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Author(s): Jamie Wise

Title: Horse racing in nineteenth-century literature

Date: 2013

Originally published as: University of Chester MA dissertation

Example citation: Wise, J. (2013). *Horse racing in nineteenth-century literature*.
(Unpublished master's thesis). University of Chester, United Kingdom.

Version of item: Submitted version

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/311621>

University of Chester
Department of English
MA Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture
EN7204 Dissertation

Horse Racing in Nineteenth-Century Literature

Assessment Number: G34469

Abstract

The popularity of nineteenth-century horse racing is firmly established. Throughout the century it provided entertainment, amusement and employment across all the classes. Most scholarship focuses on horse racing in terms of leisure and the negotiation of class values, noting the shift from the sport as a predominantly aristocratic playground in the early part of the nineteenth century, to the commercialised arena of entertainment it became towards the end of the Victorian era. What is unexplored by both historical and literary critics however is the representation of horse racing in nineteenth-century literature. This dissertation attempts to fill that void. The carnival values of the racecourse, horse racing's shift towards commercialism, concepts of class defined leisure and the sports inevitable association with gambling are all scrutinised with reference to both the historical context of horse racing and their inclusion in nineteenth-century fiction. George Moore's *Esther Waters*, Émile Zola's *Nana* and Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices' are all closely analysed in terms of their representation of the racecourse carnival, racecourse space and infrastructure and working-class gambling. The aim of this dissertation is ultimately to provide an in depth reading of the few significant representations of horse racing in nineteenth-century literature and to shed light on why the popularity of the sport across the nineteenth century is not replicated by meaningful inclusion within the literature of the day.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the English department lecturers and staff for their help and support throughout both the dissertation process and the entire MA programme. I would especially like to thank my supervisor Dr Sarah Heaton for her continued advice, patience, knowledge and critical input, without which this dissertation would have been impossible to complete. A special mention must also go to my family and friends for their ever present encouragement and helpful corrections of my often terrible spelling and grammar.

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Introduction

In 1866 the *Daily Telegraph* commented that ‘practically the only ‘sport’ which in England may fairly be described as national is comprised in the single word ‘horseracing’’.¹ Yet horse racing in the nineteenth century was not something easily defined or categorised under any single umbrella description. Rendered unstable by the seismic influences of the Industrial Revolution and the far-reaching changes to society which preceded and followed, horse racing’s position as a ‘national’ sporting pastime was subjected across the nineteenth century to the conflicting tensions of class, commercialism and leisure. It was a movable feast in which the racecourse, traditionally a site of all-inclusive carnival, became a complicated space housing middle-class capitalism, working-class leisure and morally-questionable gambling, all of which functioned in a mutually dependant yet conflicted relationship.

Despite its move towards a ‘national’ spectator sport, representations of horse racing in the literature of the nineteenth century are sparse and sporadic at best; even as textual background to a novel’s other narrative focus the sport remains largely absent. This study will examine the complex nature of horse racing’s place in Victorian society alongside representations of the sport within nineteenth-century fiction, providing both an original analysis of Victorian literature’s response to horse racing, something which like the representations themselves is mainly absent from the critical canon, while also attempting to reconcile the sport’s obvious popularity with its meagre treatment in the novels of the day.

Chapter One provides a contextual overview of nineteenth-century horse racing focussing on the racecourse as a site of carnival, horse racing’s position as a medium of working-class leisure and the sport’s inextricable link to gambling. Mike Huggins’s *Flat*

¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 20th August 1866, p. 16.

Racing and British Society 1790-1914: A Social and Economic History and Wray Vamplew's *The Turf: A Social and Economic History of Horse Racing* both provide a comprehensive and authoritative history of horse racing and the racecourse, however neither offer a detailed analysis of the complexity of racecourse space and the carnival therein.² This chapter will bring together Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnival as a sanctioned arena in which social paradigms are temporarily suspended, and Henri Lefebvre's concepts of practical and theoretical space in order to better interpret the nineteenth-century racecourse as a site which housed complex social tensions.³ Focussing primarily on Epsom, the home of the Derby meeting, what emerges is the nineteenth-century racecourse as a contradictory space in which carnival-style freedoms, increasing commercialisation, middle-class capitalist intrusion and expanding working-class leisure, existed together in a complex relationship centred on both racecourse infrastructure and evolving social concepts of leisure and the working class.

Furthermore ideas of nineteenth-century working-class leisure specifically in relation to horse racing, although discussed in detail by Huggins and Vamplew, fail to incorporate such ideas with theories of space and movement. Again focussing on Epsom this chapter will highlight how the infrastructure of the racecourse itself, as a licenced space of legitimate working-class leisure and carnival excess, was intensely problematic for burgeoning middle-class concepts of disciplined recreation. That is the cross-class excesses of the carnival provided precisely the wrong example of leisure while the social zoning of the racecourse, a product of the increasing commercialisation of the sport, limited the potential for horse racing to provide any example of middle-class leisure by segregating the classes.

² Mike Huggins, *Flat Racing and British Society 1790-1914: A Social and Economic History*, (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Wray Vamplew, *The Turf: A Social and Economic History of Horse Racing*, (London: Allen Lane, 1976).

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Rabelais and His World', in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

Finally nineteenth-century horse racing will be discussed in relation to gambling. Again both Vamplew and Huggins along with Michael Flavin's *Gambling in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* give an extensive overview of nineteenth-century gambling in terms of its legality, social perception and its function in working-class leisure time. Taking such contexts as my foundation I will again relate them to theories of space and the social restrictions of the racecourse and horseracing more generally. What will be argued is that gambling, particularly for the working classes, became a displaced intellectual activity, creating a space of autonomous expression and communal interaction which defied the hegemonic control of restrictive betting laws and the social zoning of the racecourse. In analysing horseracing in the nineteenth century the first chapter provides both the social context and theoretical premise from which the literary texts of the following two chapters will be considered.

Chapter Two focusses on George Moore's *Esther Waters* and Émile Zola's *Nana*. Both novels will be analysed in terms of their representation of the carnival, social zoning and the negotiation of racecourse space. The chapter concludes by examining the depiction of working-class gambling in *Esther Waters*. Often considered an anti-gambling polemic by both contemporary and modern critics and the author himself, I will argue that the extended descriptions of working-class betting create a counter narrative which runs against such claims, showing gambling to have both intellectual and communal value for the working-class characters in the novel.

Chapter Three examines the representations of horse racing in the work of Charles Dickens. *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices' will be analysed in terms of their representation of the racecourse carnival and racing's association with gambling. Dickens's response to working-class gambling in his non-fiction is then considered and, in what follows, I will argue that gambling for Dickens

provided both the pull of excitement he found necessary to working-class amusement, but also the counter weight of moral questionability. The outcome is an inability to reconcile horse racing as a legitimate form of leisure in both his own conceptualisation and his fiction, resulting ultimately in the lack of any significant representations of the sport in the Dickens canon.

Given the limited space available in this study it is not possible, nor is it the intention, to provide an all-encompassing, encyclopaedic analysis of nineteenth-century horse racing and its position within Victorian literature. Rather the purpose is to provide a contextual overview of the sport detailing the nature of racecourse space, working-class leisure and gambling, while examining specific nineteenth-century texts in which the representations of horse racing, in terms of these social contexts, are most prevalent.

Chapter 1

Nineteenth-Century Horse Racing: Carnival, Class and Leisure

*Carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truths and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.*⁴

Mikhail Bakhtin

I

Throughout the nineteenth century the racecourse was a sight of carnival, a place where different classes, sexes and ages mingled together in an atmosphere which encouraged the abandonment of social norms and customs.⁵ In this way it was an expression of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, a temporary liberation from socially constructed paradigms and class hierarchies.⁶ An 1839 meeting at Carlisle had, as well as the horseracing, sack races, wheelbarrow races and a soap tailed pig competition.⁷ An account of the small Hartlepool races in 1855 describes 'nymphs of the pave and light-fingered gentry and country blues perambulating among the crowds of pedestrians and the fire-eaters, tumblers and musicians'.⁸ The *History of the British Turf* published in 1879 describes how the minor course of Harlestone in the north of England had an 'importance in its own neighbourhood' as it supplied the 'occasion for a general holiday'.⁹ That is it provided the opportunity, as

⁴ Bakhtin, *Literary Theory*, p. 686.

⁵ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, pp. 117-139.

⁶ Bakhtin, *Literary Theory*, pp. 686-692.

⁷ *Carlisle Journal*, 6th July 1839, p. 24.

⁸ *Hartlepool Free Press*, 8th September 1855, p. 18.

⁹ James Rice, *History of the British Turf*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1879), p. 87.

many other nineteenth-century racecourses did for a ‘holiday’ from established social hierarchies and paradigms as cross-class crowds mingled together in a festival atmosphere.¹⁰

Epsom’s Derby meeting came to exemplify racing’s carnivalesque atmosphere. Paintings such as William Powel Frith’s *The Derby Day* (1856-1858), Gustav Doré’s illustration *The Derby, at Lunch: 1872* and the *Punch* cartoon ‘A view of Epsom Downs 1849’, all emphasise the cross-class integration which took place on the course (see appendices one, two and three). *The Era* in 1856 described it as ‘The Epsom Racing Carnival [...] this great national festival – one of those universally acknowledged British holidays’, categorising it specifically as a ‘universally’ accepted form of carnival, but crucially something which is a temporary ‘holiday’ from social norms.¹¹ The same paper also described how, in the crush to board the train to Epsom for the 1856 Derby, ‘first-class passengers were only too glad to avail themselves of third-class accommodation’.¹² The *Illustrated London News* explicitly recognised this breakdown of social boundaries declaring in 1896 that the Derby was ‘clearly subversive of the proper distinctions which should always in a well-governed society exist between class and class’.¹³ In a similar vein the journalist George Augustus Sala, in 1892, described how ‘all ranks and conditions of men and women are jumbled together on the course’.¹⁴ Even sporting papers reporting on the actual racing recognised the meeting’s carnival atmosphere. *The Sporting Gazette* in 1853 called it a ‘truly national holiday’ describing the ‘myriad ranks’ of those attending.¹⁵ The Derby was then

¹⁰ The exception to racing’s all-encompassing carnivalesque atmosphere was Newmarket, which was run by and for the upper classes, with crowd numbers often less than one thousand throughout the century it was attended mainly by the elite members of society. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 144. The *History of the British Turf* describes the ‘businesslike [sic] enjoyment of the days sport’ at Newmarket’s 1875 Craven meeting rather than the carnival excesses of other courses. Rice, *History of the British Turf*, p. 49.

¹¹ *The Era*, June 1st 1856, p. 58.

¹² *The Era*, June 3rd 1856, p. 46.

¹³ *Illustrated London News*, June 24th 1896, p. 14.

¹⁴ George Augustus Sala, in Laurie Brannan (ed.), *Derby Quotations*, (Berkshire: Sporting Press, 2004), p. 131.

¹⁵ *The Sporting Gazette*, 4th June 1853, p. 36.

recognised by the Victorians as a carnival in the truest sense of the word: subversive and divisive, yet temporary and transitory.¹⁶

Despite the obvious carnival atmosphere of the nineteenth-century racecourse the suspension of social paradigms and class boundaries it encouraged was undermined by racecourse enclosure and the building of socially exclusive grandstands. The excessively carnivalesque portrayals of the Derby by Firth and Doré, and the descriptions of wild excess from the press reveal only one side of the racecourse, side-lining the social zoning which was implemented, in varying degrees, throughout the nineteenth century. After 1875 the majority of racecourses became enclosed, meaning an admission fee was charged to all those wishing to enter.¹⁷ Such widespread enclosure instigated a shift from the racecourse as a site of carnival to a space within the capitalist framework of profit making.¹⁸ The result was a negation of many of the ideals of the carnival which the racecourse formally housed. The entrance fee restricted the attendance in monetary terms, limiting the number of working class families who could or would attend and consequently denying a mingling of the

¹⁶ Just when the Derby first became a sight of national carnival is somewhat unclear. First run in 1780 *The Blue Ribbon of the Turf* (1890) suggests that 'many years elapsed before the Derby came to be looked upon as something of a national event', and that 'the popularity of the Derby as a sight for the people [...] was of slow growth'. Louis Henry Curzon, *The Blue Ribbon of the Turf*, (Philadelphia: Gebbie and Co., 1890), p. 3, p. 8. Curzon cites 1820 as around the time the Derby meeting was attended by the masses and this concurs with early descriptions of the Derby.

¹⁷ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 117.

¹⁸ Some lamented the move towards enclosure seeing it as a manipulation of the traditional fabric of the sport, a suppression of the long established carnival tradition of the racecourse. *The Field* in 1893, commenting on Chester's enclosure, remarked that 'a pang of regret will doubtless be felt [...] on learning the old order is about to change'. *The Field*, March 18th 1893, quoted in R. M. Bevan, *The Roodee: 450 Years of Racing in Chester*, (Northwich: Cheshire County Publishing, 1989), p. 83. That is the 'old order' of the racecourse as a sight of class subverting carnivalesque atmosphere was shifting to a modern commercial enterprise. But such a shift to enclosure was needed in order for horseracing to function as a viable modern spectator sport. The *Cheshire Observer* commented as such in 1893 when discussing Chester's enclosure: 'Racing is a national pastime, but to keep up to date great expense is necessary, and it is hardly fair for the public [...] to expect a high-class entertainment provided for them free of charge'. *Cheshire Observer*, 'Sporting', May 13th 1893, p. 5. Traditionally owners ran for a prize fund which they contributed into and was further added to by local merchants in order to attract runners and increase profits for the town. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 144. This model was largely unsustainable given the introduction of a minimum prize fund of one hundred pound to the winner of every race. The rule came into force around 1875 and meant that an increasing amount of prize money was needed in order to comply. For meetings held on common land who could not levy an entrance fee this inevitably meant closure. Charles Richardson, *The English Turf: A History of Horses and Courses*, (London: Methuen and Co. 1901), p. 27. After 1875 almost all new courses were built and designed to be fully enclosed with Sandown Park being the first and, along with Chester, Kempton and Gosford Park, was commercially successful. Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 174-190.

classes.¹⁹ Furthermore enclosure, for many courses, saw the end of ancillary entertainment in the centre of the course, such as prize fighting and circus entertainers, as the focus was turned to horseracing as commercialised spectator sport.²⁰

Further compromising the racecourse's carnivalesque atmosphere was the building of grandstands, a separate space within the racecourse in which the privileged classes could pay to view the racing. Unlike enclosure, grandstand building occurred over the entire nineteenth century and, as Mike Huggins comments, was a 'necessary part of wealthier spectatorship'.²¹ The result of such extensive grandstand building was the implementation of significant social zoning as the price of admission to many grandstands prohibited the working classes from entering (see appendix four).

The significant factor in the modernised infrastructure of the nineteenth-century racecourse was the change in the licence of the carnival and the space it occupied. The move to the racecourse as a commercial space of monetary gain shifted the carnival from a site in which the temporary suspension of social norms and decorum was licenced purely as a social holiday, and into a space in which carnival, as well as being undermined by social zoning, was exploited as means of mercenary, capitalist profit making. Henri Lefebvre, commenting

¹⁹ Initially enclosure had an adverse effect on attendance as many members of working class appear to have been unwilling to pay, although it is worth noting that entry prices into the public enclosures were well within the working-man's budget. Manchester, after becoming enclosed, attracted 50,000 spectators, representing a drop in attendance of almost fifty per cent as the pre-enclosure attendance was estimated to be generally in excess of 100,000. Similarly Richmond's attendance figure fell to 4,000 in 1890 after enclosure whereas they had previously attracted around 10,000 in pre-enclosure days. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 124. Manchester introduced a penny entrance fee in 1847 while Chester charged a shilling for their first gate meeting in 1893, as did Kempton Park in 1899. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 117; *Cheshire Observer*, 'Chester Races as a Gate Money Meeting', May 6th 1893, p. 5; Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 186

²⁰ Chester's enclosure in 1893 saw the end of the traditional fairground which had long been a part of the racecourse; the centre of the course was to be free from 'shrieking hobby horses' as the *Cheshire Observer* put it. *Cheshire Observer*, 'Chester Races as a Gate Money Meeting', May 6th 1893, p. 5.

²¹ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 150. The provincial course of Hartlepool previously described had, in the midst of its carnival, a temporary wooden stand for the local gentry. *Hartlepool Free Press*, 8th September 1855, p. 18. Doncaster began by building a single stand, the Nobleman's stand, in 1826 and proceeded to build a trainers' and jockeys' stand, Lord Wharcliffe's subscription stand and Lord Astley's Lincolnshire stand as the century progressed. Rice, *History of the British Turf*, p. 30. Chester's Dee stand was built in 1840 and Ascot, Goodwood, and the smaller courses of Malton and Richmond built stands in the 1850s. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 152. Some courses even introduced a blackballing system. Sandown formed an all-male racing club in 1880 with use of its own private enclosure and vetted membership very carefully. York formed a racing club in 1884 for friends of the management committee whose membership entitled them to use a private section of the county stand. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, pp. 43-44.

on the modern arena of leisure, suggests that 'leisure has been transformed into an industry, into a victory of neocapitalism and an extension of bourgeois hegemony to the whole of space.'²² This can easily be applied to the nineteenth-century racecourse whose carnival was transformed into an industry by the rising Victorian middle classes. The lower orders were restricted in their movements on the course by the various enclosures and exclusive grandstands which limited any mixing of the classes. Furthermore any elements of carnival given licence became part of a profit making industry of leisure, strictly limited by its confinement within a capitalist space and thus the subject of hegemonic control.

This idea is extended further by the enclosure of certain parts of individual racecourses. Most racecourses across the nineteenth century, even the ones which remained unenclosed as a whole, had a paddock enclosure and betting ring in front of the grandstand which commanded a separate entrance fee. Doncaster, by 1896, had no less than six stands and two separate enclosures despite still being unenclosed and free to enter (see appendix five). By the end of the century *The English Turf* (1901) noted that 'the modern enclosure has caused the average race-goer to expect comfort, luxury, and ease'.²³ A far cry from the images of wonton excess formally associated with the racecourse carnival. The average race-goer for such a publication was inevitably of the more privileged classes, consequently this demand for comfort undermined the notions of an all-inclusive carnival upturning social hierarchies. The 'average', predominately middle-class attendees now sought and expected a form of entertainment which was removed from the excesses of the carnival, and significantly a level of comfort which was often outside the availability of the working classes. Appendices six, seven and eight shows the exclusive members' enclosures at Lingfield, Manchester and Sandown in the latter part of the nineteenth century, all of which would have

²² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 384.

²³ Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 150.

been unaffordable to the working classes.²⁴ Far from being a throng of various people from disparate social backgrounds all three offer opulent and comfortable surroundings for the wealthier classes. As Henri Lefebvre suggests control of the leisure industry extended hegemony to the ‘whole of space’; the nineteenth-century working-class race-goers were confined by a racecourse infrastructure which reinforced hegemonic control and stereotypes already at work in Victorian society.

What is significant in terms of the carnival and class paradigms is that the extensive use of enclosure within the racecourse restricted the movement of those who were not privileged to enter the more exclusive areas. Walking, as Michel de Certeau says can be viewed as a ‘space of enunciation’; it provides the walker with a voice, a potential for freedom by choosing his or her own route and by relegating un-walked areas to a symbolic silence.²⁵ De Certeau is talking about the walk through the city in relation to this idea of enunciation but it can be easily applied to the other spaces, including the nineteenth-century racecourse. The restriction of people’s movements – the inaccessible grandstands and fenced off enclosures – represented, particularly for the working classes, a removal of the freedom of walking; it was in effect a silencing by the capitalist space and a further example of hegemonic control. When Roland Barthes commented that ‘the user of a city picks out certain fragments of the statement in order to actualize them in secret’, he was suggesting that walking – specifically the choice of where to walk within the city – provided a degree of autonomy, a personal space away from conventional spatial organisation.²⁶ Again this can be applied to the nineteenth-century racecourse. Forced to explore and move around in a restricted manner the working classes are not only silenced they are denied an autonomous

²⁴ Lingfield and Manchester charged a daily entrance fee of twelve shillings while Sandown charged fourteen shillings. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 155; Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 196.

²⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (trans. Steven Rendall), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 98.

²⁶ Roland Barthes, quoted in de Certeau, *Everyday Life*, p. 98.

existence, stereotyped en masse as the unprivileged lower orders by the infrastructure of the racecourse.

It is worth looking at Epsom and the Derby meeting in relation to this as certain tensions and contradictions reveal themselves. Epsom itself remained unenclosed as a whole until the early part of the twentieth century, meaning the centre of the course – which was the particular focus of Firth, Doré and most written accounts of excess – was still free to enter. *The English Turf* (1901) called it ‘the most important racecourse in the kingdom’, noting that it had ‘withstood the rivalry of modern enclosure’.²⁷ Important then not simply because it hosted Britain’s premier classic race but because it remained outside the capitalist framework of other late-nineteenth-century courses by withstanding the ‘rivalry’ of commercialism and remaining true to its carnival ideals. However this assessment ignores the substantial amount of social zoning that was implemented at Epsom throughout the century.

The Prince’s Stand was built around the 1790s for the then Prince of Wales (later George IV) and was used exclusively for Royal guests and high ranking members of the aristocracy.²⁸ It was rebuilt in 1879 and although not used exclusively for the Royal party was still reserved for members of the upper classes usually by invitation only.²⁹ The first grandstand was built at Epsom in 1829 with a capacity of five thousand.³⁰ The capital for the building was raised by selling one thousand shares at twenty pounds each, the contributors would then get free access to the grandstand to watch the racing while the remaining spaces were filled by selling entrance tickets at one pound each.³¹ Appendix nine gives a contemporary artist’s impression of the stand, its relatively small size indicating that it was designed for a privileged few. The stand was extended in 1878 to provide more space and

²⁷ Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 88.

²⁸ David Hunn, *Epsom Racecourse: Its Story and its People*, (London: Davis-Poynter, 1973), p. 47.

²⁹ Hunn, *Epsom*, p. 105.

³⁰ www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk/grandstand, (accessed 28th March 2013), para. 1; Curzon, *The Blue Ribbon of the Turf*, p. 22-23.

³¹ www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk/grandstand, (accessed 28th March 2013), para. 3.

private boxes for those who could afford the entrance fee. By 1890 the price of entrance to the grandstand was two guineas for the entire four day Derby meeting or one guinea for either Derby or Oaks day.³² Towards the end of the 1830s Epsom introduced a saddling enclosure from which horses could be viewed pre-race; originally costing a shilling to enter it rose to half a guinea by 1890.³³ What is clear is that despite the Derby meeting being widely recognised as a national holiday renowned for its festival atmosphere, the spatial organisation of the racecourse enforced hegemonic control as the carnival was restricted to a confined space within the centre of the course (see appendix ten). Furthermore, by the 1850s Epsom charged a booth rental fee for those wishing to occupy this fairground space, even charging the thimblemen and three-card-tricksmen, as the carnival submerged further into the profit making leisure industry.³⁴

One interesting aspect of this social zoning is a temporary stand, erected by John Barnard, which occupied the prime location in front of the winning line.³⁵ Appendix ten shows its position relative to the more exclusive stands. Although there was an admission fee – by 1896 it was six shillings, a small amount compared to the main stand and well within the working-class budget – the stand was primarily used by the lower orders.³⁶ F. H. Bayles in his *Atlas and Review of British Race-Courses* (1903) saw its position as an infringement of class privileges:

It is provoking to see the Royal enclosure, not to speak of the professional and other qualified elements who pay large fees for boxes etc., deprived of a proper view of races at Epsom, whilst this plebeian enclosure, “Barnard’s”, is indulged with a perfect view.³⁷

³² Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 149.

³³ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 152; Curzon, *The Blue Ribbon of the Turf*, p. 23.

³⁴ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 151.

³⁵ Hunn, *Epsom*, p. 106.

³⁶ Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 112; Hunn, *Epsom*, p. 106. As David Hunn comments it is difficult to determine the exact price of entry to this stand because it was not widely advertised, patrons would usually turn up and either pay the price asked by the gateman or negotiate a cheaper price they could afford. Also the complicated nature of Barnard’s lease of the land from the Lord of the Manor and the fluctuation of the price he paid in rent meant the entrance fee probably changed from year to year, perhaps even day to day. What is clear however, from a number of sources, is that the stand was primarily used by the lower classes.

³⁷ F. H. Bayles, *Atlas and Review of British Race-Courses*, 1903, in Hunn, *Epsom*, p. 106.

In the true ideal of the carnival class privileges are inverted as aristocratic supremacy and the 'large fees' of the professional middle classes wield no power in gaining the best view of the finish to the Derby. The freedom of movement, the 'space of enunciation' that was denied the lower orders, is now also denied the more affluent members of society as they do not have complete access to all the course, including significantly the 'perfect view' afforded the 'plebeian enclosure'. However Barnard's stand existed only for the duration of the Derby meeting and the class inversion it instigated is, like Bakhtin's carnival, only temporary. Consequently the permanent fixture of the Prince's Stand and the main grandstand confirm that class divides endured beyond the carnival. A look back at appendices one, two and three will show that while the excesses of the carnival are foregrounded in these images the permanent stands are still visible in the background. In the midst of the temporary carnival permanent social boundaries cannot be completely removed.

What is evident at Epsom however, and indeed at other nineteenth-century racecourses, is the complicated nature of the racecourse as a definable space. The development of horse racing as a commercial enterprise in many ways undermined the carnival and instigated a shift into a capitalist controlled leisure market. There were however, as with Epsom, instances in which the space of the racecourse remained unstable, unable to completely enforce hegemonic control. As Henri Lefebvre has noted the capitalist space is never so clearly defined that it remains purely faithful to capitalist demands. It is always a space of ambivalence and contradictions; a product and necessary tool of the capitalist system but one which can never be fully controlled by that system.³⁸ Barnard's Stand may have been temporary but it denied bourgeois capitalism complete authority over its own spatial organisation of the racecourse. Epsom then as exemplifier of the racing carnival was also indicative of the nineteenth-century racecourse as a complicated space, a space where

³⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 11.

capitalist ideas were widely implemented but simultaneously undermined, in which paradigm challenging carnival, bourgeois hegemony and a new nineteenth-century leisure industry functioned in a complex and contradictory relationship. Horse racing and its association with an increasing demand and availability for leisure is however hugely complicated in itself and, as what follows will reveal, extends the discussion of racecourse space in a different direction.

II

From the mid-century onwards a rise in the average real wage meant for the first time Britain's working classes found themselves with disposable income, this combined with legislation reducing working hours meant that they had money and time to spend on leisure.³⁹ This led to increasing anxiety among the middle classes – themselves significant beneficiaries of free time and increased income – who were concerned not only with the corrupting effect of leisure on their own class, but were also particularly apprehensive about the effects of recreation on the lower orders.⁴⁰ It fell to the middle classes to set an example as to the proper and correct function of leisure in society; the idea of instilling, as Peter Bailey calls it, a 'play discipline to complement the work discipline'.⁴¹ The carnival of the racecourse was, by the mid-century onwards, no longer a temporary suspension of social decorum and norms which

³⁹ Industrial legislation in the 1860s and trade union activism in the 1870s contributed to this reduction in working hours and resulted in the Saturday half-holiday being introduced. The Bank Holidays Act of 1871 guaranteed holidays for bank workers which spread to other groups. In addition company holidays also became more common, particularly among bank clerks and railwaymen. Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885*, (London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 80-81. See also Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, (London: Croom Helm, 1980), and Stella Margetson, *Leisure and Pleasure in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Cassell, 1969)

⁴⁰ Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, p. 5. In 1859 Samuel Smiles published *Self Help*; with its emphasis on protestant work ethic, self-discipline and the building of character, it espoused the ideals of the burgeoning Victorian middle class, ideals which they sought to transfer to the new and expanding leisure market. Samuel Smiles, *Self Help: With Illustrations of Character and Conduct*, (London: John Murray, 1859). Giving a public address to the people of Bolton in 1850 Lord Shaftesbury, a leading figure in factory reform who played a significant role in the introduction of the Ten Hours Bill, warned the working-class audience of the responsibilities they now faced. He implored them to see the bill as the start of 'their great career of moral and social improvement' and entreated them not to use their free time for 'senseless and disgusting recreations'. Lord Shaftesbury 1850, quoted in Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, p. 50.

could be licenced, it had become a permanent and increasingly popular arena of leisure in which the working classes chose what form that leisure took, whether moral or immoral, and as such required policing. Once the racecourse carnival was no longer temporary and once the working classes had the free time and money to indulge in the morally-questionable attendance of horse racing it fell to the middle classes to set a disciplined example in this now permanent site of leisure.

It is worth at this point examining the extent of middle-class involvement in horseracing in order to determine just how far their idea of disciplined leisure extended onto the racecourse. Most historians of nineteenth-century horseracing have tended towards the assumption that middle-class interest in the sport was limited, extending in some cases to an out and out denial of it.⁴² However, Mike Huggins's extensive and most recent study of the subject suggests that middle-class involvement was far more widespread than previously documented. He goes as far as saying theories to the contrary are the 'product of limited research'.⁴³ The middle classes were involved in horseracing in a variety of ways; as shareholders, organisers and managers their involvement was firmly entrenched with the administrative running of racecourses, as attendees, owners and betters they were attracted more towards the sporting side.⁴⁴ Given such extensive middle-class involvement in nineteenth-century horseracing, the notion of setting the correct example of disciplined leisure becomes hugely ironic since the racecourse carnival was a site in which all classes of

⁴² John Lowerson has suggested that nineteenth-century horseracing was 'virtually without middle-class support'. John Lowerson, *Sport and the English Middle Classes*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 5. Richard Holt believed that 'the bulk of middle class [sic] opinion [...] tended to frown upon the sport'. Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 181. Even Wray Vamplew, author of one of the definitive texts on the subject, suggested that middle-class involvement in horseracing, particularly in the earlier part of the century, was sporadic at best. Vamplew, *The Turf: A Social and Economic History of Horse Racing*, p. 133.

⁴³ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p.69. Huggins's evidence is compelling sighting subscription lists, race committee members and influential figures in new racecourse building as proof that middle-class involvement in horse racing was significant, even if it received far less publicity than the middle-class lobbyists opposing the sport. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, pp. 68-85.

⁴⁴ At Chester tradesmen subscribers to the inaugural races introduced by the newly enclosed course had little prospect of substantial monetary return; their investments were evidently made out of genuine appreciation of the sport. R. M. Bevan, *The Roodee*, p. 88.

society suspended normal social behaviour and decorum. Although the enclosure of courses in the latter part of the nineteenth century in many ways stemmed the racecourse carnival by charging for entrance, eliminating fairground activities and separating the classes, this too posed a problem. The middle classes were shut off from the working classes and consequently unable to instil their disciplined ideas of leisure from the exclusive enclosures and grandstands. As Mike Huggins says the racecourse was witness to a 'significant gap between the public expression of respectable middle-class ideology and power and its working out in practice'.⁴⁵ Just as there is a gap between the implementation of social zoning in the grandstand and the freedom of the centre of the course, so too is there a gap between the moral middle-class ideas of leisure and the example set on the racecourse.

Epsom, the exemplifier of horseracing's carnivalesque atmosphere, is also a prime example of the racecourse's problematic function as a space of disciplined middle-class leisure. The Derby meeting was a recognised space of social release, a legitimised holiday from various restrictive paradigms, particularly class, however, it also actively separated the classes with a variety of priced enclosures. Therefore any example of disciplined leisure can only occur when the classes mix in the carnivalesque atmosphere in centre of the course. The obvious problem with this scenario is that the example in the centre of the course is the wrong one. The article 'Derby Dregs' by Joseph Charles Parkinson which appeared in *All Year Round* (1866) articulates this problem: 'an hour after racing [...] when the grand stands [...] looks ghastly and tomb-like in their emptiness. Foul language, drunken shrieks, fights, blasphemy and theft, seem things of the course'.⁴⁶ The articles primary concern is to highlight and attack the drunken behaviour in the centre of the course, indeed the whole article is castigating the abandonment of civilised conduct which the Derby meeting instigates. However, what the article also highlights is the gap between the grandstand and

⁴⁵ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 139.

⁴⁶ Joseph Charles Parkinson, 'Derby Dregs', *All Year Round*, 15 (1866), pp. 487-489, p. 487.

the centre of the course in terms of social conduct, and by extension, the gap between middle-class ideologies of leisure and middle-class behaviour on the racecourse. Any example of the 'play discipline' in the grandstand remains absent from the raucousness elsewhere as the middle-classes are either segregated by priced enclosure and leave after racing finishes, or abandon social decorum with 'foul language' and the like in the centre of the course: a fact emphasised here by the grandstands 'tomb-like emptiness' which appear almost as a death knell to morally legitimised leisure.

III

Exacerbating the problem of horse racing as a space for middle-class examples of leisure and as a legitimate leisure activity was its inevitable and long-standing association with gambling.⁴⁷ Gambling in general was systematically attacked across the nineteenth century, cited as being both immoral and degenerative for the working classes.⁴⁸ Consequently horseracing, because it was linked so closely with gambling came under scrutiny, particularly from the 1850s onwards when working-class leisure was an increasingly pressing issue, especially for the religious establishment. The Birmingham minister R. W. Dale asked the question in the middle-class family magazine *Good Words* (1867): 'What amusements are lawful to persons who wish to live a religious life?'.⁴⁹ His conclusion was that racing, because it had been corrupted by gambling, should be avoided. In a similar vein in 1850 the

⁴⁷ As Mike Huggins has noted: 'Betting was the *raison d'être* of racing'. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 20. Herbert Stutfield in the article 'Racing in 1890' lamented that 'the racehorse is more and more coming to be looked upon [...] as an instrument of gaming'. But the same article also recognised the 'considerable mutual dependence between racing and betting', that is racing provided the spectacle and interest on which to bet and betting on racing increased the sport's popularity; the two functioned together beneficially. Herbert G. Stutfield, 'Racing in 1890', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, 27 (1890), pp. 921-936, p. 928, p.936.

⁴⁸ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 205; Flavin, *Gambling in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*, pp. 1-5; D. M. Downes, B. P. Davies, M. E. David, and P. Stone, *Gambling, Work and Leisure: A Study Across Three Areas*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 35-36; J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England 1750-1900*, (London: Batsford, 1984), p. 171.

⁴⁹ R. W. Dale, 'Amusements', *Good Words*, 8 (1867), pp. 329-335, p. 329.

Bible Christian Magazine published a catalogue of sins which included ‘the race-course’.⁵⁰ Again the implication being that the racecourse as a medium for the corruptive influences of gambling was sinful. Even those who did not take a religious standpoint against gambling on horseracing were still opposed to it. In the article ‘Slaves to the Ring’ which appeared in *All Year Round* in 1860, Joseph Charles Parkinson laments how gambling on horses had ‘consumed the fortunes of our aspiring youth’.⁵¹ They had, for Parkinson, become ‘slaves’ to the urges of betting. The *Examiner* in 1872, with specific reference to the Derby, highlighted the tension between the ‘real and legitimate enjoyment upon Epsom Downs’ and the disreputable yet inevitable gambling that comes with it, the ‘hedging, and roping, and touting, and everything else that is bad’.⁵² Horseracing as a ‘real and legitimate’ form of leisure and enjoyment was problematized by the corrupting effects of gambling with which it was inextricably associated. The problem with demonising horseracing and gambling for the middle classes was that from around the 1840s onwards gambling on horseracing was extensively cross-class.⁵³ The idea of providing a disciplined example of leisure is problematised as there is once again a gap between the ideologies of the middle classes and their own actions relating to recreation.

⁵⁰ *Bible Christian Magazine*, quoted in Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 179.

⁵¹ Joseph Charles Parkinson, ‘Slaves of the Ring’, *All Year Round*, 3 (1860), pp. 582-585, p. 582.

⁵² *Examiner*, ‘Horse Racing’, May 26th 1872, p. 522.

⁵³ On-course gambling was predominantly done by the upper classes in the early part of the century, who would congregate at a betting post on the course and strike bets between one another. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 57. As the century progressed bookmakers became a common site on the racecourse accepting bets themselves and somewhat negating the personalised betting of the upper classes, this coincided with on-course middle and working-class gambling. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 130. Off-course gambling was done in private rooms or betting shops throughout the century. The upper and middle classes would use private clubs and gambling rooms in which to place bets either with bookmakers or each other. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 58. The working classes, from around the 1850s onwards, would bet off-course in so called ‘List Houses’. These were often pubs or billiard rooms in which a list of entries for races such as the Derby would be placed on the walls inviting bets. The odds offered were often heavily stacked in the house’s favour. As the century progressed and information available to the working classes increased such ‘List Houses’ became redundant and were replaced by specific betting shops which would offer accurate odds on various races. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 97-98. Although, as Mike Huggins has said, it is impossible to say with confidence the exact figures of those who gambled and the form which their gambling took, the variance of stakes recorded in betting houses – ranging from single shillings to several pounds – strongly suggests that gambling among the middle classes was widespread. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 95.

It is crucial at this point to establish the changing nature of gambling on horse racing in the latter part of the nineteenth century for the working classes.⁵⁴ From the early 1860s a wealth of racing information became available to the working classes as penny press publications such as *Penny Bell's Life* and the *Sporting News*, first published in 1859, along with *The Sportsman* which appeared in 1865, began circulation. Mathew McIntire describes this influx of availability as a 'democratised access to racing information'.⁵⁵ The working-class gambler was no longer behind his wealthier counterparts when it came to collating and accessing information with the view to having a bet. All the form, entries and results which had previously been published in papers such as *Bell's Life* and the *Sporting Chronicle* were out of the price range of the working classes charging around 6d (7d stamped) an issue.⁵⁶ Similarly quarterly guides such as *Ruff's Guide to the Turf* charged 15s by the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ The introduction of racing news in the penny press ended this class-biased inequality. Gambling, because of the widespread availability of information, consequently developed into a rational and studious hobby promoting the increasing literary capacity of the working classes. The need to understand breeding, handicaps, going descriptions, trainers, jockeys and the odds required a degree of skill and calculation made possible by the increase of spare time and available information. This moves the working-class gambler away from the idea forwarded by J. A. Hobson, in a chapter for *Betting and Gambling: A National Evil* (1905), that '[t]he essence of gambling consists in an

⁵⁴ There is a disagreement among historians as to when working-class gambling became a widespread endeavour. Ross McKibbin gives 1880 as around the time the working classes extensively participated in gambling; citing the influx of penny press publications and the increasing information this afforded the working classes, along with the vast amount of material produced by the anti-gambling league in the 1890s as evidence. Ross McKibbin, 'Working-Class Gambling in Britain 1880-1939', *Past and Present*, 82 (1979), pp. 147-178, p. 148. However Carl Chin and Mark Clapson suggest it began as early as the 1860s. Carl Chinn, *Better Betting with a Decent Fellow: A Social History of Bookmaking*, (Hemel Hempstead: Arum Press Ltd., 2004); Mark Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter: Popular Gambling in England c. 1820-1961*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). Mike Huggins argues convincingly for a gradual build up from around 1850 rather than a sudden expansion in the 1880; such an estimate appears the most accurate given the Betting House Act of 1853 was predominately designed to combat the influx of working-class 'List Houses'. Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 94.

⁵⁵ Mathew McIntire, 'Odds, Intelligences, and Prophecies: Racing News in the Penny Press 1855-1914', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 41 (2008), pp. 352-373, p. 353.

⁵⁶ McIntire, 'Racing News in the Penny Press', p. 352.

⁵⁷ *Ruff's Guide to the Turf: Winter Edition*, (London: Bridewell House, 1901), p. 1.

abandonment of reason'. Hobson failed to recognise the way in which the increase in horse racing information for the working classes from the 1860s onwards actually instigated a re-grasping of reason that had been lacking in the earlier part of the century.⁵⁸ Indeed A. G. Markham told the 1902 House of Lords select committee on betting that the gambler is made a 'sharper and keener man' by his studious perusal of the racing papers.⁵⁹ The thrust of Markham's argument was to separate the gambler from the drunkard, to disassociate gambling from the compulsiveness of drinking, and while it is probably an exaggeration to say that all gamblers were 'sharper and keener men' by the latter part of the nineteenth century gambling certainly *could* have that affect by providing exercise for the mind. In a similar vein, moving away from working-class gambling as an addictive compulsion, Ross McKibbin has argued that betting for the working classes in the nineteenth century was the most successful example of their own self-help in the modern era, in that it provided both amusement and a collective organisation of working-class leisure time.⁶⁰ Indeed it is important to note that despite the extreme views of the moralist anti-gambling lobbies and some wild exaggerations in the press, few who gambled on horseracing gambled compulsively.⁶¹ Various committees set up to investigate the destructive elements of working-class gambling could find little evidence of a link between betting and extreme poverty.⁶² D.C. Peddler, a late nineteenth-century critic of working-class gambling was forced to admit of the gambler: 'Very likely his house is *not* broken up, his furniture not sold, his wife and children never see the inside of the workhouse. He is degraded that is all [...].'⁶³

All that the writer can negatively proclaim of gambling it that it is moralistically degrading,

⁵⁸ J. A. Hobson, 'The Ethics of Gambling' in B. Seebohm Rowntree (ed.) *Betting and Gambling: A National Evil*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), p. 5

⁵⁹ A. G. Markham, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Betting 1902*, quoted in McKibbin, 'Working-Class Gambling', p. 170.

⁶⁰ McKibbin, 'Working-Class Gambling in Britain', p. 172.

⁶¹ See Flavin, *Gambling in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, pp. 42-64, for a comprehensive summary of the various pamphlets and articles produced by anti-gambling lobbies many of which saw gambling as a degenerative compulsion for the working class.

⁶² McKibbin, 'Working-Class Gambling in Britain', p. 157.

⁶³ D. C. Peddler, 'The Tipster and his Trade', *Monthly Review*, 12 (1903), pp. 66-77, pp. 73-74.

and this is a personal assessment, the actual evidence of its consequences does not support the view that it is a completely destructive enterprise.

What working-class gambling of the late-nineteenth century did, because of the newly democratised access to racing information, was to create a theoretical space unrestricted from class control; a space which allowed the autonomy of working-class opinion to flourish. Off-course and on-course gambling was, even at the end of the century, defined by means of class-based enclosure: off-course the upper and middle-class gambling rooms of Tattersall's and the like were off-limits for the working-classes; on-course the members' enclosures and betting rings were restricted to the affluent classes by their entrance fees and blackballing policies. Appendix eleven shows a traditional betting ring formed by the upper classes at the betting post at Epsom for the 1844 Derby, a space very much restricted to the more privileged members of society. Working-class gambling from the 1860s onwards however, by means of its autonomous space of knowledge, created an 'enclosure' of its own. Furthermore it challenged the previous class-biased enclosures of gambling as the working classes were, in a sense, free to walk unimpeded through the vast realms of information now available to them. Like the undermining of social zoning on the racecourse the 'space of enunciation' was returned as the previously class-restricted enclosures of betting and racing information could no longer exert hegemonic control.

Such a challenge to hegemony however ran counter to gambling laws introduced from the mid-century onwards. The 1853 Betting House Act intended to make all forms of ready money gambling illegal, except in specified clubs and enclosures.⁶⁴ The basic outline of the new act meant that on-course gambling remained legal while off-course gambling was illegal.⁶⁵ The act was primarily an attempt to deal with the increasing number of betting shops

⁶⁴ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 108.

⁶⁵ The status of on-course betting after the 1853 act was however highly ambiguous, it was assumed that because the act had specified 'betting houses' the laws introduced did not apply to gambling on the racecourse. The anti-gambling league contended however that the act *did* include the racecourse and in 1897 in the case of

in which the working class gambled, estimated by the 1850s to number between one hundred and one hundred and fifty in London alone.⁶⁶ In this way the act was very much class biased and based around paternalistic middle-class concern for the degenerative effects of gambling on the easily corrupted lower orders. Horace Smith, a London magistrate, commented in 1902 that the still in force betting act was ‘for the protection of the poor; as for the rich, they do not need any protection in such matters; they can help themselves, but the poor cannot’.⁶⁷ Such an idea is indicative of the myopic view that for the poor gambling was ultimately compulsive. It ignored not only the fact that the rich too could be consumed by its addictive potential and could, just like the poor, only afford to lose relative to their wealth, but also evidence to the contrary, that gambling for the vast majority of the working classes was not a compulsive addiction. Furthermore it was still legal to bet off-course on credit, something only available to wealthier gamblers, similarly the upper-class betting rooms of Tattersall’s were viewed as exempt as they were considered private clubs.⁶⁸ Indeed one councillor from Middlesbrough commented in 1880: ‘if they were going to stop betting they should stop it not only among the working men but in the clubs and the higher grades of society’.⁶⁹

That said the 1853 Act was largely ignored, with police and magistrates only willing to convict if there was significant pressure from the public or officials.⁷⁰ Similarly the complicated nature of on-course betting’s legality, which apparently made it illegal to

Hawke v. Dunn the court ruled that betting enclosures on the racecourse were included in the act. Within a month of the court case however a shareholder in Kempton Park Racecourse Company sued the company over the presence of bookmakers at the course. The shareholder was acting in collusion with the racecourse in order to bring the case for on-course betting before the Court of Appeal who subsequently ruled that betting enclosures on the racecourse were *not* part of the 1853 act and on-course gambling was reinstated. For a comprehensive summary of the court case see David C. Itzkowitz, ‘Victorian Bookmakers and their Customers’, *Victorian Studies*, 32 (1988), pp. 7-31, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Vamplew, *The Turf: A Social and Economic History of Horse Racing*, p. 203.

⁶⁷ Horace Smith, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Betting 1902*, quoted in Itzkowitz, ‘Victorian Bookmakers and their Customers’, p. 19.

⁶⁸ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 98.

⁶⁹ *Cleveland News*, May 1st 1880, p. 25.

⁷⁰ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 99. *The Times* notes how London still had ‘hundreds’ of public houses which were willing to take bets. *The Times*, 19th July 1856, p. 18. *The Penny Bell’s Life* informed its readers that there were ‘thousands’ of betting houses still operational across the country. *Penny Bell’s Life*, 9th April 1859, p. 6.

construct any sort of stand or advertise bets, was hit only by sporadic convictions.⁷¹ What is apparent, despite its illegality, is that betting was becoming an increasingly popular and accepted part of late nineteenth-century life. Notwithstanding class-biased legislative acts to the contrary the democratisation of racing information and the sporadic enforcement of the 1853 Betting Act promoted a specific working-class arena of leisure which had the ability to defy middle-class hegemony. Although remaining illegal, working-class gambling was moving closer towards a legitimate form of leisure by the latter part of the nineteenth century.

IV

The popularity of horse racing across the nineteenth century should not be underestimated, attended in various guises by all classes of society and debated across social divides in exclusive aristocratic clubs and working-class public houses, it was by definition truly a 'national' sport. And yet as a site of carnival, a medium of cross-class gambling and a morally questionable spectator sport, horse racing housed and expressed class conflicts which were becoming ever more prevalent in a Victorian society under increasing pressure to establish legitimate leisure activities.

What will be discussed in detail in the following two chapters is the notion of space in relation to the carnival and class segregation on the racecourse, this along with working-class gambling and its position within nineteenth-century society as a legitimate form of working-class leisure will form the basis of my analysis in chapters two and three. Whilst ideas of a disciplined middle-class example of leisure and its failure on the racecourse will form only a minor part of the analysis in the following two chapters, its place in Chapter One is necessary to establish the prevailing attitudes of the middle classes towards working-class leisure, and

⁷¹ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 132. At Manchester in 1876 bookmakers were banned from using their 'paraphernalia' but the following year they returned with numerous stands and advertisements. *Salford Weekly News*, 10th June 1876, p. 20. At Newcastle in 1870 when bookmakers were forced to abandon their traditional means of advertising they instead wore 'sleek hats with terrific brims'. *Morpeth Herald*, 25th June 1870, p. 15.

the problematic position of horse racing as a legitimate leisure activity. Similarly whilst the legalities of gambling itself and the instigation of class-biased betting acts are discussed only briefly in chapters two and three its inclusion in Chapter One is vital not only to establish the historical and social context surrounding gambling on horse racing, but to confirm the significant part such gambling played in the lives of the working class; particularly betting's role in challenging middle-class hegemony.

Racecourse space and its hegemonic complexities feature prominently in George Moore's *Esther Waters* and Émile Zola's *Nana*. The racecourse scenes of both novels provide, I will argue, a symbolic representation of the contradictory tensions nineteenth-century horse racing housed between class, leisure and the carnival. Similarly, the corruptive potential of working-class gambling is a significant part of George Moore's presentation of horse racing in *Esther Waters*. However, I will argue representations of such gambling, when viewed alongside the theoretical premise of the autonomous working-class space of interaction established in Chapter One, run counter to critical and contemporary readings of the novel. Finally representations of horse racing in Charles Dickens's fiction and non-fiction will be analysed in relation to carnival space and the sport's association with gambling. The complex nature of Dickens's conceptualisation of horse racing and its link to betting, particularly for the working classes, is I will argue, the overriding component behind the sparse representation of the sport within his fiction.

Chapter 2

Esther Waters and *Nana*: Racecourse Space and Working-Class Gambling

George Moore's *Esther Waters* contains the most extensive representation of horse racing in nineteenth-century fiction; it is a novel which exudes the sport in its narrative, its descriptions and in its conceptualisation of character. Published in 1894, it describes the increasingly popular and commercialised world of racing, a world in which racecourse enclosure, social zoning and middle-class ideas of leisure clashed with the traditional values of carnival release the sport continued to offer. Émile Zola's *Nana*, published in 1880 and set in 1860s France, is not far behind the detail of *Esther Waters* with its racing descriptions, using Longchamp as the setting for an extended chapter which represents, like Moore's novel, the class-based segregation of racecourse space alongside traditional carnival festivities.⁷² Significant in both representations is how the racecourse is negotiated by the working-class characters in each novel. What emerges from *Esther Waters* and *Nana* is a representation of the carnival space which is both disorientating and unstable; a symbolic depiction of the inability of the carnival

⁷² *Esther Waters* and *Nana* are used in this study as they provide the most detailed descriptions of racecourse space in Victorian literature. Furthermore *Esther Waters* depiction of working-class gambling is the biggest and most significant representation of the subject to emerge out of the fiction of the nineteenth century. There are several novels which contain minor references to horse racing and which, for the reasons of space, have been omitted from this study. Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) begins in an upper-class, socially exclusive club on the eve of the 1837 Derby in which various Lords and Earls discuss the impending race. The thrust of Disraeli's use of horseracing is to portray an aristocracy that is failing and profligate with two of the aristocratic assembly, Alfred Mountchesney and Lord Eugene De Vere, described as having 'exhausted life in their teens'. Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 2. Chapter Two describes the racecourse and the race itself but rather than portraying the carnival atmosphere Disraeli describes the betting ring, an antiquated meeting post at which members of the upper class gambled between themselves. Disraeli's *The Young Duke* and *Tancred* also have passing references to horse racing and both again relay the gambling aristocracy. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Pendennis* describes the Epsom Derby of the 1840s, focussing on the carnival as well as detailing class segregation the characters in the centre of the course remarking at the 'countless dukes and grandees' in the grandstand. William Makepeace Thackeray, *Pendennis*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 741. The main thrust of horse racing in *Pendennis* is however similar to Disraeli's representations in that it shows a profligate aristocracy wasting their time and money gambling. Anthony Trollope's *The Duke's Children*, like Disraeli's *Sybil*, shows an exclusive club on the eve of the Derby and again links horse racing to wealth, privilege and the wasteful upper-classes. The Derby scenes in the novel do however show a degree of class mobility which the racecourse carnival could instigate, but the outcome of events is to show horse racing mainly as the preserve of the profligate upper classes.

to be securely housed within the class defined infrastructure of the racecourse, but also emblematic of the corruption of the carnival ideal by the ever-increasing commercialisation of racecourse space.

The most significant feature of *Esther Waters* as a novel about horse racing however is its presentation of working-class gambling. The novel was received by contemporary nineteenth-century commentators and modern critics alike as an anti-gambling polemic, with the editor of the *Sporting Times* going as far as calling Moore a ‘puritan killjoy’.⁷³ However, although *Esther Waters* clearly does condemn working-class gambling, it also provides details of the circumstances which underpin it, describing the increase of racing information available to the working-class gambler and the class-biased acts betting was subjected to. Furthermore the extended descriptions of discussion in which various working-class characters debate the relative merits of horse-racing form offers a representation of the autonomous, intellectual space of discussion that characterised the more positive aspects of working-class gambling in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Such a representation provides a counter narrative which runs against both the general critical opinion of the text and the narrative thrust of the novel itself. What emerges is neither a novel nor an author puritanically maligning gambling, but rather a text which offers a balanced and nuanced interpretation of working-class betting and its complex position within late-nineteenth-century society.⁷⁴

⁷³ *Sporting Times*, in Joseph Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, (London: Gollancz, 1936), p. 195.

⁷⁴ Moore famously re-wrote and revised *Esther Waters* numerous times in the late-nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. The Oxford World’s Classics edition used for this study uses the copy-text from the 1899 English edition published by Walter Scott Ltd. Royal A. Gettmann and Lionel Stevenson have both made detailed studies of the impact of Moore’s repeated revisions to *Esther Waters* and although both concur that Moore extensively re-wrote various passages in order to eliminate errors, remove overbearing authorial intervention and generally tighten the prose style of the work, it is clear that any revisions to the racing scenes are minimal at most. Consequently the novel provides a representation of the racecourse and horse racing based around the latter part of the nineteenth century and the revisions made to the text in 1917 and 1920 do not affect the impression that horse racing in *Esther Waters* is very much horse racing of the 1890s. Royal A. Gettmann, ‘George Moore’s Revisions of *The Lakes*, *The Wild Goose*, and *Esther Water*’, *PLMA*, 2 (1944), pp. 540-555; Lionel Stevenson ‘Introduction’, in George Moore, *Esther Waters*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963).

The description of the Epsom Derby in *Esther Waters*, running over three chapters, is one which foregrounds the social carnival and holiday atmosphere of the meeting. There is ‘a boy walking through the crowd on a pair of stilts fully eight feet high’ and a vast array of ‘vagrants, itinerate musicians, [and] fortune-teller’s’ all mixing amongst the ‘fashion of grey frock-coats and silk sun-shades’ which characterise the social elite.⁷⁵ The narrator goes on to describe the ‘great blur that was the racecourse’ (EW, p. 230), a site where distinguishing social markers become distorted and unidentifiable. However, as with the Firth, Doré and *Punch* images detailed in Chapter One, behind the carnival festivities is a depiction of the vast amount of enclosure and social zoning which was implemented at Epsom:

The Grand Stand, dotted like a ceiling with flies, stood out distinct and harsh upon a burning plain of blue. The light beat fiercely upon the booths, the carriages, the vehicles, the ‘rings,’ the various stands. The country around was lost in the haze and dazzle of the sunlight; but a square mile of downland fluttered with flags and canvas, and the great mob swelled, and smoked, and drank, shied sticks at Aunt Sally, and rode wooden horses (EW, p. 229).

Despite the excesses of the carnival – the smoking, drinking, and ‘shrieking’ of the ‘great mob’, the ‘flags and caravans’, the ‘Aunt Sally’ fairground game, and the ‘wooden horses’ – the separation of the classes by means of priced enclosure provides a decisive backdrop to the racecourse scene, as the Grand Stand, the area of defined social zoning, stands out ‘distinct and harsh’ against the festivities. Indeed the entire description is one which emphasises the many enclosures of the racecourse. The centre of the course which is free to enter and houses the ‘booths’ and ‘carriages’, along with the more exclusive ‘rings’ of the upper classes, and the other ‘various stands’ each demanding their own entrance fee, are all specifically separated class-defined spaces; the ‘light beat[s] fiercely’ down on each enclosures emphasising the distinct and enforced segregation of the classes and the fierce hegemonic control of the racecourse space. Such control is further emphasised by the way in which the

⁷⁵ George Moore, *Esther Waters*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 228. All further references will be given in the body of the text as EW.

characters negotiate this space. When Journeyman, Esther, and Sarah try to find William in the centre of the course walking becomes disorientating: ‘The form of the ground was lost in the multitude and they could only tell by the strain in their limbs whether they were walking up or down hill’ (EW, p. 229). On one level their inability to ascertain which direction they are walking – whether up or down – is symbolic of the carnival inverting class hierarchies, but given the extensive restrictions made by the ‘Grand Stand’ and the other enclosures such a suspension of social paradigms becomes redundant. Instead de Certeau’s concept of walking as a ‘space of enunciation’ is problematized; restricted by the various priced enclosures, the ‘form of the ground’ is lost because class-defined hegemony asserts the fierce light of its control over autonomous movement by means of the spatial organisation of the racecourse.⁷⁶ Ironically it is the pressing mass of the carnival space itself which precludes the characters’ ability to walk freely and as such their disorientation becomes symbolic, not only of the restrictions implemented by the various enclosures, but of the Derby carnival’s corruption and manipulation into a space of capitalist leisure.

The various stands and enclosures of Epsom however create a space of contradiction in which elements of the class inversion can still flourish. The characters in *Esther Waters* use Barnard’s Stand and the ring in front of it – the ‘plebeian enclosure’ – which is afforded the best view of the finish line.⁷⁷ John Randall describing the scene to Sarah remarks how the runners finish ‘opposite to where we is standing. Yonder, by Barnard’s Ring’ (EW, p. 227), specifically highlighting that the working-class characters will get the best view of the finish line. Although this stand is temporary, indicative of the temporary nature of the carnival, its position on the racecourse is still an infringement of class privilege and an undermining of hegemonic control. By using this enclosure the characters undermine the capitalist space of

⁷⁶ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 98.

⁷⁷ Bayles, *Atlas and Review of British Race-Courses*, in Hunn, *Epsom*, p. 106.

the racecourse, consequently the disorientation they feel while negotiating the festival in the centre of the course moves away from a symbolic corruption of the carnival space and back towards an emblematic inversion of class boundaries. The ‘form of the ground’ is lost because it is no longer a secure place in which middle-class capitalism can exert full control over its own capitalist space.

In Émile Zola’s *Nana* the extended description of the Grand Prix de Paris run at Longchamp racecourse presents a similar focus on racecourse enclosure to the one detailed in *Esther Waters*.⁷⁸ The image of ‘the Empress entering the little central stand’ is a display which specifically highlights the social zoning of the racecourse, emphasising the exclusive enclosure of the upper classes.⁷⁹ Conversely the description of the centre of the Longchamp course, like Epsom, is one which presents an atmosphere of carnival freedom:

Carriages were still arriving. By this time they were drawn up five rows deep, spreading out alongside the rail in a dense mass speckled with the light patches made by the white horses. Beyond them other carriages stood about separately in complete disorder, looking as if they had been stranded on the grass. Wheels and horses were pointing in all directions, side by side, askew,

⁷⁸ Phillip A. Duncan gives a description of the class segregation at Longchamp at the time Zola was writing. Phillip A. Duncan, ‘Genesis of the Longchamp Scene in Zola’s *Nana*’, *Modern Language Notes*, 8 (1960), pp. 684-689. Charles Dickens details the class segregation at Longchamp for an article written for *Household Words* in 1851 and, although slightly earlier than the Zola description, gives an indication of the long-standing and rigidly defined nature of enclosure at the course. Charles Dickens, ‘French Racing’, *Household Words*, 4 (1851), pp. 213-216.

⁷⁹ Émile Zola, *Nana*, George Holden (trans.), (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 357. All further references will be given in the body of the text as N. I am conscious of the fact that I have paid a great deal of attention to the language of *Nana*, and as this is a translation from the original French text, I am primarily analysing the language of the translator. However, comparing the translation used here by George Holden to the translation by Douglas Parmée for the Oxford World Classics series, shows there to be very little difference in the language used, and certainly the contrast between the enclosures of the racecourse and the classes which use them is a contextual fact which transcends the language barrier. I quote the two parallel passages below from the Oxford World Classic edition to show the similarities between the two translations. Note particularly the use of the word ‘dense’ in both translations and the way the jumbled carriages are similarly described. Note also the use of the same phrase ‘forbidden ground’ by both translators: ‘Carriages were still arriving. They were by this time drawn up five rows deep, and a dense mass of them spread along the barriers, checkered by the light coats of white horses. Beyond them other carriages stood about in comparative isolation, looking as though they had stuck fast in the grass. Wheels and harness were here, there and everywhere, according as the conveyances to which they belonged were side by side, at an angle, across and across or head to head. [...] The scene resembled the field where a fair is being held, and above it all, amid the confused motley of the crowd, the drinking booths raised their gray canvas roofs which gleamed white in the sunshine’. Émile Zola, *Nana*, (trans.) Douglas Parmée, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 280. ‘The man at the gate, not daring to stop the woman hanging on the count’s arm, had allowed them to enter the enclosure. *Nana*, greatly puffed up at the thought that at last she was setting foot on the forbidden ground, put on her best behavior and walked slowly by the ladies seated at the foot of the stands’. Zola, *Nana*, (trans.) Douglas Parmée, p. 281.

at right-angles or head to head. [...] above this fairground scene and the confused motley of the crowd, the drinking-booths raised their grey canvas roofs, which gleamed white whenever the sun came out (N, p. 351).

From the 'dense' throng of carriages in 'complete disorder', to the 'confused motley of the crowd' and the 'drinking-booths' of excess, this is a 'fairground scene' mirroring the carnival of the Derby. Like *Esther Waters* however negotiating this carnival space is problematised and becomes symbolic of the hegemonic control enforced by the infrastructure of the racecourse. The 'dense mass' of carriages 'five rows deep' suggest a confinement, symbolic of the restrictions of the racecourse's social zoning, with even the carriages free from the throng appearing to be 'stranded on the grass'. Furthermore the carnival and movement within it becomes disorientating, the ground is a multitude of '[w]heels and horses' with carriages arranged 'askew, at right-angles or head to head'. As in *Esther Waters* the 'form of the ground is lost', walking is no longer a 'space of enunciation', with the disorientating 'dense mass' of the carnival implying both the hegemonic control of racecourse enclosure and the carnival's corruption and manipulation into the spatial organisation of the racecourse.⁸⁰ It is a scene in complete contrast to the order of the socially exclusive enclosures with their 'five symmetrical stands, rising in galleries of brickwork and timber in the middle of the weighing-enclosure' (N, p. 345), a description which reinforces the hegemonic control of racecourse infrastructure as the 'symmetrical' framework of these stands come to symbolise the implementation of rigidly defined class segregation.

However Longchamp racecourse like Epsom is a space in which contradictions can flourish. When Nana is escorted into the weighing-in enclosure by Count Vandeuves she infiltrates and compromises this exclusive upper-class space:

The attendant at the gate, not daring to stop the woman on the Count's arm, had allowed them to enter the weighing-in enclosure. Nana, bursting with pride at the idea that at last she was setting foot on the forbidden ground, put

⁸⁰ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 98.

on her best behaviour, and walked slowly by the ladies seated at the foot of the stands (N, p. 364).

Powerless to stop this intrusion the 'attendant at the gate' becomes symbolic of the incomplete hegemonic control the racecourse wields over its own space, the weighing-in enclosure may be 'forbidden ground' but it cannot completely seal off its exclusive zones from the lower orders. Just as Nana has 'imposed herself' (N, p. 364) on the Count with 'her coarse plebeian laughter' (N, p. 364) so too has she 'imposed herself' on the spatial organisation of the racecourse. The intrusion by Nana onto the 'forbidden ground' is similar to the temporary structure of Barnard's Stand at Epsom; both are temporarily afforded a privileged position within the racecourse which consequently undermines the social zoning of that racecourse space. With characters from both novels occupying such a position *Esther Waters* and *Nana* reveal how the hegemonic control of the racecourse is paradoxically defined by its spatial organisation but also undermined by it; that is the exclusive enclosures which are emblematic of the power of social zoning can never completely control or restrict their own exclusivity.

Although *Esther Waters* contains an extended description of the racecourse, its carnival and its class defined enclosures, it is a novel primarily concerned with horse racing as a medium for working-class gambling. George Moore indicated his own position on the theme and direction *Esther Waters* would take in a letter to Madame Lanza in which he describes the novel as 'all about servants – servants devoured by betting'.⁸¹ It is clear from this that his intention was to portray working-class gambling as an addiction, highlighting how the lower orders could be consumed by the compulsive, devouring pull of betting. Indeed the trajectory of the gambling characters in the novel aligns with this summation: John Randal gambles away his possessions and later commits suicide; Ketley after losing all his

⁸¹ George Moore, letter to Madame Lanza, in A. Norman Jeffares, *George Moore*, (London: Longman, 1970), p. 18.

money on an ill-fated wager attempts the same thing without success; Journeyman, after losing heavily on a race, is dismissed from the narrative; Sarah steals from her employers to finance her gambling; and William's final bet is a bet for his life, a doomed attempt to win enough money to go to Italy and recover from illness.

The general critical position of both modern and nineteenth-century reviewers when discussing *Esther Waters* is to emphasise this idea of moral degeneration and compulsion. *The Times* in 1894 proposed that the novel offered its readers a warning by showing 'the demoralisation of the lower classes by betting'.⁸² Stephen Regan, in his introduction to the 2012 Oxford World Classics edition, argues that Moore explicitly links gambling with drinking as 'mutually reinforcing intoxicants' implying that both are compulsive addictions.⁸³ A point he emphasises by suggesting the wasting and purging of the jockeys serves as an apt metaphor for the 'general diminishment and impoverishment of humanity caused by horse racing'.⁸⁴ Richard Cave, in a similar vein, argues that the characters in the novel 'gamble away their very life-blood', paying the ultimate price for their compulsions.⁸⁵ Finally Michael Flavin offers the most nuanced and insightful interpretation of *Esther Waters* and the way in which gambling in the novel exposes social ills and class-biased laws, however he concludes that it is ultimately a presentation, as Moore intended, of 'an environment in which gambling destroys both servants and masters'.⁸⁶

Although these are all astute and well-reasoned interpretations they fail to adequately analyse the significance of the lengthy descriptions of working-class gambling within the text. Beneath Moore's own intentions and the narrative thrust of the novel, there is, I will argue, a counter narrative which reveals the potential of working-class gambling to function

⁸² *The Times*, 15th May 1894, p. 10.

⁸³ Regan, p. xii.

⁸⁴ Regan, 'Introduction', p. xiii.

⁸⁵ Richard Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore*, (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1978), p. 77.

⁸⁶ Flavin, *Gambling in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*, p. 202.

as an intellectual and legitimate leisure activity. Firstly gambling offers entertainment in a life otherwise devoid of amusement, particularly for ex-jockey Ginger:

Happiness flickered up through the old greyness of the face. Henceforth something to live for. Each morning bringing news of the horse, and the hours of the afternoon passing pleasantly, full of thoughts of the evening paper and the gossip of the bar. A bet on a race brings hope into lives which otherwise would be hopeless. (EW, p. 219)

Ginger's bet on an outsider for the St Ledger provides him with the hope and excitement of potential winnings. There is no sense here of the compulsion to bet, Ginger simply gambles on the horse and then waits with anticipation for it to run. Furthermore gambling becomes physically replenishing as the 'greyness' of Ginger's pallor is altered by a flicker of happiness. The Bishop of Winchester, at a workingman's meeting in the 1872, suggested that leisure hours could and should replenish the 'physical force' of the working body, but also that free time is wasted if it is spent in 'dissipation, riot and drunkenness'.⁸⁷ Here gambling moves away from the compulsive qualities of alcohol and its debauched associations, and towards something which, in its anticipation and excitement, provides physical refreshment. There is now, for Ginger, 'something to live for'; gambling, rather than sucking away his 'very life blood' as Richard Cave has offered, or devouring him in its compulsive jaws, as Moore himself contends, instead breathes new life into Ginger's existence, replenishing him physically with the hope and anticipation of his bet.

What is also evident here, and this is the most important aspect of the novel's presentation of horse racing, is the intellectual stimulation and community values instigated by working-class gambling. The 'evening papers' and the racing information they contain, now affordable and widely available to the working classes through the penny press, provide Ginger with a constant stream of information about his horse which becomes the source of debate – the 'gossip of the bar' – within the working-class community of gamblers. The

⁸⁷ Bishop of Winchester, quoted in *The Times*, 11th October 1872, p. 8.

discussion of the Derby which follows this section shows the various characters in the King's Head, Ginger among them, debating the form of each horse. Information such as the 'half-trained' (EW, p. 220) Signet-ring, Dewberry 'the brilliant winner of the Newmarket stakes' (EW, p. 220), and Necklace 'winner of the Middle Park Plate and the One thousand' (EW, p. 220) highlights the studious analysis of form taking place amongst the working class. The information available through the 'evening papers' creates a space of rational study and discussion for the working-class gamblers in the novel which directs their gambling away from the destructive pastime put forward by the author and critics alike.

Interestingly Moore describes such debates as 'gossip' and, in line with his treaty for the novel as a vindication of gambling compulsively devouring the lower orders, is an attempt to disenfranchise working-class betting as a legitimate source of intellectual debate, aligning it to a traditionally maligned and feminine form of interaction. However as Ross Chambers has suggested gossip has the ability to move away from traditional information paradigms and construct its own knowledge system.⁸⁸ For the working-class gamblers in the bar their 'gossip', made possible by the democratised availability of the evening racing papers, creates its own system of knowledge, challenging the existing paradigm of middle and upper-class exclusivity and command over horse-racing information. Similarly Robin Dunbar has shown gossip to have significant value within a community, creating a legitimised and socially beneficial space of interaction.⁸⁹ Ginger's bet and the 'gossip of the bar' which follows allow him entry into a communal space in which autonomous opinions are exchanged. His bet, as well as giving him an individual sense of hope and excitement, gives

⁸⁸ Ross Chambers, 'Gossip and the Novel: Knowing Narrative and Narrative Knowing in Balzac, Mme de Lafayette, and Proust', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 23 (1986), pp. 210-245.

⁸⁹ Robin Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996)

him access to a space of interaction in which ‘something to live for’ extends beyond the personal and becomes imbibed with the comfort of community values and exchange.⁹⁰

This communal and intellectual space is further emphasised with the extended discussion of the upcoming Derby. I quote fully the first paragraph and part of the second from the beginning of Chapter Thirty One to give a sense of the detail afforded to working-class gambling in the novel:

Never had a Derby excited greater interest. Four hot favourites, between which the public seemed unable to choose. Two to one taken and offered against Fly-leaf, winner of the Two Thousand; four to one taken and offered against Signet-ring, who, half-trained, had run Fly-leaf to a head. Four to one against Necklace, the winner of the Middle Park Plate and the One Thousand. Seven to one against Dewberry, the brilliant winner of the Newmarket stakes. The chances of these horses were argued every night at the ‘King’s Head’. Ketley’s wife used to wear a string of yellow beads when she was a girl, but she wasn’t certain what had become of them. Ketley did not wear a signet-ring, and had never known anyone who did. Dewberries grew on the river banks, but they were not ripe yet. Fly-leaf, he could not make much of that—not being much of a reader. So what with one thing and another Ketley didn’t believe much in this ‘ere Derby. Journeyman caustically remarked that, omens or no omens, one horse was bound to win. Why didn’t Herbert look for an omen among the outsiders? Old John’s experiences led him to think that the race lay between Fly-leaf and Signet-ring. He had a great faith in blood, and Signet-ring came of a more staying stock than did Fly-leaf. ‘When they begin to climb out of the dip Fly-leaf will have had about enough of it.’ Stack nodded approval. He had five bob on Dewberry. He didn’t know much about his staying powers, but all the stable is on him; ‘and when I know the stable-money is right I says, “That’s good enough for me!” ’

Ginger, who came in occasionally, was very sweet on Necklace, whom he declared to be the finest mare of the century. He was listened to with awed attention, and there was a death-like silence in the bar when he described how she had won the One Thousand. (EW, p. 220)

The sense of excitement for the Derby is not the compulsive pull of gambling but a genuine interest in which horse is going to win, an interest which is accompanied by knowledge and discussion. As previously noted the descriptions of the form – Fly-Leaf’s Two Thousand guineas victory, the ‘half-trained’ Signet-ring, Necklace’s ‘Middle Park Plate’ and One

⁹⁰ A recent study by Mark Neal has concluded a similar thing for the modern gambler. Neal suggested that the modern betting shop provides community and means of excitement in lives which are often devoid of both. It is a refuge for the homeless, a means of structuring the lives of pensioners, an area of excitement for routine workers and a space of companionship for all these groups. Mark Neal, ‘I lose but that’s not the point’: Situated Economic and Social Rationalities in Horserace Gambling’, *Leisure Studies*, 3 (2005), p. 291-310.

Thousand guineas wins, and Dewberry's 'brilliant' performance in the Newmarket stakes – emphasises not only the wealth of information which was available to the working classes through the penny press, but also highlights the extensive interest and evaluation of this information by the working-class gambler. Indeed the merits of each horse are extensively 'argued every night at the 'King's Head'.

What is significant here is the foregrounding of individual gambling characters using different methods of selection, rather than a generic, stereotypical working-class gambler. Ketley is 'preoccupied with dreams and omens' (EW, p. 212), Journeyman is a 'scientific student of public form' (EW, p. 243), John Randal is concerned with pedigrees and 'blood', while Stack follows the rumours surrounding 'stable-money'. In presenting these various characters and methods of gambling the novel refuses to present a one-dimensional compulsive and degenerative image of the gambler. Knowledge of a horse's pedigree, its form, or rumours of the stable money could all be gleaned from study of the racing press, and the more studious and careful the study the more likely this was to benefit the gambler; Journeyman's 'scientific' methods enable him to 'note an advantage in the weights which would escape an ordinary observer' (EW, p. 243). What is given prominence by the description of these characters and the discussions in the pub is the opening of a space of autonomy in which the exchange of ideas and the intellectual stimulation instigated by form study could flourish; a working-class space which is free from ideas of compulsion and degeneration and moves towards a legitimate and beneficial pastime. Even Ketley who depends on 'dreams and omens' is significant here as he represents the more benign gambler, one who passes over form study in favour of mystical signs. He is not presented as a slave to such omens however, his gambling is a means of leisure and enjoyment, emphasised by the unthreatening tone of the narrator when relating his musing – 'Dewberries grew on the river banks, but they were not ripe yet'. Indeed the tone of the whole passage is hugely significant,

from the excitement of the first line – ‘never had Derby excited greater interest’ – to the ‘death-like silence’ which accompanies Ginger’s description of the filly Necklace. It does not imply a negative all-consuming addiction but rather a beneficial, unthreatening gambling community and a legitimate space of working-class leisure.

Furthermore, the discussions in the King’s Head provide a sense of appreciation for the sport which goes beyond gambling. Ginger’s admiration for Necklace is not simply the desire to have a bet on the horse for the Derby, he considers her to be ‘the finest mare of the century’ and his description of her One Thousand Guineas victory is listened to with ‘awed attention’ and a ‘death-like silence’. Although the likelihood is that he will have a bet on the horse this is an investment aligned to his admiration of the mare as a great athlete and his appreciation of the sport in general rather than a compulsion to win money. Similarly when the characters in the pub reminisce about Ginger’s riding ability it is not a discussion tinged with gambling, rather they allude to his ‘magnificent riding when he won the Liverpool on Foxcover (EW, p. 220).’ What is evident here is appreciation of horse racing as a sporting endeavour and admiration of sporting skill and ability which stretches far beyond the one-dimensional stereotype of the compulsive working-class gambler.

In the article ‘The Ethics of the Turf’ by James Runciman which appeared in *The Contemporary Review* in 1889 the author tackles the problematic association of racing and gambling and attempts to justify racing as a sport which exists beyond betting’s compulsive clutches. This inevitably becomes a class-biased assessment condoning the ‘nobleman who [...] employs part of his surplus riches in maintaining a racing stud’ and bets only in a ‘languid off-hand manner’ whilst maligning the lower orders who gamble compulsively and ‘show every symptom of a national decadence’.⁹¹ For Runciman the degenerative gambling

⁹¹ James Runciman, ‘The Ethics of the Turf’, *The Contemporary Review*, 55 (1889), pp. 603-621, p. 605, p. 605, p. 608.

of the working classes imparts negatively on their appreciation of the sport and racing in general:

I said that racing is a delightful pastime to those who go to watch good horses gallop; the miserable thing to me is seeing the wretches who do not care for horse racing at all, but only care for gambling on names and numbers. Let Lord Hartington, Lord Randolph Churchill, Mr. Chaplin, Mr. Corlett, Mr. Rothschild, Lord Rosebery, and the rest go and see the lovely horses shooting over the turf; by all means let them watch their own colts and fillies come flying home. But the poor creatures who muddle away brains, energy, and money on what *they* are pleased to term sport, do not know a horse from a mule; they gamble, as I have said, on names; the splendid racers give them no enjoyment such as the true sportsman derives, for they would not know Ormond from a Clydesdale.⁹²

Those who have little or no knowledge of racing, who gamble only on ‘names and numbers’ and ‘do not know a horse from a mule’, cannot appreciate its sporting essence, such people, for whom ‘the splendid racers give [...] no enjoyment’ are ultimately not ‘true sportsmen’, degenerating to ‘wretches’ and ‘poor creatures’. Significantly these ‘creatures’ are aligned with the working classes while the ‘true sportsman’ is the upper-class gentleman as Runciman cannot reconcile the notion of thoroughbred appreciation with the leisure of the lower orders. If we return to *Esther Waters*, the characters who congregate in the King’s Head should be among the ‘poor creatures’ which Runciman describes. However the descriptions of Ginger’s ‘magnificent riding’, his own eulogising of the mare Necklace and the extended and knowledgeable discussion of the Derby portray an image of the working class who are not gambling randomly on ‘names and numbers’ but on individual horses backed up by their own studious hobby. Furthermore the ‘awed attention’ with which all the members of the pub listen to Ginger’s description of Necklace’s victory, shows an appreciation which moves beyond gambling and towards the ‘lovely horses shooting over the turf’ which Runciman confines to the wealthier classes. Such appreciation challenges not only the one-dimensional depiction of the compulsive gambler but also the stereotypical

⁹² Runciman, ‘The Ethics of the Turf’, p. 608.

image of the uncultured working class. The suspension of class hierarchies in the temporary carnival of the racecourse extends to an increasingly permanent undermining of class perceptions in the autonomous space created by working-class gambling.

The appreciation of horse racing as a sport is however something that Runciman recognises can be attributed to the working classes in certain circumstances:

Rural and industrial Yorkshire are represented by thousands at Doncaster on St. Ledger day, and the tourists get no particular harm; they are horsey to the backbone, and they come to see the running. They criticize the animals and gain topics for months of conversation, and, if they bet an odd half-crown, no one is much the worse. When the Duke of Portland allowed his tenantry to see St. Simon gallop five years ago at Newcastle, the pitmen and artisans thronged to look at the horse.⁹³

Runciman recognises the working classes' ability to extend beyond the stereotype of degeneration and compulsion and appreciate the sporting endeavours of top-class horses. The crowds which flock to watch the country's oldest classic, the St. Ledger, are 'horsey to the backbone', while the working classes of Newcastle were witnessed watching and appreciating the racecourse gallop of St. Simon, the undefeated Ascot Gold Cup winner of 1884. What is interesting here is that this appreciation appears to render gambling no longer degenerative, there is no harm in the knowledgeable working-class gambler betting the 'odd half-crown'. In one sense this is because it is aligned with the temporary carnival of the racecourse, gambling is given licence because the 'tourists' are taking a holiday from normal social customs. However the crucial point to recognise here is that appreciation and knowledge of the sport extends beyond this carnival as the working classes 'criticize the animals and gain topics for months of conversation'; it becomes a permanent arena of leisure which moves past the temporary licence of the racecourse. Ginger's riding skill and appreciation of Necklace as a champion race mare highlight working-class knowledge of horseracing and the admiration which comes with it, creating a permanent space of discussion

⁹³ Runciman, 'The Ethics of the Turf', p. 608-609.

and opinion among the working classes and ensuring that such knowledge and admiration is no longer the preserve of the more privileged members of society. Similarly the betting of the gambling characters in *Esther Waters* aligns more with Runciman's harmless 'odd half-crowns' than his earlier descriptions of compulsion as the scene of Derby discussion in the novel present not an obsessive yearning to bet but a desire to discuss and share opinions on the sport in a communal and increasingly legitimised and permanent space of mutual appreciation.

Esther Waters is the most detailed and comprehensive representation of horse racing in nineteenth-century literature. That it is labelled simply as an anti-gambling polemic by modern critics, Victorian reviewers and indeed by the novel's own author does the text a huge disservice. Its rich and nuanced descriptions of the racecourse draw on complexities within nineteenth-century horse racing itself and relay a complicated space in which class, carnival and leisure are in continual and ever changing conflict. Similarly *Nana*, in the novel's extended descriptions of Longchamp racecourse, details the same complex space through its own naturalistic language. What emerges from the horse-racing representations of both texts is a symbolic depiction of the racecourse as a site of contradictions; a space in which the complex relationship between rigorously implemented social zoning and sanctioned carnival release causes the 'form of the ground' to be lost as the racecourse itself is unable to fully enforce hegemonic control over its own spatial organisation and infrastructure.

However the significance of horse racing in *Esther Waters*, and indeed I would argue the significance of the novel in the pantheon of Victorian literature, lies in its presentation of working-class gambling. The novel itself houses tensions between Moore's own anti-gambling schemata and narrative drive, and the more positive aspects of working-class betting made apparent by the lengthy descriptive passages within the text. In detailing the

complexities of nineteenth-century horse racing and gambling *Esther Waters* problematises its own narrative direction, providing a representative undercurrent which runs counter not only to the novel's more obvious plot lines and intentions, but also against one-dimensional nineteenth-century conceptualisations of working-class gambling and those who participated in it. In his autobiography *Confessions of a Young Man* Moore recalls questioning his former housemaid in order to determine the 'depth of animalism' she had sunk to, concluding brutally, that she was 'very nearly a dog'.⁹⁴ Commenting on this Richard Cave calls it 'remarkable' that the writer was still able to produce in *Esther Waters* a novel of 'sensitive and compassionate understanding' towards the heroines predicament and the plight of the poor in general.⁹⁵ While agreeing with these comments I would suggest it is equally if not more remarkable, given the writer's obvious antipathy towards gambling and his plans for the narrative, that *Esther Waters* is still a novel which sensitively and compassionately relays the significance gambling played in the lives of the late-nineteenth-century working class.

⁹⁴ George Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man*, (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), p. 108.

⁹⁵ Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore*, p. 70.

Chapter 3

Dickens and Horse Racing: ‘The Amusements of the People’

Horse racing can hardly be described as a major theme in Charles Dickens’s novels, indeed fictional representations of the sport are limited to brief accounts in his early work and sporadic treatment in his periodical writings; but as the central literary figure of the early and mid-nineteenth century any representations of horse racing within Dickens’s writing however brief are worthy of attention. However Dickens’s canonical status is not the only reason for his inclusion. Horse racing’s popularity across the nineteenth century and the sport’s status as a medium for working-class leisure and carnival release would suggest it was the ideal space in which to challenge the consuming might of industrialisation, a particularly salient point of contention for the writer. Furthermore given Dickens’s own attendance at meetings, the championing of working-class leisure and recreation in both his fiction and non-fiction and his avocation of carnival as means of leisure and amusement in *Hard Times*, the absence of a substantial representation of horseracing is at the very least a void in need of exploration and at most an inexplicable gap worthy of significant critical attention.⁹⁶

This chapter will examine the only two representations of horse racing in Dickens’s fictional canon, which feature in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, along with ‘The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices’ which he co-wrote with Wilkie Collins. What emerges is the image of the racecourse carnival corrupted by gambling. Horse racing consequently moves away from the sanctioned and eulogised amusement of the circus in

⁹⁶ Dickens attended the 1857 Doncaster St. Ledger meeting with Wilkie Collins at least once, which he described in letters to John Forster. He also attending the Derby meeting often enough to note the excessive consumption taking place: ‘so many Fortnum and Mason hamper so much ice and champagne’ as he put it, and was at Epsom in 1862 and 1863 noting the extremely wet weather of the latter meeting: ‘Last year it was iced champagne, claret-cup, and silk overcoats; now, it ought to be hot brandy-and-water, foot-baths and flannels’. Charles Dickens, ‘Epsom’, *Household Words*, 3 (1851), pp. 241-246, p. 245; Charles Dickens, ‘The Dirty Derby’, *All Year Round*, 9 (1863), pp. 369-370, p. 370.

Hard Times and towards a site of moral degradation because of its inevitable association with betting. However Dickens's response to gambling, particularly working-class gambling, is not so easily categorised as might first appear. Evidence from his letters and the significant non-fiction article 'Betting-Shops' suggests an inherent tension between gambling's moral questionability and the pull of genuine excitement and entertainment it could provide. Consequently horse racing cannot be confidently positioned within the Dickens canon, not least because its representations are sparse, confined to two of his early, often critically overlooked novels and one co-authored short story, but moreover because it occupies a complex space in the writer's own conceptualisation of leisure.

Dickens's concern with the wider application of working-class leisure and the need to provide legitimate amusement for the lower orders emerges in both his fiction and his periodical writing. His two-part essay 'The Amusements of the People' written for the first volume of *Household Words* in 1850 is one of his most significant and in which he forcefully declares: 'we believe these people have a right to be amused'.⁹⁷ Dickens saw leisure and amusement not simply as a by-product of increasing spare time but as an actual *right* of the working classes.⁹⁸ Such a right finds expression in Dickens's fiction primarily in the form of *Hard Times*. It is a novel which explicitly highlights the need for working-class leisure, using the carnival of the circus to rally against the consuming power of industrialisation and materialism, and the Gradgrindian philosophy of 'nothing but facts'.⁹⁹ In one of the most-quoted extracts from the novel Dickens sums up these sentiments: 'people must be amused, Thquire, thomehow, [...] they can't be alwayth a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a

⁹⁷ Charles Dickens, 'The Amusements of the People', *Household Words*, 1 (1850), pp. 57-60, p. 58.

⁹⁸ Similar sentiments occur in his frequent debate of the Sunday question and the temperance movement. See Charles Dickens, 'The Great Baby', *Household Words*, 3 (1851), pp. 1-4; Charles Dickens, 'The Sunday Screw', *Household Words*, 3 (1851), p. 289-292.

⁹⁹ Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 9.

learning'.¹⁰⁰ This is an avocation for leisure and amusement as specifically non-educational; free from the overbearing paternal concern of the middle classes and expressed in the words of the circus master – the director of carnival entertainment – it becomes representative of the carnival rights of the working class. And yet racing's unmistakable carnival atmosphere goes unexplored in the vast majority of Dickens's fiction.

The only representation of horseracing in Dickens's major fiction occurs early in his canon in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839) and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1841), consequently Dickens is dealing with the period of pre-enclosure in which entrance was free and the carnival in the centre of the course was at its height. *Nicholas Nickleby* describes the Manchester racecourse of Hurst Park and the way in which the scene is presented is especially interesting in terms of how Dickens views the racecourse as a site of legitimate leisure. First we are given a panoramic view of the carnival, providing a positive scene of amusement, followed by a depiction of more specific detail, one in which the carnival becomes corrupted. I place the two descriptions together to give a better sense of the shift from positive to negative:

The little race-course at Hampton was in the full tide and height of its gaiety; the day as dazzling as day could be; the sun high in the cloudless sky, and shining in its fullest splendour. Every gaudy colour that fluttered in the air from carriage seat and garish tent top, shone out in its gaudiest hues. Old dingy flags grew new again, faded gilding was re-burnished, stained rotten canvas looked a snowy white, the very beggars' rags were freshened up, and sentiment quite forgot its charity in its fervent admiration of poverty so picturesque. It was one of those scenes of life and animation, caught in its very brightest and freshest moments, which can scarcely fail to please.¹⁰¹

Here, a little knot gathered round a pea and thimble table to watch the plucking of some unhappy greenhorn; and there, another proprietor with his confederates in various disguises—one man in spectacles; another, with an eyeglass and a stylish hat. [...] These would be hanging on the outskirts of a wide circle of people assembled round some itinerant juggler, opposed, in his turn, by a noisy band of music, or the classic game of 'Ring the Bull,' while ventriloquists holding dialogues with wooden dolls, and fortune-telling

¹⁰⁰ Dickens, *Hard Time*, p. 45.

¹⁰¹ Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, (London: Wordsworth, 2000), p. 609. All further references will be given in the body of the text as NN.

women smothering the cries of real babies, divided with them, and many more, the general attention of the company. Drinking-tents were full, glasses began to clink in carriages, [...] and pickpockets to count their gains during the last heat. The attention so recently strained on one object of interest, was now divided among a hundred; and look where you would, there was a motley assemblage of feasting, laughing, talking, begging, gambling, and mummery. (NN, pp. 609-610)

First we have the carnival from afar, a ‘scene of life and animation’ in which amusement and enjoyment is bright and fresh. It is a picturesque, ‘dazzling’ scene of leisure, a space in which the working classes exercise their right to be amused in an atmosphere which can ‘scarcely fail to please’. This is however an almost utopian depiction, as the ‘cloudless sky’ and ‘snowy white’ of the tent tops present an unrealistic purity. Furthermore the reality of the scene is glossed over, ‘old flags’ become ‘new again’ and ‘faded gilding’ is ‘re-burnished’ as the tired and worn actuality of the carnival is transformed into an idealised portrayal of leisure. Even the clothes of the beggars are ‘freshened up’ as the scene becomes one of ‘poverty so picturesque’. Of course to temporarily upturn social reality is partly the function of the carnival, but this idealistic representation does not function simply to present the suspension of social hierarchies, when viewed in tandem with the description which follows it highlight how the carnival of the racecourse becomes corrupted by gambling.

All the accompaniments of the racecourse carnival are in the second description, the ‘itinerate juggler, ‘a noisy band of music’, a game of ‘Ring the Bull’, a ‘ventriloquist’, and a ‘fortune-telling women’ but, as the description becomes more focused, the reality is a carnival corrupted. The singular picturesque scene of the first quotation, the ‘one object of interest’, gives way to a multitude of gambling and excess, no longer is it a scene which can ‘scarcely fail to please’ but one in which pickpockets flourish, music is a noisy distraction, drinking tents are full and the cries of ‘real babies’ are stifled. The carnival of the racecourse, rather than ‘shining in its fullest splendour’, becomes a space which houses ‘a motley assemblage of feasting, laughing, talking, begging, gambling, and mummery’. The whole scene of the

carnival shifts from purity to degradation as focus brings with it an unwholesome reality. Use of the word ‘mummery’ becomes especially pertinent here as its sighting in the second quotation shifts the word’s usage from meaning simply to dress for a carnival, to the more depreciative definition of a ridiculous and false ceremony. The racecourse carnival, as the second description shows, becomes a ridiculous corruption of true carnival values.

Significantly this is a scene corrupted by gambling and degraded by the underhand activities of the ‘pea and thimble’ operators who entrap some ‘unhappy greenhorn’ with elaborate disguises. It is the sight of such gambling booths on the racecourse which seriously compromised horse racing as a sight of legitimate leisure and entertainment for Dickens. Describing a fair in celebration of Queen Victoria’s Coronation in June 1838 Dickens remarked:

This part of the amusements of the people, on the occasion of the Coronation, is particularly worthy of notice [...]. [...] There were no thimble-rig men, who are plentiful at racecourses, as at Epsom, where only gold can be staked; no gambling tents, roulette tables, hazard booths, or dice shops.¹⁰²

The ‘amusements of the people’ are not compromised by the corruptive qualities of gambling, there are ‘no thimble-rig men [...] no gambling tents, roulette tables, hazard booths, or dice shops’ which are a conspicuous sight at the racecourse. At the Coronation celebrations such gambling booths are notable only by their absence and as such the ‘amusements of the people’ remain legitimate. It is ‘particularly worthy of notice’ that the second racecourse description in *Nicholas Nickleby* begins with an extended description of the underhand tactic of the thimble-rig men from which the corruption of the carnival follows. The problem with horse racing as a medium of legitimate leisure for Dickens is its inevitable association with morally questionable gambling, consequently its representation in *Nicholas Nickleby* becomes one of corruption, a ‘mummery’ of the carnival ideal.

¹⁰² Charles Dickens, ‘The Queen’s Coronation’, *Examiner*, 1st July 1838, p. 403.

In *The Old Curiosity Shop* the racecourse, as in *Nicholas Nickleby*, is presented as a picturesque scene turned sour by gambling:

As the morning wore on, the tents assumed a gayer and more brilliant appearance, and long lines of carriages came rolling softly on the turf. Men who had lounged about all night in smock-frocks and leather leggings, came out in silken vests and hats and plumes, as jugglers or mountebanks; or in gorgeous liveries as soft-spoken servants at gambling booths; or in sturdy yeoman dress as decoys at unlawful games. Black-eyed gipsy girls, hooded in showy handkerchiefs, sallied forth to tell fortunes, and pale slender women with consumptive faces lingered upon the footsteps of ventriloquists and conjurers, and counted the sixpences with anxious eyes long before they were gained. As many of the children as could be kept within bounds, were stowed away, with all the other signs of dirt and poverty, among the donkeys, carts, and horses [...]. The dancing-dogs, the stilts, the little lady and the tall man, and all the other attractions, with organs out of number and bands innumerable, emerged from the holes and corners in which they had passed the night, and flourished boldly in the sun.¹⁰³

As the fair in the centre of the course springs to life, with the ‘jugglers’ and ‘mountebanks’, ‘the stilts’, the dancing-dogs’ and ‘bands innumerable’, the racecourse becomes a scene of carnival enjoyment. However like the panoramic description of the carnival in *Nicholas Nickleby* this is again an idealised scene of leisure, as the tents take on a ‘gayer and more brilliant appearance’, ‘signs of dirt and poverty’ are ‘stowed away’, and everything appears to flourish ‘boldly in the sun’. As in *Nicholas Nickleby* undercutting this description is the corruptive influence of the ‘gambling booths’; hinted at with the men employed as decoys for ‘unlawful games’ and the symbolic degradation of the ‘black-eyed gipsy girls’ and ‘slender women with consumptive faces’, the carnival again becomes an ideal which has been corrupted. Later when Nell is observing the scene the corruptive effect of gambling on horseracing is foregrounded: ‘The child, sitting down with the old man close behind it, had been thinking how strange it was that horses who were such fine honest creatures should seem to make vagabonds of all the men they drew about them’ (OCS, p. 157). Although, ironically, it is the ‘fine honest’ horse who have this corrupting effect, the strangeness which

¹⁰³ Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, (London: Everyman, 1995), p. 156. All further references will be given in the body of the text as OCS.

Nell sees is the paradox that while such creatures seemingly incite gambling they are, much like the racecourse carnival, also corrupted themselves. Both the horses and the carnival are passive implements of betting, in their ideal form they are ‘fine honest creatures’ and spaces of legitimate amusement which ‘flourish boldly in the sun’. The reality however is that, like Dickens’s idealised representations, they become inevitably corrupted by the ‘vagabonds’ who use them as a means of gambling. The ‘strange’ image of gambling’s influence on racing and its carnival for Nell is indicative of the conflict in Dickens’s own representation of horse racing, that is the problematic space of the racecourse carnival as a site of legitimate leisure given its inevitable corruption by gambling.

The only other significant description of horse racing in Dickens’s fiction comes in ‘The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices’. Published in *Household Words* in October 1857 the short story was written in conjunction with Wilkie Collins and contains an extended description of the 1857 Doncaster St Ledger meeting which Collins and Dickens attended together. Like *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* gambling is presented as a corruption of horse racing and the racecourse carnival. Obsessive gamblers in ‘The Lazy Tour’ are described repeatedly as ‘lunatics’ and their inevitable losses relayed with a tone of dread: ‘Money-losses very great. As usual, nobody seems to have won; but, large losses and many losers are unquestionable facts’.¹⁰⁴ This is not a site of festive celebration but a space of obsessive gambling in which ‘faces in the Betting Rooms [are] very long’ (LT, p. 412).

What is interesting in the description of the meeting is the way in which the space of the racecourse and the roads leading to it are depicted, particularly in relation to the use of space in *Esther Waters*, and how this impacts of notions of leisure:

¹⁰⁴ Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, ‘The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices’, *Household Words*, 16 (1857), pp. 409-416, p. 412. All further references will be given in the body of the text as LT. Although ‘The Lazy Tour’ was co-written the descriptions of the St. Ledger meeting and the gambling which ensues mirror those found in Dickens’s letters. A letter to John Forster, which will be discussed later, detailing an account of Dickens’s fortunes on race day closely resemble a description in ‘The Lazy Tour’. Consequently it is reasonable to conclude that the majority of the horse-racing descriptions in the text are by Dickens himself.

Monday, mid-day. Races not to begin until to-morrow, but all the mob-Lunatics out, crowding the pavements of the one main street of pretty and pleasant Doncaster, crowding the road, particularly crowding the outside of the Betting Rooms, whooping and shouting loudly after all passing vehicles. [...] All degrees of men, from peers to paupers, betting incessantly (LT, p. 410).

Movement around the town is restricted as the gambling hoards blocks the streets of Doncaster, 'crowding' the pavements, the road, and 'outside the Betting Rooms'. If we return to de Certeau's idea that walking creates a 'space of enunciation' then gambling in this description silences and restricts, it corrupts its surrounding environment by limiting autonomous movement.¹⁰⁵ More significantly gambling is no longer the autonomous space of the working class in which intellectual ideas are allowed to flourish, as we see in *Esther Waters*, but rather a corruptive pastime which afflicts 'all degrees of men', their incessant betting confining them into a space of compulsion. By Monday evening in Doncaster the crowds of gamblers cause 'a complete choke and stoppage of the thoroughfare outside the Betting Rooms' (LT, p. 410); a complete silencing and restriction by the compulsion to bet. In *Nicholas Nickleby* there is a specific contrast between freedom and restriction which aligns with the different representations of the racecourse carnival. Before the corruptive influence of gambling is described the carnival is 'one of those scenes of life and animation' (NN, p. 609) suggesting unrestricted movement and freedom. When the focus turns specifically to the betting booths such animation is lost as a 'little knot' (NN, p. 609) gathers around the pea and thimble table. In both *Nicholas Nickleby* and 'The Lazy Tour' gambling denies carnival release; freedom of movement becomes restricted and tied down, enunciation is silenced by the compulsion to bet, and the idealised racecourse carnival is corrupted.

The representation of the racecourse carnival in Dickens's fiction once corrupted by gambling can no longer be a site of legitimate amusement; the freedom from social paradigms and the release from the everyday drudgery of working-class life it provides mutates into a

¹⁰⁵ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 98.

restrictive space in which the desire to bet limits and confines. Paul Schlicke, in his excellent study *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, suggests that Dickens was ‘concerned with the replacement of traditional kinds of leisure activity by new forms and, more centrally, with changing attitudes to entertainment’.¹⁰⁶ Moreover the implication is that Dickens was attached to entertainment which was ‘rooted in the traditions of the past’, that is he was more concerned with the communal values of leisure rather than its commercial success.¹⁰⁷ It is tempting to view his attitude to horse racing through the same critical lens as the scenes from *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* show an idealised and crucially traditional form of carnival on unenclosed racecourses. Both novels are set in the pre-railway era and therefore such meetings were primarily local affairs for the amusements of the neighbouring aristocracy and the working class community alike. From this perspective the traditional values of the carnival in Dickens’s fictional representations which become soiled by horse racing’s association with gambling parallel the sports shift from a local and crucially communal leisure activity to a site of commercial enterprise. However this standpoint is somewhat reductive as it ignores the changing nature of horse racing and gambling for the working classes across the nineteenth century, and also rather simplifies Dickens’s own complex response to both these things, something which becomes more apparent in his non-fiction writing.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Paul Schlicke, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 2002), p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Schlicke, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Dickens’s own periodical writing about horse racing and gambling are somewhat sparse, comprising of minor descriptive passages about his experience of race meetings. However many of the articles relating to horse racing which featured in *Household Words* and *All Year Round*, and which were not written by Dickens himself, relay the same corruptive effects of gambling as found in Dickens’s own fiction. And, as Harry Stone has pointed out, Dickens maintained strict control of the content of both these periodicals. Harry Stone, ‘Dickens “conducts” *Household Words*’, *Dickensian*, 64 (1968), pp. 71-85. As we have seen in Chapter One the article ‘Derby Dregs’ by Joseph Charles Parkinson details the debauchery at the centre of the Epsom course on Derby day. Parkinson, ‘Derby Dregs’, pp. 487-489. In ‘The Roughs’ Guide’ by the same author the writer parodies sporting publication and gambling advertisements, highlighting the hypocrisy of turning a blind eye to advertisements of gambling in the press while making betting houses illegal. The thrust of the article is to lampoon interest in gambling showing it to be a reductive and untimely corruptive pastime. Joseph Charles Parkinson, ‘The Roughs’ Guide’, *All Year Round*, 14 (1865), pp. 492-496. In Andrew Halliday’s ‘My Two Derbies’ gambling, as corruptive of the racecourse carnival, is condemned. Andrew Halliday, ‘My Two Derbies’, *All Year Round*, 13 (1865), pp. 490-494. In ‘The Sporting World’ G. A. Sala specifically remarks that

‘Betting-Shops’ published in 1852 in *Household Words* was Dickens’s response to the rise in off-course working-class gambling perpetuated by the increasing number of available betting rooms. It is worth analysing in detail as it reveals many of the problems the writer had with horse racing and gambling, not least the notion that it was altogether corruptive to the young: ‘the rapid youth of England, with its slang intelligence perpetually broad awake and its weather eye continually open, will walk in and deliver up its money, like the helpless Innocent that it is’.¹⁰⁹ Gambling was corrupting the ‘innocent youth of England’ in much the same way it corrupted the racecourse carnival, the numerous betting shops providing ample means for them to feed their ‘hapless’ compulsions. The corruptive influences of betting for Dickens have no redeeming features; the ‘slang intelligence’ does not suggest a community of intellectual debate nor a studious hobby, as found in *Esther Waters*, but rather a pastime which denies any advantageous intellectual growth:

We looked as knowing on the subject, both of Tophana and the Western Handicap, as it was in us to do: though, to confess the humiliating truth, we neither had, nor have, the least idea in connexion with those proper names.¹¹⁰

Like the ‘poor creatures’ in the Runciman article discussed in Chapter Two Dickens depicts those frequenting the betting shops – primarily the working class – as ignorant of all the intricacies of horse racing.¹¹¹ The narrator’s own lack of knowledge is indicative of the ‘slang intelligence’ of the working-class gambler, betting solely on the ‘proper names’ of the horses without any prior knowledge or ‘connexion’ to their form. It is important to note however the context in which Dickens was writing in order to judge accurately his response to this

gambling, both on-course and off-course, is a corruption which taints sporting endeavour: ‘The Potato field of English sports are afflicted with something worse than a potato blight, an insect more deadly than the *aphis vastador*: by the betting blight’. Gambling for Sala is a disease which rots the sporting world from within; horse racing’s association with the ‘dead leaves of low gambling and vulgar debauchery’ negate its own pretences for sporting respectability and legitimate leisure. Indeed Sala concludes ‘The Sporting World’ by commenting that although sports such as bull-baiting, bear-baiting and cock-fighting have all but vanished ‘we are not quite spotless in our sports yet’, the implication being that gambling still taints the moral integrity of sport, specifically horse racing. G. A. Sala, ‘The Sporting World’, *Household Words*, 6 (1852), pp. 133-139, p. 139.

¹⁰⁹ Charles Dickens, ‘Betting-Shops’, *Household Words*, 5 (1852), pp. 333-336, p. 334.

¹¹⁰ Dickens, ‘Betting-Shops’, p. 334.

¹¹¹ Runciman, ‘The Ethics of the Turf’, p. 608.

form of working-class gambling. Written in 1852 the article is commenting on the world of gambling *before* the mass influx of racing information which became available to the working classes in the 1860s. It is therefore, as Dickens's 'slang intelligence' suggests an intellectually redundant activity.

This is crucial when attempting to critically engage with Dickens's response to horse racing and its association with gambling as a medium of working-class leisure. Robert Caillos in *Man, Play, and Games* splits gambling into two distinct groups: aleatory gambling based on pure chance; and agonistic gambling in which the gambler has a certain amount of control over the outcome.¹¹² Caillos suggests that gambling on games of chance such as roulette or baccarat are aleatory, whereas horse racing, in which form can be studied and analysed, is agonistic. In short, games of chance are passive gambles, whereas horseracing actively engages the brain by the study of available information which can help to predict the outcome. For Dickens, commenting on gambling in 1852, horse-racing information such as entries, form and ground descriptions as yet were unavailable to the working classes, consequently working-class gambling was aleatory, it was passive. Unlike the space opened up for the working-class gamblers in *Esther Waters*, gambling in this non-fiction commentary and in Dickens's fictional representations – the 'little knot' in *Nicholas Nickleby* and the crowded streets in 'The Lazy Tour' – becomes a site of confinement in which communal debate is stifled rather than encouraged and active intellectual engagement is denied in favour of the passive arena of chance.

The idea of activity was an integral part of Dickens's vision of working-class leisure. Commenting on a Manchester art exhibition in 1857 in a letter to William Charles Macready, Dickens remarked in relation to the working classes: 'they want more amusement, and particularly (as it strikes me) *something in motion*, though it were only a twisting fountain.

¹¹² Robert Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), p. 12.

The thing is too still after their lives of machinery and art flies over their head in consequence'.¹¹³ Although slightly ungenerous to the working-class intellect the idea of an active form of entertainment was crucial in moving them away from the drudgery of industrial life. Horse racing then becomes a complex form of leisure for Dickens, one that involves both the pull of action and the counter weight of passivity. The action of the racecourse, its carnival and the actual horserace is countered by the lack of available working-class information when placing a bet, resulting in the inert void of 'slang intelligence'.

However for Dickens there was, or at least there could be, an active excitement to gambling, something that is evident in a letter to John Forster describing the 1857 St. Ledger meeting he attended and used as a setting for 'The Lazy Tour':

On the St Ledger day a wonderful, paralysing coincidence befell him. He bought a race-card; facetiously wrote down three names for the winner of three chief races (never in his life having heard or thought of any of the horses, except that the winner of the Derby, who proved to be nowhere, had mentioned to him); and, if you can believe it without your hair standing on end, those three races were won, one after the other, by those three horse!!! [...] On the night of the Cup Day, a groaning phantom lay in the doorway of his bedroom and howled all night. The landlord came up in the morning to apologise, and said it was a gentleman who had lost £1500 or £2000; and he had drunk a deal afterwards; and then they put him to bed, and then he – took the 'orrors, and got up, and yelled till morning.¹¹⁴

Told in the third person in an attempt to dissociate himself from the moral questionability of gambling Dickens is compelled to dismiss the experience with words such as 'facetiously' and 'coincidence', and end the letter describing the 'orrors' which betting to excess can

¹¹³ *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, (ed.) Walter Dexter, (London: Nonesuch Edition, 1938), Vol. 2, p. 867.

¹¹⁴ *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Three, 1842-1843*, (ed.) Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 450. The letter bears remarkable similarities to a description in 'The Lazy Tour' and is evidence of Dickens's input into the racing scenes of that text. I print the description from 'The Lazy Tour' here to highlight such similarities: 'Saturday. Mr. Idle wishes to know at breakfast, what were those dreadful groanings in his bedroom doorway in the night? Mr. Goodchild answers, Nightmare. Mr. Idle repels the calumny, and calls the waiter. The Angel is very sorry—had intended to explain; but you see, gentlemen, there was a gentleman dined down-stairs with two more, and he had lost a deal of money, and he would drink a deal of wine, and in the night he 'took the horrors,' and got up; and as his friends could do nothing with him he laid himself down and groaned at Mr. Idle's door. 'And he DID groan there,' Mr. Idle says; 'and you will please to imagine me inside, "taking the horrors" too!' (LT, p. 413).

induce. Countering this however is a fascination and excitement as gambling on horse racing is also a 'wonderful' experience and picking three winners is indeed enough to make your hair stand on end. Significantly lack of any detailed knowledge about horse racing does not prohibit such excitement. Despite 'facetiously' picking the three horses and never 'having heard or thought' of them before, the excitement of their subsequent victories is not diminished. What is crucial to recognise here is that the passive gambling of the working classes as described in 'Betting-Shops' can still provide excitement, as a lack of knowledge does not prohibit its existence as an active means of amusement. It is clear that Dickens recognises the racecourse, horse racing and gambling as having the potential to amuse and entertain in an active release from the drudgery of industrial work, but he also sees the moral reality and consequences, the potential for an addictive compulsion to develop. There is a tension for Dickens which goes beyond the simple conflict between the uninformed aleatory gambling of the working classes and the excitement of the racecourse carnival, and extends to a tension, drawn on from his own experience, between an exciting, predominantly harmless amusement and that same amusement's moral legitimacy.

If we return to 'The Lazy Tour' these contradictory tensions reveal themselves within the text. The 1857 St. Ledger meeting described in the story was attended by both Dickens and Collins and was witness to a well documented moment of racing scandal. The filly, Blink Bonny, had won both the Derby and the Oaks that season and was 5-4 favourite for the St. Ledger; however under instructions from the bookmaker John Jackson her jockey John Charlton deliberately lost the race. Two days later at the same meeting Blink Bonny won the Park Hill Stakes in a faster time than the St. Ledger had been run, a riot ensued and the

raucous crowd almost lynched Charlton.¹¹⁵ Dickens specifically references this moment of racing scandal in ‘The Lazy Tour’:

On the great event of the day, both Lunatics and Keepers become inspired with rage; and there is a violent scuffling, and a rushing at the losing jockey, and an emergence of the said jockey from a swaying and menacing crowd, protected by friends, and looking the worse for wear; which is a rough proceeding, though animating to see from a pleasant distance (LT, p. 412-413).¹¹⁶

By including a description of what became known as the ‘Blink Bonny riot’ Dickens foregrounds the reality of moral degradation which gambling encourages; the sport and the honour of the horses, the ‘honest creatures’ (OCS, p. 157) are corrupted by the desire to make money.¹¹⁷ As with the letter to John Forster there is an attempt at dissociation, the riot is observed ‘from a pleasant distance’ as Dickens again removes himself from the scene to avoid a complete emersion in the moral depravity of the scandal. But also like the Forster letter this is again played out against evident fascination and excitement; despite it being a ‘rough proceeding’ it is, like racing and gambling itself, very much ‘animating to see’, an active and enthralling amusement evident both in the fascination of the actual scene and its inclusion within the text itself. In another letter to John Forsters he sums up the 1857 St Ledger meeting in less ambiguous terms stating, with specific reference to gambling: ‘I vow to God that I can see nothing in it but cruelty, covetousness, calculation, insensibility, and low wickedness’.¹¹⁸ There is none of the excitement of the previous letter here, nor any of the excitement of the ‘Blink Bonny riot’, simply the corruptive qualities of gambling. Yet the

¹¹⁵ www.nhrm.co.uk/archive/blinkbonny, (accessed 18th June 2013), para. 5; Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 187; George Hodgman, *Sixty Years on the Turf: The Life and Times of George Hodgman*, (ed.) Charles R. Warren, (London: Grant Richards, 1901), pp. 91-97.

¹¹⁶ Reports from the press relaying the incident are similar to the description given by Dickens in ‘The Lazy Tour’ indicating not only the accuracy of this representation but also his focus and fascination on the violence and reaction caused by the scandal. *The Preston Guardian* reports a similar mob mentality: ‘When Charlton returned to the enclosure he was saluted with mingled cheers and hisses, and as he dismounted he was violently hooted and hustled. It was with much difficulty that he could force his way into the stand. [...] The weighing stand, however, was besieged by a clamorous mob; the police were almost incapable of restraining the violence of the crowd’. *The Preston Guardian*, September 26th 1857, p. 23.

¹¹⁷ Theodore Andrea Cook, *A History of the English Turf*, (London: Virtue and Co., 1901), Vol. III, p. 468

¹¹⁸ *The Letter of Charles Dickens*, (ed.) Madeline House, p. 447.

‘calculation’ and ‘low wickedness’ *are* the fascinating aspects of the Blink Bonny scandal which forces its inclusion in ‘The Lazy Tour’ and causes a tension between the ‘cruelty’ of the corruption of an ‘honest’ horse – the champion fill Blink Bonny – and the carnival festivities, and the evident fascination of the scene. Gambling in its ‘covetousness’ and ‘calculation’ is quite clearly a point of moral contention for Dickens, yet the scandal caused by such gambling and ‘low wickedness’ is nevertheless ‘animating to see’, it is an active form of excitement and entertainment. Although the ‘insensibility’ of gambling – its link to both compulsion and a lack of information for the working classes – are primary concerns for Dickens, what the inclusion of the Blink Bonny scandal highlights is that the moral degradation, and all the passive aspect of betting are countered by the potential for excitement and fascination. The ‘rough proceedings’ of racing and gambling, however morally questionable, have the ability to enthrall and amuse, they always have the potential to be ‘animating to see’.

Dickens’s response to the 1857 St. Ledger meeting he attended, and to horse racing in general, was a complex one, clearly uncomfortable with the moral degeneration he saw in gambling yet strangely attracted to its fascinating and exciting potential and racing’s own place as an active spectacle, his position was one riddled with tensions. Horse racing for Dickens was a complex space of leisure in which there were various pulls towards the active and the passive; it was not simply a site of carnival release nor an arena irreparably tainted by gambling and ‘low wickedness’, but rather a space of contradiction which housed both the legitimate demands of working-class leisure and the degenerative compulsions of betting.

This partly answers the questions as to why there is significant lack of representations of horse racing in Dickens’s fiction. Unlike the circus which features so prominently in *Hard Times* it was not an innocent working-class amusement and it could not, as Paul Schlike has suggested of other forms of entertainment for Dickens, be a simple representation of a

traditional, more communal form of leisure consumed by industrial progress and commercialism. The result is that horse racing occupies a complicated space in Dickens's fiction; its presence, on the margins of his narrative, is liminal both in its positioning and in its complex conceptualization in the writer's mind, an unstable and contradictory status which ultimately means the sport cannot be reconciled into a significant fictional representation.

It is worth noting however that Dickens's only major representation of the circus comes in *Hard Times*, indeed popular entertainment is absent as a significant motif in all the writer's middle and late fiction. Such an absence is almost certainly down to Dickens's concern with more pressing social issues such as sanitary reform and the living conditions of the poor which he presents in detail in *Bleak House*. Paul Schlike notes that any minor representations of leisure in Dickens's later novels relate a 'growing pessimism about the possibilities of finding a place for entertainment in the new social fabric'; amusement and leisure was then relegated in Dickens's fiction, not simply because it lacked relative importance but because its position within Victorian life became increasingly problematic for the writer.¹¹⁹

But racing cannot simply be categorised along with other forms of entertainment in the Dickens canon, its complicated position within nineteenth-century life is replicated by the complex space it occupied in Dickens's writing and indeed by his own conceptions of it. The possibility then of Dickens 'finding a place' for horse racing within entertainment and indeed within the 'social fabric' of the nineteenth century as a whole was made impossible by the ensuing tensions he experienced in it. The contradictory pulls between inherent excitement and entertainment and the moral questionability he saw in gambling presented Dickens with a problem. Consequently representations of horse racing in his fiction were to remain sparse

¹¹⁹ Schlicke, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, p. 139.

and sporadic, not simply because they were replaced with more important social issues or because his own concept of entertainment in general was at odds with the shifting landscape of mid-nineteenth-century life, but because Dickens could not adequately position horse racing within his own conceptual framework of working-class leisure as a whole.

Conclusion

Nineteenth-century horse racing was an arena of sporting leisure which, like many aspects of Victorian society, defied any sweeping generalisations. Its cross-class appeal and popularity was matched by the many hegemonic restrictions the sport was subjected to, as horse racing, the racecourse and thoroughbred gambling became a complicated space of varying and complex tensions between the nineteenth-century conceptualisations of class and leisure.

How then to conclude a study of nineteenth-century literature and culture which has taken as its subject such a vastly popular sport and leisure activity yet one which housed such an enormous array of complexities? Firstly a broad overview simply will not suffice. Horse racing as an all-encompassing carnival or an upholder of established class paradigms is too simplistic a model. The racecourse was a complex arena of both carnival excess and strictly implemented social zoning, a space in which tensions ensued between notion of class, disciplined ideas of leisure and capitalist profit making. Similarly both on-course and off-course gambling on horse racing was an area of conflict. Subjected to class-biased acts intended to restrict underground working-class gambling while leaving the upper and middle classes exempt, betting on horse racing was paradoxically a space which defied hegemonic control as access to racing information for the working classes created an autonomous space of knowledge and discussion.

Secondly, as noted earlier, this study could never, nor was it intended to be, encyclopaedic. Given this there are various avenues of contextual and literary analysis which can be further explored and researched, and result, unsurprisingly in more tensions and complexities revealing themselves. I have consciously steered away from concepts of gender, particularly masculinity preferring to concentrate on the negotiation of class identities and the expression of working-class leisure. However working-class gambling as a communal space

of intellectual discussion clearly relays a certain brand of masculinity and homosocial bonding. When Moore describes the discussions in the King's Head in *Esther Waters* they are called 'gossip' (EW, p. 219) in an attempt to deny them a place as a legitimate form of leisure. More specifically they are disenfranchised by their association with a traditionally maligned feminine form of interaction. What emerges is an image of working-class gambling which is not only attacked because of its potential to corrupt but also because it constitutes a form of emasculation for the lower orders. Furthermore concepts of disciplined middle-class leisure project a different type of masculinity, one that aligns with the benefits of hard work and the manly disciplines of sport espoused by the likes of Samuel Smiles and Charles Kingsley. For the burgeoning middle classes of the mid and late-nineteenth century horse racing, to be a legitimate form of leisure, had to rise above the profligate and debauched aristocracy traditionally associated with the sport *and* the degenerative working-class gamblers, and provide, not only an example of the correct form of entertainment, but also the hard-edged masculinity of sporting endeavour that characterised middle-class concepts of manliness.

Gambling in Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* has been discussed here as a corruption of the carnival ideal, a site of degeneration which compromises the legitimacy of horse racing as a leisure activity. However the discussion can be taken in another direction as gambling in the novel relates in part to the profligate betting the aristocracy, who leave the racecourse with their 'brains on fire to the gamming tables' (NN, p. 617). This again aligns with the corruptive potential of gambling as it impinges on the carnival ideal, but also more specifically relates to the upper classes whose debauched and reckless betting is setting the wrong example of leisure for the lower orders. It is the aristocracy, the more privileged members of society, who have a hand in corrupting the racecourse carnival and compromising horse racing as a legitimate leisure activity.

My reading of *Esther Waters*, because of the limited space, neglected to analyse the character of William Latch in any great detail. He is however, a significant character in the novel, not simply because he is Esther's husband but because of his status as a self-made bookmaker. The figure of the bookmaker in the nineteenth century is a significant one in terms of class mobility as most were working-class men whose successful businesses meant they became middle class by means of their income. The bookmaker William Davies, known as the 'Leviathan', began life as a carpenter but left an estate worth £150,000 on his death in 1879, while Fred Swindell, who also rose from the working class, left his son £146,057 in his will.¹²⁰ Bookmakers occupied a liminal space in society, existing on the edges of class boundaries, neither able to abandon their working-class origin nor fully integrate themselves into middle-class society. William's success as a bookmaker in *Esther Waters* allows himself, Esther and their companions to celebrate his Derby winnings in a socially exclusive restaurant. However he is unable to completely shed his working-class roots as the 'other guests seem [...] a little terrified' (EW, p. 236) and the 'delicate food' (EW, p. 237) does not 'afford much satisfaction' (EW, p. 237). William's class status, as with his real life contemporaries, is consequently unstable, he exists liminally between the middle and lower orders; a point emphasised as he chooses to 'don his betting toggery' (EW, p. 225) at a pub symbolically located on 'the cross-roads' (EW, p. 225).

As much as the representations of nineteenth-century horse racing in this study can be further explored and other literary examples of horse racing analysed, what is a staple of the entire period is the sparse treatment of the sport in Victorian literature as a whole. Given horse racing was so vastly popular across the Victorian period it has implications for how we interpret the broader issues of class and leisure which are often so prevalent in nineteenth-century literature and society. The gap in the sport's fictional representations is then an

¹²⁰ Itzkowitz, 'Victorian Bookmakers and their Customers', p. 8.

important aspect, even an integral part, of how class paradigms were expressed and negotiated in terms of entertainment and amusement by nineteenth-century authors and the society in which they worked. Of course the lack of horse racing's presence within a novel or indeed a whole fictional canon could simply be authorial choice, and whether such a gap can ever be fully explained is doubtful. However what often appears to compromise horse racing's position in nineteenth-century literature and indeed in Victorian society more generally, is its association with gambling.

For Dickens gambling corrupted the carnival ideal, undermining the racecourse as a site of innocent enjoyment. Yet there is, throughout his fiction and non-fiction writing, an evident tension, not only between horse racing and gambling, but between the corruptive effects of betting and the genuine excitement it could induce. There is perhaps something of Dickens's the 'attraction of repulsion' in this; fascinated by the active amusement horse racing and gambling could bring but repulsed by its moral degeneration, the writer could not find a literary space in which the conflict could be reconciled.¹²¹ Consequently horse racing when it does appear in Dickens's fiction is confined to the edges of narrative, existing, as it also did in nineteenth-century society generally, between the fascinating and the repulsive, the exciting and the degrading, and ultimately between the legitimate and the corruptive.

Horse racing's position in George Moore's *Esther Waters* has none of the authorial conflict evident in Dickens; the sport and its association with gambling occupy an extended and secure place in the novel because they are clearly defined as corruptive and compulsive. Yet the novel is still a space of contradictions. The extended scene of Derby discussion in the King's Head, presenting working-class gambling as a space in which intellectual debate is allowed to flourish and the autonomy of individual ideas are aired, runs in direct conflict to the narrative, Moore's own intentions and general critical opinion of the novel. What

¹²¹ Dickens's friend and biographer John Forster used this phrase to describe Dickens's reaction as a boy to the slums of London, particularly those around St. Giles. John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1874), p. 36.

consequently emerges from *Esther Waters* is not a space of conflict in which horse racing cannot be reconciled into narrative, as in Dickens, nor a site in which comprehensive representations of horse racing and its association with the evils of gambling are laid down, but a novel, much like the racecourse space itself, as a complicated site of varying tensions between class and leisure. A site in which horse racing and its corruptive link to gambling is simultaneously highlighted and undermined as the autonomous and communal space of working-class betting materialises, as it did in late-nineteenth-century society, despite the damning narrative drive of the novel and the stereotypical thrust of middle-class opinion and legislation.

What is ultimately revealed by examining nineteenth-century horse racing's place within both Victorian society and its literature is that it was an intensely complex and unstable one, changing and mutating as nineteenth-century social mores and custom changed themselves. Housing tensions between legitimate notions of amusement, carnival excess, morally corruptive and compulsive gambling and ever more complicated notions of class, horse racing's position within society was replicated by its contradictory, often absent place in nineteenth-century literature. The gap in the sport's literary inclusion, although a void which can never be filled by a conclusive answer, is never the less a space representative of Victorian society's inability to fully comprehend and recognise horse racing's position within the ever increasing and complex arena of leisure, and indeed of leisure's own unstable and shifting place within nineteenth-century society as a whole.

[17,542 words]

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Appendix 1

William Powell Frith, *Derby Day*, 1856-1858

Available at: www.tate.org.uk

Firth's painting foregrounds the carnival of the Derby showing a mingling of all classes of society, from upper class ladies and gentlemen in the carriages to the acrobats entertaining them, and the lower class women in dishevelled clothing in the foreground. Significantly the racecourse can barely be seen; the actual race is relegated to the background as Firth concentrates on vast panorama of society which congregated in the centre of the course brought together by the Derby. *The Times* in 1858 commented on the many attractions in the centre of the course: 'dancers upon stilts, acrobats, German bands, gentlemen, ladies, thieves and policemen [...] performing dogs [...] tender infants turning somersaults [...] banjo men and tambourinists', a description which parallels the visual carnival of Firth's paintings. *The Times*, May 20th 1858, p. 32.

Appendix 2

Gustave Doré, *The Derby, at Lunch: 1872*

Available at: www.museumoflondonprints.com

Like Firth, Doré concentrates on the crowd in the centre of the course showing the integration of classes taking place at the Derby and relegating the race itself to the background; the horses appear only as small blur with the majority of the crowd ignoring the contest. Foregrounded here is the festival atmosphere with the stilt-walker and the fire-breather mingling amongst the crowd. Doré gives particular attention, as the title suggests, to the consumption which took place at the Derby meeting, emphasising the excesses and release from restraint which the Derby carnival provided.

Appendix 3

Richard Doyle, 'Manners and Customs of ye Englyshe', *Punch* (1849)

Available at: www.epsomandewelldhistoryexplorer.org.uk

As with Firth and Doré the centre of the course takes precedence over the horseracing in this cartoon from *Punch*. The integration and mingling of the wide spectrum of social classes that Derby Day witnessed – the privileged few sipping champagne in the carriages and the old

gypsy women interspersed through the crowd – is made explicit by the black and white line drawing as individual figures become difficult to distinguish and almost merge into one another. Again there is an emphasis on consumption and various form of entertainment given licence by the carnival.

Appendix 4

Lingfield's paddock enclosure and members' lawn, 1899

Available in: Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 199.

Clear from the picture is the emphasis on comfort with the carefully landscaped and maintained grass and pathways, along with the genteel behaviour of those in attendance. It is also significant how few people are using the enclosure; it is designed for a privileged few and appears the polar opposite of the descriptions of carnival excess normally associated with the racecourse.

Appendix 5

Manchester's paddock enclosure, 1901

Available in: Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 209.

Like the image of Lingfield there is an emphasis on comfort with the well manicured lawns and shrubbery, ample shelter from the rain and a number of benches on which to sit. There are more people here than in the Lingfield picture the scene does not appear overcrowded and again the impression is not one of a vast throng of various classes, but of the more privileged members of society enjoying exclusive social zoning.

Appendix 6

Sandown Park's members' lawn and Royal box

Available in: Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 177.

As with Lingfield and Manchester it is a picture of exclusive comfort; the grandeur of the Royal Box to the right of the picture and carefully maintained and fenced off member lawn present an image of exclusive opulence and reserved enjoyment rather than carnival release. Like Lingfield and Manchester the crowd is not a vast one, adding to the impression that this is an exclusive zone for the wealthy and socially privileged.

Appendix 7

Table showing admission price to the main grandstand for various meetings from the mid-century onwards

| | 1850 | | 1890 | |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| | Weekly admission | Daily admission | Weekly admission | Daily admission |
| Ascot | £1 | 10 shillings | £2 | 12 shillings |
| Doncaster | £1 | 8 shillings | £2 | 14 shillings |
| Malton | 6 shillings | 3 shillings | N\A | 6 shillings |
| Richmond | 6 shillings | 3 shillings | N\A | 6 shillings |

Source: Huggins, *Flat Racing*, pp. 150-154; Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 30, p. 40.

The average wage for the working classes in 1850 was around 12 shillings a week, by 1890 this had grown to around 16 shillings a week. See Catherine Robson and Carol T. Christ, (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Victorian Age*, (London: W. W. Norton and Co., 2012) As Robson, Christ, and Mike Huggins has noted it is extremely difficult to calculate the relative expense of entertainments given the fluctuating value of money and commodities across time, also the average weekly wage for the working classes varied between professions. However the clear from the table above is that grandstand admission would cost a substantial proportion of the working class weekly wage which would certainly restrict entry.

Appendix 8

Table showing the revenue from non-racing sources at Doncaster, 1896

| Enclosure | Revenue |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| Grandstand tickets | £9,415. 10s |
| Stand and second-class stand tickets | £1,195 |
| Private Stand | £55 |
| Lincolnshire Stand | £400 |
| County Stand | £868 |
| Private boxes | £220. 10s |
| Paddock | £1,939 |
| Tattersall's enclosure | £1,160 |
| Carriage stands | £577.7s6d |

Source: Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p. 154.

The amount of income raised from the various enclosures and stands indicates the racecourses shift to a capitalist framework of profit making. Also, and this is significant to note, the table also shows the extensive amount of enclosure implemented by the racecourse even though Doncaster as a whole remained unenclosed. Consequently even at a racecourse which remained true to the carnival ideal of free entry to the centre of the course, a significant amount of social zoning was still in place.

Appendix 9

Epsom's grandstand, 1829

Available at: www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk

The interior of the new stand was opulently decorated with ornamental pillars and spiral staircases and provided 'retiring rooms of convenience for gentlemen' with refreshments also provided for the guests. The general atmosphere is one far removed from the excesses of the centre of the course and provides a clear boundary between the lower classes and those more privileged. The capacity of five thousand – given that the total attendance of the course in 1830 was over sixty thousand – clearly segregates a privileged few and negating the social integration of the carnival. *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, 372 (1829), p. 32.

Appendix 10

Plan of Epsom racecourse, 1901

Available in: Richardson, *The English Turf*, p. 97.

Circled in green is the paddock and saddling enclosure. The black circle marks the area in which a number of temporary stands were erected for the duration of the Derby meeting, all of which charged an admission fee. The exclusive Prince's Stand is circled in blue. Barnard's Stand, occupying its prime position opposite the winning post, indicated by the red oblong, is circled in purple. The main grandstand is circled in red. The large yellow circle shows the area in the centre of the course which was still free to enter and in which the carnival flourished. What is evident from this aerial view is the amount of racecourse space which had become enclosed by the end of the century. The black, red, blue, and green circles all highlight areas of exclusivity which undermine the carnival ideal. As the plan of the course shows the carnival is very much restricted and confined to a specific space, it has become part of the leisure industry and consequently is under the control by bourgeois hegemony. Clearly any social integration can only take place if the inhabitants of the more exclusive zones choose to enter the carnival arena, while the lower orders who primarily occupy the centre of the course are limited in their movement by the admission fees levied on the more exclusive enclosures. The plan clearly indicates how the spatial organisation of the racecourse limits the movements of the working-class race-goer and consequently silences their 'space of enunciation', how bourgeois hegemony has come to control the carnival of the racecourse.

Appendix 11

The Epsom betting ring, 1844

Available in Higgins, *Flat Racing*, illustration no. 11

As the image above indicates the betting ring formed an enclosure out of the bodies of the upper classes who were gambling within the already segregated space in front of the grandstand, this constituting a further means of social zoning and enclosure. In Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) various upper class gamblers meet at the Epsom betting post in an atmosphere of social exclusivity: 'round the betting post a swarming cluster'. It is a clustered enclosure confined to the landed gentry. Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil*, (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1995), p. 12.