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The Leisured Class in 19th Century English Literature

An Examination of the Leisure Habits of the Characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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Introduction

While much of 19th century English society lacked substantial opportunities to engage in non work related activity, its upper classes have been referred to by historians as “the leisured class par excellence” (Cannadine, cited in Baker 78). Productivity gains enabled by the industrial revolution had, by this period, brought about great increases in wealth¹. The upper and upper-middle classes, which owned and profited from the nation’s capital stock, were the main benefactors. Their size and means expanded, and they were increasingly able to disassociate themselves from work and business engagements, and to assign themselves more fully to leisure activities. The eagerness with which this shift was adopted brought about the phenomenon which many now refer to as the ‘leisured class’.

Leisure has since become increasingly available to ordinary people, which has seen it gain greater attention as a topic of study. As the volume of time and money allocated to leisure pursuits has increased (ONS Time-Use Study 2000 & 2005; Taylor), so too has the desire to understand the changes in leisure trends. Interest has been especially strong in understanding and describing the rapid growth of the ‘quick and expensive’ category of leisure activities. The leisure habits of the 19th century ‘leisured class’ have attracted particular attention as a ‘point of outset’ in identifying such trends – “most general histories of modern leisure have a tendency to adopt the period of industrialization as the ‘central time-unit for study’” (Malcolmson et al, cited in Blackshaw 51).

However, as leisure is a fairly recent topic of study, limited accounts exist of the habits of the ‘leisured class’ within the discourse of social research. Baker explains how leisure was largely overlooked by historians during the 19th century, as they “fixed their attention on machines, factories, investments, transportation, demographic change, problems of housing and food supply, and questions of hours and conditions of work” (Barker,76). He claims that the topic continued to be largely overlooked until the early

¹ Real per capita GDP of the United Kingdom rose at an annualised average rate of 0.9% between 1801 and 1901. The strongest growth occurred between 1830 and 1880, during which GDP rose by 1.3% annually. By contrast, GDP growth had averaged only 0.3% over the previous 500 year period (1300 – 1800), while no measurable growth had occurred during the previous 100 years (1700 – 1800). Source: Officer, 2010 – <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukgdp/>

1970s – that it is only “[w]ithin the past few years [that] leisure ... has finally attracted the attention of historians” (Barker,79).

While the topic of leisure was neglected by social researchers of the time, its transit through 19th century England hardly went undocumented. Novelists of the time described the practice in detail, especially in relation to the leisure pursuits of the upper class. While their accounts are primarily for the purpose of entertainment, they do, in many instances, provide what appear to be accurate and detailed portrayals of the leisure habits of the upper class. Three such novels are: *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), by Jane Austen, which details the lives of five daughters of a rural family at the lower cusp of upper class society; *Jane Eyre* (1847), by Charlotte Brontë, which recounts the life of Jane Eyre, who works for a period as a governess in the household of an upper class country gentleman; and, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), by Oscar Wilde, which follows the life of a young, pleasure-seeking aristocrat in London. This essay will examine the leisure habits of the English upper classes as portrayed in these three novels. It will consider gender, wealth and the urban versus rural distinction, in order to determine whether these social characteristics influenced patterns of leisure participation within the leisured classes.

The novels at the focus of this study were selected mainly on the basis of their popularity. As some of the most celebrated English set novels of their time, they are likely to provide portrayals of society which are widely agreed on. The novels also describe leisure behaviour in intimate detail, and from the perspectives of a range of characters within the leisured classes – the ‘well to dos’ and the extremely wealthy, the female and the male, and the country dwelling and city dwelling. Finally, these novels also reflect leisure throughout the 19th century, with *Pride and Prejudice* published in 1813, *Jane Eyre* in 1847 and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1890. This provides the element of scope necessary in establishing a full 19th century perspective.

Defining Leisure

'Leisure' is typically defined as "time ... which lies outside the demands of work, direct social obligations and the routine activities of personal and domestic maintenance" (Bailey, 6). However, this is a fairly broad description and it appears to capture a number of activities which would generally not be viewed as leisure, such as compulsive self-destructive behaviour, involuntary malicious reactions, and sloth or torpor. As a result, further qualifications commonly arise. For instance, that the activity be engaged in 'freely' (Parker, cited in Blackshaw, 11), that it be 'psychologically pleasant' (Cushman & Laidler, cited in Blackshaw, 12), and that it adheres to certain 'characteristic norms' (Kaplan, cited in Blackshaw, 3).

In some instances, leisure has been described more narrowly, as a finite set of discrete activities. For instance, the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS, Time-Use Survey 2005) identifies the term as a set of activities distinguished by performative characteristics, including socialising, sport and outdoor activity, hobbies and games, reading, travel, attending performances of entertainment and culture, listening to music and radio, and using a TV, computer or video (ONS, Time-Use Survey 2005). Such a narrow definition makes it easy to identify instances of leisure engagement, and to describe the leisure habits of a person or larger group. Selwyn adopts such an approach in his analysis of leisure in Jane Austen's novels. In *Jane Austen and Leisure* he distinguishes 10 categories of leisure related activity, including: socialising; visiting pleasure resorts; needlework and art; outdoor pursuits; music; dancing; books; theatricals; toys and games; and, verses, riddles and puzzles (Selwyn, xx-xxi). He then examines the ways in which these activities are portrayed and carried out to convey information about the characters and plots of Austen's novels.

The risk of conceptualising leisure in narrow terms, such as classifying it as a set of distinct activities, is that it may lead to some other activities being overlooked. The diverse nature of leisure, and the associated difficulty in providing a narrowly defined account of it, serves to emphasise this point. The problem of defining the forms which leisure takes was recognised already by Aristotle in the 4th century BC. Of leisure he suggested that it is realised "differently by different persons, and varies according to

the habit of the individual” (Aristotle, cited Blackshaw, 3). Gagnier (2000, 110), in her analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, departs from a detailed categorisation of leisure by activity type, as adopted by Selwyn and the ONS. She identifies expressions of leisure by the quality of experience which they impart. This categorisation is broad in that a certain quality of leisure experience can be pursued by any number of means and through any number of activities. For instance, Gagnier suggests that a hunger for “sensations that would be new and delightful” motivate both Dorian’s ‘collecting and accumulating’ of foreign musical instruments, fabrics, perfumes and jewels etc, and the ‘intellectual and aesthetic contemplation’ behaviour carried out by the ‘young Parisian’ depicted in Lord Wotton’s book (Wilde, 138). It appears to be Wilde’s intention that these activities be related, to give the impression that Dorian is influenced by the young Parisian. However, the view of leisure adopted by Selwyn and the ONS, is unlikely to have facilitated such an association. Within the framework used by the ONS, ‘collecting’ would be analysed as a ‘games and hobbies’ related activity, while ‘intellectual contemplation’ behaviour is likely to have been considered a ‘reading’ related activity. In Selwyn’s approach, it is uncertain how ‘intellectual contemplation’ would be considered, or whether it be captured at all.

This analysis will approach leisure as a set of narrowly defined activities distinguished by performative characteristics – the approach taken by Selwyn and the ONS. The great volume of empirical data on leisure behaviour gathered by the ONS, since they began their Time Use Survey in 2000, has seen this view of leisure become a focus of much recent study and commentary. Adopting a similar view of leisure will help ensure that the findings of this study can be interpreted with those of other recent studies.

The great number of leisure activities detailed within the three novels will make it necessary to consider them within broader categories of activity. Several options exist for such categorisation. For instance, Krueger, in his study of US families by income bracket (Krueger, 9), draws distinction between two broad categories – those of active leisure and passive leisure. ‘Active leisure’ includes physically engaging pursuits, such as exercise and most outdoor activities, while ‘passive leisure’ includes pursuits which are not physically engaging, such as watching television or using a computer. Krueger finds that members of high income families engage in comparatively more active

leisure than those of low income families (Krueger, 12). Meanwhile, Tepper suggests that leisure activities be categorised on the grounds of two characteristics – their economic cost, and the time required for their engagement (Tepper, cited in Taylor, 2007). He thereby distinguishes between four categories of activity – those which are: time and means intensive, such as travel to exotic locations; time intensive but not means intensive, such as reading; means intensive but not time intensive, such as smoking an expensive cigar; and non time or means intensive, such as taking a short walk. Tepper’s approach is useful in that time and cost requirements of leisure activities are generally readily observable. It also provides a useful means for distinguishing between the various leisure activities detailed within *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – the activities described vary a great deal in relation to their cost and time requirements.

Defining the ‘Leisured Class’

The term ‘leisured class’ was coined in 1899, in reference to the “classes... exempt or excluded from industrial occupations, and... reserved for certain employments to which a degree of honour attaches” (Veblen, 3). Such ‘honourable employments’ included activities such as governance, sports and religious instruction (Veblen, 4). The term has since achieved widespread circulation, and continues to receive the attention of contemporary leisure theorists, such as Rojek (2000, 51) and Blackshaw (2010, 73). In conceiving the term, Veblen makes particular reference to ‘the English leisured class’ (Veblen, 97). Much use has since been made of the term in describing the lives of the upper classes of 19th century England (Nunokawa, 96; Cannadine, cited in Baker, 78).

However, it is partially misleading to conceive of the English leisured class as a unified social group. Lives dedicated to the pursuit of leisure, and including little productive work, were available to people from a wide range of groups within English society. The novels central to this study portray characters from a range of positions in the socio-economic hierarchy. The characters at the top of the social hierarchy have large incomes, own great estates and are connected to the nobility through family relation.

Fitzwilliam Darcy, in *Pride and Prejudice*, earns an annual income of £10,000². He also owns a Derbyshire estate of noteworthy splendour and a London townhouse (Wilde, 81). Darcy is connected to the nobility through his mother Lady Anne Darcy (formerly Fitzwilliam). Dorian Gray, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is in similar circumstances to Mr Darcy. He owns a great deal of property, including a 'great house' in Nottinghamshire, a townhouse in London, a house in Algiers and part ownership of a seaside villa in the fashionable French seaside town of Trouville (Wilde, 153). Dorian is also connected to the nobility through his mother, Lady Devereux, and his grandfather, Lord Kelso. The nobility formed what was known as the 'aristocratic class', which was at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy of 19th century England (royalty excluded). This group had the time and means available to participate relatively freely in leisure. They generated income by leasing land from their estates (Bush, 8 & 61) and were therefore free from any compulsion to engage in paid work. The management of leases occupied them to some extent, and some aristocrats were engaged in the running of state (Bush, 5), occupying seats in the House of Lords. However, aristocrats were generally free to pass the majority of their time in whatever manner they desired. They differed in this way from wealthy merchants and professionals, who generally spent a great deal of their time in business. Many of those who became rich from trade during the 19th century aspired to liquidate sufficient trading assets to enable them to buy land and a title, and thereby join the aristocratic class. The aristocratic class therefore became synonymous with wealth and most of England's richest people were of this class³. The Bingley family, in *Pride and Prejudice*, are in the midst of such a shift – from mercantile to aristocracy. Having amassed a fortune in trade, the family's commercial assets were liquidated, giving Charles Bingley a sizable annual income of £5,000 and allowing him to purchase an estate near Derbyshire (Austen, 297). However, Mr Bingley cannot be considered a fully fledged member of the aristocracy, as he lacks a title or family connection to the nobility. Edward Rochester, from *Jane Eyre*, is in a similar position. He owns two large estates and has sufficient means to keep a large staff of servants and travel the world. However,

² This was a very high income at the time. For contrast, solicitors, who were the highest paid professionals in 1815, received an average wage of £447.50 annually. Agricultural labourers received an average wage of only £40.04 annually (Williamson, 1982).

³ Between 1809-1858, 96% of England's 189 millionaires were aristocrats. Between 1858-1879 this figure was 80% (Bush, 61).

he appears to lack any family connection with the nobility. These characters therefore belong to a class of wealthy gentleman landowners called 'the gentry'.

The gentry was a fairly broad class. At its upper end, its members were very wealthy, although lacking in noble connection, while at its lower end they could appear struggling financially. What they had in common was the ownership of land, and an associated income by lease sufficient to free them from the need to engage in work – both paid work and unpaid household tasks. It was for this reason that the class was considered 'gentile'. In the cases of Mr Bingley and Mr Rochester, their wealth affords them luxurious estates and extravagant lifestyles. However, much of the gentry are less well off. The Bennet family, in *Pride and Prejudice*, receive sufficient income to employ servants to carry out all of the laborious household tasks. However, they can afford little beyond this. They make do with but a single carriage and set of horses, which frequently hampers their movements. They are also unable to put away savings for the future maintenance of their daughters, should they go unmarried. The Bennets associate with another family, the Lucases, which are in similarly restricted circumstances. Members of the Lucas family take upon themselves to perform laborious household tasks, such as cooking. Some members of the upper gentry also engaged in work, in the form of roles of local governance and administration (Bush, 12 and Selwyn, 4). Such roles were often lowly paid, or unpaid, although they bore a degree of social standing. In *Jane Eyre*, Mr Ashton is a magistrate of the district, while Sir George Lynn, is a representative of his local electorate (Brontë, 2:122). However, such roles typically did not involve full time employment, and they were engaged in for the achievement of social status rather than financial remuneration (Bush, 12).

At the lower end of the 'leisured classes' were a group of top professionals. Due to their work, members of this class were not, strictly speaking, free to lead lives of pure leisure. They were, however, of sufficient social standing to associate with the leisured classes, and many were able to participate in regular leisure activity despite their work obligations. Selwyn notes that the clergy and law were considered professions which did not incur 'social taint' (Selwyn, 3). Some such professionals were, for this reason, closely associated with the society of the leisured classes. The clergy and law were also the two most highly paid professions in 1815 (Williamson, 1982) and it is

likely that a lawyer, who earned an average annual salary of £448, and a clergyman, who earned £273, could afford a lifestyle similar to that of the gentry. With the addition of some family wealth, many lawyers and clergymen would have gone on to become members of the gentry upon retirement. Selwyn notes that the army also attracted a large number of independently wealthy people during the 19th century – into positions as commissioned officers (Selwyn, 3). Such commissions were available for purchase to those with “the education of a gentleman” and with the means to pay the considerable commission fee (The British Army, 2). Fees varied with the seniority of the position, but the sums were great. Commissions of high rank, such as lieutenant colonel, sold for as much as £40,000 (Allen, 46). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Bennet speaks hopefully of her daughter finding a young commissioned officer ‘of five or six thousand pounds a year’ for marriage (Austen, 25). As commissioned officers received an annual wage of little over £200 (Allen, 48), this suggests that many would have been in possession of substantial independent wealth. These officers would have been sufficiently wealthy to join the gentry on the cessation of their active service. An instance of this is found in *Jane Eyre* in Colonel Dent, who appears to be a member of the minor gentry in Mr Rochester’s society.

The leisured classes accounted for a very small portion of the total population. The National Census of the UK from 1861 shows only 0.8% of the population to be financially supported as proprietors of land or house (Bloy, 2010). This is likely to provide a representation of the share of the population which could be considered primary income earners for aristocratic, minor gentry and upper middle class households. However, in determining the size of these classes, it is not merely sufficient to consider average family size. The size of the households and incomes associated with these classes are likely to have provided for a number of close relatives in addition to a wife and children. *Pride and Prejudice* provides an example of this, in the household of the late Mr Darcy. This household provides not only for the master’s wife and children, but also for the child of a family friend. Other examples of such arrangements are evidenced in Jane Austen’s own life. She grew up in a family of ten and one of her brothers, Edward, was adopted out to a wealthy, childless relative (Tucker, 147). Austen also lived for a number of years under the roof and provision of another of her brothers,

Frank (Fullerton: <http://www.jasa.net.au/jabiog.htm>). Assuming that upper class household units may have consisted of about six members, the aristocratic, minor gentry and upper middle classes combined are likely to have accounted for about 5% of the total population. The Census 1861 also shows 0.4% of the population employed as clergymen, solicitors or attorneys (Bloy, 2010). Households within this group may have been slightly smaller, due to more limited means. If they consisted of five members, the upper professional class would have accounted for 2% of the population. Commissioned officers may have accounted for a further 0.2% of the population⁴. The leisured classes combined are therefore likely to have accounted for a little over 7% of the total population of the 19th century United Kingdom.

Analysis

The characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* engage in a great variety of leisure activities. These can be categorised into four groups, based on their requirements of time and cost. By identifying the extent to which different characters engage in the different categories of activity, it will be possible to examine whether gender, class and the rural versus urban distinction are observed to influence patterns to leisure participation. Leisure activities will be considered time intensive where their engagement demands a substantial part of the day, rather than a mere hour or so. A distinction is, by these means, created between leisure activities which dictate the structure of their participant's day, and those which do not. Activities will be considered non means intensive where no significant monetary costs are necessarily associated with their engagement.

⁴ The number of commissioned officers in the Royal Navy totaled 4,300 in 1810 (*Journal for Maritime Research*, 2010). The Army, in proportion to its relative size, is likely to have employed about three times that number of commissioned officers (Wikipedia). The total number of commissioned officers in the British Armed Forces might therefore have been about 17,300.

Time and means intensive leisure

The novels identify numerous activities which are both time and means intensive. The most frequently occurring of these is travel, which was a costly and time consuming activity for much of the 19th century, since most travel was conducted by horse and carriage prior to the establishment of a national rail network in the 1830s and 40s. The aristocrats and wealthy gentry described in the novels, are observed travelling more frequently, and to destinations further afield. For instance, Mr Rochester, from *Jane Eyre*, spends very little time at his Thornfield estate (Brontë, 2:76) – his primary residence – pursuing instead “wonderings as wild as those of the March spirit” (Brontë, 2:223). During these he settles, for periods, in St Petersburg, Paris, Rome, Naples and Florence (Brontë, 2:224). He claims to have travelled through ‘all the Continent’s lands’ (Brontë, 2:223), and to Jamaica, where he met his first wife (Brontë, 2:211). Dorian, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is not actually observed travelling in the text. However, it is evident that he is a frequent traveller. He recalls trips to Venice, Bavaria, Turkey, Egypt and Paris, and he owns property in Algiers and the French seaside town of Trouville. Characters of the lower leisured classes are merely observed travelling to domestic locations. For instance, Mr Wickham, of *Pride and Prejudice*, takes pleasure trips to London and Brighton during his regimental posting in Newcastle, while Elizabeth Bennet and the Gardiners take a pleasure trip through Derbyshire.

Travel frequently appears in the novels in the form of prolonged visits to friends and family. For instance, Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* stays several weeks with Mr Bingley at his Netherfield estate. Mr Bingley and his family entourage later reciprocate in visiting Pemberly for what appears to be a similar duration. Such visits are not the preserve of the upper gentry. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet and Sir William Lucas are observed visiting the Collins’ in Hunsford for six weeks. The youngest Bennet daughter, Lydia, accompanies family friends to Brighton for a summer of frolic and flirtation, while the eldest daughter, Jane, visits her cousins’ house in London’s Cheapside. Jane’s trip is for a change in scenery, and to see her cousins.

Trips to London were common among the 19th century English leisured classes. They were, to many, an annual affair, timed to coincide with the parliamentary

season and the congregation of upper class society which it brought. The 'London season', as it was known, lasted from February to July (Holland, 2007) and it is likely this in which Darcy and Bingley participate during their stay in London. Mr Darcy's accommodation during this period is not specified, however, it is likely that he either stays at his sister's house, or that he has one of his own. Mr Bingley's accommodation is with his sister's family, in a town house on Grosvenor Street – one of Mayfair's most fashionable addresses during the 19th century (Sheppard, 1980). Dorian, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, appears to reside the greater part of the year at his London 'town house'. However, he regularly visits his country residence, a 'great house' in Nottinghamshire, to entertain companions. Despite the time and cost associated with travel, it appears to be an activity which was widely available to, and enjoyed by, people throughout the leisured classes.

Shooting and hunting have long been associated with the upper classes in England. Regulations have been in place since the 12th century prohibiting the general public from conducting such activities on Crown land (Griffin, 25), making access to privately owned land necessary. Participation in this activity appears widespread among the male characters of the novels. Mr Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice* returns to his Derbyshire estate for 'several weeks shooting' (Austen, 254) – evidence of the time intensive manner in which the activity was carried out. During this period, he also spends a morning shooting at Netherfield together with Mr Bennet (Austen, 266). Mr Rochester's father has also apparently participated in long periods of shooting, travelling to his Ferndean manner during the hunting season exclusively for this purpose (Brontë, 2:308). Dorian Gray participates in an elaborate hunt during his stay at the Duke of Monmouth's. Their large party is drawn around the property by horse and carriage for 'a day's shooting'. Their hunt is aided by a team of staff, which include 'beaters', whose job it is drive game towards the hunter, and 'keepers', who manage the game (Wilde, 213).

Balls and assemblies were large and formal events, which required a great deal of preparation, both for their host and guests. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Bennet and her daughters discuss the Meryton assembly a fortnight in advance (Austen, 7). They then spend the following morning reviewing it together with the Lucas girls (Austen, 16). Despite their rural setting, the Bennets speak of balls as a relatively frequent occurrence

(Austen, 7). The Bennet girls are observed in the attendance of two assemblies during the course of the novel, the one at Meryton and a private ball at Netherfield. The balls of *Pride and Prejudice* attract guests from throughout the leisured classes – from young professionals, such as the commissioned officers and Mr Collins the clergyman, to aristocrats, such as Mr Darcy. Balls were no doubt also available to the urban leisured classes. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian is described as attending the ‘Mayfair Balls’ (Wilde, 142). References to his attention to detail in dressing for balls suggest that he considers them important events (Wilde, 144 & 147).

Riding was not only a means of transport in the 19th century but also a leisurely pastime. Riding might be considered a time intensive activity on the basis of the numerous tasks required in its preparation. The rider must change into suitable riding clothes, saddle and bit the horse, and then carry out a number of similar tasks following the ride. As a result, riding is unlikely to have been engaged in as a quick form of leisure. In *Jane Eyre*, Mr Rochester’s guests are twice described as ‘at the stables’ (Brontë, 2:135 & 159). This provides evidence that they did, most likely, take leisurely rides. It also gives an impression of the great amount of time spent in stable tasks before and after the ride. Riding might also be considered a costly activity. While the importance of horses for transport and industry in 19th century England meant that they were numerous and widespread, most horses were used as labour inputs and were therefore not available for ‘pleasure rides’. While many working class people are likely to have ridden on a regular basis, it would have been carried out for industrious purposes. In the novels female characters are not observed riding for leisure. The females in *Jane Eyre* do not accompany the men at the stables and, on the party’s arrival at Thornfield, Blanche Ingram is the only female described as riding on horseback; the others preferring instead to ride by carriage. The characters in *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are frequently observed riding as a means of transport. However, they are not at any point described riding for leisure.

Time and means intensive activities appear to be available to characters throughout the leisured classes, however, those of the upper leisured classes evidently engage in them on a more frequent basis.

Non time intensive but means intensive leisure

In contrast to society of today, few ‘quick but expensive’ leisure activities appear to have been available to 19th century society. However, some such activities are evident in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Dorian and friends frequently attend the opera, concerts and theatre productions, where they view performances from private boxes. While performances were not necessarily expensive in the 19th century, those of the type attended by aristocratic society would have been very expensive. There would have been so large a difference between the quality of experience of viewing a good performance at an up market venue, such as the opera at Covent Garden, versus that of a low budget production at an East End theatre, such as the one in which Dorian meets Sibyl Vane, that the two activities are hardly comparable. The performances which Dorian attends appear to attract both male and female participants. However, they all appear to belong to aristocratic society.

Dorian and his aristocratic friends also frequent the London clubs, which could be considered a ‘quick but expensive’ form of leisure. While the annual fee for club membership might not have been an exorbitant sum considering the amount of time that many patrons spent at the club, clubs operated strict membership criteria which served to exclude all but the wealthy upper crust of society. The dining, gaming, billiards and socialising which occurred at the clubs were on a casual basis which allowed members to come and go as their schedules permitted. Clubs were mainly located in London and the other large cities, which explains their lack of mention in the country set novels *Jane Eyre* and *Pride and Prejudice*. However, these novels do identify instances of gambling at cards; an activity which appears to be a significant part of club life for Dorian Gray and his aristocratic friends. In *Pride and Prejudice*, characters from throughout the leisured classes are portrayed gambling at cards – in the form of ‘whist’. Professional gentlemen, such as Mr Collins and Mr Wickham, participate (Austen, 67), as do aristocrats, such as Mr Darcy, and women, such as Mrs Bennet (Austen, 262-263).

Time intensive but non means intensive leisure

Several activities appear within the novels which are time intensive but which do not incur significant monetary cost. The reading of books appears to have been a popular activity among characters of both sexes. People in 19th century England had access to books through a number of sources. They could be purchased from booksellers, or borrowed from the collections of circulating libraries, subscription libraries, professional or learned societies, acquaintances, or private book clubs. Some such sources were outside of the means of the working class. For instance, the annual membership fee of a subscription library was high (Eliot, I), while the purchase of a new novel was very expensive⁵. For these reasons, members of the gentry would certainly have had a much broader selection of reading material available to them than member of the working class. However, reading might still be considered a low cost activity on the basis that many working class people would have had access to some form of reading material through their acquaintances. The Bennet girls, in *Pride and Prejudice*, are frequently observed reading for pleasure and self betterment. They appear to source their books from both the circulating library in Meryton, and from the personal libraries of acquaintances. While the central male characters of the novel, Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy, are not portrayed in leisurely reading, the novel identifies several male characters that are, including Mr Collins and Mr Bennet. Of the male characters in the remaining novels, all are shown reading for leisure. Mr Rochester, in *Jane Eyre*, reads himself to sleep on the night of the fire at Thornfield (Brontë, 2:112). Dorian, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is shown reading both fiction (Wilde, 138), and to educate himself in his many hobbies (Wilde, 150). Dorian's aristocratic acquaintances frequently converse on topics brought up in literary journals, such as *The Globe* and the *St. James Gazette*.

Walking appears to be another universally popular activity. All of the main characters in the novels reviewed are observed walking for the expressed purpose of leisure. In *Jane Eyre*, Mr Rochester takes frequent walks in his grounds; both at Thornfield, and, despite his blind state, at Ferndean. Mr Rochester's party of friends

⁵ While novels became increasingly affordable throughout the 19th century, the cheapest novel still cost six Shillings by 1885 (Deirdre, 22). By contrast, a working class person would have earned between three to eight Shillings for sixty hour working week (Porter, 176).

appear to share an interest in walking, as they plan a collective walk to view a gypsy camp. The characters of *Pride and Prejudice* are also portrayed taking frequent walks. Elizabeth Bennet, for instance, appears to walk in the garden on a daily basis, whether at home at Longbourn, or visiting at Netherfield, Rosings or Pemberly. Other female characters in Elizabeth's presence are commonly portrayed accompanying her on these walks, while male characters are portrayed as occasional participants. Mr Collins, Mr Darcy, Mr Bingley, Mr Wickham, Mr Gardiner and Sir William Lucas are all portrayed in company to a walk. Mr Bennet appears to be the only significant male character who does not join in on this activity. Dorian, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is portrayed on the occasional walk. He walks with the Duchess of Monmouth in her garden for an hour, and alone through London's East End for an entire evening.

However, several time-consuming and non means intensive leisure activities are associated more strongly with the female characters of the novels. One such activity is the practicing and performing of music. In *Pride and Prejudice* Mary Bennet practices and performs frequently on the pianoforte, while Georgiana Darcy is said to be in 'constant' practice (Austen, 135). In *Jane Eyre* Blanche Ingram performs on the pianoforte, on which she is considered to have 'remarkable execution' (Brontë, 2:116); likely evidence that she practices frequently. While Blanche and Mr Rochester are both commended for their singing performances, the extent to which they practice singing is unclear. Neither is portrayed in practice. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* produces the only definitive evidence of a male character in regular practice of music. Dorian plays the piano, on which he performs duets together with a female acquaintance, Lady Agatha (Wilde, 32).

Painting and needlework are other activities which are more strongly associated with the female characters. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr Bingley remarks at the accomplishments of 'young ladies' – that they can all "paint tables, cover screens and net purses" (Austen, 32). None of the male characters in the novel are portrayed in such activities. Basil Hallward in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is frequently observed painting. However, he is a professional painter. His painting must therefore be viewed as work, rather than a leisure activity.

Non time and non means intensive leisure

Activities which are neither time nor means intensive are numerous within the novels. Dinner parties are held in a variety of forms. In some cases they are of grand proportion. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian invites large numbers of guests to his London townhouse every Wednesday, treating them to an elaborate dinner and entertainment from the best musicians available. These dinner parties are, for him, a means to make an impression on London society at large. However, dinner parties are not portrayed as necessarily costly and time-consuming. Those held by Mr Rochester, in *Jane Eyre*, during the fortnight's stay of his gentile acquaintances, are more subdued affairs. Other than the arrangement for some additional char girls in the kitchen, his dinners appear to be fairly relaxed events, followed by card play and conversation (Brontë, 2: 119). Dinner parties were apparently also an option for the lower leisured classes. In *Pride and Prejudice*, even Mr Collins and Mr Wickham, along with his mob of officer associates, are invited to one such event at the Philips' Meryton house. This comparatively intimate event consists merely of a supper, followed by gambling at cards and gossip mongering (Austen, 61-68).

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian is also observed 'partying' in quite a different sense. He frequents the opium dens of Bluegate Fields, along with 'ill-famed' dock-side taverns – for the likely purpose of whoring. While highly priced opium and call girl services would certainly have been available in 19th century London, those consumed by Dorian could hardly be considered means intensive. The cost of an ounce of opium in the low class dens of Bluegate Fields would only have been about equivalent to that of a pint of beer (Henderson, 2). Low end whores would have been similarly inexpensive, costing less than £5 in inflation adjusted terms (Smith, 2008).

Letter writing provides a low cost activity which several characters appear to pursue for the purpose of leisure. While writing correspondence with pen and ink was a burdensome process in contrast to the emails of today, it would not necessarily have been a time consuming activity. Longer letters might have taken several hours to complete, however, the novels provide several examples of shorter letters which would not have taken much time. The Bennet girls, in *Pride and Prejudice*, engage in letter

writing with unmatched enthusiasm. When one of them is removed, they maintain a correspondence which occasionally leaves only a day or two between instalments. They also write to friends and family connections. Elizabeth, for instance, maintains regular contact with Charlotte Lucas and Mrs Gardiner. Male characters are also portrayed writing letters in what appears to be the pursuit of leisure. Mr Darcy maintains a frequent correspondence with his sister, while Mr Collins is eager to write to Mr Bennet in every instance courtesy warrants the act. *Jane Eyre* does not reveal any instances of letter writing for the purpose of leisure among the genteel characters. However, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* does, in Dorian's correspondences with Sir Henry and two of his former girlfriends.

The novels contain a diverse range of other leisure related activities which might be considered non intensive in terms of time and means. These include amateur theatricals, non-gambling card games, conversation and solitary rumination. However, it is difficult to discern participatory patterns in relation to these activities, either due to the very large or very small number of instances in which these activities may be observed. It might be reasonably concluded that participation in activities which are neither time nor means intensive is so frequent and widespread, that that this category of activity cannot be associated more strongly with any particular character archetype within the leisured classes.

Conclusion

The novels reviewed provide some evidence of patterns in leisure participation based on the social characteristics considered.

Female characters within the leisured classes appear to participate more frequently in time intensive but non means intensive activities; irrespective of their class status. While reading and walking appear to attract equal participation between the genders, several other activities are associated almost exclusively with the female characters. These include the practicing and performing of music, painting and needlework. The female characters are not observed in means intensive activities as frequently as their male counterparts. For instance, they do not appear to participate in shooting or riding, while their participation in gaming and club life appears to be limited.

Aristocrats, of the 'upper leisured class', appear to engage more frequently in means intensive leisure activities. This is the only class which appears to engage in overseas travel. Aristocrats also appear to engage more frequently in domestic travel, which is evidenced in part by their trips between the several houses they own. Hunting and riding are other examples of means intensive activities which attract more upper class participation.

The city based character, Dorian Gray, engages in a greater variety of means intensive but non time intensive leisure activities than the characters based in country settings. While gambling at cards is popular among country characters, Dorian is the only character observed attending performances and 'clubs'.

While this analysis considers a narrow range of literature, and limited number of leisure class characters, it does suggest possible relationships between social characteristics and patterns of leisure participation. From a gender perspective it suggests that the leisure opportunities available to women, in 19th century English leisured class society, might have been more of the low cost and time consuming (potentially arduous) types. By contrast, men appear to have been freer to engage in forms of leisure which were more costly, and less time consuming. From a class perspective the analysis suggests that leisure was influenced by economic means, with wealthier members of the leisured classes having a greater range of leisure opportunities available to them. The

analysis also suggests that urban residents were more frequent participants in 'quick and expensive' leisure activities, although few activities appear to have been available within this category.

The patterns identified in this study might be contrasted to those of the modern day to provide some insight into the ways in which participation in leisure has changed. Such comparisons might evidence shifts such as: increased participation in the 'quick and expensive' category of activity; reduced participation in time consuming but cheap leisure activity; or, shifts in the relative popularity of a category of leisure activity among the social groups studied.

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