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Speculation, Suicide and the Silver Fork Novel

Having finished reading a new novel Lady Holland wrote to her son with her verdict: "There is nothing that makes much genius in the author: it is evidently by a man who has seen London society, tho' he talks of a person as *gentlemanly*. It is mixed up with bad religious stuff, and a strange discourse, which I had not the patience to read, on suicide" (quoted in Adburgham 95, emphasis original). The novel was Thomas H. Lister's *Granby* (1826) and is recognised as one of the first of the silver fork novels. The term "silver fork" was taken from William Hazlitt's now infamous review of Thomas Hook's *Sayings and Doings* (1824) in which he fumes about Hook's apparent admiration of that narrow section of society that "eat their fish with silver forks" (722). That suicide should be a feature of silver fork fiction is not surprising given the perceived close association of suicide with the fashionable society that gives the genre its soubriquet. Donna T. Andrew observes that suicide alongside duelling, adultery and gambling "constitut[ed] a sort of constellation of corruption" practised by society's elite (4). The emergence of the silver fork novel in the first quarter of the nineteenth century coincided with significant changes in how suicide was viewed. On the one hand, while juridical and religious discourses and practices, representing venerable traditions of thought on suicide, continued to exercise authority over acts of self-destruction, these approaches of condemning and sanctioning suicide were increasingly pressured by changing attitudes towards the act and its perpetrators. The problem of suicide was coming to be seen as a social problem as well as a judicial, medical, religious and philosophical one. There has been a recent rise in a re-evaluation of the significance of the silver fork novel in relation to two connected key themes: reform and the rise of the socially aspirant middle class. Suicide in the silver fork novel has not received any such attention, though Murieann O'Cinneide does note that "many silver fork novels features a flurry of

murders, suicides and all-round collapses" (58). This article is the first to consider the centrality of suicide to a genre that is only now beginning to receive due scholarly attention, in part because, as Angela Esterhammer observes, the silver fork novel is a genre that makes a "strong claim to be an accurate observer of societal behaviour" (Esterhammer unpag.). In *Granby* Lister makes suicide the key moment in the plot, and I will argue that the reason Lady Holland found the discourse upon the subject so strange is that it is represented without judgement, condemnation or argument. As Matthew Whiting Rosa notes *Granby* "firmly established" the fashionable novel in that "moral lessons . . . virtually disappeared [as] the desire for accuracy in the portrayals of rank and setting grew" (55). The lack of judgement upon the contentious subject of suicide within a genre obsessed with accurately representing society signals this shift towards considering the act as a social problem. However, this shift in attitude and the silver fork novel both emerge from conditions specific to the 1820s, the result of which Esterhammer identifies as being a self-conscious culture of speculation.

Edward Copeland argues that silver fork novels were "attempts to lever power, to bring about the major changes in attitude necessary to make an effective union of the middle classes and the traditional ruling classes" (5). Cheryl A. Wilson posits that the novels "positioned themselves as a type of conduct book, offering a guidance for socially-aspirant members of the middle class" (1). Wilson's reading of the genre chimes with that of Copeland's in that the middle classes would be entering a brave new and interconnected world of politics and fashion, and both attribute a certainty of purpose to the silver fork novelist. On the surface *Granby* does indeed appear to promote the "Whig principles of political change" (Copeland 71). Lister's recent editor, Claire Bainbridge, attributes to *Granby* a similar sense of purpose in relation to the reform agenda of Copeland. In her introduction to the novel Bainbridge notes that *Granby* is "ideologically engaging, for at the novel's heart is the conflict between two different value systems, the Regency and the (proto)

Victorian, played out through the two main characters, Granby himself and his cousin Tyrell" (xxvi). Bainbridge's reading suggests a straightforward division between the two protagonists in relation to the reform agenda identified by Copeland, the suicide of Tyrell being symbolic of the self-destructive nature and the old model of an immoral and financially irresponsible aristocracy in favour of one that promotes self-discipline and restraint. However, Lister's own assessment of his novel is that he had "no system to announce. . . . [I]t was my intention merely to try if I could frame a tale . . . [that takes] an unexaggerated view of the surface of society" (quoted in Jump xv). Lister's claim for his work is indicative of the "self-consciousness [that] was the dominant mood" of a period which "prompted cultural introspection: 'an Inquiry, a Doubt'" (Stewart 31, 20). This self-consciousness is born of an awareness of the 1820s as a period of transition, the mood itself a response to what James Chandler terms as "the question of the 'future state'" (484). Lister's project of engaging with the "surface of society" is characteristic of this "uncertainty that [writers] turned on their understanding of their own age" (Stewart 31). Arguably the lack of judgement upon suicide in *Granby* reflects this uncertainty in response to an awareness of transition. The "strange discourse" upon the subject is a debate between Tyrell and Granby in which both sides draw upon long-established arguments; Tyrell marshals Enlightenment reasoning as to his individual right to choose death, whereas Granby draws upon religious prohibition implied by the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." Lister's lack of promotion of one side of the argument over the other is indicative of this shift towards a new consideration of the act in relation to the individual and as an individual response to social forces. Lister's covert reference to the newly passed law pertaining to the burial of suicides comes by way of flagging up this new consideration of the individual, but the limited measures of the act also signify an uncertainty as to how much consideration the suicide deserves or how society should respond. The silver fork novel as a tool for this kind of cultural introspection emerged,

argues Esterhammer, as a manifestation of the period's "preoccupation with appearances [that] finds expression in the [term] 'speculation'" (unpag.). Esterhammer notes that during this period "speculation" had multiple yet overlapping meanings: as well as designating risky financial ventures, the term also "retained its older meanings of visual 'examination' or 'observation' and 'abstract or hypothetical reasoning' [and] can also mean pure or mere conjecture" (unpag.). Lister's characters are "preoccupied with the external . . . indicators of class and income, [and] they speculate on one another's character and worth" (Esterhammer unpag.). Lister's representation of suicide as a social issue is tied to these multiple meanings of speculation. Superficially Tyrell's suicide is the result of his own financial speculations but Lister's social examination of suicide within this larger context of cultural speculation reveals an uncertainty as to how sustainable a society can be when predicated upon such shaky foundations, as well as how this present state may be reflected upon in the future.

I. Social Speculation, Aristocratic Suicide

The plot of *Granby* revolves around the fortunes of Henry Granby, a young man of limited fortune and cousin to Tyrell, heir apparent to the family fortune and estate. The plot follows Granby between fashionable town houses and country estates as he attempts to negotiate a place for himself in an alien environment; as it is a small world Granby encounters his cousin at every turn. Speculation is rife in the novel as characters engage in the enterprise of assessing the conjoined social and financial worth of each other. Granby's father, a "man of pleasure, rather than of business," is prevailed upon by "an insidious speculator" and associates to invest in a bank that fell victim to the 1825 financial crisis (9). Granby speculates as to his own worth in relation to his love for Caroline Jermyn, a presumed heiress. He also uses the language of speculation in his assessment of Tyrell's usefulness as a guide and educator as to the ways of the fashionable world; on arrival in the metropolis Granby describes Tyrell as being "in all probability, an [*sic*] useful companion" (90). Sir

Thomas and Lady Jermyn speculate as to the financial worth of any potential suitor for Caroline as she is not the heiress they pretend. Sir Thomas speculates how to best manipulate his political position and Lady Jermyn as to the absence of an invitation from their prestigious relations. Trebeck, a socially and politically ambitious dandy in the mould of Beau Brummel, speculates as to who to cultivate and who can safely be cut. Tyrell speculates to accumulate and has all the hallmarks of the Regency man-about-town and heir to a fortune, very much at home in the ballrooms, gambling dens and racetracks in and around the metropolis. There is also much speculation as to Tyrell's character as he is also rumored to be a cheat.

Tyrell is described as being "a choice union of the Palais Royale *roué* with the English blackleg" and as having a character "as bankrupt as his purse" (45). The Palais Royale was notorious for its casinos and as a regular haunt for prostitutes, and the suggestion of underworld criminality places Tyrell's speculations into a far more dangerous category than that of a mere fashionable gambler. Tamara S. Wagner draws a parallel between the speculator and the gambler:

> Speculation's association with gambling made it possible for nineteenth-century economists to distinguish it from investment, with the latter embodying the professional, trustworthy, secure, and stable, whereas speculation became linked to the amateurish as well as the risky and ruthless. (8)

Suicide, speculation and gambling are consistently linked in Lister's novel. The connection between gambling and suicide is first referenced in relation to a minor character called Courtenay, whom Tyrell has ruined through cheating, a risky form of speculation because of the attendant danger of being caught. The only reason Courtenay does not immediately destroy himself is that in his present financial circumstances he "may [not] go to the expense of powder and ball" (191). O'Cinneide notes that debts of honor amongst gentleman are

"unavoidable obligations" that are ironically named as "the debt being of 'honor' gives it financial actuality: it must be paid precisely because it is understood not to be a commercial transaction" (50). Tyrell's ruthlessness lies in holding Courtenay to debts of honor that have been contracted as the result of the dishonorable practice of cheating. Gillian Russell observes that "high-stakes gambling represented a profligacy that constantly courted ruin and disaster: it was a form of luxury that was geared not toward the display of wealth but to the display of one's insouciance of losing it" (481). To cheat is also a form of speculation in that it is a calculation to determine a favorable outcome through manipulation, rather than to place oneself in the hands of fate and face the consequences. Only when confronted by Granby, who knows about the cheating, does Tyrell release Courtenay from his obligations in exchange for Granby's silence. It is during this interaction that Tyrell initially refers to his own self-destruction, and his choice of methods are very much in line with his speculative nature and presumed aristocratic credentials. However, by introducing two potential methods of dying, he hints towards a conflicted social status.

Tyrell swallows a substantial measure of laudanum and produces a pair of loaded pistols. Both poison and pistols are extremely effective weapons of self-destruction but with one substantial difference: poison is not an acceptable method of suicide for a gentleman of high birth. In 1790 Charles Moore observed that

> It is certainly true, that most classes, and professions of men had a favorite method of dispatching themselves. The brave and those of high birth are accustomed to do it by the sword or pistol; those of middling or lower rank by the more ignoble rope, razor or deadly potion. (281)

Moore notes that "we naturally look on those instruments of death with least horror and surprise, to which we have been most accustomed" (282). When Tyrell responds to Granby's horror of the laudanum, saying, "Do you think I am going to poison myself? I am not come to

that yet" (200), it is not clear whether he means he is not yet so desperate as to commit suicide, or that he is not yet sunk so low as to do so with poison. With regard to the pistols, Tyrell initially interprets Granby's determination for satisfaction on behalf of Courtenay as a challenge to a duel, thereby demonstrating his willingness to speculate with his own life. Duelling and suicide have long been perceived as being two sides of the same coin. Michael MacDonald and Terence Murphy argue that the connection is "irresistible, since both actions involved losing or at least risking one's life for principles that one rated at a higher value than the Christian virtues of patience and hope" (186), and the weapons used for both are the same. Dueling "occupies a complex moral coding in silver fork novels" in that it simultaneously represents an older form of aristocratic honor and "negative constructions of aristocratic behavior, associated with violence, outmoded code of conduct, and an alternative set of laws for the upper classes" (O'Cinneide 50). However, the positioning of Tyrell as a template for aristocratic modes of conduct or methods of suicide is compromised when it is revealed that he is, in fact, illegitimate; poison would be the appropriate method for him to choose death. Lister's engagement with the "unexaggerated view of the surface of society" reveals that surfaces are no longer to be trusted.

II. Victim of a Speculative Society

Tyrell is the embodiment of the untrustworthy value of appearance in fashionable society at a time when, as Bainbridge notes, "aristocratic hegemony and homogeneity" is under threat (Lister xxvii). Lister shows that a previously perceived relationship between style and substance as indicators of worth is no longer reliable. As Courtenay observes, "fashion is not so aristocratic as many imagine; it may be bought, like many other things" (95-96). Lister reveals a social nervousness about probing past the surface lest some mistake is made, and offence given. Granby finds himself at a house party to which he is not invited, and asks Tyrell to point out the hostess so that he can apologize for his intrusion:

> "What are you talking of?" said Tyrrell, holding him by the arm. "I did not think you had been such a *green* one. Why my dear fellow, there is not the least occasion for any sort of apology. I'll bet you five to one . . . that there are fifty others in this room of whom she knows as little as she does of you. It is the commonest thing in the world to go to a ball without an invitation. I know one or two, (I shall not mention their names), that always go into the first lighted house they come to—they ask no questions, and nobody asks them any." (102-103)

Tyrell relies upon a preoccupation with surfaces because he occupies the positions of being a somebody and a nobody simultaneously. Copeland states that "the present holder of the Malton title and estate is illegitimate and that [Henry] Granby is the rightful heir" (71). The present and legitimate holder of the title is Tyrell's father, but Tyrell's mother is a servant. When the legitimate heir dies in infancy, "Tyrell" is named and brought up in his place. It is a small but significant detail as it is this circumstance that gives impetus and meaning to his actions throughout the novel, including his suicide. General Granby, uncle and guardian of Henry, knew of the perpetrated swap but agreed to remain silent on two conditions: that the secret should last only as long as his life time, and that the young Tyrell should not be "brought up with expectations which must be eventually be disappointed" (243). Tyrell has, therefore, known since the age of ten who he is, or rather who he is not, and his subsequent options are limited.

Prior to his discovery of his status as legitimate heir to the Tyrell estate Granby vocalizes a frustration at being prevented from pursuing a legitimate occupation. Tyrell is also essentially forbidden to pursue a commercial enterprise or occupation as to do so would raise questions regarding his relationship with his father. He must therefore act in a manner appropriate to his presumed social position; he is a gambler in order to play his role as heir presumptive convincingly, but also a speculator so as to generate his own source of income.

As noted above, this novel is generally read through the lens of reform in that Granby would appear to embody the "future state" of a morally and economically restrained new order of the aristocracy, one that possesses a work ethic. Granby does indulge in gambling with Tyrell but stays safely within his limits. But through the figure of Tyrell Lister raises the issue of how individual potential is thwarted by an emphasis upon uncertain surfaces and speculation. Tyrell strenuously denies Granby's accusation of cheating and couches his defense in terms of a work ethic:

> Crime! . . . by what statute? Crime, indeed! . . . look at the dice—are they loaded? Look at the box—is it not a fair one? Did I fight with false weapons? No, Sir, . . . I employed an art which I had been practicing for months, and which I had surely acquired a right to profit by. I won by skill—sheer skill—Skill which I had gained by my own exertions, and which I am therefore justified in using. (195)

Tyrell's perseverance and determination to succeed are qualities that could be productive if usefully channeled elsewhere. His dependence upon laudanum is similarly created by the social demands placed upon him. Tyrell's resources are sapped by having to expend energy on playing a role that has been created by an emphasis upon visually codified behavior to denote intrinsic value. Tyrell takes laudanum in ever-increasing doses in order to acquire the required insouciance for a man of his presumed status when gambling for high-stakes: "I used to be admired for my coolness. They did not know that the calm was artificial—that it was produced by a remedy more fatal than the fever it tended to ally" (345). Tyrell very much becomes a victim of a society that is based upon financial and visual speculation; he has become a cheat and a drug addict in order to keep up the required appearance. Wagner notes that suicide is the "speculator's prerogative or inevitable end" (145). However, Tyrell's suicide is not the act of a financially desperate man or the reckless gambler who stakes his life on the turn of a card, as he discovers he is to inherit his father's personal fortune, which is

separate from the entailed Tyrell estate to which Granby is heir. It is a decision he makes as a result of his "passage through society [, which] has been that of an utterer of false coin" and comes as a relief to the exhausted Tyrell.

III. Speculative suicide "fortified with reason"

Suicide had long been viewed as the vice of those who suffer from too much self-awareness of their social reputation. A 1756 article entitled "Some Observations on the Causes of Suicide" observed that

> Pride seems to be the remote cause. . . . The objects of pride are splendour, and elegance of life, intellectual superiority, great power and authority, the accomplishment of favourite designs, and whatever procures fame and reputation; when pride is mortified in any of these particulars, the consequences are very often fatal; especially in minds not well fortified with reason and religion. (204)

This passage suggests that suicide is a rash act committed without reflection and the result of a mortification that is as fleeting as it is insignificant. When read in the context of speculation, pride, as both a self-conscious and social emotion, is a marker of self-evaluation as to one's worth in relation to others, and as such Tyrell's suicide can interpreted as the product of a speculative society in which action "lacks a solid or profound basis, [one] that responds to contingencies and constructs its own pseudo-reality" (Esterhammer unpag.). A society predicated on such shaky foundations is unsustainable; as Wagner states, "the figure of the speculator [represents] ever more pressing associations with suicide, as the embodiment of a speculative economy's inherent self-destructiveness" (26). When reading the silver fork novel as a "self-reflexive narrative" (O'Cinneide 49), one cannot interpret Tyrell's suicide simply in relation to the reform agenda as a neat way of disposing of the old order of immoral and irresponsible aristocracy in favour of the new "(proto) Victorian" model. The "strange discourse" upon suicide is actually a discourse upon the conditions that

make the act the next natural step for Tyrell, but what perhaps makes it strange is that there is a discourse at all, and one that presents an argument both for and against the act without actively promoting either side. Later silver fork novels that feature suicide, such as the Countess of Blessington's *Victims of Society* (1837) and Lady Charlotte Bury's *The Disinherited* (1837), demonstrate a certainty with regards to suicide as being the just desserts of thoroughly ruthless speculators. What is also unusual is that, through their arguments, neither character emerges as being inherently good or bad as a result of their differences of opinion. Tyrell, the apparently ruthless rake, argues for the right to be able to commit suicide and is fortified by the clarity of reason but not religion. Granby, a man of integrity and compassion for any kind of suffering, is emotive in his response as one who calls upon religion and an inherent sense of duty to override any unilateral action. The debate between Granby and Tyrell is representative of the self-conscious uncertainty of the period with regards to the future state as it is no longer clear which of these long-established position upon suicide is viable when the problem of suicide was also beginning to be seen as a social issue.

When Tyrell tells Granby of his dependence upon laudanum, he also cites the advantages of the drug by way of committing suicide indirectly:

> It soothes one while one lives; and if one should grow weary of life, one may slip the tether through pure carelessness. It is but to forget the measure—and then—a tremble of the hand—or a casual tilt of the phial, and—eh? (345)

Granby is appalled by Tyrell's apparently casual approach to self-destruction and urges that "no pressure of misfortune will ever tempt you to commit the horrid crime of suicide" (345). Granby argues that life is not

> merely given us for our enjoyment,—a bauble to gratify us for a time, and to cast off when it grows distasteful. But the most careless eye can see that life is not a scene of

> pleasure . . . but one continued burden . . . which they [*sic*] are bound to bear with fortitude. . . . We have so much to suffer and to do; and were we sent to these duties with permission to fly from them when they grow irksome? . . . Our life was lent to us to be well-employed. (346)

As Tyrell's social circumstances means that he cannot be "well-employed" because of the "false character [he] was instructed to maintain" (352), the alternative he proposes is not the rash act of a typical ruined Regency rake, but a considered course of action in relation to the circumstances that created the necessity:

> I like to view these subjects dispassionately and philosophically—prejudice apart; to judge the question upon its own merits, and not to follow the mere opinion of the crowd, or the dogmas of a few old writers, who in former days of ignorance . . . put self-destruction under a *taboo.* . . . I question if it be a crime . . . I merely meant to state a proposition. I am of a *speculative* turn . . . and like to reason things, and reduce them to their first principles. Where can be the crime, I ask, of disengaging ourselves from a state of being in which we are a burden to ourselves, and can no longer contribute to the pleasure or advantage of others? (345, emphasis original)

For Granby the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" applies to the murder of the self as well as others, therefore rendering both acts "horrid crime[s]" of disobedience, whereas Tyrell points to the ambiguity of the application and therefore asserts that in "our acceptance of doubtful precepts . . . we must be guided by the light of reason" (347). Tyrell speculates as to the worth of his own life rather than upon the worth of others to him, and his argument echoes that of David Hume's posthumously published essay "Of Suicide" (1777).

Hume argues against the "sanctity of life" that was brought to bear in moral condemnations of suicide; in return he condemns religion as a form of "slavery to the

grossest superstition" that hampers freedom of thought and choice, and he dispenses with the edict that life is a burden to be endured:

> Suppose that it is no longer in my power to promote the interests of society; suppose that I am a burthen to it; suppose that my life hinders some person being much more useful to society. In such cases my resignation of life must not only be innocent but laudable. . . . If it be no crime, both prudence and courage should engage us to rid ourselves at once of existence when it becomes a burden. Tis the only way that we can then be useful to society, by setting an example, which, if imitated would preserve to everyone his chance for happiness in life and would effectually free him from all danger and misery. (31-32)

Hume turns the issue of moral obligation away from "the almighty Creator [who] has established general and immutable laws, by which all bodies . . . are maintained in their proper sphere" (26) and towards the social obligation for every individual to make a meaningful contribution towards furthering the collective interests of society. Tyrell's argument takes a similar position: "our limbs are lent to us as our lives are; they are part a part of the whole human machine" (347), and he calls upon a precedent by way of substantiating his decision:

> I will not give up the right of self-destruction; I stand up for the liberty of the species; nor will I hastily brand an act which has been sanctified by so many heroic examples of ancient virtue[,] . . . an act by which we show our fortitude; by which we soar superior to the mere instinctive dread of death; by which we exhibit the proud triumph of mind over matter, and display first our strength of intellect in forming such a terrible election, and next, our unconquerable firmness in daring to carry it into execution. (348)

The precedent of "ancient virtue" recalls Cato the Younger, whose death came to represent the nobility of suicide predicated upon principles of persecution. Joseph Addison's *Cato*; *A Tragedy* (1714) presented Cato as a Stoic whose deeds, rhetoric and resistance to the tyranny of Caesar made him an icon of republicanism, virtue, and liberty that triumphed in his death over tyranny and emotion. This line of reasoning presents Tyrell's suicide as simultaneously the inevitable outcome of a speculative society and as an act of liberation from the tyranny of having to maintain the fiction of his life. Granby rejects Tyrell's argument that suicide was the "Roman's virtue" by responding, "the Heathen's virtue may be the Christian's vice" (345) and echoes those Christian commentators who view suicide as an act of cowardice rather than courage. Cato's name is just as often invoked in the Christian condemnation of suicide. In 1773 Caleb Fleming writes,

> I am aware, some do imagine it to have been a mark of greatness of mind in the ancient Romans, and particularly the Utican-Cato, whose self-murder, the ingenious, the amiable Addison so unhappily and so mischievously too, celebrated in tragedy. . . . Whereas, far better and more honorable had it been for Cato, had he waited a lawful, rather than have presumed upon a felonious dismission of life. (45)

Writing a year later John Herries similarly condemned Cato and the many others in "the annals of heathen history" who were "prompted to this violent and irretrievable act" in the absence of "one pretext or palliation of such a crime" in either religion or reason (61). For Granby the heathen's choice of suicide is redolent of an act of desertion from one's post and is therefore indicative of an unmanly cowardice. Pete Newbon observes that "the decades following the French Revolution witnessed the rise of a movement that elevated a new paradigm of ideal masculinity . . . adversarial to the rakish, rude [and] licentiousness" (212). Newbon draws upon the work of Henry French and Mark Rothery to elucidate this shift:

> In their study of "hegemonic masculinity," [they] describe the transition . . . to a "sincere," "serious," or "evangelical" masculinity from the 1790s, and into the mid-nineteenth century. . . . "Christian manliness" inculcated a new male subject, governed by self-regulation, conscientious to curb vices such as drinking, gaming, dueling, profanity and sexual licentiousness. . . . Evangelicalism, and its newly fashioned masculinity, was yoked to the values of the Protestant work ethic. (213)

Although Granby's argument against the "heathen's virtue" is underpinned by established religious doctrine the key point that Newbon, French and Rothery make is that the "Christian manliness" upon which Granby appears to be modelled is one that is only emerging at the time of *Granby* being published. Similarly Tyrell draws upon a much older rhetoric that equates suicide with liberty but the protracted argument for a consideration of socially mitigating circumstances in relation to the individual choice is equally new. The two sides of the argument are equally weighted.

As Al Alvarez notes, "to live nobly also meant to die nobly and at the right moment" (82), and Tyrell's suicide note demonstrates his resolve in recognition that the time is right: "The die is cast. My career must shortly close. . . . My resolution is unalterable. Judge of the firmness by this writing. My hand does not tremble as it pens these lines; nor will it when it draws the trigger. Farewell for the last time. Yours in death G.G.T." (353). Tyrell's choice of the pistol for his means of choosing death also substantiates his decision to die nobly rather than by the insidious sideways approach of poison, as hinted at with the laudanum. Tyrell is aware that within a speculative society any link with illegitimacy and suicide may have an impact upon Granby's perceived worth and he attempts to kick over the traces of all possible ties. At the scene Granby finds a note addressed to him signed by "George Gregory Thompson: 'I have destroyed all my papers. I have left no memorial that can tell the world what I was. The secret rests with you. I charge you keep it'" (354). "George Gregory

Thompson" is, of course, George Granby Tyrell, with whom Granby colludes by withholding the information about the true identity of that "dark dim semblance of a human figure . . . that yonder corpse, disfigured as it doubtless is" (355). Granby leaves money and instructions that

> the remaining property belonged of the deceased was [the landlord's]; and laying several sovereigns on the table, desired that after the inquest the funeral might be privately but decently performed. He also said that he should withhold both his name and address. (355)

Granby's precautions of not giving out any information that may connect the two may superficially respect Tyrell's wishes to "slink unacknowledged to his untimely grave" (355). However, Granby's actions can also be read as being demonstrative of his Christian repugnance for that "horrid crime," an attitude that had become enshrined in law just two years prior to the publication of *Granby.* The Burial of Suicide Act 1823 (4 Geo. IV, c. 52) entered the statute books on 8 July 1823 and forbade any desecration of corpses and coroners from issuing directions that the remains be interred anywhere other than a lawful place of burial. Prior to 1823 those who had committed suicide were subject to a profane burial in a public highway, sometimes with a stake through the body. The Act also instructed that the interment should take place no more than twenty-four hours after the inquest, but only between the hours of nine and twelve at night, and "that nothing herein shall authorize the performing of any of the Rites of Christian Burial" ("An Act" 14). Granby's leaving money so that Tyrell can be decently buried is in recognition of the newly amended law. However, his refusal to leave his name by way of distancing himself from suicide is representative of that inherent disgust towards the act of self-destruction as enshrined in the caveat that suicides be buried under the cover of darkness. To refuse the Christian rites is not only an act of excommunication but also a refusal to recognize the suicide has the right to be remembered by the living community, thereby eliminating all traces of their existence.

Granby colludes with this distancing of the living from what he perceives to be the shameful dead, but he does let slip that he and the victim were cousins. It is not long before the speculative wheels of society are turning and his worth as Lord Malton is weighed against any potential devaluation of his stock worth because of his close proximity to illegitimacy and suicide.

To modern readers Granby's response to the discovery of Tyrell's suicide seems almost churlish when compared to Tyrell's reasoned argument as to the nobility of his inevitable suicide. On questioning Tyrell's landlord as to the nature of the suicide's final hours Granby takes "melancholy satisfaction" in hearing that Tyrell's "strength of intellect" with regard to his impending end had apparently failed him: "He learned that Mr. Thompson . . . had sat up writing during the greater part of the preceding night, and was frequently heard to start up and walk about, uttering terrible groans, and broken exclamation [*sic*] of anguish" (355). The act of suicide foregrounds the relationship between the individual and society; Tyrell makes a claim for the individual right to extricate himself from a society that has done him more harm than good, whereas Granby stands for the power and authority of a flawed society over and above any individual claims. The novel does not provide a moral framework as to how to respond to the suicide of Tyrell as that would be an authorial intervention that goes against the grain of Lister's intention to provide an "unexaggerated view of the surface of society." The absence of such a framework is also a reflection of a period that was unusually unsure of how its shifting present would or could last to become a future state.

IV. Conclusion

The certainty of how to respond to the "strange discourse on suicide" is indicative of the difficulty of how to respond to this new type of novel. Hazlitt observed that "it was formerly understood to be the business of literature . . . to direct the mind's eye beyond the present moment and the present object" and instead of "transporting [the reader] to faery-land

or into the middle ages, you take a turn down Bond street or go through the mazes of the dance at Almack's" (721). Hazlitt is doubtful as to the purpose of a work of fiction that "comes forward to tell you, not how his hero feels on any occasion . . . but how he was dressed" (722). Sydney Smith's review of the novel suggests that the innovation of the silver fork novel is a successful one. Smith praises Lister for creating a "very agreeable and interesting novel" that succeeds because the "very easy and natural picture of manners as they really exist among the upper classes" (396). However, it is difficult to interpret Smith's extraordinary claim that the novel pleases because he adds, "there are absolutely no events, nobody runs away, goes mad, or dies" (396). It is, of course, entirely possible that Smith never actually read the novel in its entirety, as a witticism of Smith's is that he "never read a book before reviewing it; it prejudices a man so" (Virgin unpag.) But if Smith did read the novel to its conclusion his review of *Granby* is an interesting one as he is both a cultural commentator and a clergyman. Smith's sermon "On Suicide" does not deviate from conventional doctrine that suicide is a crime, but he also is described as "an innovative and unconventional rector, putting into practice what would later be called the social gospel" (Virgin unpag.), a form of Protestantism that applied Christian ethics to social problems. Smith describes Tyrell as being "a most profound plotting villain—a man in comparison to whom, nine-tenths of the persons hung in Newgate are pure and perfect" (40) but makes no direct mention of suicide. It may simply be that Smith associates Tyrell's villainy with the criminal act of suicide, but the absence of a direct intervention upon the debate, both sides of which speak to Smith's conventional view upon suicide and social conscience, inspires pause for thought upon this transitional moment in attitudes towards suicide within a social context. Alvarez suggests "that the more sophisticated and rational a society becomes . . . the more easily suicide is tolerated" (80). What Lister invites is not only a consideration of that correlation but also of the relationship between society and suicide as an example of cause

and effect. With an emphasis upon social observation and description the silver fork novelists become the “historians of their time” (Cronin 118). O’Cinneide similarly argues that the genre was “committed to preserving a record of a fleeting historical moment” (49). It is the close tie of the genre to the ephemerality of the “present moment and the present object” that is of value, and Lister’s examination of the relationship between the speculative nature of society and the act of suicide is an early elucidation of that tie.

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