occurred within his home where, rather than finding refuge from ridicule and scorn endured in the City, he found an equally berating environment where his masculine image and authority were never secure. Despite his sentimental endorsement of domesticity, his wife's company, and a quiet life at home away from Society, Mr. Pooter's claims of authority as head of the house was always threatened by his wife, son, friends, servants, and local tradesmen.

The reader of *The Diary of a Nobody* learns most about Grossmith's antihero through his interactions with other characters in the novella. *The Diary* was constructed to be that of Mr. Pooter and it is through his eyes and from his pen that we learn about the world of the lower middle class. Grossmith carefully constructed each incident in the life of his antihero who becomes the vehicle through which the reader explores the pitfalls of

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[22] George and Weedon Grossmith, *The Diary of A Nobody* (London, 1892; reprint Kent: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), 160.

late Victorian society. The other characters, representing challenges and alternative articulations of lower-middle-class identity, serve only to reinforce the banality of suburban life and expose the pretensions of Mr. Charles Pooter. Individually and collectively, his neighbours, families and friends undermined the clerk and challenged his belief that authority, respectability, and power can be achieved through imitative respectability and mimicked manliness. Despite this Pooter remained converted to his beliefs in hard work, consumerism, and an imitation of middle-class manners.

For the most part Mr. and Mrs. Pooter were shown to have a relationship based on domestic companionship, at least from the perspective of Mr. Pooter. There are enough occasions, however, where Carrie demonstrated contempt for her husband and annoyance at his attempted claims to masculine authority. The first moment of marital contention witnessed by the reader occurred after Carrie arranged with a local butcher without consulting Mr. Pooter. The man of the house was most displeased. The dispute worsened when Pooter dismissed Carrie's chosen tradesmen and arranged matters with a different butcher. The angry tradesman returned and harangued Mr. Pooter in "a most uncalled for manner." The quarrel ended with Pooter looking foolish and, in an effort to avenge his ego, Pooter decided to "give it to Carrie" to make her "understand that this disgraceful scene was entirely her fault." But before Pooter was able to assail his wife, the butcher returned to inform him that, after falling over the scraper outside his door, the butcher would "immediately bring an action" against Pooter. The clerk quickly left the house to find an ironmonger capable of removing the threatening object. To mend matters, Pooter reinstated the injured butcher as the tradesman of choice thus inadvertently allowing his wife's decisions to prevail in matters of household commerce.[23]

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[23] Ibid., 9.

Carrie expressed her dissatisfaction with Pooter in a number of different ways and each complaint further reduced Pooter as a worthy Victorian husband. Once, he recorded a backhanded compliment from his wife where he was told, "my dear Charlie, you are *not* handsome, but you are *good* which is far more noble."[24] On a different occasion, Pooter confided in his diary his personal angst that Carrie had "several times recently called attention to the thinness of my hair at the top of my head, and recommended me to get it seen to."[25]

Pooter's enthusiastic (and usually failed) attempts to be the handy man were often greeted with annoyance from his wife. A quarrel erupted when Pooter decided to paint a variety of household objects red. Carrie, who did not find anything particularly thrilling about owning a red tub, disputed his "improvements" to the bathroom. Later, Pooter awoke to discover that he had developed a "cold" but his wife retorted "with a perversity that is just like her" that his "fearful headache and strong symptoms of a cold" were more likely to be symptoms of a "painter's colic," a result from "having spent the last few days" with his nose "over a paint-pot." In an effort to relieve his 'cold symptoms,' Pooter tried out his 'improved' bathtub only to discover that hot water dissolved this paint, and most horribly, that it turned his skin red. He was "determined not to say anything to Carrie."[26]

Carrie found Pooter's more sentimental side equally bothersome. When Pooter read excerpts from his diary to his wife, he noticed that she was less than attentive, "Did my diary bore you, dear?" She replied, "I really wasn't listening, dear."[27] On another occasion, Pooter shared his previous night's dream with his wife and close friends. When his friends expressed their boredom, Carrie took the opportunity to express her frustrations

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[24] Ibid., 31.
[25] Ibid., 137.
[26] Ibid., 27.

with Pooter: "he tells me his stupid dreams every morning" she told their company, much to Pooter's chagrin.[28]

Carrie also found more subtle and/or accidental means of emasculating her husband. When the Pooter's received an invitation to the Lord Mayor's ball, for them a prestigious social event, Carrie asked to send the invitation to her mother so that she too could see the evidence that attested to the social success of her son-in-law and daughter. Much to Pooter's chagrin, the invitation was returned with stains. The object of respectability, now spoiled by his mother in-law, foreshadowed Pooter's own failure to maintain an unblemished record in Society.[29]

Following the great social event where Pooter's behaviour embarrassed Carrie several times, Carrie made her disgust for her husband's conduct well known. Two days following the ball, Pooter finally demanded an explanation from Carrie as to why she had refused to speak to him. "I wish a little explanation of your conduct." "Indeed! And I desire something more than a *little* explanation of your conduct the night before!" Carrie retorted. Pooter replied, "Really, I don't understand you." To which Carrie snapped "Probably not; you were scarcely in a condition to understand anything." Horrified by his wife's accusations, Pooter could only managed a "Caroline!" which was brushed aside by his wife's retort, "Don't be theatrical, it has no effect on me." Mr. Pooter tried to respond to his wife's insults but she was not finished berating her husband. Pooter was told to 'hold his tongue' so that Carrie could continue, "Now *I'm* going to say something!" and

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[27] Ibid., 109.
[28] Ibid., 161.
[29] Ibid., 33.

Carrie proceeded to lay out a long list of grievances against her husband regarding his conduct in society. In his diary Pooter confessed his humiliation.[30]

When Carrie and her friend, Mrs. James, decided to hold a séance in "his" home Pooter's image as an emasculated husband was further exposed, "I am very sorry, Mrs. James, but I totally disapprove of it, apart from the fact that I receive my old friends on this evening," he told his wife's companion. Not to be deterred by the expressed wishes of this failed Victorian patriarch, Mrs. James, Carrie, and much to his humiliation, his friend Cummings all decided to continue with their plans to experiment with Spiritualism: "I firmly declined to take part in it, with the result that my presence was ignored. I left the three of them sitting in the parlour at a small round table which they had taken out of the drawing-room." Eventually, Pooter found his way into the kitchen, where he remained for the evening, an emblematic scene that demonstrated how easily Carrie could strip her husband of domestic authority.[31] That Pooter was shunned to the kitchen while his wife entertained their guests in the parlour demonstrates that solidified his secondary position in his home.

Their son Lupin was Carrie's most effective and frequently deployed weapon whereby she emasculates her husband. When Lupin renounced given name "William," (from his father's side) in favour of Lupin (from his mother's family), Carrie was most pleased and gave a long history of the name.[32] Pooter's attempt to read a sermon to Lupin about drinking and gambling were frustrated by Carrie who gave Pooter a lecture on how he would be better advised to leave their son alone. On another occasion, Pooter expressed his concern over Lupin's habit of frequenting music halls. The mother again defended the

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[30] Ibid., 42.
[31] Ibid., 184.
[32] Ibid., 55.

actions of her only child, "Do let the boy alone. He's quite old enough to take care of himself, and won't forget he's a gentleman."[33] When Lupin's love life comes unravelled he asked his father for a drink of "anything," but Pooter refused. Carrie defended her son's request and the rest of Pooter's evening was spent in "a disagreeable discussion."[34] Pooter lamented to his diary that, "when Lupin irritates me, she always sides with him."[35]

One afternoon, Carrie was persuaded to go for a drive with Lupin in his pony-trap, against the expressed wishes of Pooter. And, although he confirmed in his diary that he "quite disapprove[d] of driving on a Sunday" he felt compelled to join the party, "I did not like to trust Carrie alone with Lupin, so I offered to go too. Lupin said, 'Now, that is nice of you, Gov., but you won't mind sitting on the back-seat of the cart?'"[36] The humorous scene of a terrified Pooter taking a back seat in the adventures of the eccentric son and doting mother is emblematic of Pooter's position as spectator in his home. That his complaints and concerns in this scene regarding Lupin's rudeness and recklessness were unnoticed, or at least unheeded, can be extended to other aspects of the narrative where his meddling in the lives of his dependents was received with contempt, thus confirming that Pooter only aspired to manhood.

On another day, Pooter confided to his wife and son his private wishes regarding his diary, "If anything ever happened to me, [I hope] the diary would be an endless source of pleasure to you both; to say nothing of the chance of the remuneration which may accrue from its being published." His wife and son responded with fits of laughter at the ridiculous presumption of the 'man of the house.'[37] The combined efforts of mother and

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[33] Ibid., 58.
[34] Ibid., 98.
[35] Ibid., 58.
[36] Ibid., 132.
[37] Ibid., 110.

son led to social patricide in the Pooter household and reduced the would-be Victorian patriarch to a mere spectator, powerless to influence the lives of his dependents.

III

Lupin, who parades in and out of Mr. Pooter's narrative in loud gaudy clothes, flaunting his disdain for lower-middle-class servility and imitative respectability embodied in his father, is the foremost challenger to Pooter's attempts to cultivate a manly image. Throughout the novel, Lupin is dismissive of his father's values, advice, and goals in life and in return, presents an alternative articulation of lower-middle-class manliness: the music hall gent.

Lupin's role in the narrative extended beyond the subject of domestic disharmony; he also illustrated the problem of the new leisure and demonstrated the eagerness of lower-middle-class young men to imitate the music hall swells of the stage and cultivate "peacock masculinity."[38] Lupin's masculine identity was constructed, much to the dismay of his father, through an imitation of icons on display at the music hall.[39] For the Grossmith brothers, Lupin's love for popular culture and "going out," and his father's horror at these actions, problematized lower –middle-class consciousness. Lupin and Pooter, both members of the same social group, attempted to construct social identities along opposite trajectories. While the "Pooters" of this class sought the approval of social superiors and attempted to attain respectability through imitation of middle class social and

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[38] Bailey, "White Collar, Gray Lives?," 281.
[39] For an in depth analysis of the Music Hall gent see Peter Bailey, "Champagne Charlie and the Music Hall swell song" in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), 101-127.

commercial habits, the "Lupins" indulged in the vulgarity and banality of the new commercialized leisure. Ultimately, however, neither path led to authenticity.

The cultivation of "peacock manliness" was foundational in Lupin's quest for independence from the banality of his parents' life in the suburbs. The limitations on his fun imposed by his father were balked at and his knowledge of popular culture became a tool that enabled him to ridicule his father.

On many occasions, Mr. Pooter expressed concern for the moral well-being of his son and discontent over Lupin's behaviour, "I was about to read Lupin a sermon on smoking (which he indulges in violently) and billiards," to which his son responded with contempt and disdain as he simply "put on his hat and walked out."[40] Later Mr. Pooter discovered that his son "had gone to a common sort of entertainment, given at the Assembly Rooms. I expressed my opinion that such performances were unworthy of respectable patronage." Here again, Lupin reduced Pooter's ability to exercise manly authority over his son with disdain: "Ph, it was only 'for one night only.' I had a fit of the blues come on, and thought I would go to see Polly Pressewell, England's Particular Spark." Pooter, who obviously could not impress upon his son through words the importance of respectability, implored him through example. "I told him I was proud to say I had never heard of her." This had little effect on Lupin.[41]

Eventually, Mr. Pooter realised that he had no influence whatsoever on Lupin. Bewildered by his son's choice in lifestyle, Pooter lamented, "I wish [Lupin] would not go to so many music halls, but one dare not say anything to him about it. At the present moment he irritates me by singing all over the house some non-sense about 'What's the

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[40] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 60.
[41] Ibid., 58.

matter with Gladstone? He's alright! What's the matter with Lupin? He's alright!'"[42] Not only did Lupin use his knowledge of popular culture phrases to annoy his father, but he also used slang to insult Pooter for his aspirations to middle-class gentility. When Mr. and Mrs. Pooter accepted an invitation to East Acton Volunteer Ball, a social event that held particular importance to Mr. Pooter who anticipated that his beloved employer would be in attendance, Lupin "in his usual incomprehensible language," suggested that the event was 'a bounders' ball.'[43] For his part, Mr. Pooter preferred to remain ignorant of his son's use of slang, and took the comment as insult enough without needing to know the exact nature of the slur. In his diary, Pooter bewailed Lupin's incorrigible use of popular culture references and abhorrence of 'respectable behaviour,' "Where he gets these expressions from I don't know; he certainly doesn't learn them at home."[44]

The two Pooter men also have different opinions regarding consumption. Throughout the novella, Mr. Pooter carefully documented his consumption of cheap and imitation objects in his quest for respectability. Much to his chagrin his son had developed elaborate and ornate spending habits reflective of his own brand of masculinity. Their differing views on consumerism escalated domestic tensions and became another avenue for Lupin to dissociate himself from suburbia. When Lupin rented a pony-trap, he and his father exchanged barbs over its necessity to Lupin's lifestyle. Pooter inquired if his son was "justified in this outrageous extravagance?" Lupin flippantly retorted, "one must get to the city somehow." Unwilling to have his paternal authority usurped, Mr. Pooter pressed the issue but Lupin trumped his father with: "Look here, Gov., excuse me saying

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[42] Ibid., 143.
[43] A bounder was "a vulgar well-dressed man, an unwelcome pretender to Society, a vulgarly irrepressible person - generally a man – within Society. C. 1885." see *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8th edition ed. Paul Beale, s.v. "Bounder."
[44] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 149.

so, but you're a bit out of date. It does not pay nowadays, fiddling about the small things. I don't mean anything personal, Gov'nor."[45]

By the end of Mr. Pooter's diary Lupin had secured a well paying job and decided to move out of the suburbs and into the city. It was Lupin's opinion that "one never loses by a good address," and his parent's residence at "Brickfield Terrace is a bit 'off.'"[46] Lupin emphatically stated that, unlike his father, he would not "rot away ... in the suburbs." Here again the popular cultural jargon employed by Lupin was used to ridicule Pooter, who wrote, "whether he means it is 'far off' I don't know. I have long since given up trying to understand his curious expressions."[47]

Grossmith pitted father against son over the debate on the respectability and social status of a clerk. Pooter deemed his employment with Mr. Perkupp[48] a privilege and the life of a clerk respectable. Lupin, conversely, believed that "there's not a clerk who is a gentleman" and his own boss was "a cad."[49] Lupin's expressed hostility towards those of his profession and his willingness to include his father in these resentments provided another layer to the domestic disharmony at the Pooter residence and intensified the inability of the father to act as a respectable middle-class patriarch.

When Lupin announced his resignation from the bank, Pooter expressed his revulsion at his son's irresponsible behaviour, "How dare you, sir? How dare you take such a serious step with out consulting me? Don't answer me, sir! - you will sit down immediately, and write a note at my dictation, withdrawing your resignation and amply apologizing for your thoughtlessness." Once more, Pooter's attempt to act as head of the

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[45] Ibid., 125.
[46] Off meaning "out of date, no longer fashionable." (ca. 1892) see *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8th edition ed. Paul Beale, s.v. "off."
[47] Grossmith, *The Diary,* 191.
[48] Perk up is to carry oneself smartly, jauntily. See *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8th edition ed. Paul Beale, s.v. "Perk up."

family and exert authority over his son is thwarted by Lupin's contempt for his parent's lifestyle. "It's no use," he announced to his father. "If you want the good old truth, I've got the chuck!"[50]

With his unemployed son again under his roof, Pooter attempted to use his connections to find Lupin further employment. The principal, Mr. Perkupp agreed to assist Pooter with his prodigal son, but this act only provided Lupin with further opportunities to expose his father as an imitator of Victorian fatherhood and mock Pooter's feigned respectability. When Lupin advised the firm's most prominent client to "shop elsewhere" he was immediately dismissed. Pooter's humiliation at the hands of his son was nearly complete:

> A terrible misfortune has happened. Lupin is discharged from Mr. Perkupp's office, and I scarce know how I am writing my diary … Our most valued customer, Mr. Crowbillon,[51] went to the office in a rage, and withdrew his custom. My boy Lupin not only had the assurance to receive him, but recommended him the firm of Glyterson, Sons and Co. Limited. In my own humble judgement, and though I have to say it against my own son, this seems an act of treachery. [52]

If such an act was not mortifying enough for Mr. Pooter, he was humbled further when requested by Mr. Perkupp to write an apology to Mr. Crowbillion on behalf of his son. Pooter's emasculation through Lupin's acts of disrespect was confirmed with Mr. Crowbillion's written response, "I totally disagree with you. Your son, in the course of five minutes' conversation, displayed more intelligence than your firm has done during the last five years." A separate letter also from Crowbillion arrived simultaneously for Lupin

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[49] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 56.
[50] Ibid., 56.
[51] A "crow" was a professional gambler. *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8th edition ed. Paul Beale, s.v. "Crow."
[52] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 174.

with £25 "as a commission for the recommendation of Mr. Crowbillion."[53] Lupin could not fathom his father's distress at his actions. "I have done no injury," Lupin retorted, "Crowbillon is simply tired of a stagnant stick-in-the-mud firm, and made the change on his own account. I simply recommended the new firm as a matter of biz – good old biz!"[54] The implied insult to his father delivered in both actions and comments is unmistakable.

After being fired by Mr. Perkupp, a man who was unequalled in the mind of Mr. Pooter, Lupin found employment with another firm where the boss was "a jolly, good, all-round sort of fellow, and a very different stamp from that inflated fool of a Perkupp." The emasculation of Mr. Pooter at the hands of his son was completed when Pooter learned that "Glyterson and Sons had absolutely engaged Lupin at a salary of £200 a year, with other advantages." So shocked, Pooter had to read "the letter through three times and thought it must have been for me. But there it was - Lupin Pooter – plain enough. I was silent."[55]

The antagonism between Lupin and Pooter throughout the narrative is representative of an increasing tension in late Victorian culture between domesticity and patriarchy. As John Tosh has demonstrated in his work on middle-class masculinity, by the late Victorian era "the merits of living in domesticity were no longer so clear to this generation of middle-class men, and … increasing numbers either postponed marriage or else carved out a larger sphere for all-male society within marriage."[56] Importantly, middle class men who had grown up during the "climax" of domesticity during the mid-nineteenth-century "were troubled not only by the distortion of their parent's natures, but by the threatened distortion of their own masculine identity."[57]

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[53] Ibid., 176
[54] Ibid., 175.
[55] Ibid., 176
[56] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: masculinity and the middle-class home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999), 146.
[57] Ibid., 184.

In his work on domesticity, Tosh argued effectively that between 1830 and 1870, Victorian literature urged middle-class men to be participants in the domestic sphere not only as figures of authority but also as involved fathers and devoted husbands.[58] Although the mid-Victorians emphatically created separate spheres demarcated as masculine and feminine, there was an assumption that middle-class men when not at work would be in the home enjoying the companionship of their wives and children. The tenuous bond between the domestic and the private, however, was never complete, and Tosh contended that there was a growing trend among middle-class men by the 1870s to again seek out and emphasize all male associations in the city, such as the club, or in the homo-social world of the Empire. From the work of John Gillis it is evident that by the late-nineteenth-century middle-class fathers were absent figures from the home, yet retained through their allusiveness paternal authority. According to Gillis, the all male associations of the city provided men with surrogate families felt to be better suited to ideal manliness, but marriage, children and the existence of a home were necessary accoutrements for adult manliness. By the late-nineteenth-century, the cult of domesticity had nearly removed men as central figures within the home, but it is important to emphasize that patriarchal authority remained essential to Victorian manhood.[59]

James Hammerton has demonstrated that lower-middle-class men, conversely, retained an enthusiasm for domesticity that was inconsistent with the middle-class redefinition of masculinity.[60] Although British society would return in the twentieth century to the idea that masculinity was consistent with domesticity, this nervousness over

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[58] Ibid., 6.
[59] See John Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: myth, ritual, and the quest for family values* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 179-200; and *For Better, For Worse: British marriages 1600 to the present* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 248-256.
[60] Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership?," 291-321.

the marriage of domesticity with masculinity that underscored late Victorian discussions about fatherhood and marriage, was pivotal in the cultural narratives that sought to humiliate the clerk.

Lupin's rebellion and Pooter's inability to assuage his son's behaviour brings to the forefront of Grossmith's narrative the decreased authority of the father figure in the home. Tosh has demonstrated that between 1870 and 1900 men's authority over families was being undermined in public ways, first, through a legal system that was increasingly recognizing the rights of mothers and wives in marital disputes, and second, through the elevation of childhood. The Married Woman's Property Act, the rights of mothers to be guardians of their children, the quest for enfranchisements, and demands for woman's education, all embodied in the caricature of the New Woman, encroached upon the public masculine terrain. Independently, the romantic image of children featured more prominently in the advice literature on child rearing elevated and defined childhood as something almost sacred.[61] As a result, Tosh asserts, "the role and capacities of fathers were widely disparaged, and children of both sexes were less inclined to accept paternal authority."[62] Lupin's disregard for his father's advice and morals and his deliberate attempt to usurp Pooter's authority establishes youthful rebellion and the flight from domesticity central in Grossmith's critic of late Victorian society.

Pooter-as-stereotype attested to the incompatibility of manliness and domesticity and exemplifies the fate of the overly domesticated man: he would be unmanly at home and, as argued below, he would also be ineffectual at navigating the masculine world of work and public life. Moreover, Pooter's attempt to approximate middle-class

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[61] Tosh, 145-169.
[62] Tosh, 145.

respectability through his role as a father and his subsequent failure demonstrated that he was not only an imitator of class gentility but also an imitator of perceived gender norms. Further, that Lupin was the leading protagonist in Pooter's quest for authenticity emphasizes the symbiotic relationship of patriarchal authority and Victorian manliness: Pooter's failure to be one is both cause and effect at his inability to be the other.

Lupin-as-music-hall-gent highlights the very real anxiety of the new urban leisure for the middle classes. Peter Bailey has argued that for the middle class, the new commercialized leisure of the late Victorian era "represented a new and relatively unstructured area in the life-space where social distinctions were particularly vulnerable."[63] More problematic was that this "new mobility and independence of the urban crowd left the normal bourgeois defences of residential segregation and presumptions of plebeian deference badly dented."[64] As a fictional character, Lupin provided the critical distance between middle-class readers and the ambiguous social world associated with the new leisure. Importantly, Lupin reassured the audience of Grossmith's novella that the lower-middle-class-pretentious-fraudulent-clerk would easily be identified even in the anonymity of the urban crowd. While Lupin may have moved freely in and out of popular cultural venues and other urban social spaces, he was clearly counterfeit, ludicrous, and identifiable as an imitator. It is evident that Lupin had particular notions about respectability that were directly linked to economic success (as too his father.) Lupin, however, was eager to spend his money on new fashionable clothing, cigars, music hall entertainment, an apartment with a trendy address, and a pony-trap all in the display of his independence, success, and manhood. In this deviation on lower-middle-class masculinity, Lupin was as

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[63] Peter Bailey, "The Victorian Middle Class and the Problem of Leisure," in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 17.
[64] Bailey, "The Victorian Middle Class and the Problem of Leisure," 18.

dependent on imitation and consumption as his father for Lupin was nothing more than an imitator of the "swell," an upper class figure known for ornate dress and manners, who indulged in drinking and womanizing. Because of his social background a swell could afford to ignore work in favour of the fast life; a luxury, of course, unattainable to the music hall gent.[65]

The construction of a music-hall gent persona by young clerks, Bailey has argued, was "a wholly counterfeit exercise ... that was a poor disguise for suspect status, sexually as well as socially, for they were impugned as effeminate as well as unmanly."[66] The appeal of Lupin as a comic character, therefore, was his embodiment as the bogus young clerk who over compensated in dress, style, and manners for his inherent sexual and class inferiority. In the time span of a few months, Lupin was engaged to be married to two different women; the first woman married one of his acquaintances, the owner of a small retail business. The reader can only wonder how long his second engagement will last. Pooter commented on several occasions that both women were much older than Lupin and quite unattractive.

Lupin's dubious class status was everywhere marked by his imitation of the swell and the music hall gent. His whimsical and directionless personality and his passion for the next popular craze[67] reduced him to a mere imitation of a wealthy-upper-class-bad-boy

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[65] Bailey, "Champagne Charlie and the Music Hall swell song, " in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1998), 101.

[66] Bailey, "White Collar, Gray lives?," 281. See also Bailey "Champaign Charlie and the Music Hall swell song," in *Popular Culture and the Victorian City* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1999), 101-127.

[67] On one occasion, Lupin tries to tempt his father into investing in Chalk Pits. "'Do you know anything about *chalk pits,* Gov.? I said: 'No my boy, not that I'm aware of.' Lupin said: 'Well, I give you the tip; chalk pits are as safe as Consoles, and pay six per cent. At par.' I said a rather neat thing, viz., 'They may be six per cent. At par, but your pa has no money to invest.' Carrie and I both roared with laughter, Lupin did not take the slightest notice of the joke, although I purposely repeated it for him." Grossmith, *The Diary,* 124. Later in *The Diary*, Pooter invests in another scheme of Lupin's and looses £20, almost all of Pooter's disposable income for the year.

and he emerged from the novella as an equally ridiculous cultural stereotype. Although Lupin's quest for "peacock masculine" demonstrates his shared assessment with his father that objects and icons were central to manliness, Lupin's type of masculinity did not inhibit his economic or social success (at least among those of a similar disposition). Humour kept Lupin's achievement in check and the reader is continually reminded that Lupin was ludicrous in his lack of authentic selfhood. Nothing about Lupin was genuine: his use of slang, his eagerness to spout-off new fangled economic and social ideas provided by his acquaintances, his capricious nature, and his imitation of the swell diminished this character to an imitation of other people's ideas and constructions. Lupin and lower-middle-class masculinity remain unredeemable.

IV

Not only did Mr. Pooter illustrate the failures of lower-middle-class fathers to cultivate genuine masculine authority at home, but Pooter was also exposed as a foolish clown when out in public. Through several mishaps, Mr. Pooter not only failed to display authentic respectability but he exposed himself as a poor imitation of real manliness. Two short narratives from *The Diary* will illustrate Mr. Pooter impotence as a public man.

When Mr. and Mrs. Pooter invited their good friends, the Jameses, to town for an evening of entertainment, Mr. Pooter arranged through a friend for free tickets to a cheap theatre. When the tickets were presented at the door they were refused, much to the mortification of Mr. Pooter. "While I was having some very unpleasant words with the [door]man, James, who had gone upstairs with the ladies, called out: Come on!" Pooter followed an attendant up to box seats that he discovered, to his "horror," had been purchased by his guest. The hilarity of the situation was more complex than Pooter's

embarrassment at the door: the clerk's connections to society are fraudulent - Mr. Merton, who insisted his name was good at any theatre and procured the tickets for the unsuspecting Pooter was evidently *not* a man of influence – and Pooter's cheapness at not purchasing the tickets reinforced his sham image.

The first event of Pooter's evening hinted of his artificiality to his companions and it did not take long for him to confirm their suspicions. As he "was leaning out of the box" his "tie – a little black bow which fastened on to the stud by means of a new patent – fell into the pit below. A clumsy man not noticing it, had his foot on it forever so long before he discovered it. He picked it up and eventually flung it under the next seat in disgust." Thus, the consumption and display of cheap and *faux* clothing conspired to further humiliate the antihero. In order "to hide the absence of the tie" he was forced to keep his chin down for the whole evening which only resulted in a sore neck.[68]

The second episode leading to public disgrace was the Lord Mayor's ball, an event that proved difficult to navigate for the self-important antihero. At first, he and Carrie were delighted with the invitation. "Carrie darling," Pooter told his wife, "I was a proud man when I led you down the aisle of the church on our wedding day; that pride will be equalled, if not surpassed, when I lead my dear, pretty wife up to the Lord and Lady Mayoress at the Mansion House."[69] But that pride was only momentary and circumstances again conspired to humiliate the credulous clerk.

One of the most devastating blows to Mr. Pooter's narcissism was the discovery that among the sea of nameless faces at the ball was his working-class neighbour the local ironmonger, Mr. Farmerson. Pooter could not fathom, and was horrified by the idea, that

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[68] Grossmith, *The Diary,* 24.
[69] Ibid., 31.

a man of the working-class should be present at a ball for "respectable society." Pooter wrote, "I simply looked at him, and said coolly, 'I never expected to see you here.'" Farmerson "with a loud, coarse laugh" retorted, "I like that – if you, why not me?" Unable to formulate any means to maintain his class distinction, Pooter only responded with, "Certainly."

A terrible dancing accident was the next mishap in the long line of humiliations that befell Mr. and Mrs. Pooter while out in Society at the ball. Mr. Pooter decided to sport his new pair of boots which he "foolishly … had omitted to take Carrie's advice, namely to scratch the soles of them with the points of the scissors or to put a little wet on them." He and Carrie began to dance when "like lightning," Mr. Pooter's left foot slipped and, as he penned in his diary, "I came down, the side of my head striking the floor with such violence that for a second or two I did not know what had happened. I need hardly say that Carrie fell with me with equal violence, breaking the comb in her hair and grazing her elbow. There was a roar of laughter."[70]

Although embarrassed and humiliated, Mr. Pooter was anxious to attain all the bars of respectability that, in his mind, accompanied an invitation to the Lord Mayor's ball. But in opening the local paper, the *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News*, he found that his name had been omitted from the long list of reported guests. He was "more than vexed, because [they] had ordered a dozen copies to send to [their] friends." He took it upon himself to write "to the *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News,* pointing out their omission."[71] Pooter anxiously awaited the next publication of the *Blackfriars* but, much to his dismay, the insult had only become greater. The paper had printed:

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[70] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 36-37.
[71] Ibid., 41.

> a short list of several names they had omitted; but the stupid people had mentioned our names as 'Mr. and Mrs. C. Porter." Most annoying! Wrote again and I took particular care to write our name in capital letters, POOTER, so that there should be no possible mistake this time.[72]

Pooter's eagerness for public recognition of his "respectability" led him into another public blunder. "Absolutely disgusted on opening the *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News* of to-day, to find the following paragraph, "We have received two letters from Mr. and Mrs. Charles Pewter, requesting us to announce the important fact that they were at the Mansion Ball." Indignant, Pooter "tore up the paper and threw it in the waste-paper basket" and he insisted that his "time is far too valuable to bother about such trifles."[73] Later, Pooter confides to his diary, "I am satisfied a life of going out and Society is not a life for me."[74]

At the office, Mr. Pooter proved himself equally impotent in his attempts to extend power over his fellow clerks. Pooter assumed authority over other clerks trying to make the most of his seniority. When one of the new clerks, a Mr. Pitt, consistently came late, Mr. Pooter informed him that he could be fired. "Pitt ... told me 'to keep my hair on!'" Pooter returned the comment with, "I demand from you some respect, sir." Pitt responded with, "All right, go on demanding."[75]

His working-class neighbours were equally annoyed with Mr. Pooter's pretensions and took particular care to remind him that he was less than he pretended to be. In a quarrel with Borset (the local butterman) over the quality of his produce, Pooter was informed that Borset "would be hanged if he would ever serve City clerks ay more – the game wasn't worth the candle." Indignant, Pooter remarked it was his belief that "it *was possible* for a city clerk to be a *gentleman.*" Borset curtly replied he "was very glad to

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[72] Ibid., 44.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 92.
[75] Ibid., 10.

hear it, and wanted to know whether [Pooter] had ever come across one, for *he hadn't.*"[76] With that slight delivered by this working-class character, Grossmith summarized the view of his upper-class readership that no clerk could be a gentleman.

Pooter's own actions in the public world removed him from the ranks of manliness and placed him in the realm of the ridiculous. His failed masculinity was underscored by his inability to claim his own name, effectively defend himself when confronted in a verbal dual, or stand straight. When other men challenge his claims to authority, Pooter can never rise to his own defence and, consequently, all of his opponents have the last word and the final say in each dispute. His humiliation at dancing was metaphoric for his inability to be dignified and stand erect while moving within the public realm. The *Blackfrairs Bi-weekly News* achieved Pooter's ultimate public emasculation by refusing to allow him to claim his own surname: he was Porter and Pewter but never Pooter.

V

Mr. Pooter's inability to be an authority figure within his home and his failure to negotiate public social space were just two markers of his fallacious masculine identity. That Mr. Pooter in his adult life relied intensely on the domestic sphere, that he retained a childish sense of humour, and that he remained unable to acquire property were further indications that Pooter's unsuccessful assertions of manly authority were directly linked to his inability to move into adulthood. Hosgood has argued that lower-middle-class men suffered from their "inability to fulfill, given their often dependent status, wider class assumptions concerning adulthood."[77] The lower-middle-class lack of political

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[76] Ibid., 3.
[77] Hosgood, "Mercantile Monasteries," 325.

consciousness, of property ownership, and at times, of sufficient wages whereby to support a family or even negotiate marriage, prevented many men within this social group from attaining the accoutrements of middle-class manliness. The pretension to be middle class and their abhorrence of manual work distanced lower-middle-class men from claiming an authentic working-class masculine identity.

An important demarcation of Victorian manhood and adulthood was the ability to obtain and hold property. On a clerk's budget, however, property ownership could only remain an aspiration and a lower-middle-class family would necessarily be content to afford the rent of their suburban house. The opening page of Mr. Pooter's diary recorded that he and Carrie had just recently moved to the suburbs, although the quality of the house is suspect when Mr. Pooter mentioned that one could hardly notice the trains that roared through their back yard.[78]

The Pooters's house takes on added meaning when Mr. Perkupp purchased the house and presented the deed to the "worthy" Charles for his loyal service to the company.[79] The scene pretends to offer the possibility of Pooter's patriarchal authority whilst simultaneously and unequivocally taking it away. While this act of paternalism indicated that Pooter had achieved some recognition of respectability in the eyes of his principal, it ultimately reinforced the assumption that Pooter was incapable of actually becoming the type of man he imitated. Being indebted to Mr. Perkupp would have been problematic enough for Pooter's sense of manly independence, but the gift of property was detrimental in that it denied the antihero even the possibility to attain respectable manliness through his own economic successes. G. L. Anderson has argued that one of the most

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[78] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 2.
[79] Ibid.,199.

consistent themes in late Victorian literature on respectability aimed at lower-middle-class readership was that of economic independence. It was understood that the achievement of social prestige, class mobility, and by extension adult manhood, relied unequivocally on an attainment of economic independence.[80] Although Pooter could now claim property ownership, the reality only demonstrated his approximation of respectability and further diminished any claim of authenticity. Moreover, his indebtedness to middle-class Perkupp reinforced the lower-class clerk's reliance on the generosity of his social superiors and solidified the class divide between Perkupp and Pooter.

James Hammerton has argued that, although an object of ridicule, Grossmith's character was redeemed for being "the devoted husband, enthusiastically domesticated."[81] Yet it is precisely for this image of the enthusiastic-domesticated-husband that Pooter is mocked, and Hammerton passes too quickly over these humorous images. As argued above, Pooter's thrill for the domestic world accentuated the understanding that his brand of masculinity was in fact unmanly.

The Victorian advice literature on the raising of boys incessantly puzzled over the question of how much domesticity was appropriate for a boy.[82] What is important to consider in this study of the comic clerk is Pooter's continued reliance on the domestic sphere and his failure to successfully navigate the public realm. As historian Elizabeth Foyster has argued, manliness was conferred upon a man in the public world by his peers and was dependent upon his ability to demonstrate authority, self-control, and economic success appropriate to his social rank.[83] Pooter's unabashed eagerness to be at home in the

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[80] G.L. Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 1977), 41-45.
[81] Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership, 299.
[82] Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: honour, sex and marriage* (London: Longman University Press, 1999).
[83] See for example John Tosh, *A Man's Place;* Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1870-1850* (London, 1987); E. Anthony Rotundo, *American*

company of his wife, to the exclusion of the all male world, coincided with other failures to demonstrate adulthood and manliness. One Diary entry reads:

> "After my work in the City, I like to be at home. What's the good of a home, if you are never in it? "Home, Sweet Home,' that's my motto. I am always in of an evening … There is always something to be done: a tin-tack here, a Venetian blind to put straight, a fan to nail up, or part of a carpet to nail down – all of which I can do with my pipe in my mouth;"[84]

Pooter's childish sense of humour was consistent with other images of boyishness he so readily displayed. Throughout *The Diary*, Pooter recorded his "jokes" and the response that his "humour" elicited from family and friends. Mr. Pooter's love of puns that were only occasionally greeted with laughter reminds the reader that Pooter cannot attain manhood because he would not relinquish boyish whims. That Pooter found it necessary to repeat the jokes his companions did not find funny (assuming that they simply did not understand the pun) moved his problematic sense of humour from pathetic to ludicrous.

While out in the garden, Pooter conjured a pun and immediately appealed to his wife to share in his fun. "I have just discovered" Pooter told Carrie, "we have got a lodging-house." She replied, " How, what do you mean?" Pooter continued, "Look at the *boarders.*" Carrie was less than amused and scolded her husband for wasting her time when she was so busy in the house; his wife's chastisement wounded the sensitive Pooter.[85] On another day, Pooter detailed in his diary that he needed to "get the scraper removed, or else I shall get into a *scrape.* I don't often make jokes."[86] Despite this modest

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Manhood: transformations in masculinity from the Revolution to the modern era (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

[84] Grossmith, *The Diary,* 1.

[85] Ibid., 11.

[86] Ibid., 3.

appraisal, Pooter is incessantly constructing puns, much to the chagrin of those who share his fictional world.

Never one to doubt himself, Pooter repeats his jokes for his unresponsive audience. Following an engagement party for his son Lupin, Pooter was a bit under the weather. "I think I ate too heartily of the 'side dishes,' as the waiter called them. I said to Carrie, 'I wish I had put those 'side dishes' aside.' I repeated this, but Carrie was busy."[87] Worse yet was when Pooter took his shirts to the tailor, "I'm '*fraid* they are *frayed*'" he punned. The tailor, "with out a smile," replied, 'They're bound to do that, sir.'" The failure of this joke reminded Pooter "some people seem to be quite destitute of a sense of humour."[88]

Once, Pooter recorded with glee "one of the best jokes" he ever told. In the company of his friends, Pooter joked, "A very extraordinary thing has just struck me.' 'Something funny, as usual,' said Cummings. 'Yes,' I replied, 'I think even you will say so this time. It's concerning you both; for doesn't it seem odd that Gowing's always *coming* and Cummings' always *going*?"[89] This time both he and Carrie delighted in the joke but his friends, the objects of the joke, were less than amused.

Not only did Pooter love puns, he and his companions had an affinity for rather silly, if not childish, parlour games. In his diary, Pooter recorded an evening of playing "Pin the tail on the donkey." Pooter confided, "My sides positively ached with laughter when I went to bed."[90]

In order to understand the importance behind Mr. Pooter's affinities for puns and childish games, it is helpful to consider the public discussion surrounding William

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[87] Ibid., 91.
[88] Ibid., 46.
[89] Ibid., 25.
[90] Ibid., 134.

Gladstone's lack of a sense of humour.[91] That Gladstone's inability to tell a joke or understand complex humour was widely discussed indicates the importance of humour in the public image of a Victorian man. Famous essayist George Russell commented about Gladstone's lack of humour and suggested that, for the Victorians, a tendency for puns implied an underdeveloped, even childish sense of humour:

> It has been commonly said that he had no sense of humour. "Gladstone's jokes are no laughing matter" was the great Lord Derby's just tribute. I should rather say that he had a sense of humour, but that is was scanty, incalculable, and inexplicable. He would take what was meant for a joke with the most alarming seriousness, and plunge into a strenuous argument about some obvious and intended absurdity. On the other hand, he would laugh consumedly at babyish riddles – 'the sort of thing' as one of his colleagues said, "that my boys gave up when they left a private school."[92]

The insult that Pooter lacked an age-appropriate sense of humour, combined with the entirety of his emasculation at home and in the city, underscores the synergy of patriarchy and manliness, and Pooter's failure to achieve either.

VI

Underlying the narrative of Grossmith's novella is the ambiguity between imitation and authenticity that increasingly plagued Victorian society. In an era of booming department stores, mass consumption, widely available machine made replicas of objects, and a respectability steeped in materialism and consumption of "things," the eyes of the Victorians were consistently challenged to identify the genuine and "real." Mr. Pooter and his companions debated the importance of authenticity following a "tribute performance"

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[91] Joseph M. Meisel, "The Importance of Being Serious: the unexplored connection between Gladstone and humour" in *History,* Vol. 84 No. 274 (April 1999), 278-300.
[92] George W.E. Russell, *Portraits of the Seventies,* (1916) as quoted in Joseph M. Meisel "The Importance of Being Serious: The Unexplored Connection between Gladstone and Humour" in *History,* Vol. 84 (April 1999), 280.

to the actor Henry Irving by one of Lupin's artist friends. Mr. Pooter recorded the following conversation:

> ... we had a rather heated discussion, which was commenced by Cummings saying that it appeared to him that Mr. Burwin-Fosselton was not only *like* Mr. Irving, but was in his judgement every way as *good* or even *better*. I ventured to remark that after all it was but an imitation of an original. Cummings said surely some imitations were better than the originals. I made what I considered a very clever remark: "Without an original there can be no imitation." Mr. Burwin-Fosselton said quite impertinently: "Don't discuss me in my presence, if you please; and, Mr. Pooter, I should advise you to talk about what you understand."[93]

Emblematic of this fascination with fraud and authenticity, underlined with angst to detect the fraud from the authentic, is the séances held in the Pooters' parlour.[94] Judith Walkowitz argued that séances provided "spectacularly entertainment directed at all the senses."[95] Participants in the séance where popularly caricaturized as "crazy women and feminized men engaged in superstitious, popular, and fraudulent practices."[96] Thus, that Mr. Pooter was a participant of the séances only served to encourage Pooter's unmanliness. His ponderings and wavering about the authenticity of the séance, moreover, reinforced his ridiculous persona.

Pooter reluctantly complied with Carrie's request to sit at the table for the séance, but as the evening progressed he became intrigued by the "curious things" that took place: the table that kept tilting towards him and the possibility that an aunt was speaking through the medium. He remained sceptical about spiritualism, however, but agreed to participate in further sittings. The next day, the Pooters held "another séance, which, in some

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[93] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 102.
[94] James Cook argues that the middle class "even worried about deception in the spirit world, mounting public investigations to differentiate between authentic mediums and a distressingly large assortment of charlatans" in *The Arts of Deception: playing with Fraud in the age of Barnum* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2001), 26.
[95] Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delights* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991), 176.
[96] Ibid., 172.

respects, was very remarkable, although the first part of it was a little doubtful."[97] Pooter was certain that his friend, Mr. Gowing was manipulating the table to spell out "spoof,"[98] and although Pooter was unaware of the meaning, he was certain that *this* reading was fraudulent. The rest of the séance was "wonderful" and the Pooters were delighted to learn that Lupin would eventually be wealthy. They were later unnerved when the spirit insisted on warning the participants about Lupin's fiancé.[99] The message from the medium remained ambiguous and both Carrie and Pooter were frightened by the spirit's lack of clarity. For Pooter, the violent shakings and table movements that accompanied the readings attested to the legitimacy of the medium.

To assess the authenticity of the spirit, Pooter and his friends devised a "test" where the spirit was asked to answer a "secret" question written on a sealed piece of paper. Pooter was disenchanted with his new pastime when the "spirit" could not answer the "secret" question. "I cannot describe the agitation with which Carrie broke the seal, or the disappointment we felt on reading the question, to which the answer was so inappropriate." Mr Pooter was "quite decided" that Spiritualism was nothing more than a fraud: "if there is anything in it – which I doubt – it is nothing of any good, and I won't have it again. That is enough."[100]

But was an imitation as good as or even better than the original? Miles Orvell has suggested that the juxtaposition between the real and the artifice was central to the Victorian social space. The Victorians purposefully confused "the realms of artifice and nature as part of an overall aesthetic in which the imitation became a central category, not

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[97] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 184.
[98] To hoax, to humbug. *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8th edition ed. Paul Beale, s.v. "Spoof."
[99] Grossmith *The Diary*, 186.
[100] Ibid., 188.

merely endured, but exulted in."[101] Mr. Pooter purchased " a pair of stags' heads made of plaster-of Paris and coloured brown," and delighted that "They will look just the thing" in the little hall "and give it style." After all, "the heads [were] excellent imitations."[102] Orvell demonstrated that the Victorian household was of central importance in the playing of fraud and artifice often combining the "real" with the "imitative." Middle-class Victorian households, for example, often combined paper flowers with real and played marble or wax fruit against the genuine object.[103]

Objects were an essential component in Grossmith's exploration of respectability, imitation and authenticity. The Pooters anticipated that through the buying and proper display of "things" they would offset themselves from their working-class neighbours. The role of "things" in lower-middle-class "respectability" was not lost on the local butcher who, in a fit of anger at Mr. Pooter, yelled, "Pah! Go along. Ugh! I could buy up 'things' like you by the dozen.!"[104] The slur carried the added insult that Pooter was the artificial object easily manufactured and widely replicated elsewhere by other social pretenders.

It is with great pride and with careful precision that Pooter recorded particular items in his home. Pooter's "new cottage piano, (on the three years' system), manufactured by W. Bilkson (in small letters) from Collard and Collard (in large letters)" features prominently in Pooter's imitation of middle-class households.[105] When Pooter learned that his salary was to be increased, he and Carrie rejoiced because they would be

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[101] Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: imitation and authenticity in American culture, 1880- 1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 55.
[102] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 67.
[103] Orvell, 55.
[104] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 10.
[105] Ibid., 1.

able to purchase more "things."[106] And, if the Pooters were unable to afford the "real thing" on their meagre (yet improved) income, then an imitation would suffice.

Similar to the people in his life, Mr. Pooter cannot manage to exercise authority over his objects. The aforementioned incident with the bow tie at the theatre is just one of the many instances when Mr. Pooter's objects and respectability fail. When Gowing strongly recommended a "new patent stylographic pen" to Mr. Pooter, he rushed out to purchase a similar make. But, he noted, the pen

> has caused me constant annoyance and irritability of temper. The ink oozes out of the top, making a terrible mess on my hands and once at the office when I was knocking the palm of my hand on the desk to jerk the ink down, Mr. Perkupp, who had just entered, called out: "Stop that knocking! I suppose it's you, Mr. Pitt?" That young monkey, Pitt, took malicious glee in responding quite loudly: "No, sir; I beg your pardon, it is Mr. Pooter with his Pen; it has been going on all morning.[107]

Grossmith's exploration of the relationship between class, consumption, and respectability continued in a scene where Mr. Pooter decided to "improve" his home by applying red paint to various objects.

> I bought two tins of red [enamel paint] on the way home. I ... went upstairs into the servant's bedroom and painted her washstand, towel-horse, and chest of drawers. To my mind it was an extraordinary improvement, but as an example of the ignorance of the lower classes in the matter of taste, our servant, Sarah, on seeing them, evinced no sign of pleasure, but merely said 'she thought they looked very well as they was before.[108]

Satisfied thus far with his handy work, Mr. Pooter continued through the rest of the house generously applying red paint. "Bought some more red enamel paint (red, to my mind,

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[106] Ibid., 126.
[107] Ibid., 147.
[108] Ibid., 24.

being the best colour),"[109] he wrote, "and painted the coal-shuttle, and the backs of our Shakespeare, the binding of which had almost worn out. Painted the bath red, and was delighted with the result."[110]

Yet, despite Mr. Pooter's enthusiasm for purchasing things and his longing for respectability, the reality of his economic situation limited his ability to go into Society. The irony of Mr. Pooter's social failures, his lack of real social connections, and his poverty, however, diminished the authenticity in his statement that he chose to stay at home. To a friend Mr. Pooter stated, "No, candidly, Mr. Merton, we don't go into Society, because we do not care for it; and what with the expense of cabs here and cabs there, and white gloves and white ties, etc., it doesn't seem worth the money."[111] Other financial costs of society and respectability were noted by Mrs. Pooter who remarked on the price of Christmas cards and "that the great disadvantage of going out in Society and increasing the number of ... friends was, that [the Pooters] would have to send out nearly two dozen cards this year."[112]

It is through their attempts to purchase "things" that the fictional and real clerks challenged middle-class demarcations. Anne McClintock has suggested that the use of "things" to imitate another class was a type of "class transvestism" with the intent to deceive or "pass" as a member of another social class.[113] McClintock's work on Hannah Cullwick and Arthur Munby explores the idea of class transvestism; importantly Cullwick,

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[109] It is possible that red here is referring to suburbs and the banality of suburban life. Many of the houses in the clerk suburbs were made from cheap red brick and people often commented on the redundancy and resulting banality of having everything painted red. See S. Martin Gaskell, "House and the Lower Middle Class" in *The Lower Middle class in Britain,* 169.
[110] Grossmith, *The Diary*, 24.
[111] Ibid., 21.
[112] Ibid.,, 111.
[113] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: race, gender and sexuality in the Colonial contest* (New York: Rutledge, 1995), 173-176.

unlike Pooter, was successful at crossing the threshold of class through the acquisition and display of "things." Cullwick could be a scullery maid in the day and a middle-class woman "dainty in black silk and drawingroom cap" in the evening. Munby took pride in Cullwick's ability to be "a servant during the day and a lady in the evening ..." and that she had the talent to "fulfill either part so well, that for some time she seems incapable of the other."[114] It was through her careful adoption of middle-class dress that allowed Cullwick to cross the boundaries of class and live in the middle-class world of Munby.

The story of Hannah Cullwick, while obviously not representative of the norm, serves to emphasize the anxiety underlining Victorian consumerism and the democratization of "things" via the machine. The machine made available, on display and ready for purchase (for middle-class consumers), objects through which social status could be displayed. The consumer objects coveted by middle-class consumers, however, were often imitation of ornaments sought by the upper classes. The proliferation of these imitation objects in both variety and style, Miles Orvell has argued, provided "the middle class a new vocabulary of expression based on the language of the upper classes. Thus *the imitation* became the foundation of middle-class culture."[115]

Every level of society participated in the game of keeping up appearances in an attempt to offset themselves from those below them on the social ladder. Particular items were imbued with cultural and social meanings and an object took on far more importance than its actual essence. "The result" Orvell argued, "was a factitious world in which the sham thing was proudly promoted by the manufacture, and easily accepted by the consumer, as a valid substitute for authenticity."[116] But the practice of the lower middle

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[114] Ibid., 145.
[115] Orvell, 50.
[116] Ibid., 49.

class to imitate the outward image of respectability was an unwelcoming prospect to the middle class and, when undertaken in the anonymity of the urban social space, undermined the belief that authenticity existed as a preconceived and detectable essence within society.

Other cultural narratives from the late Victorian era underscored the problem of authenticity for the middle class and their angst over imitation. If one could decode the web of meanings surrounding respectability and consumerism, then respectability might be forged. Sensational news stories circulated during the late Victorian period of how respectable woman were mistaken as prostitutes while shopping in the West end.[117] The problem, of course, was not respectable women acting like prostitutes but that woman of ill repute could afford imitative clothing and objects and *appear* as respectable ladies, thus obscuring the line between the artifice and the authentic. In the West End, the *appearance* of holding a respectable social status served almost as well as the real thing. The horrifying prospect that not only could prostitutes approximate respectability through dress but that ladies of the middle class could be misidentified and treated as though they had *fallen from* respectability through a failure to display status through objects, signified the Victorian dilemma surrounding imitation and the possibility of fraudulent respectability.

What is evident from *The Diary* is the angst felt by the middle class over replicated objects and the anonymity of the urban space. Combined, these anxieties offered the unrespectable the possibility to deceive and the ability to blur class distinction in a dangerous game of playing imitation off the authentic. James Cook has insisted that middle class cultures were everywhere concerned with distinguishing between authentic from fraudulent. The middle class, Cook argues, "maintains a well-deserved scholarly reputation for having been deeply concerned – even downright anxious – about questions

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[117] Walkowitz 50-52.

of fraud in almost every facet of its historical development."[118] In particular, the rise of mass consumerism and the anonymity of the urban milieu made identification of "authentic" respectability much more problematic. The middle class "fretted about how to distinguish the public behaviour of their central mythic hero (the self-made man) from the era's most notorious white-collar criminal (the confidence man.)[119] Orvell noted that the nineteenth-century as a culture of "imitation" was fascinated with "reproductions of all sorts – replicas of furniture, architecture, art works, and replicas of the real thing in any shape or from imaginable. It was a culture inspired by faith in the power of the machine to manufacture a credible simulacrum;"[120] and the department store was the vehicle through which individuals of all classes could accesses these imitations. Most problematically, consumption also provided an opportunity to cultivate an outer shell of respectability and challenged the popular Victorian assumption (best represented in the "science" of phrenology) that the outer appearance adequately reflected the inner self.

For the lower middle class, and certainly for the fictional Mr. Pooter, consumption was the vehicle to achieving social mobility and eventually middle-class respectability. Historians of the lower middle class have demonstrated that by the end of the nineteenth century, the lower middle class "claims to gentility were based increasingly on a theatre of behaviour modelled after the superficial world view of consumer culture rather than the moral code stressing traditional middle-class values.[121] The message of *The Diary*, however, was that no matter how much Mr. Pooter pretended and regardless of his ability

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[118] Cook, 26.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Orvell, xv.
[121] Hosgood, "Mrs. Pooter's Purchase, 148.

to purchase imitation objects, he would only ever be an imitation of the middle-class and a poor imitator of Victorian manliness.

The novella insists that Mr. Pooter and by extension all the lower middle class had nothing authentic to recommend themselves; they were simply imitators and emulators of the middle class. The ludicrous figure of Mr. Pooter reassured middle class readers that, although objects can be imitated, the fraud could always be detected. Middle class respectability could not be authentically duplicated or reproduced through "things." Simultaneously Mr. Pooter, as imitator, served to re-enforce the supremacy of middle class as the singular social rank with a propensity for respectability. The insistence that the lower middle class pretenders were *only* imitators of respectability inversely constructed the middle class as authentic. The reality that the middle-class brand of respectability was increasingly dependent on consumption and display was diffused because consumption was an authentic middle-class prerogative. At the end of Mr. Pooter's diary, the paradox between fraud and the real thing was not resolved: while respectability required the existence of imitations, respectability was also *more* than the sum of these objects.

Conclusion

Over the past several years, historians have asked important questions about the "crisis of masculinity" in Victorian Britain. Recent scholarly works have revealed multiple social and cultural influences that shaped men's gendered experiences including, but not limited to: "the flight from domesticity;" the status and legal claims of woman; the development of a consumer society; the recession of the Victorian economy; and the scientific codification of deviant masculinities. The literature does not, however, successfully explicate the causes of these trends nor has there yet been adequate consideration of how such

social/cultural/political/economical transformations converged to destabilize masculinities. Any conclusions regarding the impact of these changes are speculative at best. This study of the comic clerk reinforces the necessity for further investigation of Victorian masculinity, the lower middle class, and their intersection; as of now, there is not enough literature on any of these to provide conclusive arguments.

The humour in Grosssmith's novella warned that changes in Victorian society and culture could threaten middle class possession of "manliness." As such, humour served to undermine the masculine identity of the lower middle class by suggesting that clerks were not really men. Patriarchal authority, assumed to be intrinsic to masculine identity, was not readily attainable to all men across all classes, further suggesting that patriarchy was (and is) a delicate power system. Both Pooter and Lupin provided readers with a long list of characteristics and behaviours that, when subscribed to, placed Victorian men in the realm of the ludicrous and prevented them from acting as authority figures in both the private and public spheres. *The Diary* does not suggest *what* characteristics and behaviours guaranteed manliness, but it does make evident that all men should not be able to exercise manly authority.

Throughout the novella, Mr. Pooter was oblivious to his own class and gender failings. Consequently the antihero was reduced to a comic figure worthy of mockery and scorn. Pooter knew what was expected of adult men in his society: he was aware that as a senior clerk it was his responsibility to keep younger men in check; he tried to dance with his wife; he realized his name was supposed to be in the paper; and he demonstrated his concern for his son's wayward behaviour. Yet, despite all of his efforts, Pooter lacked that "*something*" which would ensure public successful and respectable at home. Grossmith's narrative (re)presented both the Victorian suburb and the City as entirely problematic

spaces where people, circumstances, and objects conspired against lower-class men to deny their claims to authority. Pooter is continuously exposed to the reader as an imitator of manliness and at no point does Grossmith's tale depict an alternative reality where clerks are able to achieve authenticity. In order to identify Pooter as a sham the reader must *know* and *identify* the authentic. By never articulating what the authentic actually was, Grossmith implied that "real" Victorian manliness was obvious and available to those who were in "the know" and unattainable to those who were not. The mocking of the clerk demonstrated the connection between middle-class respectability and ideal manliness where each pre-existed as an identifiable essence that was more than the sum of its parts. Neither could be replicated through imitation. Humour reassured middle-class readers that their worldview was the authentic, the real, and therefore the desired model of manliness. By situating Pooter's failed masculinity as the object of humour, Grossmith established that imitation was ludicrous at the expense of the London clerk.

CHAPTER THREE

"SHOOTING THE GENTLE CAT": HUMOUR AND MALE SEXUALITY IN *ALLY SLOPER'S HALF HOLIDAY*

The infamous Victorian comic character Ally Sloper, with his phallic nose and knobbly knees, spent the 1880s and 1890s bashing his way through cartoon England - womanizing, thieving, sponging off friends and celebrities, and causing general mayhem wherever he went. He was the star anti-hero of the mass circulating comic paper *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday (ASHH)* that was published continually from May of 1884 to December 1916. As a prevalent comic figure of late Victorian popular culture, Sloper and his comic paper have been hailed as "one of the most popular inventions of Victorian humour."[1] On sale each week at newsstands in London and the surrounding area, Ally Sloper captured the imagination and spoke to a sense of humour that responded to many of the stresses and anxieties of modern urban life. The longevity and wide popularity of *ASHH* speaks to the success of the staff in capturing space in the popular imagination of a mass audience of Victorian Britons.[2]

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[1] *English Caricature 1620 to the Present* (London: Victorian and Albert Museum,) 22.

[2] "House of Commons debate" in *The London Times* August 11 1890. Mr. T. Healy made reference to Ally Sloper's Half Holiday as an example of common reading material familiar and understood by the masses. His use of Sloper as an example was greeted with laughter from other members of the house and suggests

Ally Sloper, Esq., "M.P," "The Eminent," "Friend of Man," and "Most Frequently kicked out man in Europe" was a commercial experiment in the burgeoning mass market of the late Victorian era. Sloper inspired the manufacture of consumer objects, such as "umbrellas, walking sticks, pipes, toys, sweets, kites, fireworks, … and watches."[3] What is also striking about this loutish character was his ability to transcend mediums, moving from the pages of his comic paper onto the music hall stage. As part of the appeal and marketing strategy of this infamous cartoon figure, the staff of *ASHH* blurred the distinction between fiction/cartoon and reality. The paper reported on Sloper's activities as though they were actual events and often depicted the roguish figure interacting with an assortment of celebrities such as Barnum, Zola, Marry Lloyd, the Prince of Wales, and William Booth of the Salvation Army. Historian David Kunzle has noted that, like Pickwick or Sherlock Holmes, Sloper was believed to be a real person[4] and as such, he was even petitioned by trade organizations to speak at working men's clubs.[5] Organizations took out classified advertisements in the *London Times* and boasted of events where "The Eminent Friend of Man" would "actually" be in attendance. William Whitely, the famed department store proprietor, posted an advertisement for an exhibition of Sloper merchandise and, fans were assured, Sloper and his family were sure to make an appearance.[6]

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that by the 1890s, Sloper had achieved wide recognition as to be a fit subject for parliamentary humour. *The Times*, 12 August 1890, Politics and Parliament section, 4.

[3] David Kunzle, *The History of the Comic Strip: the nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 318.

[4] Ibid., 320.

[5] Peter Bailey, "Ally Sloper's Half Holiday: Comic Art in the 1880s," in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998),

[6] One such example is the advertisement run by in the London Times by the proprietors of the Royal Aquarium (music hall) told fans that it was expected that Ally Sloper "accompanied by the Sloper Family, will visit the Royal Aquarium, at half past 8." At other times, Music Halls would list Ally Sloper among the actors and actresses to be appearing and performing on any given night. Who in fact played Ally

Sloper began life in the 1870s as a figure in the comic paper, *Judy*, just one of the many papers owned by the engraving and publishing Dalziel brothers. *Judy* was edited by Charles Ross, and it was his wife Marry Duval (who also worked as a music hall actress) who probably first invented this comic character. In May of 1884 Dalziel awarded Sloper his own paper where, for the cost of a penny, fans could read about the recent (mis)adventures of their favoured comic anti-hero.[7] In this new inception of the Sloper character, it was W.G. Baxter, an American born cartoonist, who gave Ally Sloper his shape and form most familiar to Sloper's Victorian fans. When Baxter died in 1888, his successor, W.F. Thomas, maintained his predecessor's creation with only slight modifications.[8]

Despite the ubiquity of Sloper's image in late Victorian popular culture, few historians have attempted to unpack the multiple layers of meaning in this comic paper. Many historians reference *Ally Sloper* as a significant cultural artefact of late Victorian popular culture and most cite Peter Bailey's 1983 article on Ally Sloper and leisure.[9] Although Bailey left a number of questions open at the end of his article, surprisingly few

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Sloper is not known from these advertisements, but these assurances by Music hall proprietors that it was the man himself further blurs the distinction between fiction and reality. *The Times,* 27 October 1888, Classified Ads, 1.

[7] The format of *ASHH* featured one large cut as the title page, and these larger cartoons are privileged in this paper. It was the first image that greeted the reader/consumer when they picked up a copy of the publication. These large cuts were much more complex cartoons than those in the pages that followed. Each publication was eight pages long, combining text and images. With very few exceptions, the large title-page cartoon *did not* introduce a particular theme for the paper, but followed Sloper through various misadventures. Furthermore, there was seldom any consistency between issues: the exceptions were such events as Sloper's arrest, where the observer learned of his arrest in one week and of his release the following. Sloper cartoons are fragmented within the issues and as a whole collection. The cartoons are tied together by various themes, explored in greater detail throughout the paper. The less complex, smaller cartoons and the larger cuts (re)present similar messages on sexuality, male power, class, and identity. The text and images seldom played off of each other, and therefore I have excluded the text from this analysis in order to understand what popular cultural messages were communicated to the observer via the visual artefact.

[8] Peter Bailey, "Ally Sloper's Half Holiday," 50-52.

historians have taken up his challenge to look more closely at this cultural artefact.[10] Such an important cultural artefact, icon, and character deserves further scrutiny if historians are to understand how Ally Sloper commanded the attention of a mass reading audience, inspired the creation of manufactured and mass marketed goods, and transcended medium boundaries. There has yet to be further discussion and analysis of the significance and meanings of this comic paper to Victorian culture since Bailey's article placed this rogue as a central figure in Victorian cultural historiography, an unfortunate neglect of a wonderfully complex cultural icon. Nearly every preoccupation and facet of Victorian urban life from the Salvation Army, seaside resorts, and the Queen, to ideas about sexuality and gender constructions, collided and converged as the comic characters navigated their way through cartoon Britain. A variety of political, racial, genders, commercial, theatrical themes can be identified in the paper, which provides a wonderful window into Victorian consumer and popular/mass culture. More specifically Bailey has little to say on the type and nature of humour in the comic paper – why is this funny and to which Victorians?[11]

The complexity of the artefact demands a focused and selective analysis and I have chosen for this chapter to explore the intersection of humour and the comic with

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[9] Peter Bailey quotes from David Kunzle, but in the second edition of *The History of The comic strip: The Nineteenth Century*, Kunzle cites Bailey at length. The obvious circular nature of the historiography of Sloper has limited further exploration into other interpretations of and hidden meanings in the comic paper.

[10] The lack of studies on ASHH could be due to the difficulty in obtaining copies of the magazine, not to mention the added challenge of reconstructing the history of production and reception of comic papers. There is also the difficulty of trying to deconstruct the complex cartoons with their obscure cultural references, many of which are lost to the historian through time and distance.

[11] Sloper was clearly an experiment in mass culture and it would be interesting to know the relationship between the highly vulgar images on paper and the content of the music hall papers. The lack of secondary material on comic papers of this type is troublesome given their privileged position in Victorian popular culture as primary reading material for the vast majority of working-class Britons. There is also the compelling problem of trying to understand why the cartoons are sanitised through out the 1890s and what the possible forces were that resulted in these transformations. Another question beyond the scope of this

Ally Sloper's manliness and sexuality. Although other characters were along for the ride (including numerous cartoons depicting the adventures of Sloper's friends,[12] family,[13] and other nameless figures) the cartoon was chiefly about Ally Sloper (purposefully "male") and his wild adventures in cartoon England.[14] In many ways the comic paper served as a character sketch of a quintessential Victorian unmanly "other," for if the dominant understanding of masculinity held that a certain behaviour, appetite, or action was outside the boundaries of ideal manliness, then Ally Sloper found time to indulge in any and all of these acts. This chapter explores how the artists of *ASHH* used humour and (male) sexuality to encourage the participation of readers and fans in a subversion of hegemonic constructions. Yet because of the comic nature of this cartoon the paper was equally adept at reinforcing other cultural assumptions where men were the actors, agents who dominated public and private spaces. The paper functioned both as a carnivalesque outlet where readers could jeer at respectability but also re-assert ideas about male supremacy in social power relationships.

From 1885 to 1895, the humour of the paper relied on images and subtext that hinted at sexual appetites and acts all recognizably subversive to Victorians familiar with dominate constructions about sex and sexuality.[15] Historians of late nineteenth-century

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chapter is simply why Sloper lost his power as a popular cultural figure in the Edwardian period and what made *ASHH* obsolete by the post-war period. See Bailey, "Ally Sloper's Half Holiday," 76.

[12] Sloper's friends change through out the period. There is Lord Bob (who is engaged to Toostie), Dook Snook, the Honourable Lord Billy, William Higgins, and Iky Moe.

[13] The Sloper family consisted of Sloper's oldest daughter, Toostie, who was connected to the Frivolity Music Hall; the much abused Mrs. Sloper, who incidentally looked remarkably like Queen Victoria; Sloper's eldest son Alexandry; the middle child (a toddler through out much of this period) Jubilee Sloper; and the two Sloper twins. At times, Sloper's niece Eveline accompanies the family and for a brief moment in engaged to Alexandry.

[14] Sloper's gender cannot be accidental and is worthy of further comment – the comic figure is male, and as such is able to move about the urban spaces of London with greater ease and less subversiveness than could a female comic figure.

[15] Many of the themes played with in the Sloper cartoons are similar to those circulating in the pornography of the period. As an example, see *The Pearl: Journal of Facetive and Voluptous Reading 1879-1880*

Britain, encouraged by Foucault's argument that repression produces discourse, have studied how the preoccupation with regulation, suppression, and control of sexuality produced cultural narratives that contradictorily demanded discussion about sex and sexuality. As John Tosh has argued, the 1870s and 1880s witnessed the legal encroachment upon traditionally assumed male "rights." The married woman's property act, changes to the divorce act, romantization of childhood, and the repeal of the Contagious Disease Act, all impinged upon the rights traditionally granted to men and eroded some of the assumptions of undisputed male power.[16] *ASHH* images of male supremacy circulated as a counter-narrative against the discourses of moral reformers, feminists, and religious organisations. The comic paper operated within a popular culture that was highly violent, sexual, and masculine, and the adventures of Ally Sloper reasserted the dominance of men within various power relationships.

W.T. Stead's sensational tale in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of the "Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon" placed male and childhood sexuality into public debate with new force and spectacle in 1885. In his sensational exposé, Stead suggested that men of middle- and upper-class status were purchasing young working-class virgin girls for the price of £5 for perverse sexual purposes. Stead, with the assistance of the Salvation Army, purchased a young girl to prove the ease of committing this moral outrage, but he himself stopped short of executing any sexually aggressive actions against the victim.[17] Stead,

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(reprint, New York: Ballantine Books, 1988, 14th printing). Incest, sodomy, sadomasochism, corruption of innocence, sexual encounters in public spaces, and orgiastic exposés are all consistent themes throughout *The Pearl* and the cartoons of *ASHH*. Although the intended audiences of the publications differ, the similarity of sexual misconducts suggests that a wide audience would have recognized these images as subversive.

[16] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: masculinity and the middle-class home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 145-169.

[17] This claim by Stead was challenged in the courts because a midwife who assured Stead that the girl was in fact a virgin submitted the young girl to physical examination. Because she was an unwilling

later jailed for his participation in the scheme, claimed that it was his intention to expose male sexual corruption and to demand that Parliament raise the age of consent for girls. Public outrage sparked by Stead's story demanded that the age of consent be raised, and parliament obliged by passing "The Criminal Law Amendment Act" that moved the age of consent for girls from 12 to 16.[18] This same act also legislated that "gross acts of indecency between men conducted in private or public" were also illegal. This was the first British legislation where same-sex acts were treated separate from other sexually deviant behaviour and the new act introduced specific laws for regulation and punishment. Previously, such activities would have been tried under general laws governing sodomy. Historians of sexuality have argued that the 1885 acts brought greater public attention to existing debates about same-sex relations and public opinion, combined with legal and medical tracts, dictated that these acts were particularly devious and therefore were in need of special legislation.[19]

Coincidentally, 1885 was also the first full year that *ASHH* was circulating in its new inception under the direction of Charles Ross and the illustrative pen of W.G. Baxter. While it is impossible to say whether or not these legal codifications directly impacted the content and drawings of *ASHH,* it certainly provided a context. The "Criminal Law Amendment Act" insisted that these "unnatural," "deviant" behaviours brought with them specific social and moral harm. Thus, no "respectable" or "normal" man should engage in these behaviours, now so clearly marked as reprehensible. The

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participant, the examination was considered by many to be a violation of this young girl. See Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delights* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 81-134.

[18] Ibid.

[19] See Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: medico-moral politics in England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1987); Louise Jackson, *Child Sexual abuse in England* (London: Routledge, 2000); and Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delights*.

public debate surrounding this legislation created new cultural meanings for Ally Sloper's playfulness with subversive sexual acts and behaviour. Importantly, the media sensation accompanying these social/legal changes would have made consumers and readers of *ASHH* acutely aware that the humorous (mis)adventures of their beloved comic figure were antithetical to recently (re)asserted ideals governing manly behaviour. This public debate, I would suggest, imbued these types of acts with new and powerful subtexts that made the playfulness of Ally Sloper socially potent for the period following the "Maiden tribute."

The humour and images of *ASHH* can be read as a counter cultural discourse that responded and grew out of these cultural narratives. Importantly, the humour of this comic paper subverted newly asserted hegemonic assumptions by positing alternative discourses grounded in early modern popular cultural traditions, adjusted and adapted to fit the Victorian milieu. In an age of moral panic where public discourses and institutional tracts demanded regulation and control, what could be more provocative than presenting sex and sexuality as a comic and hilarious subject to be treated with fun and amusement, and where confusions and manipulations of social boundaries were celebrated with laughter? Ally Sloper's character challenged and manipulated the strict dichotomies of male/female, innocent/corrupt, upper/middle/working class, and child/adult, essential divisions through which the dominant culture organized and structured space, normative behaviour, and knowledge. Sex for the *Ally Sloper* character was a "thing" to be played at; sexuality, gender, and class were not rigidly constructed identities but roles that one could easily adopt and disregard without any serious need of self-evaluation. Sex and sexuality in *ASHH* were powerful tools by which observers and

artists could ridicule dominant assumptions about hierarchy, power, sexuality, and identity and continue to articulate other popular meanings attached to sex-acts.

Determining audience for cultural artefacts is a difficult problem in studying cultural history. Who read the comic paper? What was the intended audience? What was the reaction and reception of the undefined audience? For historians of humour, the question of audience is even more difficult and compelling, for humour requires both intended construction and reception on the part of producers and audiences of humour. For this comic paper, as with many other sources of popular culture, concrete answers about audience, intent, and reception are nearly impossible to accurately pinpoint. David Kunzle, a historian of European comic papers, cites the lower middle class as the primary audience for this paper, but offers no evidence to support his claim.[20] Bailey has argued that, as part of Victorian mass culture, this comic paper commanded an audience that cut across class and gender boundaries. What evidence is available on audience suggests that Sloper was a favourite among lower-middle and working-class audiences. Bailey comprised his analysis of audience from the lists of "winners" of the paper's various competitions and found that the largest participants in the paper's schemes were "clerks, tradesmen, shop workers, and a considerable number of working class trades."[21] Bailey's findings also suggest that the paper was available in working men's clubs and in barbershops. While women too were listed among prize recipients,[22] the artistic style of the cartoons and the substance of the comic paper were clearly intended for a male audience. Men are the actors while woman's participation is limited to objects of male desire, observers of men's adventures, and sometimes as the unhappy tag-a-longs of

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[20] Kunzle, *The Nineteenth Century,* 318-20.
[21] Bailey, "Ally Sloper's Half Holiday," 54.

Ally's (mis)adventures. Some tradesmen, Bailey notes, complained that the pin-up style sketches of Sloper's daughter, Toostie (always seductively clad and in alluring posses) were distractions to working-class apprentices. The subtitle of the paper "For old boys, young boys and even girls" indicates the intended appeal across age and gender, with an undeniable emphasis on contributing to the masculine popular culture of Victorian lower classes.

Bailey has also suggested that *ASHH* was a favourite in "upper bohemia" and was read by some in the middle class. I would argue that participation by middle-class readers was unlikely or limited until the mid 1890s when the comic paper underwent a considerable sanitization. The highly vulgar and overtly sexual images under consideration in this chapter suggest that those interested in constructing and maintaining an image of "respectability" would have been unlikely to purchase this comic paper. It would reasonable to assume that middle-class readership during the early years of circulation would have been limited to school boys, upper bohemia, and the bachelor culture.

Despite the breadth and range of social background, there would have been a shared sense of humour and purpose for those who read the paper - with some allowances for class, regional, occupational, and gender differences too broad and diffuse to be considered at length here. The comic paper offered to its readers a voyeuristic participation in subculture and subtexts where sex, sexuality, and urban adventures were displayed in vivid, comic, fun, images. Unlike pornographic and other underground narratives of sexual exploration, this comic paper was readily available, having carved out a legitimate if still sub-cultural space. It was precisely its availability, vulgarity, and

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[22] Ibid.

subversive counter-narratives that gave the humour in early *ASHH* its appeal. Furthermore, although *ASHH* offered forms of subversion, these messages were minimized by humour that simultaneous encouraged reactionary narratives about male power and social dominance. The "funniness" of these images reinforced the abnormality and ridiculousness of untamed social behaviour and unabated sexuality.

Many of the cultural and social references and cues hidden within these cartoons decoded by Victorian readers are now lost to the historian through time and distance. There are clearly hidden transcripts that refer to topical issues and social concerns, but these transcripts often remain hidden and obscure.[23] What is interesting about these cartoons is how meanings and symbols operate on various levels. Many of these cartoons use symbols and tropes that would have had specific meanings in very obscure moments that demanded a highly developed awareness on the part of the reader. If the observer was "in the know" about the alternative meanings attached to symbols and words and manipulated by the artist, then his/her appreciation of the humour would have been more sophisticated than that of the outsider or less-informed audience member. Attempts by the historian to force a correlation between lived experience and the hidden transcripts contained in the most obscure humorous representations are speculative at best, yet it is precisely the seemingly impenetrable nature of humorous expressions in historical period that makes the historian's task of decoding these meanings so intriguing and fruitful. Although the specifics might never be made obvert, there remains the important task of unpacking and examining the converging, contradictory, and/or overt social meanings that *are* attainable and identifiable to the modern historian. While a complete

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[23] James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: hidden transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

deconstruction of these visual images would be difficult if not impossible, what we can read and extrapolate from these cartoons will necessarily expand our understanding of Victorian popular culture.

Every girl's crazy about a sharp dressed man[24]

Historians of early modern British popular culture have demonstrated that one of the most powerful vehicles for ridicule of elites available to 'the people' during periods of carnival was clothing. Carnival was a time where the crowd, becoming simultaneous performers and audiences in a world of inversion, would participate in ritualized cross-dressings to communicate role reversals. Keith Walden summarized carnival as a time when

> Carefully staged events such as processions with elaborate floats, athletic competitions, bonfires, and fireworks, were complemented by uninhibited, impromptu merrymaking, facilitated by widespread masking and costuming. Impersonations of animals, demons, clerics, notables of all kinds, and members of the opposite sex were customary, in part because they figured prominently in the production of mock rituals that seemed to be a standard feature of these occasions.[25]

The social inversions of carnival were largely communicated through performances and role-plays where costume and clothing had a significant role. Anne McClintock has argued, "what one can call sumptuary panic (boundary panic over clothing) erupts most intensely during periods of social turbulence. In the early modern period, sumptuary laws in Europe and Britain took shape around the upheavals in money and social status..."[26] Because of the significant cultural meanings assigned to clothes and

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[24] ZZ Top, "Sharp Dressed Man," *Eliminator*, 1983.
[25] Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: the industrial exhibition and the shaping of a late Victorian culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 292 –293.
[26] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: race, gender and sexuality in the Colonial conquest*

paraphernalia by early modern society when the world was right side up, clothing could thus be used to denote inversions in times of protest and social-play. Although carnival was a specific event of the early modern calendar, historians have identified carnivalesque inversions through out the year that also followed these ritualized patterns of inversion during festivals and/or as part of popular protests.

The artist(s) used carnival traditions of manipulating clothing in attacking Victorian power-culture. Costumes and clothing played an important function in Sloper's transgressions of Victorian social boundaries because Victorians also imbued clothing with cultural and social assumptions about wealth, status, age, respectability, and gender. The "sumptuary panic" of the Victorians reflected the middle class unease about increased consumerism and purchasing powers of the lower classes who could more readily imitate their social superiors. The mass marketing of consumer objects and the wide availability of cheap knock-offs of middle-class clothing and prized objects, blurred distinctions between the authentically respectable person and imitative fraud.[27] Furthermore, as Peter Bailey has also argued, men and women of the lower classes took great pleasure in mixing and mismatching clothing and objects to create their own style that mocked and imitated the attire of social superiors.[28] The manipulation of clothing to imitate, transcend, and mock the pretensions of hegemonic structures was an important trope in Sloper cartoons. In his study of *ASHH* Bailey has considered how Sloper played at fashion by combining the dress and attire of "high" and "low" as part of a cultivation

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(New York: Routledge, 1995), 174.

[27] See Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: imitation and authenticity in American culture, 1880- 1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

[28] Peter Bailey, "Champagne Charlie and the music-hall swell song," in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 101-127.

of a dandy-gent image. The inversion served to mirror the ease with which Sloper moved within the Victorian class hierarchy. But there is more to Sloper's use of costumes in his ridicule of the dominant constructions of gender, masculinity, and sexuality. As part of Sloper's ritualized attacks on society, this Victorian trickster adopted costume where he easily mixed the clothes and paraphernalia of high/low class, men/women, boy/man, man/little girl to attack power hierarchy and challenge dominate and popular assumptions about normalcy and social order.

Although Sloper adopted and discarded the clothing of children and women he re-emerges in other cartoons with his hyper-manliness still intact; Sloper is simply a role-player who assumes various articles of clothing if it will enable him to trick and scam his way to momentary gratification. His play with gender and age, either in private or public settings, provided another dimension to his ruffian-masculinity and expressions of otherness. Sloper refused to cultivate ideals of independence and maturity central to hegemonic constructions of ideal masculinities. By adopting the clothing of a dependant, Sloper is expressing a vulnerability and powerlessness that is profoundly antithetical to Victorian ideals of adult manliness. Of course, it is very clear through his actions that Sloper has never once professed any desire to be part of dominant or hegemonic models of manliness. Humour reinforced the absurdity of a grown man, head of his household and family, dressing as a child or as a woman. Furthermore, his adoption and play of gender and age are guises used to further his own personal desires, momentary aspirations, and short-term gains. His companions, dependence, and the anonymous observers of his adventures, seldom reprimand him for his manipulations and playful deceits; the reader is encouraged to be equally forgiving.

In cartoons where Sloper role-plays within the boundaries of manly ideals, he fails to ever approximate the image of the ideal man. He is much more convincing in this cartoon as a woman. "In a fix at Southend" [Figure 3.1][29] Sloper has transcended the boundaries of Victorian hegemonic manliness in several ways. First, Toostie informs the reader that Sloper has been "gamicking" in the "Foaming billows, like a kid of tender years." After behaving in a childish manner, Sloper mistakenly enters a bathing machine that is not his own. Although his mistake is comic enough, W.F Thomas pushes gender and age boundaries to the furthest end in his cartoon. Sloper's adoption of feminine dress, the reader is compelled to acknowledge, is absurd and ridiculous. Not only has Sloper put on the dress, hat, shoes, and stockings, he has opened the parasol and lowered the netting on the hat over his eyes, making his cross-dressing as complete as possible. He rejects the "improver" and knowingly states "H no dear, no, we never wear' em now!" Sloper exhibits his understanding of intimate female attire and offers his own opinions on feminine dress and fashion. The cartoon suggests that Sloper knows more about female fashions than the young woman who owns the items. Here, then, Sloper is more than simply adopting attire of the opposite gender; he is imitating, assuming, manipulating – or playing the role of a young women at sea.

In order to complete Sloper's transformation into a young woman, the artist has drawn Sloper centred with his body squarely positioned in the field of view. His arms are open leaving his entire body exposed and unprotected against the gaze of the observer.

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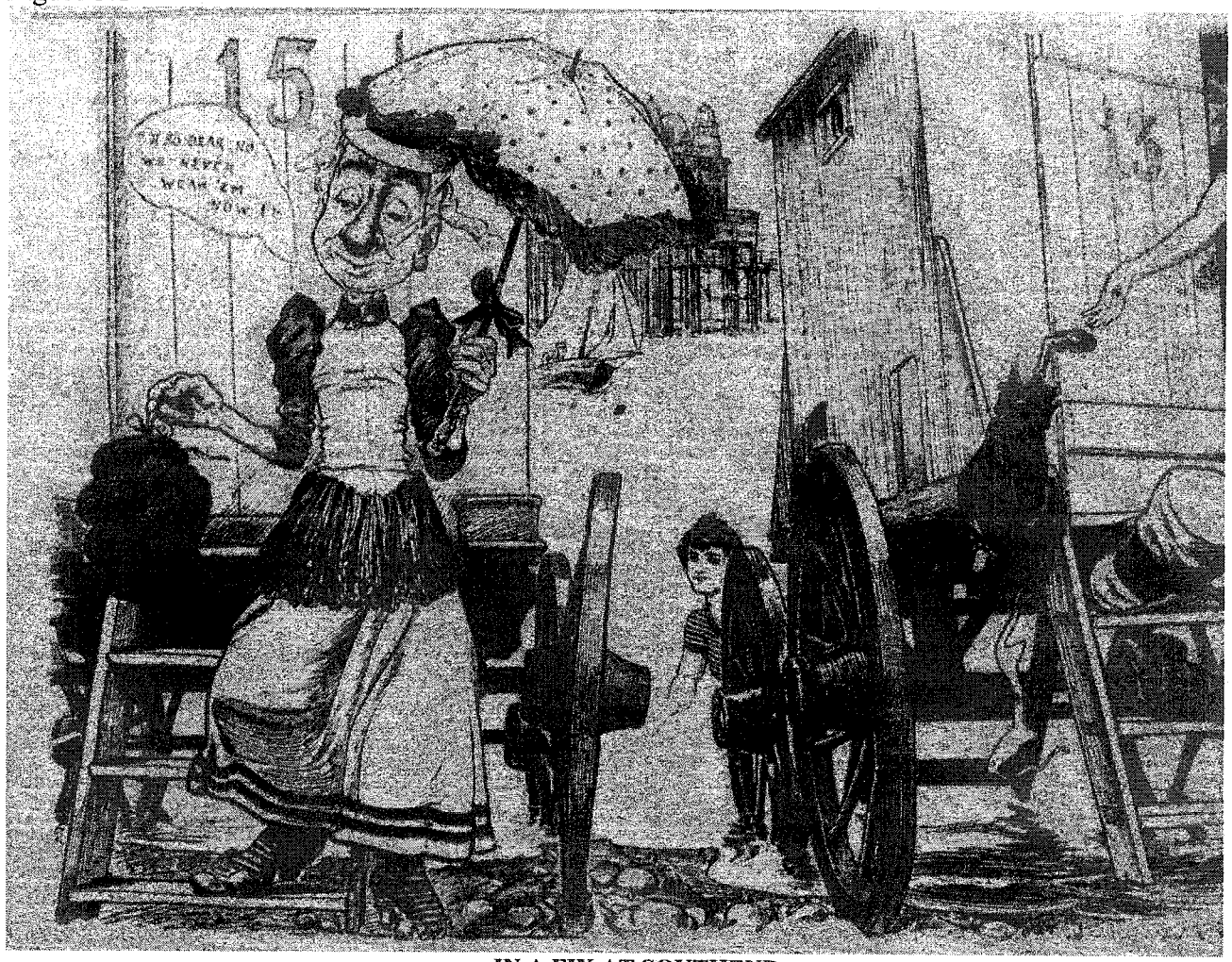
[29] W.F. Thomas, "In a Fix at Southend," *ASHH*, 19 September 1891, 297.

Figure 3.1



IN A FIX AT SOUTHEND

"A very awkward incident has occurred at Southend, merely through papa not noticing the number of his bathing machine. After gammacking amongst the foaming billows, like a kid of tender years, Poor Pa adjourned to what he believed was his machine and at once proceeded to dry himself. Turning to don his fourteen and sixpennys, he found that he had made a slight mistake, and that the only thing available were those belonging to a lady. Beggars cannot be choosers, so arraying himself in everything but the 'improver,' he was starting for home when -. Poor Pa's awfully Thoughtless." – Tootsie.

He is also drawn with downcast eyes, reinforcing his submissiveness and femininity as a female whose image and profile are positioned to privilege the male gaze. As such, Sloper is more than simply adopting attire of the opposite gender, he is imitating and assuming a feminized persona that he achieved with greater completeness than any of the male identities/personas he role-plays. As a result of his transformation, Sloper is about to be physically attacked by the women he offended. His cross-dressing has made him *so* vulnerable that he can be over-taken and physically punished by women.

Sloper's play with age and gender is the subject of humour in "Ally starts for the sea." [Figure 3.2][30] His very phallic nose plays against the women's hat he is wearing (complete with a bow) and the pantaloons he has adorned (complete with lacy ruffles). Sloper remains oblivious to the laughter of the attendant who, with his pointed finger, communicates to the observer that Sloper is the object of his (and therefore the observer's) amusement. In his left hand Sloper carries a child's sand shovel and bucket while on his right arm he escorts a pretty young woman, playing adult manly off of his infantilism. Despite his cross-dressing and childishness, Sloper remains a desirable figure to this pretty woman. The reader is to be amused by the ease with which Sloper's mistress is merged into the family.[31]

Sloper's unmanly attire combines childishness and femininity which are played against the wardrobe of Jubilee Sloper, the young toddler at the far right of the picture. Jubilee has an adult face that, in combination with his gentrified dress, blurs the boundaries of class and age. Jubilee-as-toddler-dandy wears the hat, collar, and coat, and

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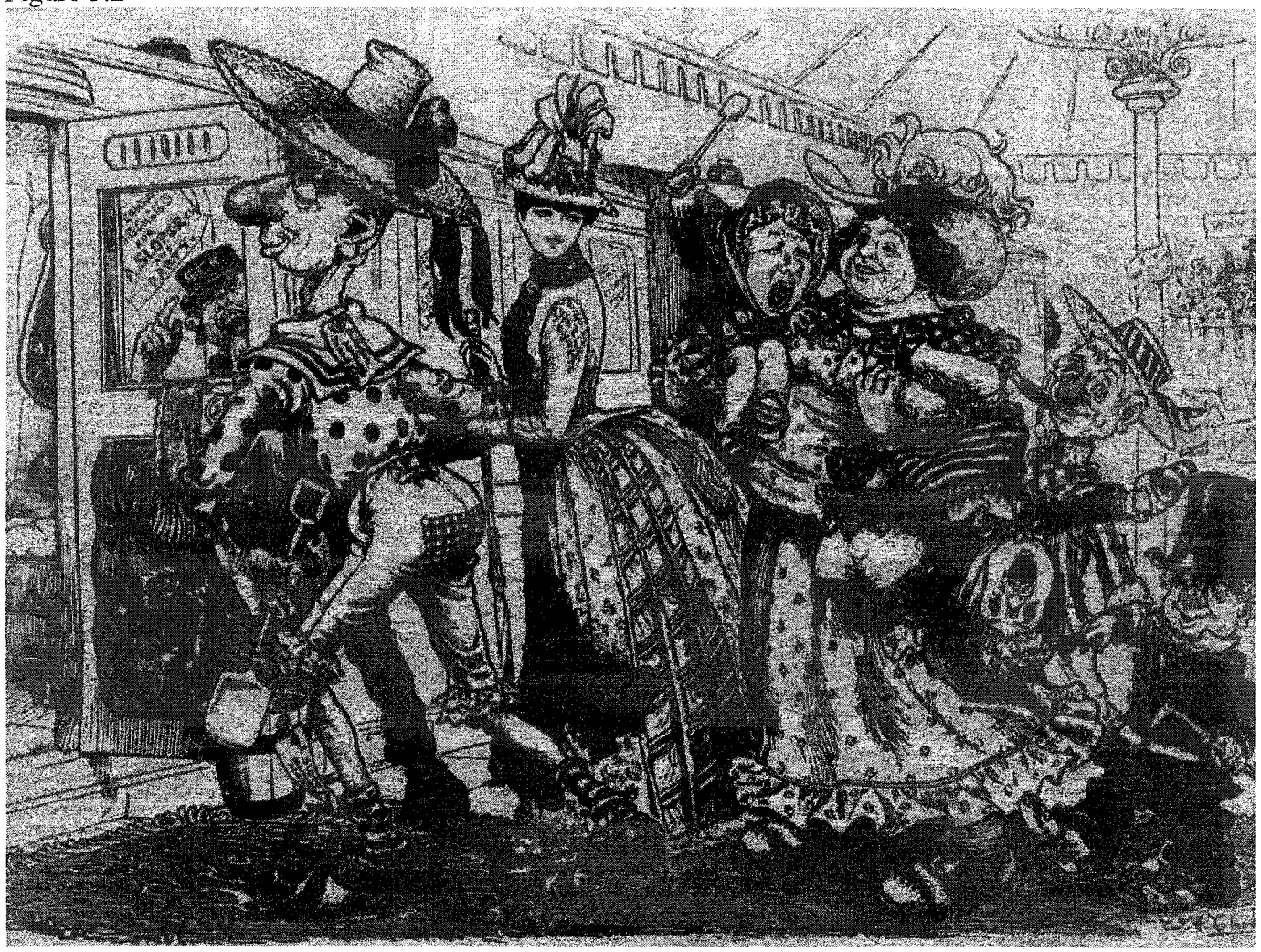
[30] W.F. Thomas, "Ally Starts for the Sea," *ASHH*, 30 June 1888, 201.
[31] The depiction of the object-women who Sloper's lusts after resemble the illustrations from advertisements rather than comic-figures. This is consistent through out the paper.

Figure 3.2



ALLY STARTS FOR THE SEA.

"Papa left London yesterday for Margate, accompanied by mamma, Alexandry, Jubilee, Boulanger Shakebacon, Ginetta Margarine, and a young lady friend of Papa's, whose name is at present unknown to any of us. thank goodness! we shall see none of them again in town for at least three months. This annual tour has become a big thing, and the Dook says that this year Papa has been commissioned by the Government to report on the state of National Defences. -- Tootsie.

carries the walking stick, of the dandy about town, or the "gent." His poverty demands that his costume must be an imitation of the dandy and thus Jubilee is the quintessential working-class gent. In this cartoon the son dresses as the grown, wealthy man while the father carries the paraphernalia of a child who is off to the beach. That Sloper's male children are usually depicted with adult faces contributes to the comic papers manipulation with childhood/ innocents and adulthood/corruption. The young child is smoking a phallic cigar, suggesting sexual awareness that would have horrified any devotee to Victorian hegemonic culture. Furthermore, the Victorian patriarch dressing as a woman and child, while his children smoke cigars and dress like adult gentlemen, affronted Victorian understandings of normative familial relations. Jubilee is the man in the family. The Sloper family has inversed and mocked fundamental Victorian assumptions surrounding age, power, childhood, and fatherhood as part of their construction of otherness and subversiveness.

The inversion of gender, age, and class dress reappears in "Sloper starts for the sea." [Figure 3.3][32] In this cartoon it is the teen-aged Alexandry who is decked out in the clothes of the swell and/or music hall gent, complete with walking stick, gloves, and eyeglass. Alexandry's body language communicate snobbery, regalness, and self-importance and his gaze looks out of the picture to meet the observer.

Sloper, conversely, is trying to pretend he is a seven-year-old girl. His "lamb-like" get-up includes a wig of long-flowing hair, a hat, and a sash tied into a bow. Sloper's interactions with the ticket-booth operator have homoerotic undertones as his

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[32] W.F. Thomas, "Sloper starts for the sea," *ASHH*, 15 June 1889, 185.

Figure 3.3


"IT'S NO GO, ALLY. I'VE SEEN THAT NOSE BEFORE."
THIRD CLASS
RETURN TICKETS TO MARGATE
YOUR LIFE INSURED £150 FREE
7/6
CHILDREN HALF-PRICE
SECOND CLASS
SLOPER STARTS FOR THE SEA.

always-erect phallic nose is positioned near the open mouth and hand of the man in the booth who confesses his familiarity with that pronounced nose.

Exhausted by too much recreation and weeks of play at the sea, Sloper in "The end of the Seaside Tour" tricks "the girls of the Friv" to come to the seaside to "baby" him until he regains his strength and vigour. [Figure 3.4][33] Sloper uses the costume of an infant, complete with a bonnet and perambulator, to manipulate these young women into paying him the attentions he craves. Here again the cartoon artist is blurring and playing innocence with corruption and/or life experience as Sloper's infant costume is juxtaposed with his phallic nose and sexual lusts for the young women. The comical scene of this hyper-sexed patriarch reduced to an infant-like state and who therefore must rely exclusively on the attention and companies of women to nurse him back to health is antithetical to the ideal Victorian man. The ideal man, conversely, would seek the company of men, stand with his peers in public settings, and shed any childlike attributes in cultivates of self-reliance, self-control, and dignity. Sloper finds no use for these attributes and prefers to cultivate the opposite image in order to gain the favours and attentions of the women-cartoon-objects.

Costumes functioned as a primary tool in Sloper's indiscretion of social propriety. In this section, the clothing of women and children are important in Sloper's transgressions against dominant masculinity. Although costumes have been discussed at length here as part of Sloper's construction of an unmanly "other" that manipulated the boundaries of age, gender, and class, clothing continues as an important weapon in Sloper's performances of sexualities and genders and, consequently, his attack on

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[33] W.F. Thomas, "The end of the seaside tour," *ASHH,* 1 October 1892, 314.

Figure 3.4

THE END OF THE SEASIDE TOUR.

"The girls of the 'Fair' were dreadfully startled the other day on receiving a telegram requesting their attendance at Pontoise to receive Papa Fair, and 6 more. One or two immediately ordered mourning, and quite a number of the poor dears burned off at once, only to find that Papa had been made the victim of Dad's tricks. After a laborious seaside tour, Papa is naturally a bit pippy, as he terms it, but he was certainly not in a condition that his girls to expect. Luckily, they are good-tempered, so soon settled down to their business, which was to chivy Papa Fair up."—*Punch*.

hegemonic culture. Often the ease with which he reinvents himself is symbolized by the easy adoption or discard of paraphernalia. Sloper uses clothing to transgress class and gender lines, but he also manipulates clothing to communicate momentary assumptions of identities as he navigates his way through the power hierarchies of Victorian Britain. Clothing continues as an important tool in Sloper's attack on other hegemonic assumptions about power structures and will re-appear as an important demarcation of role-playing, performance, and manipulations.

She told me to come but I was already there[34]

One of Sloper's favourite pastimes is the pursuit of much younger women. His abilities to frolic and flirt with young pretty women are never hampered by familial obligations, age or poverty. In these cartoons women are objectified as glamorous characters used by Sloper in exploration of his sexual fantasies and are drawn as mere objects of men's desires. Women are neither actors nor agents in these situations but only respond to Sloper's advances. At times they may express shock by Sloper's advances, but they seldom resist nor do they make any real attempt to protect themselves from his lustful designs. Furthermore, there is never a hint of chastisement from these object-women who find themselves as the central objects of Sloper's designs.

As passive figures, the representations of these cartoon women are consistent with hegemonic constructions of feminine sexuality as passive. Thomas Laqueur has suggested that the Victorian construction of separate spheres was based partly through the scientific "discovery" that women were biologically different, not lesser-developed men.

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[34] AC/ DC "Shook me all night long" *Back in Black*, 1980.

Women were understood to be vessels of ethics, innocence, and purity, and the feminine body and mind needed a separate space different, and protected, from men. He wrote:

> "Whatever ideological work the doctrine of separate spheres did in the nineteenth century … it shattered the notion of a hierarchy of the sexes and served as the cornerstone of a powerfully multivalent alternative model. Women as beings who are 'little affected by sensuality ... a species of angels' 'powerful race … destined to inspire in the rest of society the sentiments of all which is noble, generous, and devoted' … were the cultural creation of the middle classes, men and women, with a variety of political agendas."[35]

That the Victorians constructed femininity as the passive "other", Laqueur argues, reflects the popular, legal, and medical tracts where women were "creatures less plagued by passion, a selfish and destructive tendency, more fully endowed with fellow feeling and the sort of corporeal tranquility required to be the radiant centres of a new morality."[36] Important for the organization of gender hierarchy, hegemonic Victorian culture constructed women as passive and weak, in need of male protection from the harms of the urban space where other men threatened to corrupt their innocence. A separate sphere for women was necessary in order for society to protect and preserve purity and innocence. As such, respectable society demanded that men be active, aggressive, and agents who could protect (normative) or harm (deviant) women.

The art show at the Royal Academy provides Sloper with ample opportunity to gaze at pretty young women [Figure 3.5]. [37] Sloper adorns the gentrified attire of the artist complete with a feathered cap and breaches. The costume allows him to assume an

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[35] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), 195.
[36] Ibid., 204.
[37] W.F. Thomas, "Ally at the Royal Academy," *ASHH,* 5 May 1888, 137.

Figure 3.5

image of an artistic gentleman capable of appreciating the female nudes without a desire for erotic pleasure, yet his actions reveal Ally's decision to set up a chair for the purposes of observing the nude paintings. He is a fraud who is only playing the part of an artist in order to indulge his sexual voyeurism. He has positioned himself in front of paintings representing "the female form divine" and Mrs. Sloper's indignation is understandable when her husband boasts of his intimate knowledge of these women (prostitutes) who posed for the paintings. Her chastisement of pinching his ear seems to only have added to his arousal. His elongated nose, the leg of the stool that is purposefully drawn between his legs, and the phallic gin bottle protruding from the picnic basket, communicate Sloper's delight. He demonstrates his disregard for social proprieties on several layers: First, by bringing binoculars and sitting down with a picnic basket in front of the nudes, Sloper is demonstrating that his interest is far more than appreciating the artistic nature of the paintings. Second, it would be understood that if a man touring the Academy were in any way acquainted with the women in the pictures, he certainly would not make his liaisons with prostitutes known. Third, Sloper ignores his commitments to his family in order to find satisfaction in the objectified women in the paintings.

Other patrons of the Academy are not visible in the field of view but Toostie assures the reader that Sloper "was the centre of attraction at the Private View, every one of note paying him the greatest possible respect." The humour of the cartoon is furthered through Toostie's innocent reportage where she assures the reader that her father, although a lout of humble origins, is nonetheless respected by those whose social position is substantially above his. Perhaps the social superiors do not realise that Sloper has only assumed a disguise in order to profane art, but the cartoon could also be read as an

affirmation by respectable men who would not boast as Sloper does, but who nonetheless respect him because of his skills in "appreciating" the female nudes both at the art show and in his own personal sexual encounters. His construction of an alternative manliness that hinges upon the transgression of social norms and boundaries brings him respect and admiration from men of Society, not disrepute.

In "Sloper Seeking information in Paris" [Figure 3.6][38] the "Eminent Friend of Man" is in quest of a very particular type of knowledge from this young woman. The young servant girl is obedient and passive as she curtsies before Sloper; he is very thrilled to see her, evident by his phallic hat and nose. The implication in this cartoon is that the young woman will submit to Sloper's desires as an object of his fantasy. Her submissiveness and her curtsey, combined with her obvious youth, are all symbols to clue the reader that Sloper is playing a game of corruption. The reader learns through the text that Sloper's liaisons in Paris are unknown (but not unsuspected) by his wife, and the resulting humour derives from the reader's sense that Sloper has "gotten away" with adultery and the corruption of a young servant girl. The cartoon experiment with corruption of innocents allows the reader to participate in the exploitation of a young servant by an older, experienced married man. If the image did not clue the reader as to the nature of Sloper's "movements" in Paris, the text offers further evidence. The reader is in the "know" but the aggrieved party, Mrs. Sloper, is only suspicious of her husband's adventures in Paris and now must take out an advertisement in the paper "seeking information." The reader must use the provided clues to ascertain what information he/she is privileged to know, and, consequently, must also ask her/himself whether or not

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[38] Artist Unknown, "Ally Seeking information in Paris," *ASHH*, 1 May 1886, 141.

Figure 3.6


SLOPER SEEKING INFORMATION IN PARIS.
N.B.—Mrs. Sloper is also seeking information as to
ALLY'S movements at Easter time.

to inform Mrs. Sloper of her husband's liaisons with this servant girl. The paper does not indicate if Sloper is ever found out.

In "Sloper's Forty Day's Feast" [Figure 3.7] [39] the Eminent Friend of Man is the subject of a scientific/ medical experiment. Tootsie informs the reader that Sloper has been commissioned by the Royal Aquarium to undertake an experiment in gluttony. Sloper is to gorge himself on food and drink "at someone else's expense," his favoured way to enjoy himself. Yet, only gin, wine, and champagne contributed as gifts by eminent persons appear in the visual. Sloper has been asked to publicly display a lack of self-control and restraint in order to prove a point of grave social importance. Although the cartoon can be read as form of protest against general legislation that has impinged on men's public behaviour, the specific cultural reference is unclear and remains as a hidden public transcript that only the knowing would be able to identify. The text confirms the reader's suspicion that Sloper's actions could be read as protest to legislation prohibiting male activities in public space. The reader learns that a friend of Sloper's, Dook Snook, will ask "the House of Lords whether the government proposes taking the steps to prevent a man making a pig of himself." Sloper, the reader is to understand, is a willing participant in the experiment but, one suspects, it is his own interests that occupy his thoughts and not the larger social protest. The trickster takes on the role of the public gentleman protesting for social justice, but what motivates him is the possibility of achieving gratification at the expense of society. The ultimate goal of the public spectacle is to assert manly dominance in public space, uninhibited by limitations imposed by the moral reforms in parliament. As the antithesis of the ideal public man,

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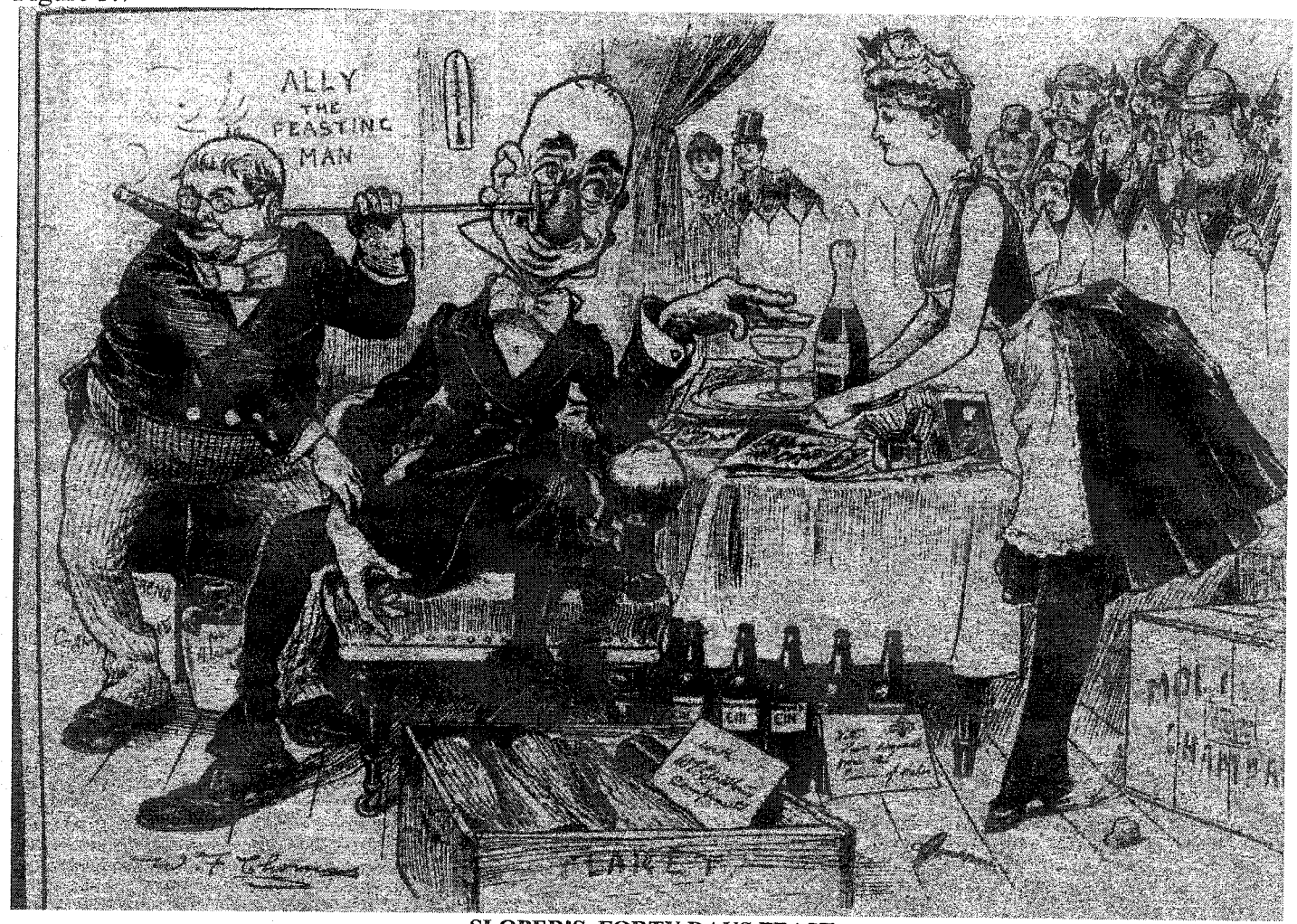
[39] W.F. Thomas, "Sloper's Forty Day's feast," *ASHH*, 17 May 1890, 153.

Figure 3.7



SLOPER'S FORTY DAYS FEAST

"The Royal Aquarium have completed the arrangements for Poor Papa's Forty Days' Feast. Pa undertakes to eat and drink the best of everything for Forty Days, at someone else's expense. His medical man will be with him day and night, and will see that they both have all they wish for. At the end of the feast Poor Papa will appear at the Central Stage, and after drinking to Old England several times, will walk home as straight as the circumstances will permit. The Dook Snook intends asking in the House of Lords whether the Government proposes taking any steps to prevent a man making a pig of himself." – Tootsie.

Sloper shirks duty, work, self-restraint, and social propriety, and the cartoon insists that the social inversions and manipulations crafted by Sloper and his supporters are not condemned but applauded.

The crowd is composed of a mixture of classes and genders to clue the reader that Sloper is a figure recognizable and admired by a cross-section of Victorian society (whether the reality reflects this reputation or not). These men and women register a mixture of shock, amusement, and respect as they watch the first few moments of the experiment. Sloper's actions are endorsed by key government figures, evident by the complimentary gifts of food and drink from William Gladstone and the Prince of Wales. Sloper's protest, the reader is to understand, is conducted on behalf of all men of all social ranks. Sloper's public acts of unmanliness have earned him the respect and admiration of privileged government/ social figures who endorse his efforts.

The subtext of the cartoon, consistent with many other depictions of Sloper associations with women, has erotic undertones. Sloper is reaching towards the uncorked bottle that is held by the beautiful and scantily clad attendant. The physical assistant checks Sloper's phallic nose, listening intensely to ascertain Sloper's health and well being through the examination of this prominent characteristic. The examination intensifies the importance of Sloper's phallic nose and reinforces the reader's awareness that the woman is nothing more than an object to serve Sloper's needs and fantasies. Consequently she presents herself with submissiveness in body and gesture implying a willingness to cavort with the Friend of Man (and woman.). Her stance indicates that she offers Sloper more than just the champagne bottle for his taking. The cartoon hints of

publicly displayed sexual desire and/or exchange of a sordid nature that serves to underscore the subversivenss of Sloper's public displays of indulgence and gluttony.

The women and the champagne as the consumables in this cartoon exemplify the twinned meanings of Sloper's bulbous/phallic nose. His nose here and in other cartoons represents the nose of the habitual drunkard, suggesting hedonistic twinness of nose and penis, both "flushing" from pleasure, never from embarrassment. Furthermore, the depiction of Sloper in this cartoon emphasises his sloe-eyed nature, further emphasising the duality of drunkard and besotted sexual sensuality.

In "Poor Pa at Southend"[40] [Figure 3.8] the prominently displayed poster on the side of Sloper's bathing house "Vote for Sloper the Friend of man (and women)" exists along with the image of indignant and defensive women evokes an ironic reading of Sloper's presence. The women in this cartoon demonstrate an assertive resistance and/or articulate their displeasure at being the victims of Sloper's prank, a rare moment of resistance and anger for the cartoon women in *ASHH*. Sloper would certainly love to be friendly with these women by they are less obliging than he is used to. Not to be put off, Sloper casually sits at the edge of his bathing house pointing his phallic umbrella and nose in the direction of the shocked women whose anger, rage, and defiance have little effect on Sloper. The Friend of Man has taken over the women's bathing house and, consequently, prohibits their ability to return to their clothing and avoid his scrutiny. Through his actions, Sloper foists vulnerability and embarrassment upon the women. Nearby are the outraged Mrs. Sloper, the gleeful Alexandry and his cousin who all witness the social impropriety of the senior Sloper male. The outrage of these female

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[40] W.G. Baxter, "Poor Pa at Southend," *ASHH*, 10 July 1886, 217.

Figure 3.8

figures places them as objects of the reader's laugher and thereby their plight is humorous and comical. Through Sloper's defiance, the reader is obliged to join him in ignoring the outrage of all women present and to indulge in fantasies of public adulterous sexual displays.

Sloper is overly excited by the companionship of the two pretty women accompanying him to the horse races in "The First Favourite Everywhere" [Figure 3.9].[41] Ally's friend Moses calls for bets with odds 1000 to 1 in favour of the "old firm" (a cheap pun) versus "anything." Moses also refers to Sloper as a "moral certainty" (and there is nothing moral in his actions) which assures readers of Sloper's inevitable and unproblematic success with these women. His companions ignore the horse races and are instead focused on Sloper's interactions. In his distraction at the nearness of the young women, Sloper's nose is erect and enlarged and his uncorked bottle spills into the face of a male companion, providing alternative subtexts of homoeroticism and hyper-male-sexuality. Because Sloper's sexual drive is so manly, he cannot control himself and he must find release with either men or women. Another young man, much younger than Sloper and probably legitimately in gentlemanly attire, is reduced to a spectator of Sloper's success. With all of the other males present, Sloper is favoured to succeed. The suggestion of multiple sexual encounters, Sloper's outright refusal to exercise self-control, and the orgiastic celebrations in public space, reinforce the ruffian's image as a transgressor of social propriety. Sloper flaunts his sexual promiscuity, his adulterous behaviour, and his hyper-manly-sexual appeal. In laughing at Sloper's excitement,

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[41] W.G. Baxter, "First Favourite Everywhere," *ASHH*, 5 June 1885, 178.

Figure 3.9

success, and incompetence, the reader participates vicariously in Sloper's social delinquencies.

Sloper's escapades with women and public misconduct cross from social deviance to criminality in "Brigands in Shoe Lane" [Figure 3.10].[42] Sloper and his companions have assumed the costumes of pirates in order to conduct the dishonourable deed of abducting the family washerwoman. There is enough amiss about Sloper and his companion's adoption of the outlaw costumes to signal the reader that this too is another identity momentarily assumed in an effort to gain momentary pleasure. The availability of multiple roles is further reinforced by a poster on the window behind the scene that displays Sloper in pirate costume. Sloper is not *really* criminal or part of the underworld; he is simply playing a role. The subtext is again male aggressive sexual acts against women and if the phallic noses on Sloper and Alexandry are not indication enough of sexual exploitation, then the suggestive folds of the washerwoman's dress should leave little doubt that these men's assault carries sexual implications. As a notable feature of the woman's dress, the image of female body visibly exposed indicates availability and vulnerability. The cruel gleeful faces of the young boys assisting Sloper and the pleasure taken by the Eminent's canine friend are cues to the reader that the inevitable sexual assault and aggression against this woman are hilarious, pleasurable, comic, and play. The aggressions are cast as part of a role-play, and her resistance is part of the comic re-enactment of "playing" at bandits. The violation of women and their reduction to objects

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[42] W.F. Thomas, "Brigands in Shoe Lane," *ASHH,* 22 October 1887, 337.

Figure 3.10

BRIGANDS IN SHOE LANE

"The frequent captures by Brigands of Tourists abroad, and the heavy ransoms they demand for the release of their prisoners, have, I regret to say, tempted Papa to start what he calls the 'Sloper Banditti." The first raid was made the other morning on the Family Washerwoman, but I am inclined to think that although a very large sum has been demanded by Papa, the ransom in her case is far more likely to take the form of unwashed shirts than actual bullion." - Tootsie

not only reinforces Sloper as the dominant male in the comic paper but also celebrates male supremacy and sexual rights over all women.

The text further diffuses any taint associated with committing the serious legal crime of kidnapping, sexual assault, and ransoming. Sloper's subject is unlike the wealthy tourists of the bandits he imitates and he is only likely to obtain "unwashed shirts" for his trouble. The ridiculousness of Sloper's actions, to hold ransomed a workingwoman with no money or social connections, redirects the reader's attention away from the assault on the washerwomen to the pathetic nature of Sloper's imitation of the bandit.

Mrs. Sloper is victim to her husband's sexually aggressive acts in "Sloper's switchback at Scarborough," [Figure 3.11].[43] Sloper has crafted a chair-slide for patrons to use rather than walking the stairs down to the sea. Like most of Sloper's "inventions" there are design problems that jeopardize the safety of the customers. Disaster has already befallen the twins, but Mrs. Sloper is about to fall victim to a different sort of misfortune. The aggressive sexual subtexts of the cartoon follow a similar construction as previous cartoons: Sloper's stance, the suggestive cushion-on-a-spring purposefully positioned between Sloper's legs, Mrs. Sloper's spread legs, and Ally's phallic nose all indicate the inevitability of male sexual exploitation of women. The text of the cartoon reassures the reader that all "is working to Sloper's satisfaction." Alexandry, who has demonstrated in other cartoons his sexual competence involving his mother, chases after the unfortunate woman with his phallic nose and outstretched arms, making him a competitor to his father in the sexual misconduct and subversive behaviour. This cartoon

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[43] W.F. Thomas, "Sloper's switchback at Scarbouroug," in *ASHH,* 19 June 1890, 225.

Figure 3.11


HI! TURN HER ASTARN!
EASY DOES IT, MISS
SLOPER'S SWITCHBACK AT SCARBOROUGH.

maintains the theme of sexual misconduct and social impropriety in public space and speaks of the perversity of the Sloper household.

Sloper as the failed Victorian Patriarch who presides over a disorderly and sexually deviant family is continued in several cartoons depicting the Sloper family at home. Far from being the quiet refuge from the threats of urban space, the Sloper residence is full of dangers, perversions, and misadventures where men who should have provided protection instead violate their dependants. In Ally Sloper fashion, Sloper and his sons find every opportunity to flout conventions with their alternative organization of domestic space and power relationships. Similar to the women Ally exploits in his adventures in the urban cartoon world, Mrs. Sloper and Cousin Eveline are objects with whom men can experiment and explore their fantasies.

Historians of Victorian culture have suggested that Christmas was re-invented by Victorians as a commercialized holiday that centred on the family and children.[44] The Sloper Christmas holidays are unmistakably antithetical to Victorian ideas about appropriate family interactions. During the chaotic Christmas dinner of 1886 [Figure 3.12],[45] the artist reveals the disarray of the Sloper household, complete with broken chairs that indicate both violence and poverty. Sloper is actively engaged in several violent and sexually suggestive activities: he leans over the table to hit his guest over the head; his knife in his right hand has come dangerously close to stabbing his son in the back; he thrusts his phallic nose towards his wife's face and her partially opened lips.

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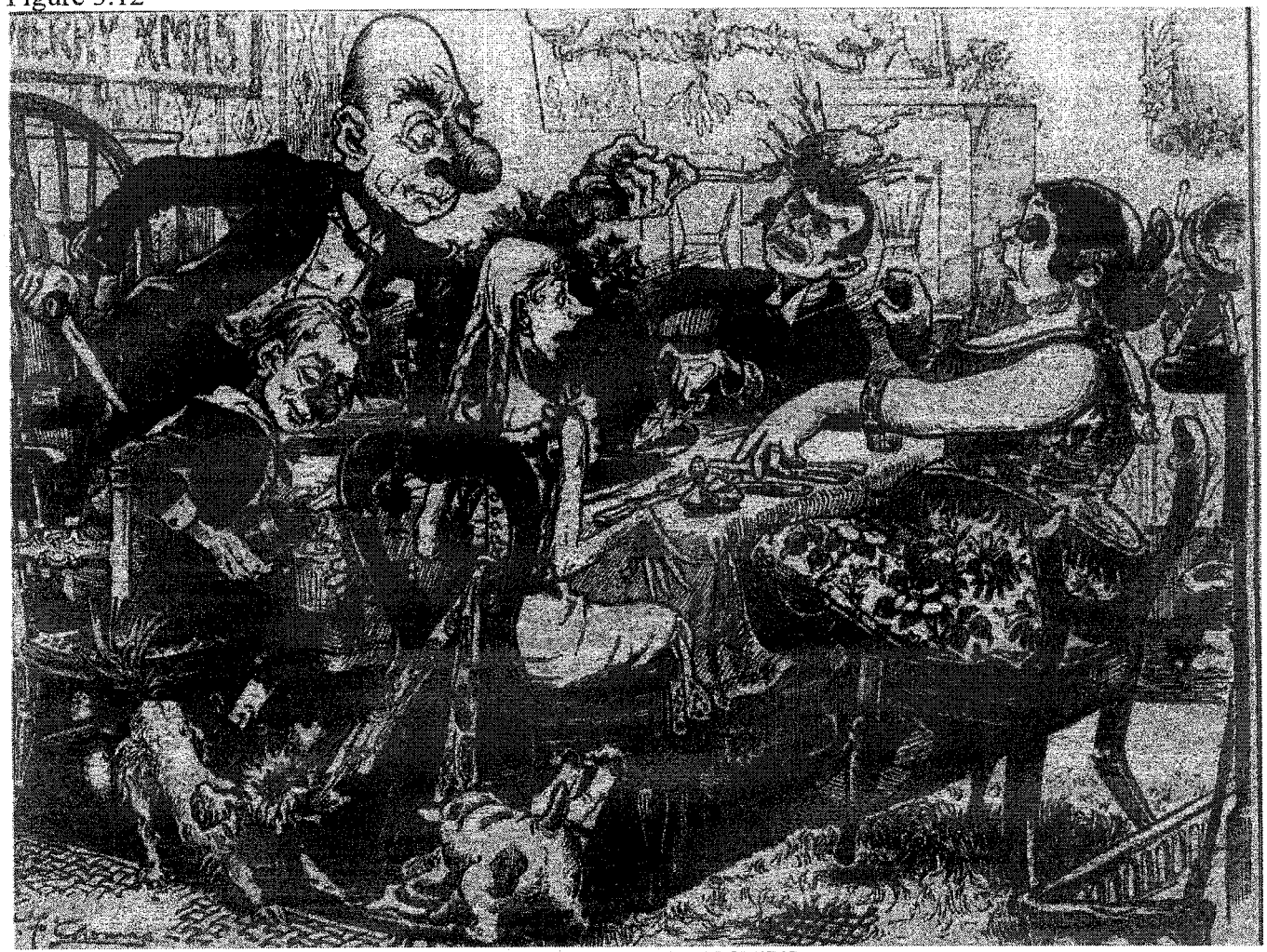
[44] John Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: myth, ritual and the quest for family values* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).
[45] W.F. Thomas, "Christmas Day at A. Sloper's," *ASHH*, 25 December 1886, 409.

Figure 3.12



CHRISTMAS DAY AT A. SLOPER'S.

"Poor Papa's Christmas dinner this year was not so numerously attended as on former occasions, Cousin Evelina and the William Higgins being the only visitors present. Everything went well until the Pudding arrived, when Papa very naturally felt annoyed at William picking currants out of it with his fingers. Alexandry, too, offended Mamma considerably by letting a ginger-beer cork go off in her eye." – Tootsie.

Mrs. Sloper is simultaneously accosted by her son who pops his cork in her face. Cousin Eveline is also the object of male sexual aggression, evident by the phallic erect tail of the dog eagerly tearing at her dress.

Rather than being an expression of wholesome family celebrations, the Sloper Christmas dinner is portrayed in orgiastic displays of dysfunctionality. In keeping with other representations of woman, this cartoon presents Mrs. Sloper and Eveilna as powerless objects of male sexual designs. As part of the "humour" the images of the Sloper women indicate their shock and vulnerability reinforcing the subversiveness of the men's expressions of sexuality. The displays of sexual transgressions and violence deepen Sloper's image as a ruffian. Far from presiding over a household offering moral and physical protection of woman and children, Sloper uses his domestic space to capture and confine women, keeping them hostages to the designs of the men in the household.

Christmas dinner in 1891 [Figure 3.13][46] is a much smaller event. Sloper was responsible for providing food for his family and, once again, he has failed his dependants. Sloper has brought home food unfit for consumption. With a personal resolve backed by physical aggression, Sloper is determined to carve up the turkey for his dependants. Sloper, aided by his son, is trying to saw and hack the bird so that his family can partake of the Christmas dinner he has (inadequately) provided. Toostie watches disapprovingly as her father, now propped on the chair, violently attacks the bird. Sloper's countenance is full of rage and determination, but his gaze is fixed on his wife, not on the bird. Sloper is (again!) lunging his nose towards his wife. Mrs. Sloper is

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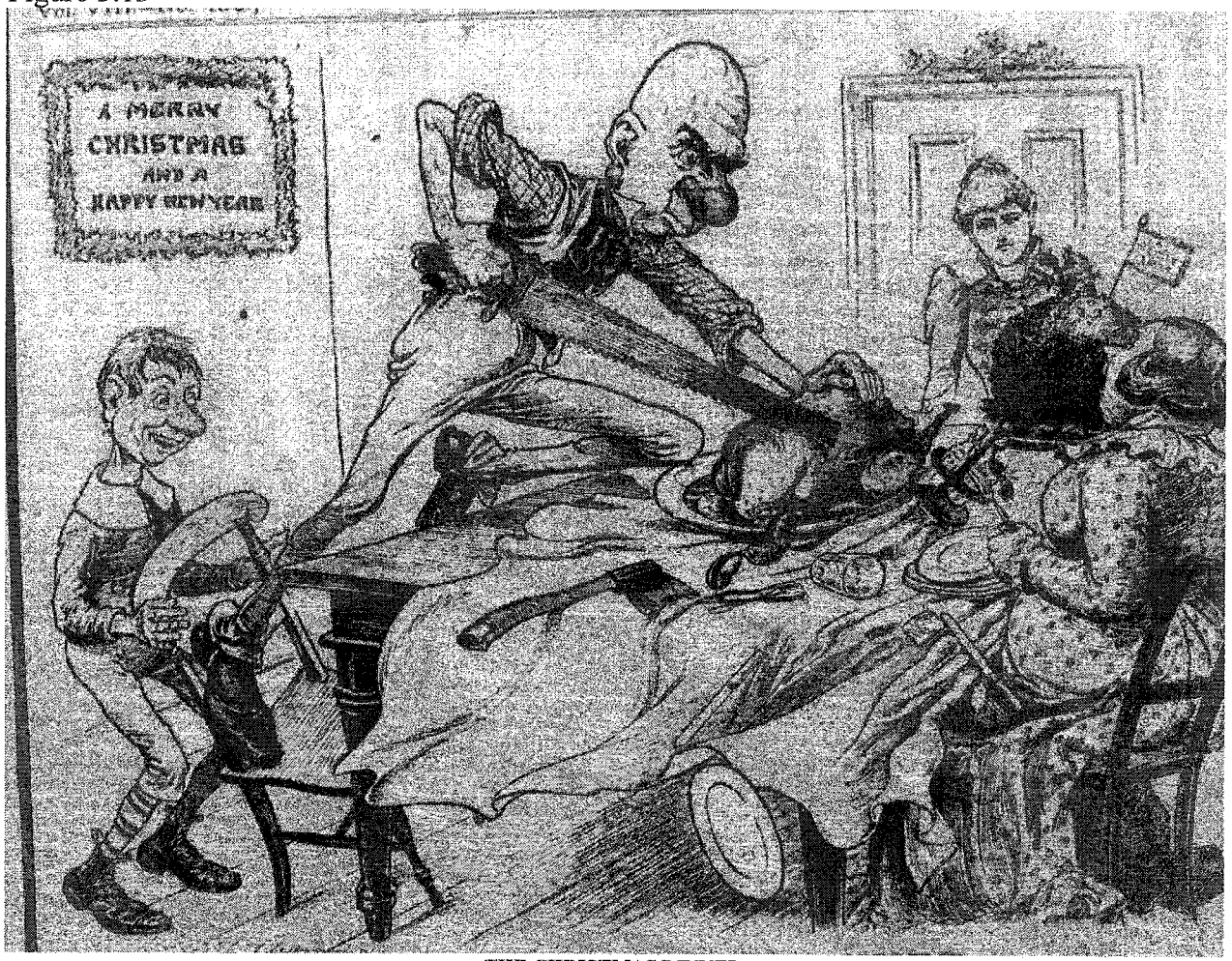
[46] W.F. Thomas, "The Christmas dinner," *ASHH*, 26 December 1891, 409.

Figure 3.13



THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

"As poor Pa is continually boasting of being somewhat of a bird fancier, it was natural that he should be commissioned to purchase the Christmas turkey this year, and that consequences were disastrous goes without saying. Somehow or another, everything Papa handles turns out a dismal failure, and his turkey, which, if not present at the creation of the world, must certainly have been hatched in the Ark, with no exception to the rule. With no exception to the rule Papa's efforts to dismember it on Christmas Day were both heartrending and fruitless, and eventually ended in the wreck of the dinner table and the collapse if Ma.- " Tootsie

shocked and horrified but stationary and frozen while her husband continues in his actions. It is only when the table collapse, Toostie informs the reader, that Sloper desists. That such an exchange transpired at the kitchen table in front of children confirms the perversity of Sloper's home environment.

In other cartoons, the artist requires the reader to use a slightly more nuanced deconstruction of popular cultural slang and symbols to understand subtexts about male aggressive sexual acts against women. One example that demonstrates the many layers of popular cultural imagery used by Baxter and Thomas is the theme of violence against cats as code for sexual violence against women. In several cartoons, Ally and his companions shoot cats. French cultural historian Robert Darnton has studied the importance of cat torture in early modern European popular culture and popular protest in his book *The Great Cat Massacre.* Darnton suggests that the apprentices of a particular workshop found glee and amusement in the death and destruction of the cats (whose annoying night habits prevented the men from sleeping) because the men understood their actions as a form of protest against their bourgeois employers. The cats, and in particular the favourite pet of the mistress of the shop, were identified as the woman's familiars; thus violence against that cats was in proxy for violence against the woman herself. The employers also understood the subtext of the men's actions, but because they had consented to the death of the cats in order that end the disruption of sleep (the men in fact imitated cat noises outside of the master's bedroom so that the mistress would order the death of her own cats) and there was little that could be said about the men's behaviour.[47]

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[47] Robert Darton, *The Great Cat Massacre: and other episodes in French cultural history* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 75-104.

On one level, therefore, the cartoon about "shooting the gentle cat" [Figure 3.14][48] played out of a popular cultural tradition of cat torture as social protest, the prevention of witchcraft, and as sport to end nighttime disruptions caused by the rambunctious activities of stray cats. The one cat on the roof has presented himself and is about to be ravaged by the man's gun (also note the phallic shape of the man's night cap). "Shooting the gentle cat," then, has more connotations to the Victorian reader than just cat torture. "Shooting" was slang for violent penetration and ejaculation and "cat," as in "pussy cat," referred to female genitalia, only slightly less vulgar than "pussy."[49] The subtext of this cartoon and "Love's young dream" [figure 3.15][50] is male sexual aggression and success.

Toostie writes that it is Evelina's purring in response to her suitor's advances that inspires Sloper to search out cats as sport. The sign on the wall near the two young lovers reads "Tom cat shooting in season" and indicates that male sexual adventures are also in season. The text of the cartoon adds several innuendos that indicate the artist's intention to associate cat violence and male sexual success - the reader learns of the "spasmodic leaps and bounds" of the young lovers in recent weeks and that Sloper's hunting nearly brought the "extraordinary antics of the betrothed pair" to a "climax." Although the cartoon is about sexual male aggressions, it is important to note that Evelina found enjoyment in being conquered, a theme also prevalent in Victorian pornography.[51]

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[48] Artist Unknown, "Shooting the gentle cat," *ASHH,* 28 February 1885, 66.
[49] Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8th edition ed. Paul Beale, (New York: Routledge, 2002), s.v. "shooting" and "cat."
[50] W.F. Thomas, "Love's young dream," *ASHH*, 30 January 1892, 53.
[51] See again *The Pearl* as an example.

Figure 3.14

Shooting the Gentle Cat

Figure 3.15

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

"Alexandry's love affairs are progressing by a series of spasmodic leaps and bounds , and, consequently, we are all made uncomfortable by the extraordinary antics which characterize the betrothed pair. Only last Tuesday Papa was almost committing an error, which might have had a horrible climax. Hearing a purring noise beyond the water-butt in the back yard, the idea of cats at once suggested itself to his mind, so, arming himself with a blunderbuss, he sallied forth in search of sport. What the result would have been had not Evelina shrieked out, Heaven knows. But fancy a water-butt as a trysting place." – Toostie.

Near the top of the cartoon, cats scurry out of range of Sloper's gun, but in doing so have presented themselves in a suggestive and vulnerable manner, furthering the connection between cat violence and sexual activities of the young betrothed pair. And if the connection between sexual aggression and cat violence has not been pictorially represented satisfactory to cue the reader, Sloper's call to the cats should erase any doubt of the vulgar-metaphoric connection. The humour of the cartoon relies on the "knowingness" of the reader to detect and associate where appropriate violence against cats, sex, aggression, and sexual success.

A "Terrible scene at Henley Regatta" [figure 3.16][52] is one of the few cartoons where Sloper is not portrayed as the popular Friend of Man (and woman). Here Sloper, uninvited, decided to show up to the party with the girls from the "Friv." His unwelcome presence caused a ruckus on the boats with the resulting scene, captured in this cartoon, of Sloper falling overboard and, thereby, invoking the sympathies of the young women. Sloper has committed a social *faux pas* by arriving to a party to which he was not invited to yet he manages to manipulate the situation (however accidental) to maintain his notoriety as the centre of female attention, foisting his unwanted presence on the women who must rescue him and nurture him following his embarrassing escapade. Sloper's shocked face, spread legs, and flying gin bottle invoke a subtext of male sexual incompetence. Unbeknownst to Sloper, he remains an annoyance to the women who find his manly incompetence bothersome and an unwelcome interruption of their social gathering. The reader is aware of how the women have responded to Sloper and, although the centre of attention,

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[52] W.G. Baxter, "A Terrible Scene at Henley Regatta" in *ASHH*, 4 July 1885, 210.

Figure 3.16

Sloper's presence is only tolerated by these women. The usually suave anti-hero is now the object of amusement, scorn, and ridicule.

Yet, even in distress, Ally is thrown life preservers and lasso ropes (which represent vulvas) to rescue (encircle) his "endangered phallic nose." This is a highly sexual pun. What he sought was women, and he was "rescued" when they threw symbols of their sexuality at him.

"Sloper the leap year Masher" [Figure 3.17] [53] is one of the few cartoons where women are the active solicitor's of Sloper's attentions. In this cartoon Sloper is about to be attacked by a group of "well regulated" schoolgirls who succeed in taking "privileges" with the Eminent. The text implies that their actions are out of character for young girls and only given vent because of the leap year and, therefore their actions are part of a momentary carnivalesque inversion of sexual norms.

The supposed experience of these young girl and their desires for experimentation are contradictory to Victorian sensibilities about the innocence and purity of middle-class women/girls. Far from being the "sexless" creatures propounded by Victorian advice literature and medical expertise, these young girls are actively seeking Sloper's attentions. These are privileged middle-class girls who are anything but innocent when it comes to sex, and Sloper has assumed an image of the innocent and uncorrupted. Young girls are the sexual aggressors who attack Sloper, while he assumes an attitude of submissiveness, a characteristic usually ascribed to the women he objectifies. The reversal of roles provides another dimension to these girls' sexual

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[53] W.F. Thomas, "Sloper the Leap Year Masher," *ASHH*, 25 Feb 1888, 56.

Figure 3.17

aggressiveness: they are more initiative in their voyeurism than Sloper, who reacts to their antics with bemusement.

The only horrified figure in the picture is the schoolmistress, yet she does not intervene to prevent her pupils from educating Sloper (again playing on themes of inversion.) Her horror acknowledges that what is about to transpire is contrary to hegemonic sensibilities and, therefore, furthers the reader's awareness of the inversion and transgressions of social boundaries. The pleasure of the reader/Sloper/and the girls, is therefore that much more subversive and yet understandable because it is undertaken in a carnivalesque moment. Sloper confides to his daughter of his escapades, and Toostie asks the reader not to mention anything of this to her mother. The directions given the reader through the text reaffirm the subversive nature of the image and encourage the reader to feel a sense of inclusiveness at participating voyeuristically in these young girls' sexual experimentations.

The humour in Sloper's interactions with women allows the reader to participate voyeuristically in Sloper's active corruption of the innocent and in his desecration of the domestic world. Yet importantly, the reader's laughter acknowledges these acts as perverse. There is very little comic about the ordinary. The artist relies on the reader's understanding of Sloper's "otherness" and his/her recognition that Sloper's conduct is antithetical to Victorian manliness. The reader agrees with the artist that Sloper's acts are transgressive and the humour of the situation is derived from this recognition. In acknowledging the counteractive nature of Sloper's appetites and actions, the audience necessarily and implicitly reaffirms the normalcy of conventional constructions of masculinity that Sloper acts against.

Sloper cartoons manipulate and attack these assumptions through a depiction of women as available, passive, sometimes the victims, sometimes the willing (but still passive) consorts in men's sexual adventures. Sloper's numerous exploits toward women occur in public space and here the humour re-affirms the fear that women will find nothing but danger and misfortune when they venture outside the confines of domestic space. Those who insisted on separate spheres for women and men argued that only within the domestic space could women and children be protected from the ills of the urban space. The majority of women who Sloper violates are all depicted in public spaces, without male companionship (other than Sloper) and, as such, are easily preyed upon and manipulated. The resistance of women also reinforces the transgressive nature of Sloper's exploitations and, therefore, provides the reader with an opportunity to subvert dominant understandings about sex and sexuality and the necessity of preserving feminine innocence. The black humour of the cartoons insists that the vulgarity, violence, and transgressions committed by Sloper are all playful and comic. The paper invites the audience to become part of a group who knowingly deconstruct the images and laugh at one of the vilest transgressions of cultural assumptions: the corruption of innocence.

Yet, humour in Sloper cartoons also functioned through inversions of norms and, as such, domestic space is constructed as an equally vile, dangerous, and perverse place for women. Sloper and other male characters insure that domestic space is anything but a haven. In the desecration of domestic space the male cartoon characters mock, ridicule, and transgress images of respectability. Rather than constructing his masculinity in keeping with hegemonic ideals where manliness was demonstrated through self control

and where manly strength was used to protect and preserve the innocence and virtue of women, Sloper demonstrates a counter-masculinity, based on ideas of hedonism, where hyper-heterosexual-manliness is demonstrated through the aggressive, multiple, adulterous encounters with numerous (youthful) partners in public space and the violent sexual exploitation of his wife in the domestic sphere. Women are objects that, when manipulated, confirm Sloper's manly appeal and a hyper-manliness.

The cartoons of male sexual aggression in *ASHH* play out of early modern popular cultural traditions that often explored gender relations as the battle of the sexes. Whether it is the Punch and Judy show, the image of the cuckolded husband, or the scold on the chair, early modern cultural narratives asserted that, if society was to function in an orderly fashion, men should be in power. Sloper cartoons continue playing off these assumptions. Thus, while Ally Sloper's sexual deviances contested hegemonic constructions of manliness and mocked the ideal, the cartoons reinforced patriarchy and male dominance over women. Women are always objects that can be manipulated by men or, if masculine charms fail, then men can physically overpower women in order to demonstrate masculine domination. If women act in a sexually aggressive manner, it is only an inversion particular to carnivalesque events. Sloper cartoons couch the horror, shock, and resistance of women as part of a power struggle between the sexes, one that men must and can win. Women put up resistance as their part in this power struggle but, if one is to believe the cartoons, women can also be willing participants in men's fantasies of domination. Sloper's refusal to exercise "manly" self control or restraint only bring him social notoriety from men of all ranks. He is the "other" but he manages to cultivate his ruffian-masculinity freed from the confines of legal or moral restraint.

Show me the way to the next little girl.[54]

As part of his irresponsible-socially-deviant-sexually-perverse image, Ally Sloper harbours lustful designs on children. Sloper's image as a sexual predator is furthered by these insistences that the Eminent will foist his lustful designs on the most innocent in society, the unprotected child. One must puzzle as to what could possibly be amusing or comic about the suggestion of a cartoon character exploiting children in an attempt to satiate his unbridled sexual drive. His exploitation of children is constructed as part of a larger persona of the failed-Victorian-father-figure who eagerly shirks his domestic responsibilities. While innocence was somewhat paradoxically associated with married adult women, childhood was understood as the essence of purity and innocence. Thus, the cartoons depicting Sloper engaged in sexual activities with little girls and boys provide another avenue for the reader to contravene dominant assumptions about the necessity of protecting childhood innocence.

In Louise Jackson's study of Victorian court cases of child abuse she found that men of the Victorian judicial system understood child sexual abuse as a class issue. It was commonly assumed that it was idle-drunken-working-class fathers who were the perpetrators of sexual incestuous crimes.[55] Frank Mort has similarly argued that "incest was the most common source of moral anxiety, precisely because it dramatically disrupted middle-class norms of family propriety."[56] Furthermore, Mort's research suggests that for the middle class "sexual immorality was divided through the significations of dirt, disease, squalor, corruption, and the political and cultural threat of

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[54] The Doors, "Alabama," *The Doors,* 1967.
[55] Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: medico-moral politics in England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Press, 1987), 38-39.
[56] Ibid.

an urban working class populace."[57] While the assumption that child abuse was largely a class issue of incest is notably problematic and contradicted by substantial evidence of child prostitution, the cultural image of the loutish irresponsible father who felt no impulse to control his sexual appetites is easily situated with Ally Sloper's image of the cheat, idle, drunken father. Child abuse was a perverse and grievous crime in the eyes of the courts, although punishment levied seldom reflected the social condemnation of the crime. The understanding that adult/child, father/child sexual relations were the most grievous forms of sexual impropriety provided the artists and readers of *ASHH* with powerful and subversive meanings to attach to specific sex-acts and, therefore, to construct images of these acts whereby dominant sensibilities regarding innocence, childhood, and normative manly sexuality could be ridiculed and mocked.

In "Good Old Sloper!"[Figure 3.18] [58] our infamous rogue is seated in his office administrating the poor relief fund. Here is an example of how the producers of the comic paper attempted to blur reality with cartoon, as the text insists that Toostie and Sloper personally direct and manage the paper's poor relief fund. There is one young girl in the line, however, that has caught Sloper's attention and not out of want or poverty. Sloper's sloe- eyes are wide and his cigar erect, his hands clasped over the phallic-looking umbrella handle that reappears time and again in his sexual exploits. The young girl meets Sloper's gaze and suggestively points to her open mouth. The artist has situated Sloper's phallic umbrella on a parallel horizontal line with the young girls receptive mouth, and the suggestion is either that a mutual desire or at least that a consensual sexual exchange is about to transpire. Her body leans towards his hinting of

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[57] Ibid.
[58] W.F. Thomas, "Good Old Sloper" *ASHH*, 10 March 1888 , 73.

Figure 3.18

acceptance and consent in his sexual fantasies. She communicates her passivity and her receptiveness to be another object of Sloper's many sexual appetites. The encounter takes place in public, adding another layer to the already tabooed exchange. What is perhaps most disturbing about the image is that none of the other characters have noticed or have paid attention to Sloper and the young girl; and if the gleeful expression of the young boys in the picture is indeed directed towards Ally, their attitude would only serve to encourage rather than condemn Sloper's conduct. The suggestion of the cartoon, therefore, is that young girls are receptive to Sloper's advances and that society has not condemned him for his sexual transgressions. There is a sense that Sloper has "gotten away with something" which adds to the voyeuristic enjoyment of the reader in feeling that he/she too has "gotten away" with subversion of hegemonic understandings of sexuality and sex.

On one level "Sloper Helps Barnum" [figure 19][59] is constructed to further confuse the reality/fantasy of Sloper's image. The artist simultaneously plays this ambiguity and Sloper's reputation as a con man with the image of the American icon of artful deceptions. Thus, as Sloper corrupts youth so too does Barnum. Yet, although on the surface this cartoon is about fraud, deceptions and the entrepreneurial pairing of American and British con men, the image also carries the assumption that Sloper has other interests at the exhibition. The young child is probably male as Sloper addresses him as "boss," although too young to be wearing breeches. With Sloper's erect cigar and nose, and the advantageously positioned stick cradled in his left hand, there remains little doubt that Sloper has other activities in mind for the child. The other two men in the

[59] W.F. Thomas, "Sloper Helps Barnum," *ASHH*, 16 November 1889, 361.

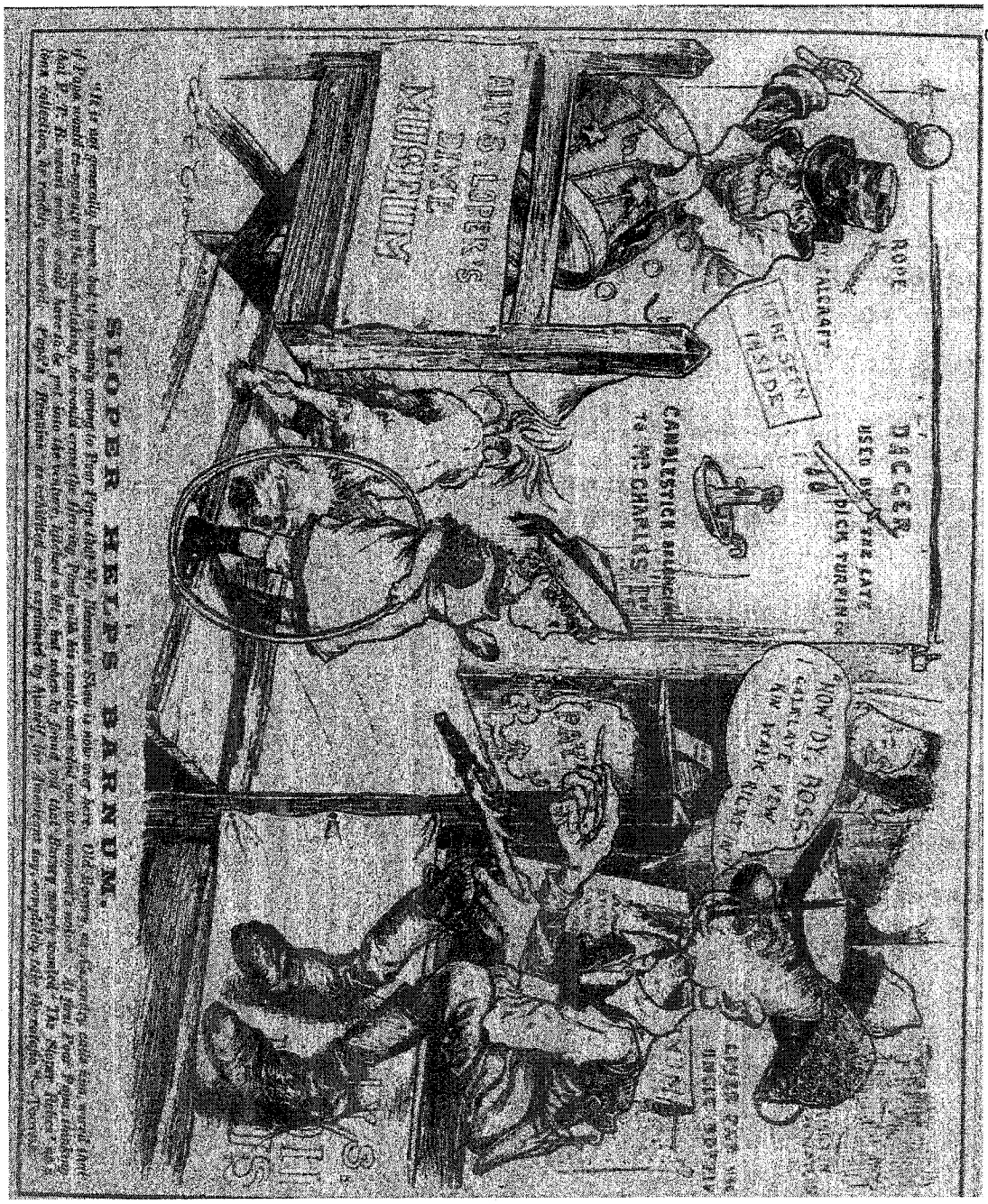

Figure 3.19

image who secretively witness Sloper's transgression wear expressions of sardonic delight. The reader is similarly participating as voyeur and is encouraged by the sneaky-side-glances of the minstrel and Barnum's semi-hidden position to acknowledge the seedy nature of Sloper's activities, although there is nothing to encourage condemnation.

"The age of Melancholy" [figure 3.20][60] is perhaps the best example of Sloper's adoption of multiple sexual roles. The cartoon depicts four of the varied sexualities Sloper periodically adopted. The narrative of the cartoon is a comment on the double lives of those within the dominant class. Sloper plays the part of the gentleman in public space who fraternizes with young women. At home, however, Sloper's domestic life is chaotic (signified by the clutter of the bedroom) and he engages in perverse sexual activities as a failed Victorian father.

In section one, Sloper is dancing with a young woman who he obviously finds attractive, as evident by his erect phallic nose. Sloper has assumed a gentrified persona by adopting (if not completely) the image of the gent including an evening jacket and monocle. He stands erect in the public realm as he whirls the young woman in his arms. Here Sloper is the womanizer, successful and happy in pursuit of extramarital liaisons with much younger women.

Part two of the image finds Ally Sloper redirecting his sexual desires to his infant son. In this frame Sloper has become the abusive father, the aggressive partner of a same-sex exchange, but the existence of the child and the wife in the background indicate that Sloper has also performed his "duties" as a husband. Ally's guise of responsible and caring fatherhood, however, is destroyed by the telltale image of his ever-erect phallic

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[60] W.G. Baxter, "The age of melancholy," *ASHH,* 24 January 1885, 25.

Figure 3.20

nose. The artist has chosen to draw the young Sloper with an adult-like face that is clearly male. The son, who is obviously distraught, has placed his hand in a masturbatory fashion on his father's phallic nose. The child's open mouth also hints at other sexual acts. The connection between Sloper's two sexual objects in frame one and two is underscored by the similarity in the shape of the woman's dress and his son's sleeping gown. Mrs. Sloper in the background appears to be shocked and horrified at her husband's conduct, but is nonetheless complicit (as too is the reader) as she observes the sexual exchange between father and son. What remains uncertain is whether the child is fussing *because* of the advances of the father, or, is the sexual act intended as a means of *pacifying* the child? If it is indeed the latter reading, the insistence that Sloper's infant son consented to the activity suggests consent that would have been more than problematic to Victorian sensibilities about childhood. The rejected pacifier/bottle in Sloper's one arm implies that the child has proclaimed his preference, suggesting a form of early-childhood sexuality offensive to dominant Victorian assumptions regarding childhood purity and innocence.

"The same old game" [figure 3.21][61] is a disturbingly titled cartoon that implies that Sloper is continuous in his deviant indulgence of drink and sexual exploitation of his children. Here he is in 1892 still unreformed in either his drinking habits or his sexual appetites, and worse yet his son Alexandry now mimics his father's perverse behaviours. Mrs. Sloper proves much more diligent in this cartoon in protecting her children from becoming victims of their father's desires. Sloper's elder son Alexandry, dressed in mock-gent style, imitates his father's sexual appetites, suggested by his reclined pose and erect cigar. The two infant Slopers are in a state of horror and fear as they run away from

their inebriated father and elder brother. The text reconfirms the image that Sloper, in his reclined pose, leaning on his umbrella, with his erect nose, and suggestive glance may be up to his "same old game" of sexual exploitation. Toostie confirms the reader's suspicion; "Papa seemed to be delighted with their appearance, and immediately commenced blessing the children' but Ma soon brought him to his senses."

"In The Briny at Teignmonth" [Figure 3.22] [62] confirms that Sloper cannot be left unsupervised with his children. Sloper's lack of propriety is not limited in this cartoon to his disregard for normative bathing habits at the sea, but it extends to making public sexual advances towards his twins (again!). From Tootsie's narrative the reader learns that Sloper "thought fit to bathe from the beach, and while he was in the water, to give his things an airing on an old clothes horse he brought down from his lodgings for the purpose..." Still more mortifying, however, was when "The head of our House went through a series of evolutions in the sea with the Twins ..." Sloper, mostly naked in the water, tosses his twins in the air. His reclined position on his back, legs apart, child on one foot, draws attention to his phallic-ended umbrella handle conveniently in line with the open mouth of one of the fussing twins. Sloper's other infant child is flying unheeded and out of control through the air and is about to land head first into the ocean. Not only has one child become the object of his sexual designs, but the physical safety of the other has been jeopardized in pursuit of the sexual gratification of the father. Again, the abuse (both sexual and physical neglect) of his children transpires in a public setting. In this cartoon the audience registers their abhorrence at Sloper's actions – although the text insists that the resulting social discomfort of the masses is over Sloper's exhibitionism on

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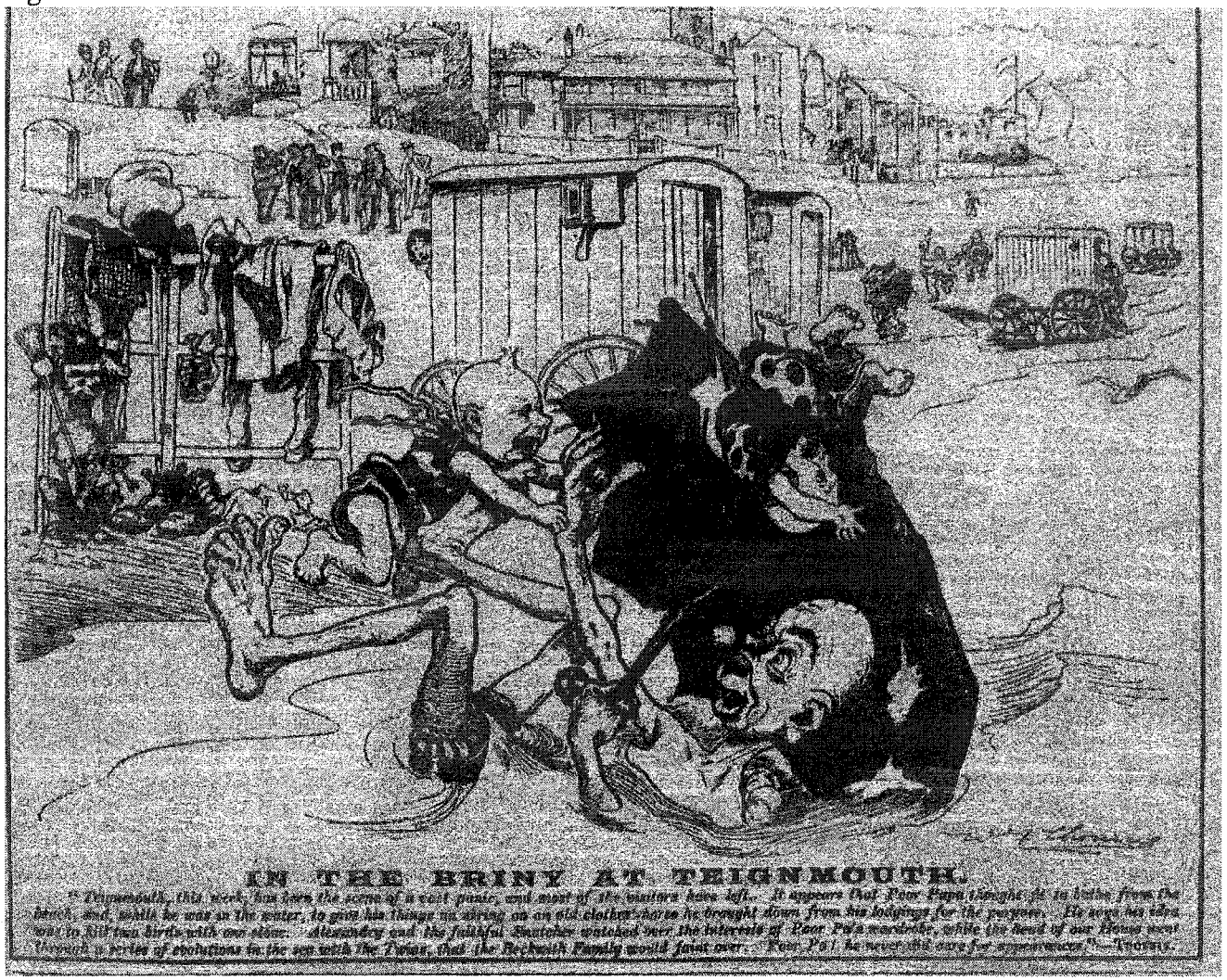
[61] W.F. Thomas, "Same old game," *ASHH*, 2 January 1892, 1.
[62] W.F. Thomas, "In the Briny at Teighmouth, *ASHH*, 27 July 1889, 232.

Figure 3.21

THE SAME OLD GAME.

"This year Pa's good resolution took the shape of coming home just as the clock struck twelve on New Year's Eve disgustingly intoxicated and, to crown all my poor, misguided brother, Alexndry, was in even worse condition. The disturbance created by the two inebriates downstairs roused the whole household and Ma, thinking by the noise that she would have to face a whole regiment of burglars, armed herself with a poker, and followed by the Twins , burst into the kitchen. Papa seemed to be delighted with their appearance, and immediately commenced blessing the children; but Ma soon brought him to his senses." - Tootsie

Figure 3.22



the beach and not his sexual misconduct. That the observers are horrified at what seems like the lesser of the two crimes suggests that the endangerment and exploitation of children are minimal, and therefore the humour exposes the hypocrisy of Victorian society. These cartoon figures are more concerned about preserving public innocence and have ignored the private crime of sexual exploitation of children by their father. The half-hidden faces of the audience reconfirm the voyeuristic design of the cartoon, and although society has condemned Sloper's behaviour, no one has intervened to protect or rescue the children. Similar to all aforementioned cartoons, Sloper does not indicate that he finds anything amiss with his conduct and fails to demonstrate any remorse. Evidently he does not feel inclined to hide his actions or desires from the public. Sloper pursues the children-objects of his desires openly and publicly.

Sloper's abuses of his children also take on a sadistic undertone. While some of the violence unleashed by Sloper is accidental, there are many occasions where he deliberately jeopardizes the safety and well being of his dependants. The cruelty of Sloper towards his family adds yet another layer to his constructed image of masculine "otherness." He is seldom the protector or provider, more frequently he is the abuser and the aggressor who endangers and exploits his family for his own pleasures and amusements.

In "Shooting at Folkstone" [Figure 3.23][63] Sloper and his son Alexandry are playing "William Tell." Mrs. Sloper and Alexandry's sweetheart Evelina have intervened to prevent Sloper from shooting his son. The other observers in the cartoon,

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[63] W.F. Thomas, 'Shooting at Folkstone," *ASHH*, 22 July 1893, 225.

Figure 3.23

SHOOTING AT FOLKESTONE.

"As neither time nor inclination will permit of Poor papa visiting Bisley this year, the success of the Volunteer Meeting is pretty well assured; but Dad does not intend giving up shooting altogether. In order to create an impression at Folkstone the other day, he in conjunction with Alexandry, arranged to do a bit of William Tell business. Of course, though, Evelina and Mamma must spoil sport. Thinking their darling, as they term Alexandry, in danger, they rushed boldly to the rescue, and it was only after severely mauling Papa, that they found his blunderbuss was loaded with blank cartridge." – Toostie.

however, find the possible violence between father and son amusing. These anonymous figures do nothing to intercede but only serve to encourage Sloper's aggressions against his son. Alexandry does not protest his father's actions and appears to be complicit and/or unconcerned about the possibility of death or bodily harm that his father seems eager to inflict upon him. Mrs. Sloper's intervention and chastisement of her husband contributes to the public scene of familial discord and simultaneously provides another layer to Sloper's complexly developed (un)manliness. Here the wife publicly harangues this failed Victorian patriarch for his failures as a father and protector.

As part of the spectacle, Sloper has combined the wardrobe of a "Bobby" (hat) and military uniform and the cartoon could therefore be a social criticism about the irresponsibility or untrustworthiness of men in uniform and/or the inability of both to provide protection and safety. Thus, Sloper is playing the role of irresponsible father and the man incompetent in his public office. [64]

It is only from Tootsie;s text that the reader is reassured that Sloper is only playing at being irresponsible – his gun is loaded with bank cartridges. (A further incompetence if Sloper is indeed subsuming the image of a Bobby.) In constructing the "joke" the artist is playing with the believability that Sloper would endanger his children (and he does so consistently throughout the comic paper.) In this cartoon, however,

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[64] Judith Walkowitz's work on policing and prostitution is a useful study of understanding the increased powers of the state via police in the regulation of working-class communities for the purposes of state/social reform moments in Britain during the 19th century. While primarily a discussion about the Contagious Diseases Acts, Walkowitz demonstrates how prostitution was just one way that the state was extending control into working-class neighbourhoods to police women, and by extension, the communities they inhabited. Reformers against CDA used the invasive presence of the law within working-class communities to rally local support for the repeal of these laws. While there are many works that demonstrate the development of police forces through the 19th century, Walkowitz's work is fundamental in understanding working-class reactions to this new presence. See Walkowitz's, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: women, class, and the state* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

Sloper is playing at a social image of the irresponsible father and public man, but given past misbehaviour this cartoon serves to reinforce the ambiguity of Sloper's feelings towards his family. Is he the father eager to be rid of paternal responsibilities or is he the childish-father-figure whose failed manliness jeopardizes the safety of his children? This cartoon blurs the reader's ability to detect the "authentic" Sloper from the "role-player" Sloper: is he the kind of father who abuses his children or are all transgressions simply a result of misunderstandings and fun gone astray?

Alexandry is the object of Sloper's paternal discipline/violence in "Ally at the Lord Mayor's show" [Figure 3.24].[65] In this cartoon Sloper abuses his child for the purposes of social protest. It is difficult to understand from the clues in the cartoon how Ally walloping his son "commemorates" the recent strikes. This cartoon is a clear hidden transcript that contains political references regarding class struggles in Victorian Britain. The specific references pertaining to strikes in Britain remains unclear and what explanations were hidden in the cartoon are all but lost to the modern reader. What is interesting in the context of this study of Sloper cartoons is that the comic paper (re)presents social protest within the context of homoerotic-sadomasochistic-incestuous-child-abuse, and that such a cartoon was intended as comical.

The beating of a child by his father is a curious expression of social protest and humour. Sloper's profound nose again appears to be intended as a phallic image and the size and enlargement of this feature suggests that Sloper has taken sadistic pleasure in the punishment of his son. The face and body gestures of the young boy indicate that he is

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[65] W.F. Thomas, "Ally at the Lord Mayor's show," *ASHH*, 9 November 1889, 353.

Figure 3.24

experiencing considerable pain, confirmed in Toostie's text, "But loud above the deafening cheers of the British people were distinctly heard the piercing shrikes of my poor Brother, Alexandry." Sloper complains of a sore hand as a result of his diligent spanking of his child. Although he is clearly in pain, Alexandry's nose has morphed similar to his father's, suggesting that on some level the young child is taking masochistic pleasure in being vigorously spanked.[66] Alexandry's pain and discomfort is artistically mocked and therefore minimized by the existence of a literal bucket of tears, and thus his suffering becomes cliché and humorous.

The crowd revels in the sadomasochistic public display between father and son. Individual faces in the crowd are drawn with expressions of delight, surprise, and amusement. Toostie encourages the reader to "never mind" the boy's cries; "let us hope it has done him good." Thus, Sloper has exercised paternal discipline to a sadistic extent, encouraged by the cheers of the crowd who somehow associate the vicious spanking of a child with strikes of weeks past. The crowd experience their own pleasures and a delight in a voyeuristic/spectatorship, and the reader is encouraged to do the same. The crowd is a cross sampling of class, gender, and ages, thus the social "comment" is enjoyed by upper-, middle -, and working-class men, women, girls and boys.

The suggestion that Ally Sloper has covert designs on girls and boys moves this character further into the realms of masculine "otherness" and reinforces his defiance of social and legal restrictions on manliness. That his sexual exploitation of children is undertaken in public spaces reinforces the dominance and supremacy of male sexuality. There are no recourses against Sloper for his active destruction of innocence, nor is there

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[66] Masochism and spanking are reoccurring themes throughout the pornography. See as an example *The Pearl*.

a suggestion that he should be reprimanded for his exploitations. He continues unaware and unhampered by social and cultural constraints that demand self-restraint and self-control.

Sloper's disregard for appropriate male sexual behaviour situates these cartoons within a larger power struggle surrounding manly prerogative/power and social limitations governing masculine expression. It also provides the reader with opportunity to vicariously and voyeuristically participate in the corruption of innocence. Corruption is not limited to that of the cartoon characters but extends to the reader who is corrupted through a tacit participation in these transgressions. Furthermore, through the act of decoding the symbols of sexual abuse, the reader is exercising their knowledge and awareness of subversive sexual acts. The voyeuristic nature of the cartoons allows the reader to witness these blatant transgressive acts, exercise his/her knowledge of inappropriate sexual behaviours, while the insistence that these images are "funny" and thereby maintains a critical distance between the perverse Sloper and the observer. Thus the comic allows for social subversion while the artist and reader, tongue-in-cheek, insists that this is all fun and intended as a "joke" and thus reinforces Ally as the loutish and deviant "other."

As shown in the preceding sections, one of the most prominent themes throughout the cartoons is the corruption of innocence. Historians of sexual abuse have argued that by using discourses necessitating that "purity" and "innocence" were fundamental to childhood, moral-purity-advocates simultaneously eroticised and fetishised the child.[67]

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[67] Jackson, 114-117; and James R Kincaid, *Child Loving: The erotic child and Victorian culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), 183-214.

Louise Jackson insists the social discourses of the 1880s that centred on the threats to innocence "served to fashion the child as an object of desire."[68] Innocence was tenuously situated with the image of the virtuous wife and mother. The constructions of ideal childhood and womanhood also insisted that domesticity be carved out as a private space protected by men. These constructions, therefore, provided tabooed terrain that, if violated, provoked both thrills and horrors.

If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with [69]

Not surprisingly, Sloper also finds men to exploit as he navigates cartoon London in pursuit of sexual adventures. Nineteenth century popular notions of same-sex-acts between men, historian George Chancey has argued, were much more diverse than those reflected in the legal and institutional tracts. Uses of male prostitutes were not uncommon by the population of men who were inclined to pay for sexual encounters. Female prostitutes were feared to be the source of venereal diseases and male prostitutes would perform fellatio (another "defence" against venereal disease), an activity most women, including female prostitutes, refused to execute. If a man maintained his position as the active partner and never became the passive participant in the same-sex exchange then he could retain his identity as a heterosexual man. A man who played the passive role jeopardized his claims to manliness, an extension of the popular assumption of female sexuality-as-passive. Accordingly, Chancey suggests, although not condoned or accepted as normative, in many sectors of late Victorian America and Britain same-sex-acts

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[68] Jackson, 116.
[69] Crosby, Stills, and Nash, "Love the one you're with," *Four Way Street*, 1971.

between men were tolerated.[70] Jeffery Weeks has argued along a similar line, suggesting that male prostitution were understood to be "part of the continuum of undifferentiated male lust, [a] product of men's sexual selfishness."[71]

The 1880s legislation that regulated same-sex acts were inspired by moral crusaders' outrage to what they saw as dangerous, unchecked, male sexuality. The new legislation was also informed through popular and medical beliefs that increasingly understood transgressive sex acts as signposts of internal sexual deviance and perversions, and the persons who manifested these deviant personalities needed to be monitored by institutions and/or removed from society.[72] Popular understandings about same-sex-acts were informed and reformed by these institutional codifications that treated sexual acts between men as uniquely perverse.

The Sloper cartoons that use images of same-sex acts and homoerotic subtexts are as much a comment refuting newly asserted ideals about male sexuality, identity, and behaviour, as they are a reaction against the erosions of male sexual prerogative. Sloper sought out same-sex relations unconcerned with a reorganization of an internal self; the comic reading of Sloper suggests that sexual acts could be separated from identity. Sloper is not a homosexual: he plays at being the sodomite. The insistence that Sloper can engage in same-sex acts and the homoerotic subtexts of several of his encounters provides another layer to the construction of Sloper's "otherness" and certifies his place as the antihero who can avoid social stigmas, institutional labels, and legal repercussions for deviant and perverse behaviours.

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[70] George Chancey, *Gay New York: gender, urban culture and the gay male world, 1890- 1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
[71] Jeffery Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (Cambridge, U.K: Polity Press, 2000), 92.

The imagery of "The Sloper Pantomime" [Figure 3.25][73] is indicative of how Sloper manipulates costumes in his role-playing of sexualities. Both of Sloper's companions Ikey Moses and Lord Bob have been assigned costumes of buffoons for the pantomime. Ikey Moses has adopted a noticeably fake beard, easily separated from his face. This, combined with his large phallic nose, makes it plausible that this costume item symbolizes this character's womanizing - as in beard-splitter (a noun that could refer to either a man or his penis).[74] Ikey Moeses' large nose is also in keeping with stereotypical portrayals of Jewish characters in Victorian comic drawings. Given the crime that may soon transpire, it is fundamental to Victorian ethnic humour that the reader is aware of Moses' "racial" profile.

The subtext of this cartoon is homoeroticism. Moses is dangerously close to touching Sloper's sausages, slang for penis in the nineteenth century.[75] The locked eyes of Sloper and Moses can be read on two levels: first as a confirmation of participation in the same-sex acts and mutual pleasure. Second, locked eyes may simply be in preparation of attacking and robbing the man (with an erect cigar and suggestive stance) leaving the Ally Sloper Office.

As his part of the subversive pantomime Sloper's young son is moving towards the phallic coat tails of his father with the implication of performing fellatio. Unlike the suggestions of child abuse in other cartoons, the young Sloper, with his own small phallic nose, will engage in this act of his own free will. Because he is part of a pantomime he

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[72] Angus McClaren, *The Trial of Masculinity: policing sexual boundaries, 1870 - 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
[73] W.G. Baxter, "Sloperine Pantomime," *ASHH*, 10 January 1885, 9.
[74] *Dictionary of Slang and unconventional English*, s.v. "beard-splitter."
[75] *Ibid.*, s.v. "sausage."

Figure 3.25

too is only playing at sodomy. The isolation of Sloper's daughter Toostie in the background, dressed as the "saucy" girlfriend of the Harlequin, reinforces the closeness and erotic interactions of the four men. The purpose of the pantomime, aside from the homoerotic subtext, is a cover for an attempted robbery, but the narrative of the cartoon is lost in the overt sexual imagery. For the reader, the humour is again understood only through a decoding of the symbols and images manipulated by the artist. The reader's familiarity with music hall tropes is also essential in order to understand the ordering of the men in this cartoon. Sloper as the clown is the alpha male and each of the other characters must submit to the interest of the main character in the narrative of the pantomime. Of course, Sloper and his comrades only *play* at these subversive sexual acts as part of the comic narrative and their deviance is only momentary and not reflective of internalized perverse identities.

What is important to note in considering the homoerotic undertones of the Sloper cartoons is the ambiguity involved in the image of men who commit and engage in same-sex acts. On the one hand, there are the incompetent men who, through their unmanly (in)actions are the victims of sexual exploitation by their more manly counterparts. The passive partner in the same-sex acts is unmanly and these cartoons, therefore, reinforce that men should be active, aggressive, and dominant. In other cartoons, the homoerotic undertones suggest a hyper-manly overflowing of sexual aggression that extends to men. As such, these men's sexualities are so charged that they cannot help the sometimes-accidental sexual encounters with men. In these cartoons it is not unmanly incompetence that causes uncontrolled and/or premature ejaculation, but an over-abundance of hyper-heterosexual lusts that must find an outlet even if it is with other men.

This ambiguity can be illustrated through two cartoons depicting Sloper's Guy Fawkes Day celebrations. The first cartoon, appearing in 1885 [Figure 3.26],[76] has clear undertones of homoeroticism that are a result of exuberant hyper-heterosexual desires. The orgiastic homoerotic public displays of sexuality are expressed through the fireworks and rockets that are fired off in any and all directions. At the forefront of the cartoon the reader witnesses a public orgiastic all-male celebration as Sloper and McGooseley accost Bill. The Honourable Bill, however, seems receptive to the men's advances, suggested by his open mouth ready to receive from Sloper. Bill is the submissive recipient of two men's advances, showered in an excess of sparkles. The dog has presented himself to be ravished and, yet, simultaneously, the sparks from his phallic tail have caught the attention of Mrs Sloper. Another young figure with stick in hand is suggestively pushing his lighted firecracker towards the dog. Toostie interacts suggestively with Lord Bob, while Mrs. Sloper is ignored by her husband and led away by her adolescent son. The sparks are numerous and indiscriminate in destination as they land on everyone and everything.

Conversely, the Guy Fawkes Celebrations of 1890 demonstrate an important shift in the homoerotic subtexts of Sloper. [Figure 3.27][77] The explosions occur in front of one character with the result that all men are thrown head over feet. Sexual incompetence leaves the men vulnerable to Sloper's advances, and the rocket suggestively firing from the direction of Sloper is intended to penetrate one of the figurea. His exploitation of these characters inflicted permanent damage, communicated in Tootsie's text: "the younger members of the family will go about on crutches for the

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[76] W.G. Baxter, "'Guy Fawkes Guy' Day," *ASHH*, 7 November 1885, 253.
[77] W.F. Thomas, "Fireworks on the Fifth, *ASHH,* 8 November 1890, 354.

Figure 3.26

Figure 3.27

remainder of their lives." Here male sexual incompetence and the resulting homoerotic subtexts have perverse, dangerous, and long lasting effects on the young and innocent, an indication that homosexuality (rather than sodomy) targets and corrupts innocence and youthfulness. Sloper is the active agent, the younger men are the passive partners and the result is long-lasting corruption of innocence. The cartoon reaffirms Sloper's position as the dominant male, for only he remains in an upright position with an aggressive stance ready to exploit and penetrate. He is also the older, the more experienced, and therefore the partner capable of corrupting the young boys he associates with.

Homoeroticism is rampant in many cartoons, but it is particularly important as part of the paper's ridicule of public men. There are numerous depictions of Sloper in public roles that usually befall "responsible" Victorian men where, it is suggested, Sloper engages or will commit same-sex acts. Here homoeroticism is both a criticism of the incompetence of public men, but it also functions as a subtext that profanes glorified images of manliness. Whether Sloper is an M.P., a soldier, or part of the London police force, there are strong homoerotic undertones in the representation of Sloper in these hyper-masculine roles.

The Imperial officer was an esteemed figure in the cultural imagination of hegemonic Victorian Britain, for he epitomized the necessary traits and qualities for manliness: he was physically fit, honourable, powerful, aggressive, and the protector of home and country. Educational and medical experts all propounded that young British boys should be fit for military service, and only when all British men met these rigorous demands would Britain solidify its place in world. It was widely understood that mind and body were linked and if a boy/man could gain physical mastery over his body he

could similarly control his will and, consequently, construct within himself a strong moral character in keeping with normative assumptions about manliness. British society, therefore, required physically fit young men who imitated the ideals of militarism and manliness.[78]

In Figure 3.28[79] Sloper joins the Recruits who are off for the Sudan. On one level this cartoon is "funny "because it reinforces popular assumptions about the homosocial nature of the Empire. According to John Tosh, the Empire was understood as a place far away from the debilitating effects of domesticity on masculinity. In the Empire, men would associate with other men and develop characteristics of independence, strength, and physical stamina.[80] A second reading is that by placing Sloper within imagery of the Empire and soldiers, both are profaned. The Eminent proves his incompetence at soldiering by placing his boot in the wrong stirrup and wearing his spurs backwards. Sloper, the lout, the pervert, the con man, is now the Soldier off to the Empire to offer the services of his erect nose and his phallic sword. He takes with him his gin bottles and his umbrella, the converging symbols of the debauched lowlife against the feigned respectability that Sloper constantly plays with in his dress and costumes.[81] The carelessness with which his pistol now rests on the temple of the young boy provides the boy with pleasure and excitement and furthers the homoerotic

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[78] Roberta J. Park, "Biological thought, athletics and the formation of a 'man of character;" John Springall, "Building character in the British boy: the attempt to extend Christian manliness to working-class adolescents, 1880-1914"; John M. Mackenzie, "The Imperial pioneer and hunter and the British masculine stereotype In late Victorian and Edwardian times;" and Donald D. J. Mrozek, "Popular manliness: Baden Powell, scouting and the development of manly character,"all in *Manliness and Morality: middle -class masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, ed. J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

[79] W.G. Baxter, "More Reinforcements," *ASHH,* 28 February 1885, 65.

[80] Tosh, 170 - 194.

[81] See Peter Bailey, *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, 67.

Figure 3.28

subtext of the cartoon. Sloper is unaware of the thoughts and desires of his son whose phallic nose, aimed directly at his father's backside, suggesting penetration. If penetration occurs, Sloper the soldier would be stripped of his claims to being the power-figure and dominant male. The young Sloper's thoughts, therefore, are further this cartoon's mockery of the pretensions and artists ridicule of Empire as a sphere where manliness in developed and preserved.

Other cartoons depicting Sloper as a soldier provided further evidence that sexuality and same-sex acts were weapons used by the readers/artist to ridicule dominant constructions of ideal manliness. In "By an old master" the reader learns that Sloper's hyper-manliness is hereditary. [Figure 3.29][82] In this image Sloper publishes a portrait of his ancestor whose predominant phallic nose inhibited his abilities to adorn the costume of a soldier. He is *too* manly to be a soldier, and thus Sloper has inherited the qualities of the hyper-masculine man. This cartoon also mocks the Victorian fascination with distinguished pedigree. In the painting by "An Old master," the supposed nobility and manliness of Sloper's distant relative profanes the image of the Soldier and of hereditary nobility. The phallic nose protruding out of the helmet suggests that, like Sloper, this distant relative had a habit of adopting the clothing of respectability, but he is unable to completely adopt the image and he, like the Victorian Sloper, remains a fraud and imitator.

One story published in the comic paper relays to the reader that Sloper is a fan of Military Exhibitions. [Figure 3.30] [83] He not only attends the exhibition but he does so "attired, as he says, in warlike garments, which although rather out dated, having

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[82] Artist Unknown, "By an old master," *ASHH,* 20 February 1892, 64.
[83] Artist Unknown, "untitled," *ASHH*, 24 May 1890, 166.

Figure 3.29

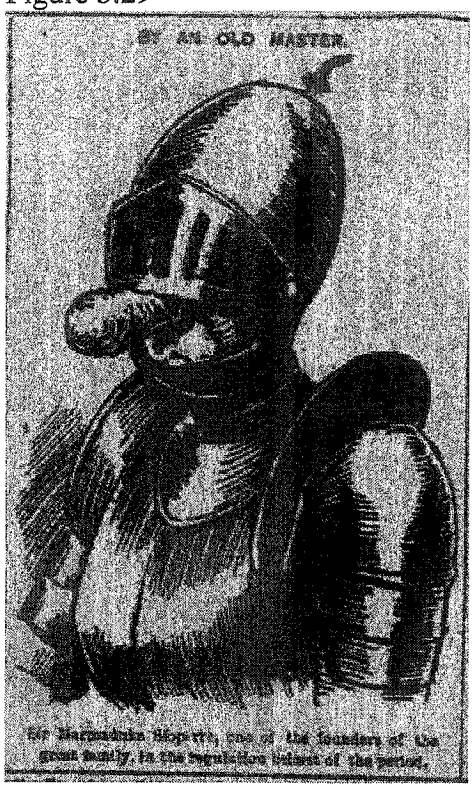

Figure 3.30

belonged to a Sloper of the 16th century, yet come in very appropriately for the occasion." Again, the comic paper uses distended phallic symbols to mock the pretensions of Victorian militarism, the quest for a distinguished pedigree, and ridicules the assumed prestige of the military family.

In "Sloper and Captain Shaw" [figure 3.31][84] Sloper is dressed in uniform to assist Captain Shaw in securing the safety of London Theatres. In this cartoon, Sloper is pictured at his favourite haunt, the Frivolity, and the pretty young girls who usually occupy his time are only background figures. In this cartoon, the homoerotic subtext is unmistakable as a stream from Sloper's nozzle ejaculates into the face of the distinguished Captain. The text assures the reader, however, that the Captain was only "amazed" by Sloper. The women in the background, who observe the deviant exchange, look amused and even pleased by Sloper's actions. His eyes follow the spray as it hits the captain with force, and his phallic nose reinforces that perhaps this was no accident. Sloper's actions while in uniform disgrace his appointed office. The social commentary in the cartoon is both comment on the incompetence of the "men in charge" but the cartoon also plays off the rumoured (and to a certain extent substantiated stories of) homosexual activities in the London police forces and British army.[85]

Many of the cartoons depicting same-sex-acts are smaller images found on the inside pages of the comic paper. At times, Sloper is the manly aggressor where other men are the willing submissive participants in Sloper's aggressions. In other cartoons, Sloper's unmanly failings leave him passive, exposed, and therefore exploited.

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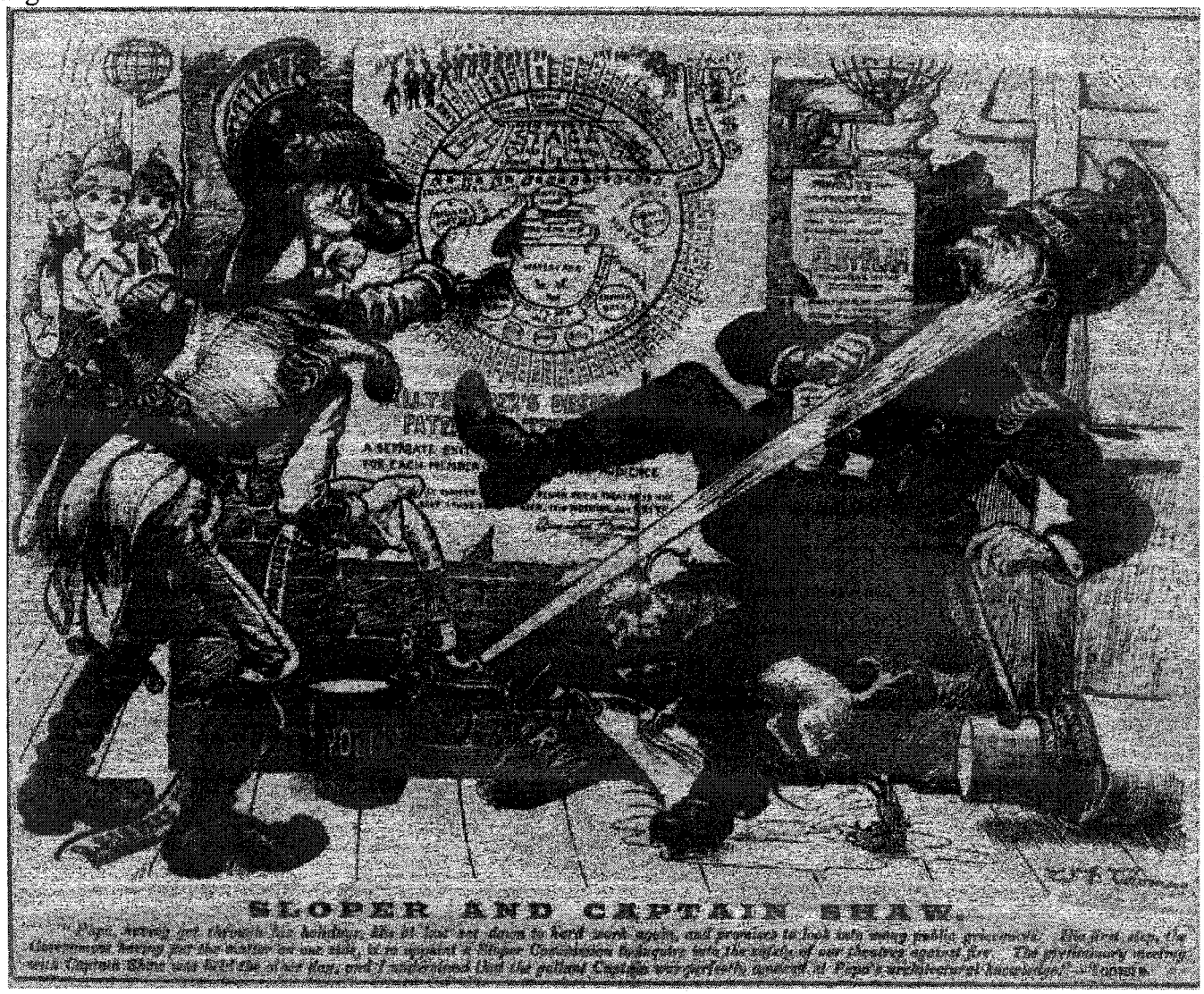
[84] W.G. Baxter, "Sloper and Captain Shaw," *ASHH*, 15 October 1887, 329.
[85] See Arthur Gilbert, "Buggery and the British Navy, 1700-1861" in *Journal of Social History,* Vol. 10 No. 1 (Fall 1976): 72-98; see also Ronald Pearsall, *The Worm and the Bud: the world of Victorian sexuality* (Toronto, Macmillan Company, 1969), 448-473.

Figure 3.31



In [Figure 3.32][86] Sloper struggles to open oysters, a fitting food of choice for a man always in pursuit of sexual adventures. His inability or struggle to pry open the resistant shell creates a situation where he is vulnerable to the advances and/or lustful designs of the Sloper paperboy. Sloper's coat tails are spread, emphasizing his exposure and vulnerability. In other cartoons Sloper is the perpetrator of sexual attacks, but here the situation is reversed so that this child/youth is the aggressor in the corruption of the older/adult. The cartoon implies through the boy's bodily stance (hands clasped in front to hide his erection) that the longing looks cast towards Sloper reflect a *desire* for same-sex relations with the Eminent. This is not an accident nor is the sexual exchange due to uncontrolled hyper-heterosexual manliness, but this young boy is demonstrating his *preference* to engage in sexual activities with his employer.

Sloper's incompetence leaves him exposed in "Cutting a figure" [figure 3.33].[87] Sloper cannot master ice-skating and, consequently, is unable to stand with confidence in public space. As a result, Sloper's body has morphed into an obvious phallic pose in preparation to be penetrated. Simultaneously, however, his body is also positioned to penetrate. By failing to stand as a man, Sloper has lost his position as the dominant man, and, it is suggested through the text, is both willing and comfortable to engage in same-sex acts as either the aggressor or the penetrated. The cartoon also uses homoerotic undertones and subtexts to ridicule the image of the man-in-public-office. Sloper as the M.P. demonstrates manly incompetence and, in doing so, is prepared to both "fuck" and be "fucked." Thus, the failed manliness of Sloper, M.P. invokes a reading of figurative "fucking" of politicians by other men, and vulnerable men by those they elect.

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[86] Artist Unknown, "The Eminent opening oysters," *ASHH*, 9 January 1886, 12.
[87] Artist Unknown, "Cutting a figure," *ASHH*, 6 February 1886, 44.

Figure 3.32

Figure 3.33

The figurative "fucking" of workers by M.P.s is continued elsewhere in the comic paper, such as the cartoon, "The Shoe lane baker" [figure 3.34].[88] The baker presents himself as the submissive partner but solicitor of same-sex-acts with Sloper. The baker's expressed preference to have Sloper as his "customer" reinforces Sloper's position as the most sexually desired figure in the comic paper. In this cartoon the provider of sexual services solicits Sloper as his client, and if Sloper is so willing to satisfy this baker's demands, the labourer promises to vote for Sloper, M.P. The social commentary of this cartoon, therefore, is of the worker being "fucked" by the politician, and furthermore, that the worker is willing and excited by the prospects of literal/figurative "fucking."[89]

Historian Martin Pugh has argued that late Victorian political culture was increasingly marked by working-class suspicions and hostilities towards public men, government officials, and government policies, all of which failed to represent workers' interests. The various Victorian reform methods on poverty had failed including programs of "self-help, charity, and the poor Law." "What is significant," Pugh argues, "is that by the last twenty years of the nineteenth century all three were increasingly recognized as unsatisfactory and inadequate."[90] Pugh suggests that working-class scepticism denounced measures by middle-class reformers and politicians because many of "the existing expressions of intervention in the lives of working-class people aroused a good deal of antagonism, which naturally blunted the appetite for more."[91] Such measures included the police, who were viewed as instruments of surveillance of

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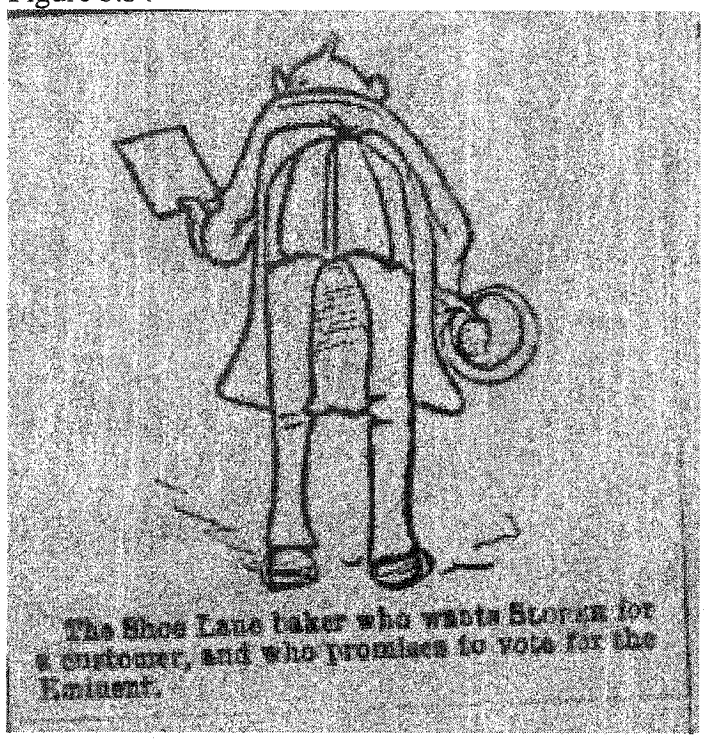
[88] Artist Unknown, "The Shoe lane baker," *ASHH*, 21 November 1885, 376.
[89] *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang,* ed, Jonathan Green (London: Cassel, 1998), s.v. "fuck" and "fucked, to be."
[90] Martin Pugh, *State and Society: a social and political history of Britian 1870-1997.* 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 48.
[91] Ibid., 51.

Figure 3.34


The Shoe Lane taker who wants Storm for a customer, and who promises to vote for the Eminent.

working-class neighbourhoods and not as protectors of working-class interests. Compulsory education kept children in schools when parent's and family incomes required the assistance of older children. Medical measures of child vaccination and lunch programs were viewed with suspicion by parents who saw the work of public health workers, truancy officers, and teachers infringing on the rights of parents. Furthermore, many within the working classes believed that these figures were nothing more than middle-class agents sent to monitor working-class neighbourhoods. Other government programs on food and housing were often implemented poorly and were deemed by the working class, who felt unjustly taxed for these inadequate programs, as a misspending of worker's money. Thus, the reform acts which enfranchised workers ushered in a period where the working class demanded governments that abandoned their national initiatives. Throughout the late Victorian period working people voiced louder their suspicions of national government policies and turned their political agitation to local concerns.[92]

These Sloper cartoons depicting the "fucking" of the workingman by those who intended to represent him reflect the unease and reservations of working-class voters. The homoerotic subtexts reinforce the manliness of action and of penetration and the undesirable situation of being the passive recipient of sexual/political aggressions. The homoerotic subtexts of the cartoon depicted hyper-manliness where over-charged sexual drives could find release upon less dominant men. It was the active, dominant, partner, however, who retained his respectability, honour, and normalcy. There are few cartoons that suggest same-sex acts were manifestations of a deviant identity. Homoeroticism and same-sex acts were weapons to reflect power relationships between men but they could

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[92] Ibid., 50-56.

also be used as tools to mock and profane dominant ideals of manliness, constructions based on false pretensions and ridiculous prestige.

I'm sorry for what I did; I did what my body told me to [93]

In other cartoons, Sloper assumes an attitude of penitence in a feigned attempt at self-reform. These cartoons chronicle rare moments in Sloper's life when he acknowledges that perhaps he has not been behaving appropriately. These moments are brief and fleeting, and one suspects, are only other roles Sloper assumes in his manipulation of others in pursuit of self-gratification. The penitent man, like the sexual abuser of children, perverse father, exploitive husband, womanizer, and bandit are all adopted and discarded with no internalization or serious consideration of values and ethics. If Sloper appears penitent, it is only an assumed persona and not a commitment for improvement or conformity. Sloper is poseur with no real authentic character of his own.

In "Turning over a new leaf" [Figure 3.35][94] the artist is ridiculing the material nature of Victorian respectability. In this cartoon the reader is assured that Sloper's self-reform is "attributed to a new hat." Because of a material object, Sloper is now dignified and gentrified, the Christian gentleman, and consequently, "no longer the man hew was" [sic]. The reader can easily locate the bottle of gin in Sloper's back pocket that symbolizes his lack of commitment to his newly (and momentarily) reformed image. Nonetheless, by purchasing a new "gentlemanly hat" Sloper has convinced those nearest him that he has indeed turned over "a new leaf." The humour for the reader lies in his/her awareness that the good public Victorian family man on his way to church on

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[93] Weezer, "Butterfly," *Pinkerton,* 1994.
[94] W.G. Baxter, "Turning over a new leaf," *ASHH*, 2 January 1886, 1.

Figure 3.35

TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF.

My dear, you would never believe it, Poor Pa is no longer the man he was. We attribute it to a new hat; but all feel sincerely glad. As Ma says, there is a time for all things. We were accidentally three-quarter of an hour late last Sunday, and caused some attention to be directed towards us. But that need not occur again." [Extract from Toostie's Correspondence].

Sunday is a dubious persona. The social commentary of the cartoon implies that the Christian gentleman is only so in appearances and through fine clothes and conforming attitudes, he hides a multitude of sins. Sloper's shamefulness as the failed Victorian patriarch is quickly reaffirmed when the family "mistakenly" arrived three-quarters of an hour late for church.

Valentine's Day of 1893 is a particularly difficult time for both Mr. and Mrs. Sloper. Sloper, Toostie informs the reader, is "suffering from an acute form of Valentine fever, and his chief grievance during his fits of delirium seems to be that his wife no longer loves him." [Figure 3.36][95] Mrs. Sloper, the cartoon continues, has taken to wearing "crinoline" in order to protect herself from the constant besiege of her husband. Although Sloper is in the attitude of penitence, his attempts to regain the affections of his wife take on an equally sexually aggressive subtext to those situations that could be the cause of her grievances. The cartoon portrays Sloper's intentions as noble, but his assumption of costume signifies that he is only playing the role of the gentlemanly suitor. His hat, eyeglass, and gloves serve as props as he takes on the new role of suitor who must woo from a distance – a result of female costume and dress of upper-class women. The costume of both Mr. and Mrs. Sloper reinforce that this is only a brief moment of role-playing as a respectable couple that will soon deteriorate as soon as a new costume is appropriated by either character.

For the reader, Sloper's moments of penitence reinforces the subervsiveness of his (mis)adventures and exploits. These cartoons affirm the reader's part in a socially subversive amusement that attacks and ridicules dominant understandings about

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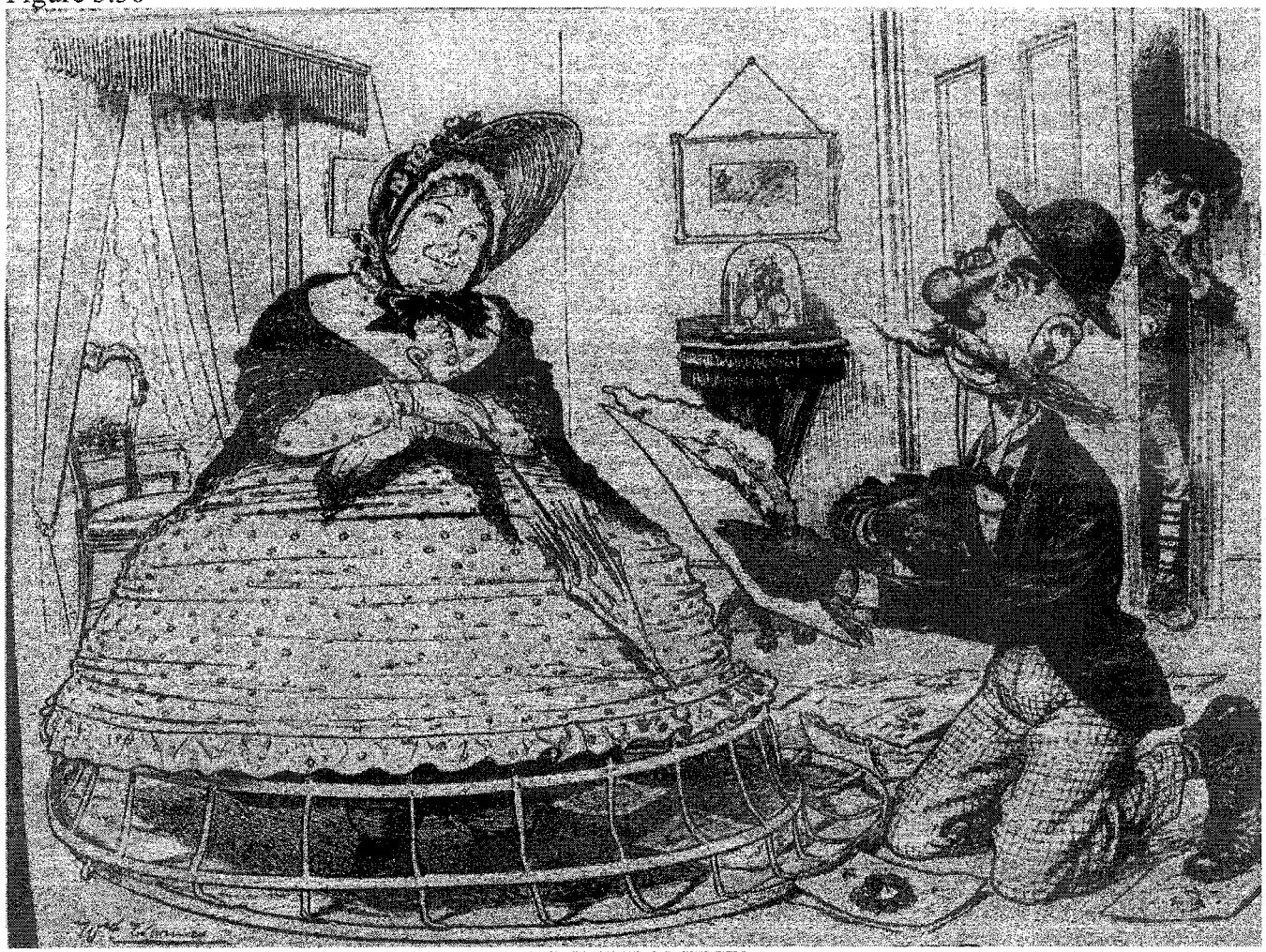
[95] W.F. Baxter, "Mrs. Sloper Besieged,' *ASHH*, 11 February 1893, 42.

Figure 3.36



MRS. SLOPER BESIEGED

"Poor Pa is at present suffering from an acute form of Valentine fever, and his chief grievance during his fits of delirium seems to be that his wife no longer loves him. About every hour in the day Papa asks for a kiss, and none being forthcoming, he reels off yards of Valentine sonnets, in which Mamma is designated as his Heart's Delight, his Yum-Yum, and other things. In order to keep him at a proper distance, Poor Ma has encased herself in one of the soon-to-be fashionable crinolines, and nothing is left for papa but to fire in his broadsides from along range, much to Alexandry's delight."

masculine behaviour. Yet, these moments are presented in light-hearted and comic narratives that simultaneously reinforce the ridiculousness of repentance. Sloper does not *really* feel the need for self-evaluation. In fact, the comic nature of Sloper's penitence plays an important role in painting social propriety ridiculous.

Conclusion

The humour of Ally Sloper cartoons provides the historian with a colourful avenue to access counter-cultural discourses within Victorian society. What is evident from the Sloper cartoons is how dominant discourses on sexuality that emphasized self-control, regulation, restraint, and observation, created opportunity where sex and sex-acts could take on multiple perverse and therefore subversive meanings. The Sloper cartoonists chose sex-acts and sexuality as key themes in their ridicule of dominant culture, and remarkably and notably, other bodily functions/acts do not receive similar attention. Unlike early modern popular culture tracts that profaned the sacred and ridiculed dominant assumptions and power figures, there are few if any cartoons in *ASHH* that use defecation, urination, flatulence, or violent deaths as part of their attack of the power culture.[96] Sloper cartoons, therefore, lend a very particular type of evidence to the substantial scholarly literature that explores the Victorian preoccupation and anxieties about sex. It is precisely these anxieties that give meaning to Sloper's playful, violative, sex-acts and appetites. The distinct and strict boundaries defining normative sexuality constructed numerous actions and appetites as taboo and made the possibility of transgression alluring.

Sloper commanded women and children and, as his social inferiors, these figures complied. The Eminent's behaviour should not be taken as literal representations of believed ideals of manliness, for it is only by recognising that Sloper has crossed boundaries that these cartoons take on humorous messages. The comic paper asserted that corruption of innocence was not a manly trait; yet there existed an equally strong message that argued for manly domination of inferiors and dependents.

The humour of *ASHH* reflected the phallic-centric Victorian definitions of sex. Sex in *ASHH* is without exception represented as penetrative and/or the threat of penetration is a near possibility. Humour is derived from the near, soon to be, almost, or failed act of penetration. Sex-acts are metaphors where power relationships are mediated. Action is manly where passivity marks the inferiors who are exploited to satiate the desires of the dominant figure.

Historian Tim Hitchcock has argued that early eighteenth-century popular opinions about sex reflected an understanding where expressions of intimacy between heterosexual couples encompassed a wider definition of what constituted sexual activity.[97] He further asserts that the available literature on history of family, sexuality, and demography indicates that throughout the eighteenth-century British society redefined sexual activity in terms that emphasized penetrative sexual acts.[98] Hitchcock

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[96] see for example Robert Darnton, "Peasants' Tell Tales," in *Great Cat Massacre*, 9-72; and Peter Thomson, "Magna Farta: Walpole and the Golden Rump," in *Humour and History,* ed. Keith Cameron (Oxford: Intellect, 1993).

[97] Hitchcock writes that sexual activities of unmarried couples often included "mutual masturbation, long-drawn-out sessions of kissing and fondling." Tim Hitchcock, "Redefining Sex in Eighteenth-century England," *in Sexualities in History: A reader,* eds. Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay (London: Routledge, 2002), 185.

[98] "The maternalization of women's bodies, the creation of homosocial worlds of home and work, the denial of the existence of the female orgasm and the general increases in the policing of particularly middling sort social interactions all suggest that the barriers to greater sexual activity were growing, just as

suggests that it is only be understanding how this society re-defined sex can historians make sense out of seemingly contradictory narratives and discourses where women were passive and sexless and yet more frequently mothers and wives. He continues:

> By the end of the century sex had become increasingly phallocentric. Putting a penis in a vagina became the dominant sexual activity – all other forms of sex becoming literally foreplay. Indeed, it is little wonder that use of the term "play" without its prefix, as a term for sexual activity, died out in [the eighteenth century.] But, more significantly, it was the penis that became the active member. What the eighteenth century saw was the development of an obsession with the penis, and of an assumption that there was only one thing to do with it.[99]

Hitchock concludes by suggesting that the eighteenth-century witnessed a "sexual revolution" that "resulted in more penetrative sex: not more sex overall, but rather a different type of sex. In other words, it resulted in a transition from a form of sex in which the interests of both individuals played a substantive part, to a form where the male orgasm became the all important out come."[100]

The representation of Ally Sloper's sexuality clearly reflects a preoccupation with the penis and an understanding that it can be a tool to exercise control over social inferiors. With the penis as "the active agent" and manliness defined through appropriate "action," Sloper's understanding of sexuality communicated an ordering of the world where adult male *actors* dominated social and familial relationships as the power figure. The act of penetration also functioned as a symbolical weapon to tear down boundaries. When penetration in these cartoons occurs outside the confines of married-heterosexual-private-sex-acts where men are the active agents, then observers and artists are allowed to

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the demographic evidence for an increase of that sexual activity, in the form of more babies, was becoming more certain." Ibid., 186.

[99] Ibid., 191.

[100] Ibid., 192.

flagrantly disregard the norms. The interpretation of the sex-humour in *ASHH* required an awareness of the nature and definition of hegemonic sexual relations and manipulated middle class anxieties associated with these sex acts.

Sloper cartoons reflect an understanding of selfhood and sexuality where acts were not necessarily linked to identity. His perversion derives from his social impropriety and multiple exploits rather than any particular sexual appetite. His sexual exploits of children, men, and women are all manifestations of his hyper-manly-sexuality. Sloper does not profess a preference for a particular gender, but he does consistently lust after the young and youthful. It is by targeting youth, combined with his failures to lust exclusively after adult women, that makes Sloper's construction of masculinity so unpalatable to dominant Victorian assumptions about manly sexuality. Despite his indiscretions and his indiscriminate sexual lusts, the artists and fans cast Sloper as a ruffian or lout, but not a legally or medically defined pervert. Although his actions are undeniably antithetical, they remain unconnected from an internalized self. Sloper's actions, therefore, do not interfere with his construction of a hyper-manliness and his engagements with children and men only re-affirm his hedonism.

Sloper exists as a fragmented person within the urban space, lacking any definable self. He was a trickster who was too busy finding immediate self-gratification to be bothered with much comment on long-term social problems or political solutions. Cultural historian Robert Darnton has argued that the "trickster" was a common trope and favoured character in early modern British popular culture. According to Darnton, the trickster "works within the system, turning its weak points to his advantage and ultimately confirming it." Furthermore, trickesterism "provided a way of coping with a

harsh society instead of [providing a] formula for overthrowing it."[101] Sloper is the Victorian trickster who manipulated and transgressed social boundaries as a means of achieving momentary satisfaction. As a trickster, Sloper attempted to scam and manipulate the social hierarchies, but despite his transgressions, he did not attempt to overthrow the system he moved within. The trickster has a vested self-interest in maintaining the system for he is skilled at manipulating structures, people, and material objects in a quest for hedonistic gratification. The structures must exist in order for the trickster to practice his trade. The Victorian structures are reinforced as normative throughout Sloper's escapades.

Sloper's physical features also communicate his lack of discernible self. Sloper's sloe-eyed look (more representative of a basset hound than of an alert seducer) is part of his passive and mindless character. His large loose mouth suggests appetite alone. His weak chin implies weakness of character. Sloper is all surfaces, all hedonism in that surface, and no depth, nothing to psychologise over.

ASHH is a social expression where counter-discourses were given outlet within certain social confines and particular mediums. Through their depictions and constructions of Sloper's sexuality and counter-masculinity, the artists of *ASHH* asserted an alternative construction of sexuality, sex, gender and power relations. The continuation of these counter-narratives well into the late Victorian period is remarkable and the demonstrated continuance of older traditional popular culture and world views reveals the persistence of alternative social structures against a narrowing hegemonic norm.

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[101] Darnton, 59.

CONCLUSION

Victorians used humour and the visual in defining, interacting with, and (re)presenting their world. By failing to engage with these sources, historians have dismissed methods of cultural expressions that were fundamental in shaping the experiences of nineteenth-century Britons. Through an examination of visual and text sources, this thesis demonstrates that both were equal communicators of cultural assumptions. British cartoonists and satirists expressed humour in picture and word to reflect a particular understanding of how to organise society that was specific to and informed by class and gender. As this thesis has argued, the exploration of cultural expressions of humour is an illuminating approach available to the historian to access and understand the power relationships that structured late Victorian culture. The (visual) cartoon and satirical texts emphasised that manliness and masculinities required elaborate performances in public and private spaces. These sources further communicated to their respective audiences that manliness was only accessible within limited confines. Yet, as both Lupin Pooter and Ally Sloper demonstrate, men who were excluded from claiming legitimate manly authority manipulated their position outside of class and gender norms to construct alternative masculinities where they could still exist as actors and agents. Visual and textual humorous expressions that (re)presented manliness and deviations from this norm served to reinforce and manufacture consensus that the defined power structures of class and patriarchy were normative.

The visual and textual sources studied in this thesis reveal that humour, like gender, was partly created by class definitions. Proprietors of comic publications targeted specific class audiences, and as such the content of the publication placed class as a central subject of humour. *Punch* and *Fun* cartoonists not only attacked those outside of hegemonic culture, but they also unleashed humour as a means to communicate to a middle-class audience their own ideals and reinforced these as commonsensical. To further the claim that manliness was a middle-class prerogative, the dominate class unleashed a vicious humour on those who threatened the stability of social hierarchies. *The Diary of a Nobody* as an example of this malicious humour assured middle-class readers that the brand of masculinity and respectability articulated by "real life" Mr. Pooters never approximate the "authentically" middle class constructions. Although Ally Sloper cartoons subverted gender and class structures, the humour contained in these images required recognition that this famous anti-hero could only achieve momentary inversions. The perverse and hedonistic Ally Sloper was only funny to an audience aware of how his actions and appetites deviated from normal manly behaviour. These expressions elicited a strong reaction of being either hilarious or offensively grotesque; consequently, one had to be willing to engage in this subversion in order to appreciate the humour.

Despite their content and differing class audiences, all of the sources studied here were committed to (re)presenting a world view where the norm was male dominated spaces. They reconfirmed that the way a man could achieve and remain unchallenged as a power figure differed depending on his class. By targeting specific segments of the population, the humour in these sources attempted to create a sense of group cohesion

and an understanding that those who posited alternative identities and social structures were absurd "others." Thus humour reveals the way groups within Victorian culture depicted their own beliefs as commonsensical and delineated opposing groups into the realm of the ludicrous.

Each example of Victorian humour studied in this thesis relied on the existence of "the other" and in so doing allowed the hegemonic ideal to exist undefined and unarticulated, looming as an omnipresent normative who condemned these comic figures. Yet, the ridiculous could also be used as a weapon to assault hegemonic constructions and beliefs and thereby assert other traditional understandings of identities, behaviours, and appetites. These alternative popular expressions, therefore, used humour to attack certain constructions but reinforced that patriarchy and class definitions were fundamental social structures that defined individual experiences. Humour subverted, it challenged, but ultimately reinforced hegemonic assumptions.

PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS

There are several main questions left unanswered by this thesis, and in this section I want to briefly outline some of the problems and limitations with the study of humour in the navigation of social space in late nineteenth-century Britain. The first problem, perhaps best articulated by popular cultural historians of early modern Europe, is the difficulty of defining a "popular culture."[1] What is "popular culture?" By the late

[1] Tim Harris, "Problematising Popular Culture," in *Popular Culture in England c. 1500-1850* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 1-27; Emma Griffin, "Historiographical Reviews: Popular culture in Industrializing England" in *The Historical Journal,* vol. 45 no 3 (2002), 619-635 Barry Reay, "Popular Culture in Early Modern England," in *Popular Culture in 17t century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).; Barry Reay "The Culture of the People in Early Modern England" in *The Journal of British Studies,* vol. 36 no. 4 (October 1997), 467-472 Martha Vicinus, "The Study of Victorian Popular Culture" in *Victorian Studies* (June 1975), 473-483.

nineteenth-century class distinctions were perceived to be both rigid and fluid. Late Victorian mass/popular culture blurred class distinction in ways that made middle-class moral reformers anxious. For example, proprietors of music halls changed the structure and style of music hall entertainment in an effort to attract a larger and more diverse audience. As a consequent, music halls allowed men and women of all classes to mix together. Yet, there were still numerous public/private spaces where participation was defined and limited by class status.

The publications considered in this thesis are examples of both the rigidity and fluidity of class boundaries. It is impossible to say that *no* working-class person ever read *Punch* - it is probable that some did although unlikely due to economic limitation. It is feasible that middle-class boys and men purchased *ASHH* or encountered him on the music hall stages. Thus, the Ally Sloper character should not be considered exclusively working-class. The unique socialisation of the individual, defined through class, gender, race, and locale, means that there were numerous and distinct reactions to these publications well beyond those intended by the artist. And, not all members of any given social rank would have universally enjoyed these cultural expressions. While *Punch* and *Fun* were *popular* with middle-and upper -lass audiences, this is not to ignore that there would have been many within these social groups whom would not have participated nor appreciated the humour. Likewise, *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday* targeted segments of working and middle-class audiences, but it was not a universal expression/reflection of all working class.

Many historians have deliberated about the limitation of studying popular culture, focusing on the dilemma of gauging the reception of an indefinable audience. Tim Harris

has argued that while "popular culture" is shorthand for historians, it erroneously suggests the existence of a shared culture of "the people."[2] This problem of audience is compounded further by debates surrounding mass/popular culture. Are *Punch, Fun, Ally Sloper's Half Holiday,* and *The Diary of a Nobody* popular culture (expressions of the still undefined and fragmented "people") or, because they are commercially produced, are they mass culture? It is impossible to detect where the boundaries of representation and presentation exist, for these periodicals both reflected and manufactured ideas about class and genders consciousness.

It is also problematic to situate these cultural remnants of working, middle, and upper class culture side by side, as I have done in this thesis, and discuss them as expressions of the same "popular culture." In doing so there is a danger of creating a false presentation of Victorian culture as cohesive and homogenous. For this study, each source was chosen because of its popularity with varying segments of Victorian society and scrutinised for what it represented about visual culture, class, gender, and humour. It became evident that, in order to appreciate how humour functioned within and between classes and in navigating power relationships, it was necessary to consult diverse sources that cut across class boundaries, ~~understand~~. And, while these images/texts circulated during the same time period, they reflect fundamentally different world-views and most likely would not, for the most part, have shared overlapping audiences.

The problem of mass and popular culture will not be reconciled in this conclusion, and those who deliberate these issues must concede that there will only be a continued debate. The study of humour in Victorian popular culture, however, is complicated by the inability of the historian to accurately pinpoint the audience. In defining humour in

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[2] Harris, 25-27

the introduction of the thesis, I argued that humour was an intentional manipulation of shared cultural signs and signifiers, recognised by both producers and audiences to be humour. Yet, with no definable audience and without the means of determining reception, can the historian actually study humour? Only with limitations. Because the reception of humour has been lost through time, this thesis has attempted to understand the intent in the production of these comic publications. The popularity and longevity of these sources and the shared recognition of producers and consumers that these were comic publications, allows the historian to study the comic and the intended humour. Without a definable audience, however, the reception (and therefore humour) cannot be ascertained. By decoding as much of the intended meaning of humour in popularly circulating publications, this thesis has demonstrated that humour in Victorian popular culture reveals the boundaries and frontiers of power relationships through an illumination of hidden meanings in seemingly alien expressions.

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