

PAVED WITH GOLD - THE REAL WORLD AND LITERARY ENTERPRISE

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The Brothers Mayhew

Paved with Gold is a novel about the nineteenth-century underclass. It was written by Augustus Mayhew (1826-75) and published in monthly numbers during 1857. Thereafter the novel followed a classic nineteenth-century publishing pattern: an expensive three-volume imprint of 1858 attempted to capitalise immediately on the monthly parts; then three cheaper reprints appeared over the following ten years or so. It was even one of Routledge's 'Railway Novels' in an edition of 1972. This brief publication history is testimony to the novel's popularity in its own time. But, like many other nineteenth-century novels, *Paved with Gold* has now dwindled to the status of a footnote, most evident whenever Augustus Mayhew's more famous brother Henry is the focus of discussion.

London Labour and the London Poor was actually published after *Paved with Gold*, in 1861-62, but the research which fuelled both books (for the *London Morning Chronicle*) had been carried out during 1848-49. Throughout his research Henry Mayhew was aided by a small group of assistants, the most important being his brother 'Gus'. A respected popular journalist in his own right, Augustus frequently collaborated with his elder brother on literary projects. The 'Brothers Mayhew' had already collaborated on six novels.

Paved with Gold was planned as just such another collaboration, and the 'Brothers Mayhew' formula appears on the novel's title-page. But Henry dropped out of the venture in April 1857 after the first few numbers. Nonetheless, when he wrote his Preface to the three-volume first edition in 1858, Augustus acknowledged his debt to the *London Labour* work, talking of 'the extreme truthfulness' brought to *Paved with Gold* through the 'long and patient enquiries' which had constituted the *Morning Chronicle* research. He cites two sections of *Paved with Gold* to back his own claim for documentary authenticity; the material on crossing-sweepers in Book 1 Chapters 3 and 4, and the Rat Match incident in Book 1 Chapter 9 was, he says, 'originally undertaken by me at the request of my brother'.

The relationship between *London Labour* and *Paved with Gold* has been fully researched in recent times; Anne Humpherys in particular has shown that a good deal of the novel can be cross-referenced both to Henry's book and to the original *Morning Chronicle* articles (see Humpherys, 1977 - she identifies verbatim use of such material in the Prologue Chapter 2, on the 'Asylum for the Houseless Poor' and in Book 2 Chapter 2, the description of the watercress market at Farringdon).

The 'Brothers Mayhew' were well-known to their mid-Victorian audience as professional literary gentlemen, and *Paved with Gold* is dedicated to yet another writer-brother, Horace. A more accurate way to describe them might be that they were 'literary entrepreneurs'. Writers, especially those on the London scene, had to have an eye for the main chance, and were constantly trying to make money from their business of writing through that mixture of daring and initiative, bluff and hype, that typifies the entrepreneurial spirit. Almost always male, they inhabited an undoubtedly privileged, but often impecunious, Bohemian world of clubbishness in which journalistic and literary deals, projects and counter-projects were part of daily life. The Mayhews, like scores of other 'men of letters' (and their illustrators) set up, worked for, and edited magazines; they produced articles for newspapers; they wrote novels in monthly parts and three volumes; they composed plays of all descriptions - anything that would pay (and much that didn't). Both Dickens and Thackeray began in this witty, catty, literary demi-monde, hoping like everyone else that one of their speculative efforts would catch the public eye, that some editor would 'discover' them, that their 'enterprise' would

ultimately payoff and lead to wealth and fame. They constitute the literary branch of Samuel Smiles' self-help society.

For the Mayhews, *Paved with Gold* was suitably titled, encapsulating their one really rich and successful literary enterprise. The 'real life' research undertaken for the *Morning Chronicle* articles both authenticated and provided a focus for subsequent activities. But both Henry and Augustus seem to have been affected by their discoveries to a degree which prevented them assenting any longer to that stereotypical novelistic tone about the poor which, in other nineteenth-century novels, renders them ineffably 'other' - cute, incomprehensible, funny/sad, attractive in a sentimental way, part of an undifferentiated 'background' which effectively denies them context or history. While never making the brothers exactly radical, their research does seem to have made both Mayhews politically ambivalent. It is this which makes *Paved with Gold* a text riven with thought-provoking contradiction.

The Contradictions of Enterprise

The key contradiction has to do with the double nature of all Victorian 'enterprise'. More than one kind of enterprise paradigm is observable historically, especially in the mid-Victorian period in which *Paved with Gold* was written. As well as the explorers, missionaries, speculators and developers assiduously plying their various colonialist trades in Africa and Asia, and as well as the industrialists, inventors and financiers busy making England into the world's first and foremost industrial nation, there were other explorers charting poverty-stricken 'Darkest England'. Whether they were factory inspectors, evangelical ministers, foreign visitors (like Engels), or journalists and novelists, their common project was to draw attention to circumstances which, although visible, were apparently seldom seen.

The very means-of-drawing-attention, the forms which mediations of poverty took, can be seen as part of a process of class accommodation which tended to neutralise the campaigning edge of this activity. This is nowhere so well articulated as in the sub-title Augustus chose for his novel: 'The Romance and the Reality of the London Streets'. Through the efforts of the 'explorer/reporters', however well-intentioned, the Victorian reading public was helped both to an understanding of territory of which it often had no direct experience, and to an acceptance of it. The fact that the denizens of the 'poor country' might at any time rise in revolt against their betters, or infect them with cholera, or both, was sufficient to produce a climate of opinion in which reports from the Terra Nova of urban poverty would be listened to avidly, and the very reporters themselves elevated to the status of important witnesses.

Class accommodation was facilitated by such reports because the parameters for action were frequently circumscribed in undeclared, perhaps unconscious, ways by the very act of viewing/reading. As Frederic Jameson (1988, p172-3) has remarked, the observer's dominating superiority over an observed subject is affirmed through the 'special kind of inspection inherent in the obsessive visual survey'.

The documentary prose of *London Labour* and *Paved with Gold* constitute a particular kind of 'look' at urban poverty in which Jameson's notion of a 'will to power' can be traced. H.K. Browne's drawings in *Paved with Gold* have a similar kind of 'documentariness' which reinforces the tendency.

As with studies of urban poverty then, so with film and television documentary now; often a prurience exists alongside outrage in the consumption of documentary modes. This ultimately expresses itself as an assumed right to look for one side; an obligation to be looked at on the other. Through such materialised power relations, poverty is effectively specularised by means of literary and/or visual representation. The act of mediation renders a moral problem controllable aesthetically. A fairly undifferentiated 'concern' provides an enabling rubric for

the 'artistic' experience, a fact confirmed in the very notion of 'Romance' co-existing with 'Reality'

At the time of the Mayhew's original research into poverty in England's capital city there was an urgent need for something to be seen to be done for the nation's poor. If there was one thing which concentrated the collective mind of the Victorian bourgeoisie, it was the spectre of working-class revolution, and during the 1840s it seemed as if a 'worst fear scenario' was about to be realised. With a new French Revolution in 1848 and other European risings further east, and with the Irish famine exacerbating political problems to the west, it is no wonder that the presence of organised working-class dissent at home (culminating in a 'second coming' of the Chartist movement in 1848) caused the controllers of the Victorian hegemony to rush first to 'law and order' politics and then to philanthropy. In April 1848 the victor of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington, virtually garrisoned London against the Chartists and, when the crisis proved no more than a kind of fiction itself, the relief was real enough for the Home Office to telegraph all chief magistrates in order to tell them that London (and hence, of course, the kingdom) was saved. A widespread cholera epidemic similarly concentrated minds upon the 'condition of England'. All this in 1848, the year in which *The Communist Manifesto* was first published.

It was against this background, reinforced by Factory Inspectors' Reports, Royal Commission 'Blue Books', and *Morning Chronicle*-style early sociology, that the 'social problem novel' achieved a high profile in the literary world. Dickens, Kingsley, Mrs. Gaskell and others struggled in their work to square manifest circles, to create a consensus against cracks and fissures in English society that were becoming more and more apparent and threatening. In retrospect, the social problem novel can be seen as a kind of 'sealing off' of a potentially revolutionary moment - the final cultural evidence of its impossibility. The 1850s was the decade in which meanings were manufactured which helped to secure the status quo. Behind each of the 'high art' novels, let it not be forgotten, existed reams of the 'low art' journalism which frequently fed them. To take the example of Dickens, his magazine *Household Words* carried a regular series of articles on industry and industrial problems throughout the 1850s, a journalistic anxiety re-made into the closure of his 1854 *Hard Times*.

But if 'literature' tended towards a containment politics of integration, Henry Mayhew's particular brand of journalism problematised this project in ways which reverberated through the 1850s and beyond. The *Morning Chronicle* articles caused impact beyond those bursts of middle-class concern and philanthropic endeavour which helped to shore up the Victorian hegemony. E.P. Thompson's phrase 'susurrations of class guilt' (1973, p34) usefully articulates that acknowledgement of responsibility inherent in the whisperings and murmurings stirred up by the *Morning Chronicle* revelations. In the ten years before the publication of the 'finished' *London Labour and the London Poor*, various attempted uses of the material provide an indicator of the continuing (and continuous) impact of Mayhew's work. *London Labour* may have been delayed by a dispute between Henry Mayhew and his printer, but the research was never really out of the public eye during the 1850s, owing in large measure to other literary enterprises inspired by the work.

The impact in the predominantly (not to say exclusively) middle-class world of the novel reader may be judged from the fact that novelists incorporated Mayhew as a ready-made means for authenticating their fictions (Charles Kingsley, for example, was mightily struck by the articles, and used material from Mayhew in his 1849 *Alton Locke*). The London slums of *Tom All Alone's* and the pathetic street boy Jo the crossing-sweeper in the 1852-3 *Bleak House*, and the street-life aspects of the 1864-5 *Our Mutual Friend* can be usefully described as 'Mayhew-esque' as an indication of their authenticity. Read alongside the relevant sections of *Paved with Gold*, the *Bleak House* material is especially interesting intertextually.

London Labour and the London Poor has remained vital source of knowledge about Victorian England, although its status as a 'trustworthy' text is now more troubled. In many ways the book is a precursor of what we would now recognise as 'oral history', or 'history from below'. Such inquiry investigates those passages of history 'cancelled' in official accounts of the life of a nation. Cancelled history tends especially to include accounts from the working class, who have frequently been denied a direct 'voice' (unless it can be quoted in support of ruling class prejudice and ambition). Any 'sanctioned' historical account (which is to say any account endorsed by the state or its institutions) will always tend to minimise historical details which do not redound to its credit (to put it no more strongly). Mayhew's year-long journalistic expose of the grinding poverty in which, on even the most optimistic analysis, at least a third of the nation lived meant that the facts of Victorian poverty could not be completely elided into pious notions of self-help-ery, providential determinism and utilitarian 'political economy'.

Claiming the Real

Similarly, *Paved with Gold* offers something which better-known novels can easily be made to mask: an excellent opportunity to go beyond conventional accounts towards a reading of a key historical 'moment' - the mid-century crisis of the English bourgeoisie. The political ambivalence of both Henry and Augustus can be usefully read as quite a delicate instrument, measuring the extent of the historical moment's actual containment. Inscribed within the confusions and contradictions of *Paved with Gold* are very real boundaries - boundaries which mark out the terms and conditions of 'belonging' to the Victorian hegemony. The gloss characteristically offered whenever *Paved with Gold* features London street argot, for instance, constitutes an incessant 'cleaning up' of the Lower-class voice which marks out class boundaries just as effectively as any sociological account.

The implied reader, struggling to cope in the poor man's country, is throughout the novel being helped not only by instant glossaries but also by the language in which an alien experience is being transmitted - in the kinds of comparative for which the author habitually reaches, for example:

But the real truth was that Merton was only trying to soften the discounter's heart, and cared no more what became of him, provided he could get his cheque, than you do for the shells of an oyster, after you have eaten the peppered and vinegared bivalve. (p203)

This curiously-balanced sequence mixes fake feeling, acquisitiveness and conspicuous consumption in the character depicted, with shades of similar things in the implied reader; it is a heady cocktail of 'other' Victorian values.

A critical reading of *Paved with Gold* will struggle if it tries to reclaim it as an undiscovered masterpiece, or makes unfavourable comparisons with 'better' work. When a novel so clearly popular in its own time is de-selected in our own century, the reasons for its occlusion are usually not difficult to find. To begin with, the vast production and consumption of novels in the period has ensured that many writers much more popular in their own time than Augustus Mayhew have failed to pass the 'test of time'. Then again, 'aesthetic' considerations have marginalised certain texts which have been constructed as inadequate in some way. Novels with 'inconsistent characters' or 'poorly-developed plots', with discredited themes and discontinuous ideas have been filtered out, while others have been deemed to represent 'the Victorian Age'.

Study of this Age is now fashionable. The Victorian Industry has thrived, with the Victorian Novel a vital feature in the building of the business. Fuelled by a succession of TV and film adaptations, and a proliferation of courses of academic study, the Victorian Novel now has a cultural centrality and respectability only comparable to the Elizabethan Play. In the UK, the final twist was a political movement, Thatcherism, which stridently proclaimed 'Victorian values' of thrift and self-help, economic growth at all costs, and military strength. This quintessence of one kind of Victorian world-view has been aggressively deployed in the service of a 'new/old' Heritage ideology. Thatcherism would seem to have secured for the twenty-first century an ideology which once appeared to have been discredited, but which was only lying dormant. A novel like *Paved with Gold* can show that a reassuringly unitary view of the Victorian period was, and is, a chimera.

Like *London Labour*, *Paved with Gold* is testimony not only to the underside of Victorian England, but also to an on-going bourgeois interest in (indeed, positive taste for) working-class poverty which partially recuperates the problem. In London street life of today, down-and-outs who mistakenly hoped that the twentieth-century streets of London might also be 'paved with gold' live in cardboard-box 'homes' cheek-by-jowl with the South Bank palaces of English culture. Reporters have interviewed in, and taken photographs of, 'Cardboard City' (see, for example, *The Observer Magazine* 23 April 1989). They posed as down-and-outs themselves in order to give their readers the 'real' feel of the place; Conservative MPs were persuaded to tryout *Life on the Dole* for ITV in the same period. All this can be read as Mayhew-esque in a different way. The brothers would certainly recognise not only this particular penumbral world (with its own rules, impenetrable language, and history), but also a society in which the poorest elements are so marginalised in the collective consciousness that they become inhabitants of a partially-mythologised parallel world needing to be 'discovered'.

They might not recognise the new discourses of journalistic and photographic realism, yet these fix and explain the problem of poverty for its major consumers - the social groupings which make up the class-in-power - just as surely as *London Labour* did. Thus the Cardboard City 'society within a society' is appropriated anew through being written about, photographed, 'subjected'. The Right's continuous disavowal of poverty in the 1980s and 1990s might, perhaps, have surprised the Mayhews; but they themselves may have contributed unwittingly to this denial by mediating poverty in their own work so successfully. *London Labour and the London Poor* was a precursor of a documentary method, which privileges an 'objective' eye and ear. This has now become the camera eye and microphone ear, eliding anew the political space between observation and action.

The discourse which enabled Victorian writers to set a reassuring tone in relation to questions both of poverty and working-class unrest returns, aided by new technology, in the 'Heritage' industry and its gift-wrapped 'history'. The assiduous marketing of a vague concern as timeless English social responsibility re-colonises aspects of the working-class past of the nineteenth century and denies it for a second time. Real working-class history is deleted in favour of a notion of the continuum of (social) progress, and the unitary view that what's Good for the Nation (that is, the small fraction that still owns and controls wealth) has always been/still is Good for Everyone. The sound you hear in industrial museums up and down the land is that of generations of workers turning in their graves.

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Even when in full 'Romance' mode, when the hero Philip Merton gains access to the Grant household in romantic pursuit of Lucy Grant (Book 3 Chapter 15), it is her father Lt. Grant's drunkenness which is the focus of Mayhew's interest. He demonstrates detailed knowledge of the ways of the drunkard, with its violent swings of mood, cunning ploys to obtain access to drink, and sheer unpredictability. It is this that the author chooses to develop rather than the more obvious love relationship, which is quite cursorily treated.

In effect, Mayhew's journalist/researcher knowledge of low life and criminal worlds sustains his book, as everyone who has written on *Paved with Gold* acknowledges. The usual conclusion reached by commentators is that Mayhew was simply inept (see Humpherys, 1971, pvii, for example), which may be right, but is not very interesting. One, pragmatic, reason for Augustus's apparently cavalier approach may lie in the background to literary production in the period. Augustus, in other words, polished off his book for the same reason his brother may have quit the project - because it had become uneconomic in relation to other speculative possibilities. To continue to chase down the various themes of reconciliation (of classes, interests, politics) was a waste of effort; he had, after all, made sure that the realistic material was foregrounded, and this was what would sell. In classic marketing parlance, he knew his 'soft target' audience well enough to be sure that they would be suckers for the low-life stuff, so he wasn't too bothered about aesthetical considerations. Being true to the factual material he and his brother had discovered was, perhaps, more important than leaping through literary hoops. But more interesting still is the manner in which he gets through the hoops.

The novel's profoundly ambiguous ending is a crux. Much has been written about the classic realist text's capacity for 'closure', or satisfactory resolution of themes at a novel's conclusion. This was once accounted an emblem of efficiency in the production of meanings. Uncoupled to some extent by modernism, the need for closure is still evident in some 'popular' texts (in *Mills and Boon*, for example). In recent Hollywood film, postmodern versions of closure sometimes artfully reveal excess in the very moment of its denial (David Lynch's 1986 *Blue Velvet* is a good example of this). All of which indicates our present more ambiguous and nuanced relation to closure, a relation which makes *Paved with Gold* more interesting than a novel with conventional closure. When Dickens was compelled to alter the ending to *Great Expectations* (1861), his readers, quite simply, wanted something more resolved. They wanted Pip and Estella's class, personal and sexual conflicts to be dissolved in the institution of Victorian marriage - they wanted a 'happy ending'. Any conflicts proposed in terms of race, class, sex, or politics contribute when 'successfully' resolved to a more-or-less unified textual world-view which is, in effect, patriarchal-bourgeois (or which could be brought into sufficiently close relation to a male bourgeois view of the 'real world').

But in *Paved with Gold*, such a project comes notably and interestingly unstuck. The novel constantly promises to behave, but never quite does. It begins with a classic mystery trope: a bourgeois girl - Katherine Merton - bears a child, Philip, in a situation of poverty and degradation then dies (cf. *Oliver Twist* - 1837-8). This naturally raises the prospect of the Inheritance, with its ultimate promise of economic security. Thus one strand of *Paved with Gold* is the 'rags to riches' story of Phil Merton, a working-class boy/criminal. This story might show him learning the Error of His Ways, eventually Settling Down to Become Respectable and Happy (cf., again, *Oliver Twist*). There is potential here for a Darwinian tale of moral natural selection - natural virtue overcoming learned vice. In parallel, there is the melodrama of the working-class girl, Phil's 'sister' Bertha Hazlewood, Undone by a Cad (cf. Mrs. Gaskell's 1853 *Ruth*, in which a dressmaker is so seduced). This has the additional possibility of her would-be seducer, the society rake Merton Crosier, being Saved By Love

(cf. Eugene Wrayburn in *Our Mutual Friend* 1864-65). Bertha has elements also of the 'social healer' Amy Dorrit (*Little Dorrit* 1855-6), and it is interesting to compare the 'Phiz' portraits of the two characters. They are almost identical not only in their physical smallness and delicacy, but also in their absence of feature. Their faces are drawn as ovals of pure blankness onto which, perhaps, the Victorian male could inscribe fantasies of some new urban Madonna.

Efficient closure in the nineteenth-century novel also depended upon punishment as well as reward - so that the general tendency of society towards moral health could be re-asserted, and it could be readily seen that Crime Does Not Pay. There are plenty of textual clues which seem to suggest that this will happen in *Paved with Gold*. Book 3 opens with this portentous line:

God help Philip Merton and save him from the ruin to which he is hastening! (p250)

Nor is this the only time Mayhew alludes to Phil's impending 'ruin' (see also p236, p384). Bertha is referred to as early as p99 as 'his conscience', and the scenes in which she and others counsel him also contribute to this potential moral parable (see pp70-72, p121, p127, p208). And there is the further promise in Book 3 that Phil's love for Lucy Grant will help him to reform (*Saved by the Love of a Good Woman!*). But the fact of the matter is that he never does reform. As a result, Mayhew eschews at least two potentially affecting scenes - Phil's confession to his young wife, and his repentant reunion with his spotless sister Bertha.

In short, the elements never quite coalesce in *Paved with Gold* to give that reassuring picture of virtue ultimately triumphing over vice which they were designed to do, and which Mayhew even claims in his Preface to have done ('by destroying the fancied romance of wickedness'). It is not just that Augustus Mayhew is perfunctory in dealing with these elements of his story, although he is. Both in his conclusion to his novel and (more importantly) in the way he deals with its moral dimensions he constantly evades (or cannot handle) those solutions which are so readily available in order to privilege his 'reality material'

So young Phil goes unpunished, as does his villainous French father Emile Vautrin. Indeed the latter finishes up 'dressed in a style of fashion which, as a man of fortune, he was entitled to assume' - converted from scoundrel into gentleman 'by a roll of notes' (p408). Like Dickens's M. Rigaud in *Little Dorrit*, Vautrin displays his devious foreignness through frequent slippery changes of identity which are in themselves denials of English straightforwardness. Overt xenophobia is certainly not beyond Mayhew, as can be seen in the Prize Fight chapter, where he inquires directly of his reader,

Who would wish to change his bold English nature for the deceit of the Spaniard, or the treachery of the Greek? (p183)

In context, it is difficult to read this ironically.

But despite Augustus's obvious distaste for the foreigner, and despite all the moral pointers against crime, father and son do in fact secure untroubled possession of Katherine Merton's inheritance. Thus compound villainy, rather than righteousness, is economically empowered. Available structures are cancelled, as it were, in Mayhew's rush to closure. With neither Phil's long-promised ruin nor his reformation actually occurring, nor his father achieving the gallows he so apparently deserves, it would seem that Mayhew believed that rogues who are 'nine-tenths a genius' (p297) will be the ones who actually find golden streets.

Paved with Gold articulates orthodox Victorian morality only on the surface; the deep structure of the novel is fascinated by the fake and the bogus. Even the supposed moral heart of the novel, Phil's innocent 'sister' Bertha Hazlewood, remains only technically spotless according to mid-Victorian values because of the extent to which she is duped by a bogus marriage service (see Book 3 Chapter 22). Only the accident of the her 'husband' dying prevents her seduction, a seduction which would otherwise have been inevitable (and comparable with that suffered by the real young prostitute interviewed by Henry Mayhew for London Labour). Nathaniel Crosier, her 'father-in-law' (so many of the relationships in the novel have to be hedged round with inverted commas), decides not to disabuse her about her 'marriage', so Bertha is saved but never enlightened (just as her would-be seducer is punished but not saved). Unenlightened, she can no longer act as Phil's conscience, but like Phil she is rewarded economically. Brother and sister achieve a kind of independence without moral authority, a paradoxical independent-in-subjection - the very epitome of the price the Victorian bourgeoisie were prepared to pay for a quiet life. It would be an interesting project to compare Bertha's fictional trajectory with, for example, Ellen Ternan's real one.

'What is it you want? Is it money?'

Nathaniel Crosier's relief that there is no urgent need 'to disturb the secrecy of [his son Merton's] deceit' (my italics) is thought-provoking. This convoluted phrase defines the moral economy of a novel in which appearance doesn't simply mask reality, it distorts and even replaces it. It is not just dodgy money that is passed from hand to hand, as it is in the chapter on 'smashing' or counterfeiting (Book 3 Chapter 17); 'feelings' so bogus that they devalue. Feeling are also exchanged. Just as cleverly-made coins and notes construct a 'black economy', so the black emotional economy is constituted through labyrinthine dissimulation. The disjunction in Merton Crosier between what he thinks he should feel, what he thinks he might feel, and what he really does feel, is the emotional equivalent of 'smashing'. His 'love' for Bertha is irrevocably counterfeit, starting as it does from the admiration she elicits when seen at a window by his upper-class cronies. It is monstrous in its development, locked in as it is with his confused desires both to possess her and to be upwardly mobile. His ultimate weapon of seduction is economic: he sets up Bertha and her mother Nurse Hazlewood in an 'independent' house in the suburbs, certain that he can turn economic into physical subjugation - as many a Victorian gentleman, Charles Dickens included, did:

By his lending them money, they would fall into his power, and the deuce was in it if he did not arrange things in his own way. (p276)

Augustus Mayhew acknowledges this class-delimited world, and as a petit bourgeois himself shows simultaneous distaste and fascination for its criminal and privileged extremes.

What he also reveals in a less stable form is the extent to which classes and sexes in mid-Victorian England were hermetically-sealed off and alienated from each other by their economic relations. Both Merton and his 'nephew' Phil, separated by class, are similarly worked upon and moulded by their friends' definitions of socially-viable roles; Merton's pals Tom Oxendon and Charley Sutton happen to be upper class, while Billy Fortune and Ned Purchase are lower, but they are equally influential on the novel's male principals. Bertha and Lucy are divided by class, but are both constructed as pretty and feckless objects to be exchanged in patterns of exploitation and domination which render them doll-objects to be owned and consumed by men.

Emotions, fears and feelings end up being capable only of economic definition. 'What is it you want?' asks the Banker Nathaniel Crosier of the burglar Vautrin, 'Is it money?' (p404). It is a natural assumption, since this is precisely what everyone is after, for in the world of Paved with Gold only money confers power. As a result, all the characters are enslaved by it,

not just the vagrant poor who so obviously lack it. 'Respectable' Merton Crosier, unexpectedly struck by a real emotion when his mother dies, finds this real grief rapidly transformed 'when he discovered to what an "amount" the departed parent had loved him' (p330). The money (£200 per year and a lump sum of £5000) dissolves the real feeling into a cocktail of bogus grief and selfish lust. In this he is just like the low-life Vautrin who, because he had 'become entitled to property through his wife's death. . . had ceased to deplore her loss' (p345).

Because the cash nexus is so firmly in control of the emotional events of the novel, the tropes of reconciliation and redemption are all troubled and incomplete. It is as if, given his detailing of the customs and practices of the English underclass, Mayhew can no longer take a conventional attitude (in both the formal as the general sense) to bourgeois theories of human relationships and the beneficent nature of capital. This erupts on several occasions into direct attacks upon the philosophy of capitalism itself. These attacks are rendered ambiguous by being placed in the mouths of 'immoral' characters, Billy Fortune and Vautrin, but while direct authorial approval is withheld, the author draws the reader into being an accessory to subversive ideas as a part result of his own unstable apportioning of praise and blame.

Billy Fortune gives a succinct class account (with translations by his author) of an aristocratic land deal in Book 3 Chapter 1 (when he, Ned and Phil are resting from their 'tramping' outside Stafford):

'Do you see all this land?' said he . . . 'well, the grandfather of this here Lord Southwark got it for "nix". He was the knowingest "nob" that ever wagged the "red rag" (tongue). He begged this land of King George for to make a kitchen-garden, as he said. The king didn't know there was so many thousand acres, and give 'em. That was a good day's work, wasn't it? He's turned some of the land into farms, and very nice ones they make. Now, if you or I was to do such a dodge as that, we should have the "body-snatchers" (police-officers) after us, and get shoved in the blockhouse (gaol).' (p254)

Vautrin articulates a very similar view of the hypocrisy of capitalist morality in his 'advice' to his son Phil. While both sneakthief son and con-man father ostensibly pursue the same goal, which Vautrin defines simply as 'to make money', the father observes,

You, for a few pence, risk a prison and the treadwheel. I, for the same punishment, speculate [my emphasis] for hundreds of pounds. (p346)

Although the argument is framed by (mild) authorial disapproval, the actual rewards enjoyed at the conclusion of the novel are signifiers of a deeper nature. The Victorian reading public may have demanded a valorisation of thrift, hard work and self-help (which Mayhew dutifully but mechanically delivers), but at another level they get Vautrin the 'venture capitalist' successfully training his son to stop robbing and start 'speculating'.

Vautrin even justifies himself as a kind of Robin Hood figure in a class war; he is, he claims, 'one of the standing army of poverty, who fought the war of want with their enemies, the rich' (p361). He compares capitalist society's treatment of devious bankrupts with its treatment of honest thieves:

'That's justice is it! Here is one scoundrel steals goods to the amount 30,000/. [the bankrupt], and another [the thief] who pilfers a mere remnant valued at four shillings. The one is sent back to his home cleared of his debt, and placed in a position which enables him to rob again on the morrow. The other, who turned thief to get food, perhaps, is packed off to prison to come out, after three months, a branded reprobate.' (pp359-60)

Under the rubric of this justification, son and father are left in 'respectable' possession of a wealth which appears to be deserved by nobody; mother and daughter are complaisantly hoodwinked into believing that their exploiters are their benefactors; father/grandfather willingly trades appearance for truth. In *Paved with Gold*, as in Victorian England, there is nothing which it is not possible ultimately to buy up, trade-off, or sell on.

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