

UCLA

Departmental Honors Theses

Title

"Rebellious 'Malignants' to the Last": Disease, Revolution, and Moral Reform in St. Giles

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8138j5bv>

Author

Cook, Jessica

Publication Date

2013-11-01

Undergraduate

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

“REBELLIOUS ‘MALIGNANTS’ TO THE LAST”: DISEASE, REVOLUTION, AND
MORAL REFORM IN ST. GILES

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY
JESSICA COOK
ADVISOR: DR. HELEN DEUTSCH

LOS ANGELES

NOVEMBER 1, 2013

ABSTRACT

BY: JESSICA COOK

“REBELLIOUS ‘MALIGNANTS’ TO THE LAST”: DISEASE, REVOLUTION, AND
MORAL REFORM IN ST. GILES

Over the course of this paper, I analyze the ways in which bourgeois British social reformers utilized metaphors of disease in depictions of the St. Giles Rookery during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I examine manifestations of this technique from a variety of angles—including, but not restricted to, the epidemiological, political, socioeconomic, and moral upper viewpoint of the upper classes on the Rookery. While I have divided my discussion roughly into three sections (epidemiological/economic, political, and moral), my overarching goal is to illuminate the ways in which these dialogues are highly interconnected. In the epidemiological section, I discuss the influences of contemporary academic medical discourse surrounding anticontagionism and contagionism on social reform depictions of the Rookery. I then analyze the ways in which conservative politicians and reformers associated political radicalism with disease, and the implications of this connection with respect to St. Giles. Lastly, I investigate bourgeois conceptions of the Rookery as morally diseased and discuss social reformers’ proposed solutions by social reformers through an examination of institutionalized charity. By examining St. Giles from these economic, epidemiological, political, and moral perspectives, I hope to elucidate the larger ideological motivations behind bourgeois society’s contempt and disgust for the neighborhood and examine the extent to which public health transformations in early Victorian London catalyzed the proliferation of this viewpoint.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	4
2. FOREWORD.....	5
2. INTRODUCTION: ST. GILES AND THE EMPIRE.....	6
3. PART II: EPIDEMICS AND ECONOMICS.....	10
4. PART III: (YOU SAY YOU WANT A) REVOLUTION: POPULAR RADICAL ENTHUSIASM IN THE ROOKERY.....	35
5. PART IV: REFORMING THE GIN-DRINKING POOR: CHARITY AND ST. GILES.....	50
6. CONCLUSION.....	80
7. APPENDIX.....	82

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Fig. 1: <i>London</i> from <i>Songs of Innocence and of Experience</i> by William Blake.....	82
2. Fig. 2: <i>Gin Lane</i> by William Hogarth.....	83
2. Fig. 3: <i>HOLY THURSDAY</i> from <i>Songs of Innocence</i> by William Blake.....	84
3. Fig. 4: <i>HOLY THURSDAY</i> from <i>Songs of Innocence</i> by William Blake.....	84

I. Foreword

Over the course of this thesis, I seek to explore the early Victorian British bourgeoisie's attitude towards capitalism, transformations in London's public health policies, political radicalism and the French Revolution, and the morality of the poor by focusing specifically on metaphors of disease utilized to depict the London slum of St. Giles. Throughout my examinations, I will analyze a variety of different mediums such as social reform literature, newspaper accounts, medical pamphlets, fictional prose, poetry, popular engravings, and statistical evidence. I will begin each section by providing a wide historical overview of the societal factors influencing each of the aforementioned issues, then zoom in via textual close readings to first elucidate the ideological position of bourgeois social reformers and then critique the inherent problems that such a perspective has for our understanding of the lived experiences of the people residing in St. Giles. Because my overarching goal is to illuminate the extent to which these epidemiological, political, and socioreligious discourses were intimately interconnected in the early Victorian era, I examine historical documents in order to present a cohesive contextual framework for my ensuing literary arguments. My textual examinations then constitute the substantive evidentiary backbone of my arguments by concretely exemplifying the ways in which these literary metaphors of disease exist as byproducts of larger, heavily pervasive contemporary ideological discourses (as literature today still does, of course). Overall, I hope to present a more nuanced analysis of a region scorned and detested in its own period and, in doing so, contribute to a growing body of scholarship on the importance of public health discourse to all aspects of early Victorian society.

II. Introduction: St. Giles and the Empire

The short period between 1790 and 1855 was characterized by a remarkable conflation of epidemiological, political, and socioeconomic events—including two devastating cholera pandemics, the French Revolution, and Britain’s continued ascension as a global imperial superpower—that definitively shaped British society for the next century onward. As the Industrial Revolution progressed into the early nineteenth century, Britain’s economy became increasingly reliant on urban factories rather than rural industries, effectively causing a swift modernization of the capitalist system. London’s population concurrently burgeoned as individuals displaced by the enclosure of common land in the countryside moved to urban areas to find new means of sustenance. This rapid industrialization and mass exodus of people effectively flooded the city, causing a proliferation of substandard housing conditions, sanitary issues due to overcrowded tenant housing, and horrifyingly widespread poverty.

One of the worst slums in London during this period was the St. Giles Rookery, located at the southern end of the St. Giles parish adjacent to Seven Dials, which held notoriety as a haven for prostitutes, thieves, and other immoral renegades. The upper classes unequivocally viewed the neighborhood as embodying, in Raymond Williams’s terms, the oppositional form of residual culture.¹ St. Giles was heavily and uniquely fraught with the same epidemiological, political, and socioeconomic problems that threatened the entire British Empire. For this reason, I assert that by viewing the Rookery as a microcosm displaying the overarching tensions that threatened Britain as a whole, we can better understand the ways in which early Victorian society responded to issues relating to modernization and globalization.

¹ Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory.” In *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London: Verson, 1980), p. 40-41.

The parish of St. Giles-in-the-Fields was built on a former medieval leper hospital built by Queen Matilda, and was also the initial location of the Great Plague outbreak in 1665.² For these reasons, the region was historically associated in the public mindset with epidemic disease. In addition, the Rookery was historically and contemporaneously fraught with religious tension: during the fifteenth century, St. Giles's Fields was the site of a sizeable Lollard gathering that (unsuccessfully) attempted to overthrow the King, and was also the location of Sir John Oldcastle's execution.³ More pressingly, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the inhabitants of St. Giles were prevalently Catholic, due to its large Irish immigrant population (a demographic that earned the neighborhood the nickname "Little Dublin").⁴ Stiff tensions existed between the Catholic inhabitants of St. Giles and Evangelical Protestant reformers, who attempted to convert the Rookery population. The 1780 anti-Catholic Gordon riots, which occurred on both sides of St. Giles (in Lincoln's Inn Fields and Soho), are a clear reminder of the violent flare-ups in public animosity towards Catholics during the period.⁵ Lastly, St. Giles's geographical position between Oxford Street and Holborn (the current location of New Oxford Street) situated it directly adjacent to one of London's main routes connecting St. James, the neighborhood of the powerful and wealthy, and the City of London proper, the seat of British commerce and banking. I argue that from the mid-eighteenth century to the destruction of St. Giles in the mid-1840s, upper class British conservatives and social reformers utilized metaphors of disease to depict the Rookery poor as medically, socioeconomically, and morally infectious, thus effecting the annihilation of the area via the building of New Oxford Street.

² Walter Thornbury, *Old and New London: A Narrative of its History, its People and its Places, Vol. III.* ed. Edward Walford (London: Cassel, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1880), p. 197, 208.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁴ Richard Kirkland, "Reading the Rookery: The Social Meaning of an Irish Slum in Nineteenth Century London," *New Hibernia Review* 16, 1 (Spring 2001), p. 16.

⁵ Thornbury, p. 212.

As a result of London's rapid urbanization, sanitation policy became an urgent issue as a result of sharp increases in waste production and public health crises caused by multiple cholera epidemics that ravaged the city (in 1831, 1848-1849, and 1853-1854).⁶ Underlying the resulting public health measures (most importantly, the 1848 Public Health Act) was the contemporary academic medical debate on the origins of epidemic disease.⁷ Anticontagionists claimed that epidemic diseases were caused by toxic miasma produced by rotting piles of filth, while contagionists contended that diseases were transmitted from person to person via an infectious vector.⁸ I argue that social reformers utilized both anticontagionist and contagionist dialogue in their depictions of St. Giles to portray the area as unstable and infected with a multiplicity of diseases, both medical and metaphorical. These reformers did so by depicting the Rookery as medieval, disgustingly filthy, Oriental, and anti-capitalist to warn their audience that the region posed an imminent threat to more prosperous areas of London.

The British bourgeoisie viewed the new working class produced by the Industrial Revolution as highly volatile, and these fears reached a climax in the 1790s when the French Revolution broke out. British conservatives such as Edmund Burke, fearful that proletariat-led political revolution would spread to England, utilized the contraction of disease as a metaphor for the spread of radical political ideology, classifying the dangerous enthusiasm of the working class as potentially infectious. In addition to provoking a strong backlash from British conservatives, the revolution in France also inspired radical groups such as the London Corresponding Society and influenced major literary figures, including Mary Wollstonecraft,

⁶ Anthony Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 118.

⁷ Michelle Allen, *Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London* (Athens: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2008), p. 30.

⁸ E. A. Heaman, "The Rise and Fall of Anticontagionism in France," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, 12, 1 (1995), p. 4.

Tom Paine, and William Blake. Saree Makdisi has extensively detailed the distinctions between Blake’s antinomian-influenced radicalism and the “hegemonic radicalism” of the authors and societies mentioned above, and I agree that Blake should be seen as belonging to a distinct subset of radicalism due to his refusal to glorify the modern capitalist system or the individual, which are both essential characteristics of hegemonic radicalism.⁹ In addition, however, I would like to propose that by viewing Blake as articulating a viewpoint shared by the inhabitants of St. Giles, we can better understand the importance that non-hegemonic political sympathies, communal experience, and anti-capitalistic impulses held for the people living in the Rookery, and how social reformers specifically rallied against these characteristics in their accounts of St. Giles.

Upper class social reformers also utilized metaphors of disease to portray the “idle” “gin-drinking” poor—who refused to exhibit the Protestant work ethic so important to economic growth and instead engaged in sinful gluttony—as socioeconomically and morally dangerous to modern capitalist society. Reformers such as William Hogarth and Hannah More both condemned gin drinking amongst the poor, arguing that such sinful behavior generated crime and civic unrest.¹⁰ These reform strategies denounced the Rookery neighborhood’s strong sense of communality, arguing that strong communal ties among the poor also actively propagated sin and social anarchy. Rather, bourgeois social reformers championed institutionalized charity as a

⁹ Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Because I am examining poverty in the Rookery from the perspective of bourgeois social reformers (with the exception of William Blake), when I am discussing their accounts I will at times refer to the inhabitants of St. Giles as “the poor,” in keeping with their stereotyped viewpoint of the lower classes as homogeneously idle, drunken, and rowdy. I acknowledge that such an approach is problematic, but my goal in these sections is to most clearly elucidate these social reformers’ motivations and prejudices. I believe that this objective can best be attained by framing the issue in the same ideological perspective that these writers held, if only as a springboard to then examine the inherent dilemmas in such broad classifications. I will analyze resulting issues of identity and representation in a more nuanced fashion through my reading of Blake’s “London” and “Holy Thursday” poems.

better alternative for the poor than communal loyalty, asserting that it allowed the most desperately impoverished and uneducated Londoners to improve their living conditions (although not their social statuses) through hard work and religious devotion. However, aside from viewing charitable giving as a moral duty, these upper class Evangelicals, reformers, and politicians also utilized charity to exert social control over the working class, a motivational standpoint William Blake explores in his “Holy Thursday” poems. Specifically, the upper classes recognized that institutionalized charity offered a means of improving the poor’s morality, mitigating class animosity, and extinguishing lower class political radicalism under the guise of benevolent assistance. I propose that by analyzing the reasons why social reformers saw bourgeois charity as the overarching solution to the Rookery’s political tendencies and public health issues, we can better understand the large role religious beliefs and charity played in controlling political radicalism and urban poverty. Overall, by focusing on the ways in which members of the bourgeoisie utilized disease metaphors in socioeconomic, political, and moral arguments, I hope to provide valuable insight into the nuanced motivations for social reform in the early Victorian era.

II. Epidemics and Economics

Upper class social reformers portrayed the Rookery as ideologically foreign, physically circumscribed, and infected with epidemic diseases to emphasize its pejorative distinctiveness from the emerging centers of capitalism surrounding it. As Richard Kirkland correctly asserts, the London bourgeoisie felt particularly threatened by the Rookery due to what he describes as its “positionality”¹¹—namely, in Fredrich Engel’s words, St. Giles’s proximity to “Oxford Street, Regent Street, [...] Trafalgar Square and the Strand.”¹² For the bourgeoisie, the light-infused

¹¹ Kirkland, p. 20.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

spaces, general excitement, and bustling crowds that characterized such neighborhoods seemed to epitomize London's growing progress and modernity, sentiments Mary Robinson deftly captures in her poem "London's Summer Morning."

However, as urban growth brought these areas into closer proximity with the Rookery, upper class reformers strove to emphasize the distinctions between the two neighborhoods while concurrently warning their bourgeois audience that the Rookery posed a threat to the burgeoning industrialization in neighboring areas. I have chosen a number of accounts, such as those by W. Weir, Thomas Beames, and Charles Dickens, that provide an excellent cross-section of the various concerns and prejudices of early Victorian social reformers,¹³ as examples of a genre of work written by those participating in what Richard Kirkland calls "poverty tourism"¹⁴—visits to the slums made by disinterested upper class individuals to observe the destitute people and their decrepit surroundings. In their accounts, Weir and Beames both portray the Rookery as an infectious manifestation of residual medieval backwardness and assert that the region stands in direct juxtaposition to Victorian goals of teleological advancement. Weir, Beames, and Dickens all emphasize the stagnant piles of filth, darkness, and putrid smell in the region, characterizing it as filled with infectious miasma, a "noxious vapour rising from putrescent organic matter, marshland, etc., which pollutes the atmosphere."¹⁵ Miasma was a putrid olfactory

¹³ I have largely attempted to choose reformers writing in or before the mid 1840s (when the main section of the Rookery was torn down to make way for New Oxford Street), although I include accounts by Beames and Dickens—*The Rookeries of London* (1852) and *Little Dorrit* (published serially starting in 1855, in full in 1857), respectively—because they are important in showing the explicit connections between plague and the Rookery and provide an interesting perspective on public attitudes toward epidemiological discourse in the wake of the 1848 Public Health Act.

¹⁴ Kirkland, p. 19.

¹⁵ "miasma, n.". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford Univ. Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/117825?redirectedFrom=miasma> (accessed October 14, 2013).

signifier of malaria, “an unwholesome condition of the atmosphere” that was thought by anticontagionists to cause “febrile disease[s]” including cholera.¹⁶ These reformers connected the Rookery with plague—either through the usage of Orientalist metaphors or directly—to emphasize the that extent of destruction and morality that would occur if substantial reform was not enacted would be similar to that caused by the 1665 Great Plague, which killed 55,797 Londoners, or roughly 19% of the city’s population.¹⁷ Dickens characterizes the Rookery as a foreign region akin to Egypt, utilizing Egypt’s notoriety as an area endemic to bubonic plague to imply that epidemic diseases—like plague, and by popular association, cholera—were endemic to St. Giles.¹⁸ Beames explicitly connects St. Giles to plague by emphasizing its origins as the epicenter of the 1665 epidemic in London. Weir extends his portrayal of the Rookery as medically diseased into an economic metaphor that depicts the area as infected with idleness, which he sees as highly threatening to the capitalist growth in the adjacent commercial regions. Overall, in addition to constructing an identity of St. Giles as medieval, infected, and foreign, these reformers utilized their portrayals to persuade their upper class readership that the Rookery posed an economic, as well as medical, threat to the growth of adjacent neighborhoods.

In order to examine why so many upper class bourgeoisie social reformers depicted St. Giles as embodying these exact qualities, it is first necessary to understand how they felt about the burgeoning, vivacious areas of London, which they viewed as a collective, binary converse to the Rookery. Mary Robinson’s poem “London’s Summer Morning,” provides an ideal

¹⁶ "malaria, n." OED Online. September 2013. Oxford Univ. Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/112765?redirectedFrom=malaria> (accessed October 14, 2013).

¹⁷ A. Lloyd Moote and Dorothy C. Moote, *The Great Plague: The Story of London’s Most Deadly Year* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2004), p. 10.

¹⁸ LaVerne Kuhnke, *Lives at Risk: Public Health in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1990), p.70. PDF e-book.

example, depicting the emphasis on timeliness, melodious city sounds, and bustling industriousness that characterized the modern urban experience in the thriving regions of London from the perspective of an upper class observer:

Who has not wak'd to list the busy sounds
Of SUMMER'S MORNING, in the sultry
smoke
Of noisy LONDON? On the pavement hot
The sooty chimney-boy, with dingy face
And tatter'd cov'ring, shrilly bawls his trade,
Rousing the sleepy housemaid. At the door
The milk-pail rattles, and the tinkling bell
Proclaims the dustman's office, while the
street
Is lost in clouds impervious. Now begins
The din of hackney coaches, waggons, carts;
While tinmans' shops, and noisy trunk-
makers,
Knife-grinders, coopers, squeaking cork-
cutters,
Fruit-barrows, and the hunger-giving cries
Of vegetable venders, fill the air.
Now ev'ry shop displays its varied trade,
And the fresh-sprinkled pavement cools the
feet
Of early walkers. At the private door
The ruddy housemaid twirls the busy mop,
Annoying the smart 'prentice, or neat girl,
Tripping with band-box, lightly. Now the
sun
Darts burning splendour on the glitt'ring
pane,

Save where the canvas awning throws a
shade
On the gay merchandize. Now, spruce and
trim,
In shops (where BEAUTY smiles with
INDUSTRY,)
Sits the smart damsel, while the passenger
Peeps through the window, watching ev'ry
charm.
Now pastry dainties catch the eye minute
Of humming insects, while the limy snare
Waits to enthrall them. Now the lamp-lighter
Mounts the tall ladder, nimbly vent'rous,
To trim the half-fill'd lamp; while at his feet
The pot-boy yells discordant! All along
The sultry pavement, the old-clothesman
cries
In tone monotonous, and side-long views
The area for his traffic. Now the bag
Is slily open'd, and the half-worn suit
(Sometimes the pilfer'd treasure of the base
Domestic spoiler), for one half its worth,
Sinks in the green abyss. The porter now
Bears his huge load along the burning way;
And the POOR POET wakes from busy
dreams,
To paint the Summer Morning.

When describing the early morning city, the speaker emphasizes the temporal precision with which particular noises begin as Londoners start the day's work. Similarly to a musical conductor, he cues the city's sounds as its inhabitants awaken, repeating "now" to actively announce the entrance of each participant into the bustle.¹⁹ Each new set of noise functions like a harmonic line in a musical score, enhancing the melodious fullness of London's sounds. The

¹⁹ Mary Robinson, "London's Summer Morning" in *Romantic Women Poets, 1770-1838, Vol. I*, ed. Andrew Ashfield (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1997), p. 130.

speaker portrays these noises as highly positive and industrious, depicting the “busy sounds” as entities doing work, rather than as cacophonous byproducts of commercialism.²⁰ Describing servants beginning the day’s work, the speaker observes, “sooty chimney-boy, with dingy face / And tatter’d covering, shrilly bawls his trade, / Rousing the sleepy housemaid.” Here, the chimneysweeper’s yells catalyze the start of productive domestic action by galvanizing the housemaid to begin working. His cries induce physical movement and industry in others, rather than acting as a purely introspective record of his personal experiences.²¹ These sounds also create a viable consumer base that allows venders to more successfully sell their products. The speaker conveys that the “hunger-giving cries / Of vegetable venders” actively produce a market for the items these vender sell, rather than simply filling an already-present demand.²² Here, sound itself becomes the entity necessary to stimulate commerce; it not only advertises the goods for sale, but also actively produces a desire for the venders’ products in those who hear the cries.

When depicting the masses of people in the streets, the speaker focuses on the industriousness, cheerfulness, and vitality of those he observes. I argue that he asserts that the workers exist solely for their jobs by portraying the “noisy trunk-makers, / knife grinders, coopers, [and] squeaking cork-cutters” entirely in terms of their occupation. The speaker’s descriptions focus completely on the actual products being made (trunks, sharp knives, corks); he identifies individuals simply by the actions they perform to create these products.²³ These individuals’ identities are entirely dependent on their job performance—personal qualities or histories do not factor into the narrator’s portrayal. In addition, the speaker represents the workers as contented, healthy, and industrious, professing an upper class idealized viewpoint of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ In this sense, Robinson’s chimneysweeper is antithetical to Blake’s chimneysweeper from *Songs of Experience*.

²² Robinson, p.130.

²³ Ibid.

the working class experience. Describing a domestic scene, the speaker states, “At the private door / the ruddy housemaid twirls the busy mop, / Annoying the smart ‘prentice, or neat girl, / Tripping with band-box lightly.”²⁴ Here, the speaker depicts the housemaid as robust and cheerfully capable. The word “ruddy” connects the housemaid to the rude natural vitality associated with the idealized rural peasantry. Even as the housemaid playfully moves the mop, she still industriously completes her tasks. And, although her lighthearted actions mildly irritate the younger housemaid, the girl still cheerfully skips along as she lights the house’s fires. The speaker portrays younger girl’s irritation at the older housemaid’s actions as a comical yet endearing encounter, rather than an example of deep animosity between the two women.

The speaker also portrays shopgirls highly positively by depicting them as neatly industrious workers, thus diverging from the common cultural stereotype that represented shopgirls as only slightly less promiscuous than prostitutes. In describing a store front, he observes, “Now, spruce and trim, / In shops (where beauty smiles with industry), / Sits the smart damsel; while the passenger / Peeps thro’ the window, watching ev’ry charm.”²⁵ In the early nineteenth century shopgirls were commonly associated with prostitution due to their common occupation as an object of desire.²⁶ Here, however, the speaker does not portray the shopgirl’s beauty as temptingly sensual or immoral, but rather as positive because it allows her to stimulate the *institutionalized* capitalist system, rather than becoming a mistress or a prostitute. While the passersby closely scrutinize her, the speaker argues that the girl’s beauty does not immorally enchant passersby but rather enables her to attract more customers into the store. Thus, the speaker’s phrase “beauty smiles with industry” asserts that beauty and industry both flourish

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lise Sanders, *Consuming Fantasies: Labor, Leisure, and the London Shopgirl, 1880-1920* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2006) p. 203.

(beauty thrives together with industry), but also that girl's beauty radiates industriously—that is, her charms are purposely geared towards sanctioned economic, rather than sensual, ends. The speaker parallels the shopgirl's purpose with the delicious baked goods described immediately after. He states that “pastry dainties catch the eye minute / Of humming insects, while the limy snare / Waits to enthrall them.”²⁷ Here, the alluring pastries entice the flies to enter the store, just as the shopgirl's beauty productively draws in male customers to the establishment. In the case of the sweets, however, the flies become entrapped in deathly lime traps, rather than successfully consuming the desserts. This parallel asserts that the shopgirl's beauty exists only to draw admirers into the store so that they can then buy other goods—like the sweets, she exists only as an object for observers to visually but not physically consume.

Through “London's Summer Morning,” Robinson portrays London from the viewpoint of an upper class observer—she focuses on modern society's increased emphasis on timeliness, conception of identity based on occupation rather than personality or individual experiences, celebration of industrialization, and portrayal of the working class as healthy, cheerful, and industrious. I suggest that early Victorian upper class reformers generally shared a similar viewpoint to that of Robinson's speaker and, as such, actively constructed depictions of St. Giles as the antithetical embodiment of positive modern advancement. Keeping this value system in mind, I want to shift now to their depictions and analyze the various techniques that these reformers used to position the Rookery and its inhabitants as a threat to modern London society.

Before delving into these accounts, however, I want to provide a brief overview of nineteenth century epidemiological discourse, because an understanding of the medical theoretical background is vital to understanding the public health motivations behind their accounts. First, it is important to note that the debate surrounding anticontagionism and

²⁷ Robinson, p. 130.

contagionism refers only to epidemic diseases, such as plague, yellow fever, smallpox, and cholera. Contagion refers to the “transmission of the same disease from a sick person to a healthy one by means of self-perpetuating agents or entities of disease—germs—which resided in bodily fluids and must be alive because they could reproduce.”²⁸ Contagionism public health measures, which had been used successfully in London during the plague, include the construction of lazarettos (quarantine areas, often located by ports) and *cordon sanitaires* (“guarded line[s] between infected and uninfected districts, to prevent intercommunication and spread of a disease or pestilence”) to contain disease contraction within a specific locality.²⁹ Historically, the general, non-medical public widely accepted contagionism as fact,³⁰ although contagionism measures became highly unpopular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with merchants because they heavily restricted commerce.³¹ In contrast, anticontagionism emphasized that rotting piles of refuse in specific locations produced dangerous miasma and that the “continuous generation” of this effluvia caused epidemics.³² Anticontagionists claimed that quarantines actually worsened the spread of epidemic diseases by forcing healthy individuals to remain in an unwholesome environment, exposing them to greater chances of infection (via the increased inhalation of miasma). Anticontagionism was widely accepted among members of the English medical community, and by 1848 it was the dominant theory driving English public health reform (beginning with the 1848 Public Health Act) under Edwin Chadwick. Anticontagionist

²⁸ Heaman, p. 4.

²⁹ "cordon, n." Def. 4. OED Online. September 2013. Oxford Univ. Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/41471?redirectedFrom=cordon+sanitaire> (accessed October 17, 2013).

³⁰ Michael Brown, “From Foetid Air to Filth: The Cultural Transformation of British Epidemiological Thought, ca. 1780–1848,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82, no. 3 (Fall 2008): p. 544. PDF.

³¹ Heaman, p. 4.

³² *Ibid.*

reform measures typically focused on social reform efforts, like improving drainage and removing filth from mucky areas, which actually did help prevent disease, albeit for the wrong theoretical reasons.³³

There is still much current debate about the extent to which anticontagionism and contagionism existed as completely oppositional theories. In the decades following Erwin Ackerknecht's seminal article, scholars typically viewed the two theories as mutually exclusive.³⁴ More recently, Margaret Pelling and Christopher Hamlin have refuted Ackerknecht's representation of these philosophies as antithetical to one another. Pelling argues that Ackerknecht exaggerated distinctions between the two schools of thought.³⁵ Hamlin argues that they overlapped in terms of enacted reform measures, perceived threats (i.e. filth and overcrowding), and some proposed theoretical mechanisms on the physiological mechanisms behind disease contraction, although he reminds us that the same tangible public health actions often stemmed from very different theoretical beliefs.³⁶ E. A. Heaman tracks a wide range of subset theories under both contagionism and anticontagionism, arguing that Ackerknecht exaggerated to some extent, but that the two theories did diverge as the nineteenth century went on.³⁷ Michael Brown aligns with Ackerknecht's views more closely by portraying the two schools as distinct, although he focuses on the theoretical transformations within anticontagionism only.³⁸ However, rather than becoming mired in a discussion over the precise *degree* to which

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Erwin H. Ackerknecht, "Anticontagionism between 1821 and 1867," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 22 (1948): p. 562-93.

³⁵ Margaret Pelling, *Cholera, Fever and English Medicine, 1825-1865* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978).

³⁶ Christopher Hamlin, "Predisposing Causes and Public Health in Early Nineteenth-Century Medical Thought," *Social History of Medicine* 5 (1992): p. 43-70.

³⁷ Heaman, p. 3-25.

³⁸ Brown, p. 515-544.

anticontagionism and contagionism were related, I suggest that by generally accepting that the two theories were (to some extent) concordant, we can much better understand the why these social reformers utilized elements of both theories in their accounts. I contend that by intermeshing both contagionist and anticontagionist theory, they sought universal support for their reform goals, appealing to both members of the non-medical upper classes and to the government's public health policy-makers.

Contemporary medical debate surrounding anticontagionism and contagionism occurred most pressingly in response to Asiatic cholera, the most feared epidemic disease of the Victorian era, which occurred in five major pandemics over the course of the century.³⁹ Cholera first hit England in 1831 as part of the second pandemic, killing 6,536 Londoners.⁴⁰ The disease infected poor individuals at a much higher frequency than those in affluent areas because cholera thrives on overcrowding, unclean water, raw sewage, and inadequate diets consisting mainly of overripe food, which were all found in abundance in the slums.⁴¹ As such, cholera further exacerbated class tensions between the poorest individuals, who had no choice but to remain in the afflicted areas, and the bourgeoisie, who were seemingly more innately immune (due to their intake of fresher foods, which remain in the stomach's acidic environment longer than rapidly expelled rotten foods, and thus theoretically carry less *vibrio cholerae* bacteria into the intestinal tract) and also had the ability to flee to the countryside.⁴²

³⁹ Frank Snowden, "Asiatic Cholera (II): Five Pandemics, podcast video (class lecture). Epidemics in Western Society Since 1600. MOV, 50.5. Accessed August 10, 2013. <http://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-234/lecture-10>.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey R. Ryan, ed. *Pandemic Influenza: Emergency Planning and Community Preparedness* (Boca Raton: CRC, 2009), p. 11. http://books.google.com/books?id=t13C_eWhOX4C&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁴¹ Snowden, "Asiatic Cholera."

⁴² Ibid.

Cholera and plague were highly conflated in the public mindset; indeed, many people believed during the earlier pandemics that cholera was the return of the plague.⁴³ Although cholera was not responsible for the greatest quantity of deaths in the nineteenth century, it was the most feared disease, as plague had been in the fourteenth, due to “its extremely sudden appearance; its exotic and unfamiliar character; the agonizing and gruesome nature of its symptoms; its high case fatality rate; and its predilection for adults in the prime of life, rather than children.”⁴⁴ The large-scale conflation of the two diseases in the public mindset is evident in nineteenth century pamphlets, prints, and other popular printed material. For example, an 1832 cholera pamphlet opens by directly comparing the disease to bubonic plague, stating: “Since the Black Plague slaughtered one fourth of the inhabitants of Europe, in the fourteenth century, no pestilence has ravaged the world to such a frightful extent, and with such unappeasable ferocity, as Sporadic Cholera.”⁴⁵ This opening tactic was highly common in contemporary cholera pamphlets.⁴⁶ Thus, even as advocates of public health reform championed the ways in which the sanitary movement would improve and modernize society, there was also a profound sense in which they looked back to historical epidemics as a way to understand and combat the widespread devastation caused by cholera.

When depicting St. Giles, early Victorian social reformers similarly engaged in a retrospective examination of the Middle Ages to depict the Rookery as an archaic medieval

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ John Warner Barber. *An account of the rise and progress of the Indian or spasmodic cholera: with a particular description of the symptoms attending the disease: illustrated by a map, showing the route and progress of the disease, from Jessore, near the Ganges, in 1817, to Great Britain, in 1831.* (New Haven: Published and sold by L.H. Young, 1832), p.3, sequence 10. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HMS.COUNT:1154236>.

⁴⁶ Pamela Gilbert, *Cholera and Nation: Doctoring the Social Body in Victorian England* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), p. 2.

impediment to societal progress. Weir portrays the Rookery as, in Richard Kirkland's words, "a symbol of the residual, the decaying, and the uselessly medieval," arguing that the neighborhood, like the individual inhabitants who live there, lacks any desire to improve itself.⁴⁷ When describing St. Giles, Weir states, "It is one dense mass of houses, 'so olde they only seemen not to falle.'"⁴⁸ Weir references a line from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* ("so old, it seemed only not to fall"),⁴⁹ yet alters the spelling to mimic that of Middle English. In alluding to a work that includes an overt reference to the medieval period in its title (that of the word "childe"),⁵⁰ Weir builds upon Byron's textual reference to the Middle Ages to overwhelmingly stress the Rookery's medieval nature. Far from attributing nostalgic charm to the Rookery, Weir asserts that St. Giles, unlike other parts of London with medieval origins such as St. James, has negatively remained "unchanged, unchangeable."⁵¹ Through this derisive statement, he contends that St. Giles is an archaic impediment to the advancement of London as a whole: while other neighborhoods have improved in character from similarly dismal origins, St. Giles has remained squalid, archaic, and disappointingly static.

When describing the origins of the neighborhood, both Weir and Beames connect St. Giles with frightening epidemic diseases such as leprosy and plague. In their introductions, both

⁴⁷ Kirkland, p. 19.

⁴⁸ W. Weir, "St. Giles's, Past and Present," in *London*, Vol. III. Ed. Charles Knight, p. 267. PDF e-book.

⁴⁹ Lord George Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Brussels: Du Jardin-Sailly Brothers, 1829), p. 11.

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=SyNbAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&authuser=0&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA11>.

⁵⁰ "child, n." Def. 5. OED Online. September 2013. Oxford Univ. Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/31619?rkey=b3IeDG&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed October 17, 2013).

⁵¹ Weir, p. 258.

highlight St. Giles's status as a leprosy hospital (lazaretto) in the Middle Ages.⁵² By beginning their histories of the Rookery in this manner, both Weir and Beames both immediately stigmatize the region by representing it as a quarantine region for terrifying epidemic diseases. Beames goes so far as to explicitly suggest that contemporary rookeries (meaning slums in general) are akin to lazarettos. When discussing their origins, he questions, "Were they [...] allowed to fester, so they did not infect—upon sufferance, because they had their use—poisoned walls, yet girdled round by certain barriers which confined the pestilence within a given circle?"⁵³ Here, Beames unequivocally portrays rookeries as confined regions where diseased individuals were interned to prevent the spread of infection—in short, as quarantine areas. He suggests that rookeries, although repulsive, are somewhat utilitarian (like lazarettos) in that they enclose infectious people in a specific region, thus preventing the rest of society from contracting the affliction. Beames also explicitly portrays rookeries, such as the one in St. Giles, as localities infected with bubonic plague. After detailing the ravages of the "great plague of 1665, which was supposed to have killed 80,000 people, [and] was only the last of a series,"⁵⁴ he asserts that rookeries are "plague spots which still remain."⁵⁵ Thus, Beames reminds the reader of the Rookery's historical connection with lazarettos, leprosy, and bubonic plague to assert that the region is endemic to horrifyingly destructive diseases and still presents a clear threat to contemporary London.

In portraying St. Giles both as a medieval lazaretto associated with leprosy and plague, Weir and Beames both evoke a parallel between the medieval period and disease that was central to the argument championed by Chadwick and his followers: namely, that sanitary reform was

⁵² "lazaretto, n." Def. 1. OED Online. September 2013. Oxford Univ. Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/106540?redirectedFrom=lazaretto> (accessed October 18, 2013).

⁵³ Thomas Beames, *The Rookeries of London* (1852; London: Frank Cass, 1972), p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7.

progressive and thus necessary for the teleological improvement of society. As Michael Brown notes, Thomas Southwood Smith, a key medical figure behind Chadwick's reform movement, presented "a history of disease prevention within a teleological narrative of social, cultural, and moral progress."⁵⁶ Thus, these reformers exemplify the Rookery as antithetical to the shining goals of modernity so upheld in Victorian society by depicting the region as connected to the two of the most feared diseases of the Middle Ages.

These social reform depictions further emphasize St. Giles's infectiousness by dwelling on the lack of light and congestion of filth in the region, suggesting that infectious effluvia pollute the Rookery's air. He blames the "atmosphere" of St. Giles for corrupting Seven Dials, a formerly affluent region to the south.⁵⁷ In addition, Weir emphasizes the buildup of decaying refuse in the Rookery to highlight that these rotting piles are not only repulsive, but exist as dangerous sources of miasma. Weir attributes the "indescribable [...] smells" he witnesses in St. Giles to "the stagnant gutters in the middle of the lanes, the accumulated piles of garbage, the pools accumulated in the hollows of the disjointed pavement, [and] the filth choking up the dark passages which open like rat-holes upon the highway."⁵⁸ By highlighting the putrid smells in the Rookery, Weir asserts that the area is completely saturated with foul miasma. He also stresses the monumental quantity of rotting refuse piles to contend that these large reservoirs of miasma-producing refuse pose an imminent threat of infection. Weir repeats the word "accumulation" to warn that these large heaps of filth will continue to amass and, in doing so, produce even more toxic effluvia until public health measures improve waste removal in the area. Syntactically, his use of commas connecting the list of highly sensory descriptive phrases mirrors the repetition of the word "accumulation" by building each successive phrase to amplify the horrific nature of the

⁵⁶ Brown, p. 540.

⁵⁷ Weir, p. 259.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

scene. This description of St. Giles is highly similar of one by Southwood Smith of the Middle Ages, which he characterizes as having ““narrow, unpaved, undrained, uncleansed, unlighted streets.”⁵⁹ This similarity illuminates the extent to which Weir’s depictions of the region are highly grounded in the social ideology associated with anticontagionism, which positioned public health reform as positive because it was a modernizing force.⁶⁰ In addition, Weir’s use of the “choking” personifies the passageways, explicitly portraying the streets as corporeal pathways under abnormal bodily conditions. He argues that the Rookery, as a chaotic, refuse-clogged area amid London’s other bustling neighborhoods, is metaphorically akin to a diseased organ system in an otherwise healthy body. Overall, Weir challenges the reader to imagine a scene of nightmarish proportions, explicitly portraying the Rookery as completely defined by the miasma-producing waste lining its streets, and further emphasizes the consequences of this filth on the human body by portraying the entire region as a dysfunctional organ disrupting healthy bodily processes.

Just as Weir argues that St. Giles (the geographical region) is akin to an organ system within the body, he contends that the actual people living in the Rookery are physically diseased. In portraying the *people* in the region, rather than the physical locality of St. Giles itself, as contagious, Weir’s descriptions here align more with the contagionist perspective (unlike the

⁵⁹ Thomas Southwood Smith, “The Common Nature of Epidemics and Their Relation to Climate and Civilization: Also Remarks on Contagion and Quarantine from Writings and Official Reports by Southwood Smith M.D.,” ed. T. Baker Esq. (London: N. Trübner, 1866), p. 35.

⁶⁰ As Michael Brown rightly notes, our contemporary conception of sanitary reform as positive is highly influenced by “our contemporary obsession with cleanliness and postbacteriological notions of disease” (Brown, p. 516). However, in the mid-nineteenth century, many people believed that public health reform was medically and culturally dangerous. Michelle Allen provides a very thorough examination of the widespread opposition and societal anxieties surrounding Chadwickian public health reform. See Michelle Allen, *Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2008).

depictions of filth noted above, which draw heavily from anticontagionist theory by focusing on miasma). He intimates that the people of the Rookery exhibit the early symptoms and risk behaviors (namely excessive alcohol consumption) for cholera, warning his upper class audience that an outbreak could occur at any moment. As the same 1832 medical pamphlet later notes, doctors recorded that cholera victims would often feel “a most subduing feeling of exhaustion” a day or so before falling ill, and as individuals became more afflicted, “the eyes [...] were encircled by a dark colored ring, the features sunk; [...] and the hands and feet shriveled.”⁶¹ In addition, medical professionals believed that insobriety induced cholera: as another 1832 pamphlet cautions, “the chief victims of cholera are the habitually intemperate; [...] a fit of intoxication during the prevalence of the disease is extremely apt to be followed by an attack.”⁶² Weir draws upon similar symptoms and supposed causes in his depiction of the people in Seven Dials, noting “the old with wrinkled parchment skins, [and] the young with flushed swollen faces and heavy eyes.”⁶³ I suggest that the “flushed swollen faces” here refers to signs of the children’s extreme intoxication, which Weir describes in detail later in his account.⁶⁴ By representing the poor in terms of the primary symptoms of cholera, Weir warns that the poor are not only contagious but will continue to become even more threatening to the rest of society if the causes of the disease are left unmitigated. In specifically depicting the young and old as cholera patients, Weir portrays the cyclic nature of such ills, intimating that these infections transcend generations and will continue until the cycle of poverty is broken. In portraying the Rookery as a lazaretto and the people as dangerously ill, Weir argues that the people of St. Giles have the

⁶¹ Barber, p.11, sequence 18.

⁶² Dundee Board of Health, "Report, &c. ": p.3, [http://sites.scran.ac.uk/lamb/cholera-pages/L308\(30\).htm](http://sites.scran.ac.uk/lamb/cholera-pages/L308(30).htm) (accessed October 17, 2013).

⁶³ Weir, p. 267.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

ability to infect individuals from higher levels of society, and contends that urgent reform is necessary to prevent a devastating disease outbreak.

Like Weir, in his account “Seven Dials,” Dickens similarly emphasizes the lack of movement and light in the Rookery to argue that the entire area is infested with miasma that negatively affects the mental and physical health of those who inhabit the region. When surveying the scene, the narrator describes the “unwholesome vapor which hangs over the house-tops, and renders the dirty perspective, uncertain and confined; and lounging at every corner, as if they came there to take a few gasps of fresh air as it has found its way so far, but is too much exhausted already, to be enabled to force itself into the narrow alleys around, are groups of people [...].”⁶⁵ By characterizing the area as filled with miasma (“unwholesome vapor”), the narrator emphasizes that the entire region is endemic to epidemic diseases. This vapor is not only degrading to one’s bodily wellbeing, but causes a loss of disinterested perspective, which harms the ability of the Rookery inhabitants to find a clear means of action to mitigate their poverty. The narrator argues that the Rookery environment taints the mental perspectives of its inhabitants, causing them to engage in laziness, squabbles, promiscuity, and gin drinking rather than industrious labor. The word “exhausted” personifies the air, suggesting that it lacks the energy necessary to carry itself into the deep recesses of the slum. However, this description also portrays the air as a limited resource, like water or food, has been almost entirely consumed by people in more affluent areas of London before it can seep into the Rookery. David Fairer notes in a similar context that Evangelical reformers strongly praised the “trickle-down” of wealth upper class down the social hierarchy to the poorest classes by metaphorically comparing charity

⁶⁵ Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz*, National Library Edition (New York: Bigelow, Brown and Co., Inc, 1920), p. 87-88.

to running bodies of water.⁶⁶ I will return to this concept in more detail when discussing Blake, but here I would like to note that Dickens, like Blake, critiques the effectiveness of this trickle-down effect. Dickens does so by depicting air, rather than water, as a limited resource consumed in large majority by the rich and largely unavailable to the poorest Londoners. Like the stream in Blake's illumination from "Holy Thursday" from *Songs of Experience* that circumvents the deprived child lying on the ground, here the flow of nourishing air does not reach the people of the Rookery who are most in need.⁶⁷ Thus, Dickens's description, like Weir's, emphasizes the Rookery's dangerously enclosed, miasma-choked spaces but largely asserts that this miasma robs the region's inhabitants of the ability to view their situation with any critical distance, thereby entrapping them in a cycle of poverty by forcing them into a lifestyle in which they only consider the short-term rewards of their lazy and immoral behavior, rather than the long term consequences of living in such a situation.

Dickens characterizes the Rookery as an Oriental region similar to that of Egypt, a British colonial target where plague was notoriously endemic. Contemporary accounts detail twenty-one Egyptian outbreaks of plague from 1783 to 1844, including an outbreak in 1799 that devastated Napoleon's troops,⁶⁸ one in 1801 that ravaged recently arrived British troops,⁶⁹ and another in 1835 that reportedly killed 80,000 people in Cairo and 200,000 in Egypt overall.⁷⁰ A number of French physicians, including French Commissioner Etienne Pariset, went to Egypt in 1828 to study an outbreak of plague, which, along with another Egyptian outbreak in 1835, provoked

⁶⁶ David Fairer, "Innocence Reading Experience: Contextualizing Blake's 'Holy Thursday,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 4 (Summer, 2002), p.550.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Heaman, p.6.

⁶⁹ Fleming Mant Sandwith, *The Medical Diseases of Egypt*. Vol. 1 (London: Kimpton, 1905), p.159. PDF e-book.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

intense debate in the medical field over contagionism and anticontagionism.⁷¹ However, plague and Egypt were associated in the minds of the non-medical British public as well as those of the medical academy, a connection Dickens utilizes in his account “Seven Dials” from *Sketches by Boz* to portray the Rookery as akin to the unconquered, exotic Egyptian landscape and thus as plague-ridden. Dickens himself explicitly emphasizes the association between Egypt and the plague in his 1857 serialized novel *Little Dorrit* (which takes place from 1826-1828), a connection through which he explores bourgeois attitudes on anticontagionism and contagionism in the midst of Chadwick’s public health reforms in the 1850s. Like Weir and Beames, Dickens associates the Rookery with plague, but does so by looking eastward, rather than retrospectively.

In his account “Seven Dials,” Dickens portrays Seven Dials, the southernmost part of the Rookery, as a completely foreign, unconquered, bewildering wasteland antithetical to the thriving regions surrounding it. When describing the experience of visiting Londoners first entering into the area, the narrator warns, “The stranger who finds himself in ‘The Dials’ for the first time, and stands Belzoni-like, at the entrance of seven obscure passages, uncertain which to take, will see enough around him to keep his curiosity and attention awake, for no inconsiderable time.”⁷² Giovanni Belzoni was a late eighteenth century Italian explorer who extracted many artifacts from Egypt for the British Museum.⁷³ By portraying Londoners entering the Rookery as adventurous explorers completely unfamiliar with the region, the narrator emphasizes that the Rookery is not an interconnected part of London but rather akin to an uncultivated foreign land. In associating Seven Dials with a British imperial target, Dickens intimates that the Rookery needs to be conquered and civilized by the Empire. Moreover, the narrator’s reference to Belzoni

⁷¹ Heaman, p. 15.

⁷² Dickens, *Sketches by Boz*, p.87.

⁷³ BELZONI. *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art (1822-1842)*, 18, p. 2. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/135922076?accountid=14512>.

inherently portrays the Rookery as archaic and inert, like an undisturbed ancient Egyptian ruin, in direct juxtaposition with the bustling modernity of other areas in London. By representing the Rookery as a harsh foreign environment similar to Egypt, Dickens utilizes British conceptions of the East as distinctly foreign, antiquated, and infected to portray St. Giles as the uncultivated and dangerous antithesis of modern London.

In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens utilizes this same parallel between Egypt and plague, as well as a parallel between plague and cholera, to explore contemporary public opinions about anticontagionism and contagionism. Through *Little Dorrit*'s discussion on lazarettos, which occurs in the context of plague in 1826, Dickens explores contemporary bourgeois public opinion regarding England's large-scale public health reforms, which were galvanized by the 1831 and 1854 London cholera epidemics. The book's English subplot opens in the midst of a conversation between two English gentlemen in quarantine, Mr. Meagles and Arthur Clenham, who discuss the measures instituted in Marseilles to prevent the plague from spreading westward. Dickens depicts Mr. Meagles, a retired banker, as a caricature of the new British middle-class gentleman created by the Industrial Revolution. Mr. Meagles is honest, jovial, well intentioned, and business savvy. However, he condescendingly believes England to be superior to all other nations in all aspects and staunchly opposes the French Revolution. When conversing with Arthur, a British businessman returning to England after living in China for twenty years, Mr. Meagles denigrates the people of Marseilles for loudly yelling in the streets, supposing them to be engaged in political insurrection (we later learn they are protesting the release of a suspected murderer). He characterizes the French people as wild radicals who revolt constantly without cause, rather than fighting for justice or freedom. Rather, Mr. Meagles contends that the French, rather than defending those ideals, oppressively impinge on the rights of lawful citizens by incarcerating them in quarantine, which he sees as both ineffectual and tyrannical. He argues that the French officials would do much better "to let other people along and march on about

their lawful business, instead of shutting 'em up in quarantine!”⁷⁴ Mr. Meagles sees mandatory quarantine as akin to unjust forced imprisonment, a comparison Dickens emphasizes by positioning this episode directly after a scene in a French jail. Mr. Meagles’ opinions on the injustice of enclosing travelers in quarantine ally him with the British merchant class, who argued that lazarettos threatened the growth of British trade overseas by prolonging transit times.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Mr. Meagles sees the public health measures as a false pretense enacted by the French authorities to justify their exertion of absolute power, rather than a necessary oversight. He speculates that if he caught the plague, the French health officials would exploit the outbreak to justify their contagionism safety measures, stating, “I have been waking up, night after night, and saying, [...] *now* these fellows are making out their case for their precautions.”⁷⁶ Mr. Meagles’s sentiments resonate strongly with those of a British *Times* writer in 1854 who railed against Chadwickian public health measures relating to cholera, stating, “the British nation abhors absolute power . . . We prefer to take our chance with cholera and the rest than be bullied into health.”⁷⁷ In short, Mr. Meagles views lazarettos as an unnecessary and tyrannical enactment of strong governmental force, and he views public health measures as highly negative because they threaten his abstract personal rights without tangibly securing his bodily health.

Conversely, Arthur espouses a contagionist point of view, defending the necessity of quarantine and further strengthening the correlation Dickens constructs “Seven Dials” between Egypt and the plague. Arthur reminds Mr. Meagles that the quarantine measures are necessary because the entire group is returning from Egypt, replying, “But as we come from the East, and

⁷⁴ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press Inc., 2008), p. 12.

⁷⁵ Gilbert, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 13.

⁷⁷ Qtd. in Norman Longmate, *King Cholera: The Biography of a Disease* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966), p. 188.

as the East is the country of the plague—.”⁷⁸ Arthur constructs an identity of the Orient wholly in terms of its status as an endemic plague region. Although he has lived in China for most of his life, his characterization of the East is exceedingly simplistic—it reflects the British imperialist conception of the Orient as antithetical to the West in its lack of public health safeguards and medical knowledge. Arthur, in portraying the East as the “country” of the plague, intimates through this binary that the West is distinctly *not*; he implicitly reminds readers that while Egypt struggles to contain a series of massively devastating epidemics, the West had largely eradicated plague over one hundred years before.⁷⁹ In a more general sense, then, Dickens characterizes the Orient as archaic and plague-ridden, a conception that resonates highly with Weir’s depiction of the Rookery. Although Dickens is not explicitly describing St. Giles here, I argue that his association of these characteristics with the East provides important insight into the implications of his earlier metaphor connecting Egypt and the Rookery in “Seven Dials.”

Thus far, I have discussed a number of strategies that Victorian social reformers such as Weir, Beames, and (in a more abstract sense) Dickens utilized to portray the Rookery as infectiously antithetical to other regions in London. Utilizing various tactics, each portrayed the region as medieval, miasma-filled, endemic to epidemic diseases, and foreign. I want to turn now to the ways in which these depictions reflected bourgeois economic fears about the region. More specifically, I argue that the upper class social reformers viewed the region as a dangerous impediment to London’s rapid modernization and portrayed the region as diseased in order to caution the upper classes that the Rookery population could ideologically, as well as physically, infect other regions by spreading idleness to adjacent neighborhoods.

⁷⁸ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, p. 13.

⁷⁹ Frank Snowden, “Plague (I): Pestilence as Disease,” podcast video (class lecture). Epidemics in Western Society Since 1600. MOV, 50.5. Accessed August 10, 2013. <http://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-234/lecture-03>. The last Western plague epidemic occurred from 1720-1722 in Marseilles.

Weir harshly critiques the lack of industriousness and liveliness in the Rookery, implicitly contrasting the lazy inhabitants with the people in other thriving regions (like those in “London’s Summer Morning”). However, even as Weir heightens the sharp distinctions between the Rookery and the vital hubs of commercialism adjacent to it, he concurrently highlights the *lack* of delineation by suggesting that the region’s boundaries are indistinct. I argue that Weir evokes these paradoxical descriptions to warn his contemporary audience that although the contagious qualities of the Rookery inhabitants—such as laziness by capitalistic standards and passionate communal loyalty—presently remain in quarantine, an ideological epidemic could occur at any moment and infect adjacent regions with the same ennui endemic to the Rookery.

In addition to portraying the Rookery poor as cholera victims, Weir harshly critiques its inhabitants for their laziness, depicting them as similar to the stagnant piles of filth that line the streets. He strikingly characterizes St. Giles as a “land of utter idleness” and asserts that this ennui universally affects all inhabitants, regardless of age or gender.⁸⁰ He observes, “men lean against the wall or lounge listlessly about” while “groups of women, with dirty rags hung round them, not put on, cower round the doors.”⁸¹ Even though men and woman perform different gender roles that loosely parallel dominant Victorian gender expectations—in the sense that the men leave the house (to lean against the walls outside) while the women remain inside the doorway—both types of actions equally exhibit exhaustion and laziness. The men comfortably loaf around while the women congregate in public view without fully dressing. By completely defining the Rookery poor through their deliberate inaction, Weir highlights the severity of this idleness epidemic and intimates that the inhabitants are somewhat responsible for their poverty.

Building upon his earlier depictions of St. Giles as a lazaretto, Weir portrays the Rookery as highly distinctive to assure his readership that the area’s diseases and culture remain entrapped

⁸⁰ Weir, p. 267.

⁸¹ Ibid.

(at present) within the Rookery's boundaries. He asserts that St. Giles is "bounded by Bainbridge Street, George Street, and High Street, St. Giles," emphasizing that the region is clearly demarcated by London's physical urban geography.⁸² By precisely stating the exact location of the Rookery, Weir assures his reader that the filth, miasma, and idleness choking the region exists only within the triangular region he mentions. Weir further emphasizes the enormous distinction between the Rookery area to adjacent regions, stating: "unspeakable is the difference between life, however faint, and utter apathy."⁸³ Weir emphasizes this distinction, which he sees as stemming from the "thought, and hope, and exertion"⁸⁴ that still exists in areas adjacent to the Rookery to argue that although the inhabitants of St. Giles have similar socioeconomic statuses to the people living in neighboring regions, the boundaries between the two groups are highly defined. He states that while the individuals on the north side of Oxford Street still retain their status as people due to their strong work ethic and goals, the people of St. Giles are merely "human bodies which move mechanically about amid its pestilential effluvia."⁸⁵ Here, Weir equates aspirations and industriousness with human life itself, and argues that the St. Giles inhabitants are so intrinsically unlike other Londoners that they exist in a non-human, almost zombielike state. Rather than acting as people capable of intellect and dynamic action, the inhabitants of St. Giles have lost the capacity to think and physically control their motion—they have been stripped of the qualities that make them human, and now exist merely as vacuous bodies replete of human drive, agency, or emotion. In portraying the Rookery's physical geography and inhabitants as utterly alien and physically separated from other neighborhoods in

⁸² Weir, p. 267.

⁸³ Ibid. p. 270.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

London, Weir assures his audience that the area's ideologically diseases, while malignant, remain distinctly interned within a clear locality.

Concurrently, however, Weir emphasizes St. Giles's proximity to neighboring centers of commerce to warn his audience that the area, while presently contained, could potentially infect neighboring regions with diseases and destructive ideology. He contends that many Londoners ignore the genuine threat that the Rookery holds towards more affluent areas. Weir relates that people travelling between the western and eastern parts of London via an "airy thoroughfare" that "connects High Holborn with Oxford Street," observe the scene by "merely remarking how shabby fly-blown provision-shops, old furniture repositories, and marine shops look" but think little "of the squalid scenes that lurk behind them."⁸⁶ Weir emphasizes that, unlike the Rookery's miasma-clogged spaces, the areas surrounding the Rookery are well ventilated and filled with salubrious air. However, he asserts that while his bourgeois readers may be familiar with the Rookery, its aesthetically displeasing appearance often deceives Londoners into underestimating the region's true hazardousness. Emphasizing the Rookery's extreme closeness to these areas, Weir states, "One step conveys us from a land of affluence and comfort to a land of hopelessness and squalid want."⁸⁷ In utilizing a hyperbole to convey the St. Giles's proximity to its surroundings, Weir stresses that although the two regions are as disparate as different countries, geographically they are intimately connected. Furthermore, Weir asserts that the Rookery has already begun to corrupt adjacent regions. He states that the Rookery's "limits are not very precisely defined, its squalor fades into the cleanness of the more civilized districts in its vicinity, by insensible degrees, like the hues of the rainbow."⁸⁸ In contrast to other sections of his account where he highlights the Rookery's foreign and starkly delineated nature, here Weir deemphasizes

⁸⁶ Weir, p. 270.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

the strict geographical boundaries constraining St. Giles to warn his audience that the region has already begun to sprawl outwards, infecting adjacent areas with the same filth and squalor that characterizes the worst parts of the Rookery. In portraying this outward spread as a stain that dulls the radiantly unsoiled and refined adjacent neighborhoods, Weir asserts that the Rookery's encroachment threatens the very civility and modernity of these areas. Furthermore, his simile connecting the gradient of filth to a rainbow transmutes his argument into aesthetic, rather than purely social reform or public health, terms. In adding an aesthetic dimension to the poverty in St. Giles, Weir appeals to those in his readership who view the improvement of the slums as a subject unfit for the upper classes but have a keen interest in art and aesthetics. Thus, Weir asserts that region is both completely autonomous but also a source of contagion; its connections to the rest of London are paradoxically barely existent yet imminently threatening.

As we have seen thus far, early Victorian social reformers constructed elaborate metaphors of disease to depict the Rookery as an infectious impediment to modern progress. They did so through a variety of strategies and theoretical backgrounds—alternately portraying St. Giles as medieval, unprogressive, miasma-filled, and Oriental—appropriating elements of anticontagionism and contagionism to assert that the Rookery existed as a volatile threat to the rapidly modernizing urban centers adjacent to it. I now want to examine the ways in which upper class observers and politicians utilized metaphors of disease to characterize popular political radicalism as an infection.

III. (You Say You Want a) Revolution: Popular Radical Enthusiasm in the Rookery

In response to the outbreak of the French Revolution, throughout the 1790s the English bourgeoisie became increasingly apprehensive that the revolution would spread to England. English conservatives such as Edmund Burke viewed popular radical enthusiasm as an infection that, if allowed to spread within the British population, would seriously threaten the future of the

monarchy. Because Burke was one of the leading conservatives of his day, his account is important in understanding the ways in which the upper classes viewed the state political body as akin to the physical human body and therefore understood political radicalism as akin to a destructive disease. Similarly to the way in which I presented Mary Robinson's poem as a celebration of bourgeois capitalism in the previous section, I want begin this section by examining how Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* exists as an encapsulation of bourgeois society's beliefs (here, with regard to political radicalism). In discussing the political debate surrounding the French Revolution, it is not my intention to provide a nuanced overview of the entire 1790s political sphere. Rather, my overarching goal in this section is to roughly constellate the various shades of conservatism surrounding proletariat radical enthusiasm and, in doing so, illuminate the reasons why Blake's drastic departure from this ideology makes him a particularly apt spokesperson for the political sympathies of the people living in the St. Giles Rookery. In order to do so, let us first turn to Burke and the bourgeois conservative stance on the French Revolution to examine why the British upper class viewed liberal radicalism with such a strong sense of anxiety and alarm.

In *Reflections*, Burke passionately elucidates the horrified sentiments of the English conservatives towards the French proletariat by contrasting the loyal and sturdily embodied British with the undutiful French revolutionaries. Representing the British people as a whole, he declares, "we have not yet been completely emboweled of our natural entrails" but instead "have real hearts of flesh and blood."⁸⁹ Burke's emphasis on the British subjects' robust physicality conjoins effervescent bodily health with a "natural" duty to uphold the existing political, religious, and social hierarchies. Burke sees the institution of monarchy as an organic, intrinsically positive form of government—as a vital organ necessary to the functioning of the

⁸⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), p. 128.

state body. He intimates that although checks on British monarchical power have unnecessarily tempered the institution by adding an element of manmade artificiality, Britain's government remains much more in accordance with naturally ordained laws of hierarchy than the French government, which has become completely synthetic. Burke contends that British subjects' bodily stoutness and ability to feel a sense of duty causes them to "fear God; [...] look up with awe to kings, with affection to parliaments, with duty to magistrates, with reverence to priests, and with respect to nobility."⁹⁰ He asserts that a direct connection exists between an individual's robust embodied physicality and the extent to which he upholds the existing sociopolitical order. Burke contends that unlike the French people, who have been "filled, like stuffed birds in a museum, with chaff and rags and paltry blurred sheets of paper about the rights of man," the British subjects' experience of vivacious physicality becomes a metonymic marker of the nation's strength as a whole.⁹¹ Burke contends that the French people no longer physically feel a sense of naturalistic duty towards the monarchy, the only naturally ordained government institution, because ambiguous philistine writings about liberty, rather than corporeal intuition, now determines their loyalties. These radical vulgar tracts have taken the place of the French people's very lifeblood, effectively distancing them from the corporeal vitality that constitutes the human condition itself. Burke contends that because the French revolutionaries rationally uphold intellectual writings championing inherent rights, rather than supporting the established sociopolitical system due to feelings of duty, the French "body" is artificial and lifeless—it exists only as a taxidermied animal in a sepulcher, completely separate from real or embodied experience. Thus, as Burke so clearly elucidates, the British ruling class viewed bodily health and vitality as conjoined with political adherence to existing political, social, and religious

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

systems and (somewhat counter-intuitively) associated lifelessness and lack of vigor with civic disobedience.

Like Burke, Charles Dickens also discusses the possibility that revolution could spread from France to England in his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, specifically pinpointing St. Giles as a politically volatile region where revolt would be likely to break out. Although Dickens published the novel in 1859, the early part of the novel takes place in 1775, making that segment of the narrative contemporaneous with the American War. This temporal allusion to the American War is important for our purposes because it marks a pre-1790s attempt by the British government to (unsuccessfully) quell a popular insurrection enacted by commoners (the American colonists, whom the British viewed as uncouth traitors). I argue that Dickens's mention of St. Giles during the novel's introduction is important both in understanding the region's notorious reputation in the late eighteenth century—when the bourgeoisie feared the region because of its alleged Jacobin political connections—and in the mid nineteenth century—when these apprehensions increasingly began to reflect the upper class conception of the Rookery as a threat to public sanitation, Victorian capitalist growth, and the relative domestic peace that Britain enjoyed (as compared to France and the rest of the Continent, which experienced multiple political uprisings throughout the nineteenth century).

Looking back on the period before the French revolution, Dickens compares the France to England (as Burke did much earlier), but rather than constructing an English identity antithetical to that of France, Dickens foregrounds similarities between the two nations' sociopolitical climates in order to caution the English bourgeoisie that the "symptoms" of political unrest that ignited the French Revolution were highly tangible in England as well. Dickens creates a parallel between St. Giles and the Parisian suburbs, which he later identifies as perilous hotspots of revolutionary fervor (most illustriously, Saint Antoine). Significantly, Dickens chooses the beginning of the novel, the point in which he most famously and clearly

illustrates the comparisons between France and England, to draw these parallels so distinctively. In a passage that comes immediately after a depiction of the judicial cruelties of the French state and a foreboding intimation about the impending revolution in France, Dickens drolly remarks, “musketeers went into St. Giles, to search for contraband goods, and the mob fired on the musketeers, and the musketeers fired on the mob, and nobody thought any of these occurrences much out of the common way.”⁹² This passage, while humorous in its diminutive depiction of the violent police raids and ensuing uprisings in St. Giles, also functions as a somber warning to the British upper classes, which Dickens censures for paying little attention to recurrent rioting in the slums. His alliteration (“mob”/ “musketeers”) diminishes the identity distinctions between the insurgent poor and the infantry soldiers, creating a level of ambiguity as to which party holds power over the other. By suggesting that both parties are interchangeable in their military strength as well as in their names, Dickens intimates that the mob may exist as the (publicly) sanctioned military body, rather than the soldiers. In thus characterizing the state infantry as exchangeable with the multitude, Dickens alludes to the events of the French Revolution, in which the popularly sanctioned mob literally replaced the state military and violently took control of the government. Dickens places these two circumstances in direct comparison to argue that the class tension caused by the cyclic violence between the law enforcement and the English poor could potentially galvanize the same results. He cautions the upper classes not to act similarly to the insensate French aristocracy by viewing the continual rioting in St. Giles as commonplace and benign, when in reality such skirmishes exist as symptoms of popular rebellious fervor that could lead to widespread anarchy if not preventatively controlled.

W. Weir also expresses the same sense of political fear shared by Burke and Dickens, using a seventeenth century pamphlet to exemplify St. Giles’s historical propensity towards

⁹² Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1873), p. 3.

political dissention. He relates a scene from a 1641 pamphlet entitled “The Tapster’s Downfall and the Drunkard’s Joy; or, a Dialogue between *Leatherbeard*, the Tapster of the Sheaves, and Rubynose.” In this dialogue, Rubynose relates the discontent of the St. Giles community in relation to a law passed by Parliament that strictly regulated the sale of “yeomanly beer” while loosening regulations on the sale of “lordly wine.”⁹³ Weir contends that resulting class tensions rendered “St. Giles’s and all its worshippers of John Barleycorn [...] ripe for revolt.”⁹⁴ Here, Weir exemplifies that ruling class blindness as to the highly volatile class relations in St. Giles pushed the region to the brink of revolution in the seventeenth century; thus, he intimates that the same situation could develop again unless the bourgeoisie becomes more sensitive to the plight of the people living in the Rookery. Weir includes this dialogue relating the neighborhood’s historical class tensions to contend that the Rookery is still fraught with the same class anxieties in his contemporary period, explicitly warning that St. Giles has had an “unvarying character [...] from the days of the Commonwealth to those we live in.”⁹⁵ Overall, he presents the Rookery’s historically radical political climate as evidence that the region is still a hotspot of political dissention.

Like Dickens, Weir compares the sociopolitical climate of St. Giles to that of France immediately before the revolution to argue that the upper classes, in remaining ignorant of the presence and true causes of poverty in the Rookery, exacerbate class tensions that could potentially galvanize a proletariat revolution in England. Weir observes that a very large amount of weaponry is for sale in Seven Dials, asserting that the inhabitants would have the technological means to riot if provoked. He states, “theatrical amateurs appear to abound; at least the ample store of tin daggers, blunt cutlasses, banners, halberds, battle axes, &c., constantly

⁹³ Weir, p. 260.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

exposed at a cellar in Monmouth Street, indicate a steady demand.”⁹⁶ Weir depicts the presence of weapons as both menacing and benign, assuring his bourgeois audience of the poor’s latency while also arguing that the Rookery inhabitants have the potential and means to become violent under the correct conditions. Initially, Weir placates the fears of his audience by observing that the weapons seem to be for theatrical purposes. However, his phrase “at least” debunks the assured tone of his initial observation, revealing it as mere speculation rather than tangible observation. He emphasizes the sheer amount and diversity of the weaponry choices, portraying the stores as “ample” and including a detailed categorization of types to argue that the poor have access to a very large amount of armaments. His phrase “constantly exposed” compounds the threat that this situation poses by highlighting that the poor also have unlimited access to these weapons. Weir contends that a thriving arms trade exists, leading the reader to speculate that these weapons likely have a consumer base aside from that of amateur actors.

However, even as Weir uses scare tactics to alert his upper class audience to the latent hazards in Seven Dials, he simultaneously portrays the weapons as harmless and archaic, attempting to shock and enlighten his audience into productive action, rather than simply terrify them into paralysis. In addition to contextualizing the weapons as stage props, Weir emphasizes their unsturdy, unreliable nature by stating that the daggers are made of tin, a highly malleable metal, while the cutlasses are dull. Furthermore, rather than depicting contemporary 19th century weapons (such as bayonets or guns), Weir portrays the weapons as those belonging to medieval or early modern warfare: both the halberd⁹⁷ and the battle-axe⁹⁸ were not used for warfare after the sixteenth century. By associating these weapons with theatricality, Weir classifies this armament trade in one sense as a performance on the part of the lower classes, but concurrently

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁹⁷ "halberd | halbert, n.". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/83367?rskey=R0mLPt&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed November 01, 2013).

⁹⁸ "battle-axe | battle-ax, n.". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/16267?redirectedFrom=battle-axe> (accessed November 01, 2013).

blurs the distinction between performativity and reality to suggest that the Rookery inhabitants will resort to actual violence if left uncontrolled.

After portraying the region as a political threat, Weir proposes a solution to mitigate this problem: he contends that if the inhabitants of the Rookery could be enticed to uphold the same “British” values as the upper classes do, then the neighborhood’s leaders would hold the rest of the subpopulation accountable.⁹⁹ In detailing famous historical inhabitants of the region, Weir extensively focuses on François Thurot, a French privateer and smuggler who preyed on British shipping during the Seven Years’ War. Although Thurot profited extensively at the expense of British merchants, Weir valorizes his biography, describing him as a “gentleman” and stating that he displayed “skill, courage, and humanity” in his escapades.¹⁰⁰ Essentially, Weir argues that even as a French smuggler, Thurot honorably displayed values upheld by British society.

Furthermore, Weir places Thurot hierarchically above the other French inhabitants in Seven Dials—a number of whom settled in the region following the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes¹⁰¹—by stating that although Thurot was French, he “had some Irish blood in his veins”¹⁰² and thus belonged to a slightly more socially prominent racial category (that of the Irish, who were “above” the and French only in that they were domestic, not foreign, enemies). He further praises Thurot, stating that when a group of Frenchmen in a club in Seven Dials were “most grossly [abusing] the English and Irish,” Thurot threw the offenders out of the bar.¹⁰³ Thus, by classifying Thurot as Irish and not French, Weir upholds Thurot as the exemplar of

⁹⁹ Hannah More professes this same idea in “Betty Brown, the St. Giles Orange Girl,” and as such, we will return to this idea in the next section.

¹⁰⁰ Weir, p. 263.

¹⁰¹ Thornbury, p. 200.

¹⁰² Weir, p. 262.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

what an Irishman should be: a righteous protector of British honor. He contrasts Thurot heavily with Captain Paul Jones, a Scottish-born naval commander, whom Weir states was “much of the same caliber and class” as Thurot, but who infamously insulted the British naval captain during the American War.¹⁰⁴ In comparing these two figures, both of whom were born in British domains but differed by respectively defending or insulting British honor, Weir argues that even lower class Irish individuals, such as those living in St. Giles, can achieve true heroism by upholding “British” (meaning bourgeoisie) values. In doing so, Weir seeks to combat the politically radical tendencies of the St. Giles poor by presenting an appealing model by which these individuals can attain acceptance and even praise within mainstream British society by abandoning class ties in favor of nationalistic loyalty towards Britain. Weir asserts that convincing Rookery inhabitants to act in this manner would mitigate popular radicalism by transforming the neighborhood’s leaders into enforcers of British values and political conformity, rather than allowing them to remain as dissident spokespeople geared towards instigating a revolution.

Overall, Burke, Dickens and Weir all portray lower class political insurrection as immanently threatening to the British state as a whole. Burke specifically connects radical insurrection to bodily disease, stating that political loyalty to the existing hierarchy is akin to physically living as an embodied human. Dickens portrays St. Giles as particularly fraught with radical anarchists, warning the bourgeoisie that continuing to ignore lower class grievances and political demonstrations could create sociopolitical conditions similar to those that started the French Revolution. Weir argues that St. Giles’s historical reputation as a region sympathetic to political dissention still remains accurate. He expresses concern over the amount of weaponry available for sale in the Rookery, and asserts that the upper classes need to focus on improving

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 262.

the area before an outbreak of revolution occurs. He proposes that the upper classes should attempt to imbue the inhabitants of St. Giles with “British” values so that the lower classes would virtually police themselves.

However, not all writers of the period classified the poor as politically dangerous. William Blake, while enumerating a position as inherently political as those of Burke, Dickens, and Weir, critiques institutional injustice and the hegemonic beliefs of the Enlightenment-inspired radicals, and instead attempts to give impoverished individuals the agency to represent their own experiences. Blake was born in 1757 at 28 Broad Street (now Broadwick Street)¹⁰⁵ and later apprenticed to engraver John Basire, whose shop was located at 31 Great Queen Street,¹⁰⁶ both of which are within a ten-minute walking distance from the core of the St. Giles slum. Thus, Blake would have been intimately familiar with the Rookery area, and when the speaker in “London” describes the “Marks of weakness, marks of woe” on the visages of the people he passes, we should see this depiction (in one sense) as Blake describing what would have been a daily personal experience.¹⁰⁷ However, while I contend that Blake’s experience of living in such close proximity to the Rookery had an enormous impact on his views on government, religion, imperialism, and poverty, his acute sense of his own perceptual limitations as a poet should cause us to recognize that his depictions in “London” are highly nuanced: the poem is not simply a straightforward list of social ills. On this basis, I disagree with the assumption made by David Erdman that Blake is the speaker of the poem,¹⁰⁸ as well as Michael Ferber’s position that the

¹⁰⁵ Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1998), p.5.

¹⁰⁶ William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Great Albion* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998). Ed. Morton D. Paley, footnote 15, p. 273.

¹⁰⁷ William Blake, “London.” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977). Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. For visual images of the poem, see Fig. 1 in the Appendix.

¹⁰⁸ David Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1954).

speaker is an omniscient observer of truth.¹⁰⁹ These accounts, in their eagerness to highlight Blake's role as a champion of the underprivileged, sacrifice discernment in this matter to provide direct connections and clarity of meaning.

Building off Heather Glen's persuasive arguments about the unreliability and even complicity of the speaker in the suffering he describes, as well as Saree Makdisi's conception of hegemonic radicalism, I instead assert that Blake portrays the speaker specifically as upholding Enlightenment-inspired hegemonic radical views, thus highlighting the erroneousness of the position that at the most basic level, social ills stem from the state's denial of certain rights to all men (what Glen calls "the 'objective' manacles of repression").¹¹⁰ I argue that for Blake, the hegemonic radical viewpoint was still highly repressive because it specifically defined which rights the government unjustly denied to its citizens, and in doing so inherently limited the category of inalienable rights to *only* those specifically advocated for. In this way, the hegemonic radicals were not radical enough because they still conceptualized freedom in terms of certain distinct rights, rather than expanding their definition of liberty to include all rights, both defined and indeterminate. Although I argue that Blake critiques this viewpoint specifically in "London," I do not mean to suggest that he does not critique state-sponsored religion and the government here as well—clearly, he was very much against "State religion, which is the source of all cruelty"¹¹¹ and the tyrannical "iron laws"¹¹² of the government, and these sentiments are explicit throughout the poem. However, I argue that in addition to doing so, Blake also implicitly

¹⁰⁹ Michael Ferber, "'London' and its Politics," *English Literary History*, 48.2 (Summer 1981).

¹¹⁰ Heather Glen, "The Poet in Society: Wordsworth and Blake on London," *Literature and History*, 3 (March 1976), p. 10.

¹¹¹ William Blake, annotations to Richard Watson, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1988), p. 611.

¹¹² William Blake, "The First Book of Urizen," in *Blake: Complete Writings* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972). Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. Plate 23, p. 235.

critiques the hegemonic radical viewpoint by depicting the speaker as unreliable, eventually contending that the tangible and unjust embodied conditions produced by the regulations of the church and state, not simply the abstract repressive ideologies themselves, exist as the true causes of human suffering.

“London” is a poem deeply interested in strict boundaries, in what it means for an area to be physically demarcated and for an individual to exist in a particular space. The speaker, meditatively wandering through the streets of London, states:

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

In the first stanza, the speaker emphasizes his subjective experience of physically moving through the streets near the Thames, contrasting his ability to fluidly “wander” with that of rigidly immobile “charter’d street[s]” and “charter’d Thames,”¹¹³ which have been cartographically, commercially, and bureaucratically affixed in unmovable geographic positions.¹¹⁴ While the speaker can “wander” through these strictly demarcated areas, the inhabitants, like the streets and the boundaries of the river, exist as static objects of observation. The speaker demonstrates his objectifying perception of the people he meets by depicting them

¹¹³ Blake, “London.”

¹¹⁴ David Erdman, E. P. Thompson, Robert Gleckner, Michael Ferber, and many others have extensively detailed the multiplicity of meanings in “charter’d.” See David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, third rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), p. 276-277; E. P. Thompson, “London,” in Michael Phillips, ed., *Interpreting Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), p. 6-10; Robert Gleckner, *The Piper and the Bard: A Study of William Blake* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959); Michael Ferber, “‘London’ and its Politics,” *English Literary History*, 48.2 (Summer 1981), p. 312-313.

as homogenous—in short, as “the poor.” In his eyes, at least, all share the same regularity and depth of melancholic emotion.

Blake contrasts the speaker’s heightened individualism with the speaker’s portrayal of the masses as indistinguishable to highlight the hegemonic radicals’ tendency to portray unity by homogenizing all dissimilarity. As Makdisi argues, Blake would have been highly against “constant identity [and] conformity,” which “would turn the world into a predictable mechanism,” and instead believed, “it is precisely the infinite variety of humankind that makes it ‘alike’ and constitutes its essential unity.”¹¹⁵ Thus, when speaker asserts that the emotions of “every Man,” “every infant” and “every voice” are identical yet antithetically separate from his subjective experience, he does so to differentiate his identity from that of the masses.¹¹⁶ The speaker’s technique of constructing himself as a transcendent figure was a strategy commonly deployed by Enlightenment-inspired radicals, who eschewed all associations with the working class rabble and strove to legitimize their arguments by portraying themselves as distinct from both the corrupt aristocracy and the radically enthused vulgar masses in their heightened consciousness regarding higher ideals (as the term “enlightened” suggests). Hegemonic radicals utilized this strategy to separate themselves both from the British proletariat and from indigenous colonial subjects globally.

In addition, the speaker has the ability not only to entirely represent the people he observes, but also to “mark” them—to actively render them as a homogenous entity by interjecting a commonality not intrinsically present (that of a metaphoric mark). Thus, the speaker does not simply observe already present qualities in the people (as some critics have suggested in the word “see”) but in addition actually affixes these “marks of weakness; marks of woe” to all the people he observes. I disagree with Michel Ferber’s suggestion that Blake did not

¹¹⁵ Makdisi, p. 249.

¹¹⁶ Blake, “London.”

mean “mark” to have this double meaning (“see”/ “stamp”), and that an understanding of “mark” as “impress” would amount to us viewing the speaker as physically painting marks on people on the street. Rather, I argue that this second meaning is essential to our understanding of the shift in the power differential from the initially agency-laden speaker to his impotent fellow Londoners in the second half of the poem.

In all respects, in the first half of the poem the speaker has ultimate agency—he acts and exists in flux, while his physical surroundings remain stiffly delineated and his fellow Londoners become objects of passive observation. While some critics have suggested that the “mind-forg’d manacles” imprison only the masses, as the transcendent speaker laments in his description of the Church’s and the state’s ideological entrapment of the urban poor, I argue that the “mind-forg’d manacles” refer to the speaker as well. Thus, when the speaker states, “in every voice; in every ban, / The mind-forg’d manacles *I* hear” (my emphasis), we should be wary of assuming that the speaker objectively hears the truth.¹¹⁷ Rather, Blake’s clear emphasis on the speaker’s subjectivity in the first two stanzas aligns him with the figure of the transcendent hegemonic radical, who upholds the individual as the basic unit of human experience. In doing so, Blake intimates that the speaker erroneously attributes the Londoners’ suffering to what he sees as the church and government’s withholding of distinct rights, but fails to understand that the common man’s attainment of liberty via the acquisition of only *certain* natural and civil rights is incompatible with true freedom (as Blake see it, which involves, as Makdisi states, “*endless* striving, creativity, making”) (my emphasis).¹¹⁸ In specifically admonishing the people’s lack of specific religious and political freedoms, the speaker implicitly asserts that the state’s withholding of these rights (only) is responsible for the suffering of the British people. However, Blake’s point is that this definition of liberty is just as repressive as the current status quo: while

¹¹⁷ Blake, “London.”

¹¹⁸ Makdisi, p. 281.

it nominally affords individuals a few more rights, in actuality it still drastically limits them from attaining ultimate freedom, which cannot be defined in terms of a specific set of liberties.

In the third stanza, however, Blake's portrayal of the tangible actuality of the victims' shockingly visceral suffering affords the victims the agency to represent their suffering with less mediation from the speaker. Like Glen (who takes her cue from Erik Erickson), I use the word "actuality" here and not "reality" because "actuality" has "connotations of presentness and immediacy" that are essential to our understanding of the significance of temporality in this stanza.¹¹⁹ This stanza marks the crucial apex of the poem, for it is the point at which we realize that the speaker's representation of "reality" here is highly inadequate in describing the subjective "actuality" experienced by those he attempts to speak for. It is important to note that these depictions of actuality are not immediately sequential but *conflated*. For example, Blake conjoins the soldier's emotions directly to his physical suffering, stating, "the hapless Soldiers sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls."¹²⁰ Blake, in thus melding the emotions and suffering of the victims into a single instant, portrays these two entities not as sequential binaries but instead as two complementary parts of the same actuality. The soldier's sorrowful emotions, expressed in the form of a sigh, are synonymous with his blood streaming down the walls of the monarchical seat of power. These confluations cause the breakdown of linear diachronic time—which was so monotonously present in the speaker's wanderings through the city streets—in favor of synchronic time that arrests any type of linear causality and instead throws the immediate suffering of the victims into harsh relief.¹²¹ In destroying this temporal linearity, Blake reverses which parties hold the agency of depiction, allowing the suffering parties to

¹¹⁹ Glen, p. 11.

¹²⁰ Blake, "London."

¹²¹ Makdisi notes this same breakdown of diachronic time via synchronic conflation in *America* and "Ah! Sunflower." See Makdisi, p. 160-161.

represent themselves. As such, the victims themselves gain the ability to “mark”: the chimney-sweepers affix a sense of horror and shock to the walls of the church with their cry, the soldier stains the palace walls with his blood, and the harlot marks the “Marriage hearse”¹²² with her curses.¹²³ Blake expresses the completeness of this break between the first second and third stanzas by including a line separating them on the engraving. By altering the conventions of agency, time, and physical connectivity of the stanzas in the second half of the poem, Blake signals a change that allows the victims to represent their own suffering, which becomes a much more startlingly actual portrayal than that presented through the hegemonic radical speaker’s mediation.

Overall, Blake’s poem radically differs in its portrayal of the working class from depictions by Burke, Dickens, and Weir because it allows (or at least attempts to allow) these individuals to express their own feelings of discontent about the sociopolitical power structures that confine them by conferring an agency of representation to those being observed. Whereas Burke, Dickens, and Weir attempt to speak for the British nation as a whole and, as such, classify discordant political beliefs as dangerous and insurrectionary, Blake’s poem critiques the notion that a single person would be able to accurately represent the experiences or beliefs of an entire class of people, or that one conception of British values or “Britishness” exists (even if the Church and government insist otherwise). Ultimately, Blake argues for a conception of identity as communal, but not as homogenously communal or hierarchical (meaning the positioning of one individual or set of individuals above others)—rather, he asserts that the very diversity of political beliefs and personal narratives fundamentally constitutes the human experience. While Burke, Dickens, and Weir encapsulate the viewpoint of the British bourgeoisie in portraying dissident radical politics as an ideological disease that threatens British society as a whole, Blake

¹²² Blake, “London.”

¹²³ Glen, p. 12.

conversely argues that heterogeneity of beliefs within society is key to ensuring that all individuals can truly attain freedom.

IV. Reforming the Gin-Drinking Poor: Charity and St. Giles

Thus far, we have discussed the ways in which social reformers and politicians classified the Rookery as medically and politically infectious, as well as the inherent complications in those representations. At this point I would like to examine large-scale social reform efforts in St. Giles through the lenses of morality, religion, and institutionalized charity. I chose to examine the Rookery from this angle last because morality holds a distinctly multifaceted position within social reform dialogue. Specifically, the subject of morality is unique in that social reformers portrayed lower class immorality, like economic laziness or radical political sympathies, as a disease, but more importantly emphasized that improving the morality of the poor was the overarching solution to all three problems. In this section, I will examine the techniques of social reformers who classified the Rookery inhabitants as morally diseased, the reasons why they viewed religion and charity as all-important in eradicating poverty, and the darker sociopolitical motivations behind these arguments.

In the mid eighteenth century, widespread urban poverty created conditions where crime and social chaos flourished, convincing many members of the bourgeoisie that society was in crisis—that the debauched actions of the multitudes posed a dire threat to traditional Anglican moral values. Thus, upper class Evangelicals and social reformers characterized the poor as infected with sin and argued that reform in the slums was necessary to contain the spread of immorality before it spread to the upper levels of society. Prominent figures such as William Hogarth and Hannah More portrayed St. Giles as the epitomized location of such immorality, utilizing the region's notoriety to emphasize the dire need for increased legal regulations against gin production. As a solution, they advocated for charity that fostered working class

industriousness, rather than creating an increased desire for handouts. Hogarth's 1751 print *Gin Lane* (Fig. 2) sensationalizes the social chaos and destruction caused by lower-class gin drinking in an attempt to shock the upper classes into action.¹²⁴ The print was a major factor in the reform efforts that successfully galvanized lawmakers to pass the 1751 Tippling Act, a law that drastically reduced the English population's gin consumption, thus ending the "gin craze" that had begun in 1720.¹²⁵ Hannah More depicts St. Giles in a similar light, portraying the Rookery as a starkly immoral area filled with gluttonous, idle, and sinful inhabitants in her short story "Betty Brown, the St. Giles Orange Girl," and encouraging her lower class audience to eschew gin drinking in favor of more industrious, moral behavior. More also argues that the upper classes should provide charity to the poor, but contends that this benevolence should only be given to worthy, hard working individuals, and that it should come in the form of education, rather than money. In contrast, William Blake analyzes the viewpoints espoused by Hogarth and More, portraying charity as an exchange system in which the upper classes expect sociopolitical conformity and economic industriousness in return for their assistance. Blake critiques the upper class perspective on charity through his pair of poems, both entitled "Holy Thursday," from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, by focusing on the superficiality of the annual Holy Thursday ceremony, where charity children were publically showcased at St. Paul's Cathedral.¹²⁶ He first vocalizes the social and moral benefits of institutionalized charity from the perspective of an upper class benefactor in "Holy Thursday" from *Songs of Innocence* and then directly contradicts such a viewpoint in "Holy Thursday" from *Songs of Experience* by criticizing the power differential created by the unequal division of wealth, the commercial motives of the benefactors, and the unmitigated destitution of the beneficiaries. Ultimately, by examining the

¹²⁴ William Hogarth. *Gin Lane*. 1751. Etching and engraving on paper. British Museum, London.

¹²⁵ Ernest L. Abel "The Gin Epidemic: Much Ado About What?" *Alcohol & Alcoholism* 36.5 (2001), p. 131-132.

¹²⁶ Fairer, p. 536.

socioreligious motivations for and critiques of bourgeois social reform in St. Giles, my intention is to provide a more comprehensive picture of the manifold driving forces behind the large-scale Victorian reform efforts later in the century.

In his 1751 print *Gin Lane*, Hogarth propagandistically depicts the urban streets in a state of horrific anarchy as a result of unfettered gin drinking in the slums. He espouses the prevalent conservative viewpoint that gin drinking was a lower class epidemic that produced unruliness, laziness, prostitution, theft and other crimes among the poor. As Ernest Abel points out, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the middle and upper classes viewed gin as an “unprecedented problem not because drunkenness was more commonplace, or because of benevolent concern that it was impairing the health of poor as individuals, but because of its perceived dangers to the Nation’s welfare and economy.”¹²⁷ Among the many reasons why bourgeois critics viewed gin consumption, from a financial perspective businessmen feared that cheap gin prices would hurt horizontal industries by leading to a decline in the consumption of similar products like beer and tobacco.¹²⁸ In addition, excessive gin consumption by members of the proletariat was thought to decrease longevity and bodily strength, which drove up the price of labor by producing a smaller viable workforce and created national security concerns by seriously threatening England’s ability to form an able-bodied army if the nation became involved in a war.¹²⁹ Lastly, gin was widely considered to be a foreign alcohol (as it was created in Holland), and thus eschewal of beer (England’s national drink) in favor of gin was perceived as unpatriotic.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Abel, “The Gin Epidemic: Much Ado About What?” p. 402.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 402-403.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

There is no doubt that gin drinking in the eighteenth century was pervasive: Parliament had unsuccessfully attempted to decrease the public's consumption of gin earlier in the century, but without avail; by 1751 the per capita gin consumption had risen from one to two pints in 1700 to one gallon.¹³¹ However, in 1751 a number of upper class reformers such as Hogarth and his friend, London magistrate and author Henry Fielding,¹³² led public campaigns against gin, which eventually galvanized Parliament to pass the Tippling Act.¹³³ *Gin Lane* contributed to this effort by presenting an exaggerated visual exemplification of the types of immorality and vice that stem from proletariat gin consumption. Because *Gin Lane*'s price of one shilling would have made it financially inaccessible to the lower classes (unless they saw it in a shop window), Hogarth's main audience would have been the upper classes, which had the ability to effect social change by creating new laws or influencing lawmakers.¹³⁴ As Hogarth himself states, in *Gin Lane* "every circumstance of its horrid effects is brought to view *in terrorem*. Idleness, poverty, misery, and distress, which drives even to madness and death, are the only objects to be seen."¹³⁵ Hogarth depicts the effects of gin at their most extreme: large-scale rioting, widespread death, and the annihilation of the domestic sphere—in short, the immanent ruin of society—to terrify the upper classes into enacting laws to halt lower class gin consumption before these consequences occur in reality.

Hogarth demonstrates that gin destroys productive industry, instead producing idleness and widespread civic violence in the Rookery. He contrasts the dilapidated store and homes with the

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 401.

¹³² Ibid., p. 403.

¹³³ Abel, "Did Hogarth Know About Fetal Alcohol Syndrome?" p. 131.

¹³⁴ Christine Riding, "Crime and Punishment." *Hogarth*. By Mark Hallett and Christine Riding (London: Tate, 2006), p. 181.

¹³⁵ William Hogarth, *Anecdotes of William Hogarth, Written by Himself* (London: J.B. Nichols & Son, 1833), p. 64.

flourishing pawnshops, undertaker's shop, and gin distilleries, emphasizing this distinction by juxtaposing the stable undertaker's shop with the falling bricks and leaning buildings surrounding it.¹³⁶ In the pawnshop, a craftsman attempts to pawn his tools, while a woman pawns her cooking pots to buy gin. Hogarth blames gin consumption for the ruin of traditional occupations, arguing that it deprives people of the means they need to earn an honest livelihood by reducing industrious tradesmen to paupers. In addition, he furthers the connection between gin drinking and idleness in his depiction of the snail crawling towards a young boy leaning on a wall, to the left of the young beggar fighting a stray dog for a bone. The snail, a traditional Christian symbol for sloth, further exemplifies that gin completely destroys any productive industry in the poor, causing them to idly loiter instead of work and then scavenge for food.¹³⁷ Instead of working, the poor spend their time lounging around or engaged in drunken street brawls, such as the one erupting outside the distillery. Hogarth thus argues that gin drinking stimulates businesses that thrive on human destruction but destroys Protestant work values and reduces formerly honest workers to rioters and lazy beggars.

In addition, Hogarth argues that the gin drinking most negatively affects females, although the practice remains destructive to all age groups and both sexes in some capacity. Christine Riding notes that gin, which was often referred to with feminine epithets such as "Madam Geneva" or "Mother Gin," was "popularly associated with working-class women" and was thought to have particularly destructive effects on women and children because it lowered birth rates and increased child mortality.¹³⁸ Hogarth propagates this viewpoint, highlighting gin drinking's destructiveness on the domestic sphere by choosing a grotesque drunken prostitute as the central figure in the composition. The woman's breasts and legs are uncovered, and syphilis

¹³⁶ Riding, "Crime and Punishment," p. 190.

¹³⁷ Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1974), p. 430.

¹³⁸ Riding, "Crime and Punishment," p. 190.

sores cover her legs.¹³⁹ Rather than protecting the infant, she lets him fall to his death into a gin cellar as she takes a pinch of snuff. Overall, Hogarth portrays the woman as completely antithetical to the ideal domestic female, who was expected to caring for the children, exhibit modesty, and embody moral perfection.¹⁴⁰

In addition, as Abel points out, the woman may be the child's wet nurse, not his mother.¹⁴¹ The ambiguity of the child's relationship to the woman transforms Hogarth's depiction of extreme maternal negligence from a situation that would have been viewed with shock and pity by the upper class audience into one manifesting the horrifying possibility that their children could be the primary victims of such destructive behavior. As such, Hogarth argues that gin not only causes public unrest and commercial laziness but also threatens the very heart of British life—the private domestic sphere—on all social levels. Hogarth compounds this spectacle by depicting more females drinking in the background. On the right, a woman force-feeds her baby gin to calm him, while two young girls drink gin next to a distillery. A woman next to them gives an old woman gin in a wheelbarrow, while drunken crippled and blind men fight in the streets behind them. While all the individuals in the scene are clearly inebriated, Hogarth only portrays women in the act of drinking gin. Thus, he asserts that gin destroys the natural corporeal relationships essential to the human life cycle: it is responsible for the death of children while their mothers remain indifferent. Here, the children behave as the adults do by partaking in a gin drinking frenzy, while the adults act like immature children, drunkenly neglecting their duties as citizens, workers, and parents.

¹³⁹ Ernest L. Abel, "Gin Lane: Did Hogarth Know About Fetal Alcohol Syndrome?" *Alcohol & Alcoholism* 36.2 (2001), p. 132.

¹⁴⁰ Riding, "Crime and Punishment," p. 190.

¹⁴¹ Abel, "Gin Lane: Did Hogarth Know About Fetal Alcohol Syndrome?" p. 132.

Hogarth contends that gin drinking fosters madness and death, as well as immorality and civic unrest. Hogarth's name for the distillery, "Kilman," makes this lethal connection clear. In addition to the child falling to its death down the staircase, a dancing madman waves a baby impaled upon a spike in the street behind, exemplifying that gin drinking destroys rationality and promotes violence. In the background, two orphaned children cry as their deceased mother is placed into a coffin, and a man who has recently been hanged swings in the second story of a dilapidated building on the right. Ominously, the gaunt male ballad-seller in the foreground recalls the symbolic medieval figure of Death.¹⁴² Besides him sits a black dog, a "symbol of melancholy and depression" that recalls the mythological English hell-hound.¹⁴³ Hogarth utilizes these symbols to magnify the death that follows in the wake of gin drinking, arguing that unless the bourgeoisie restrain the poor, they will continue to spread lethal immorality and civic unrest.

Ultimately, Hogarth visually represents lower class gin drinking as an epidemic that threatens the very foundations of British life to elicit horror from his upper class audience and galvanize lawmakers to produce a swift, effective legal response. He emphasizes the negative effects of gin drinking on capitalistic growth by contending that it destroys working class industriousness. Hogarth also exploits upper class fears of mass rioting by depicting gin drinking as a rabble-rousing call to anarchy for the lower classes, emphasizing the violence and chaos that ensues. He argues that gin drinking threatens the domestic sphere by destroying maternal instincts and promoting sinful promiscuity. Overall, Hogarth utilizes *St. Giles* for his exaggerated portrayal of gin-induced slum anarchy to terrorize his audience into action by displaying the worst possible consequences of such a situation.

¹⁴² Christine Riding, "Introducing Hogarth." Lecture. *Introducing Hogarth*. Tate Britain, London. *Tate*. Tate, 11 July 2011. Web. 4 Oct. 2013.

¹⁴³ Riding, "Crime and Punishment," p. 192.

Similarly, in her short story “Betty Brown, the St. Giles Orange Girl” from *Cheap Repository Tracts*, Hannah More also chooses St. Giles as the setting for her tale contrasting the destructiveness of gin drinking with the benefits of hard work and religious conformity. Many scholars have extensively discussed the *Tracts* and other writing by More such as *Village Politics* within the context of 1790s political discourse.¹⁴⁴ While these discussions are certainly important to understanding the conservative backlash to hegemonic radicalism, it is not within the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive overview of the entire 1790s political sphere. Rather, here I want to shift away from politics and instead focus on More’s socioreligious motivations for advocating for reform in St. Giles by analyzing her viewpoint on charity. By examining More, one of the most influential upper class Evangelical advocates of social reform, I hope to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which charity both helped the people of St. Giles and ultimately led to its annihilation by portraying it as a dangerous harbor for criminality.

More’s *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795-1797) were a series of Evangelical short stories printed in the style of cheap popular literature which she wrote to enlighten the lower classes as to their own immorality, the dangerousness of revolutionary fervor and mass excitement, the benevolence of the upper classes, and the just nature of the existing status quo.¹⁴⁵ The *Tracts* had a wide upper class readership as well, as More shared the text with prominent Evangelicals and aristocratic friends to gain support for her cause and monetary donations to aid with publication.¹⁴⁶ In “Betty Brown,” More details the social and moral assent of Betty Brown, a

¹⁴⁴ See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963); Mona Scheuermann, *In Praise of Poverty: Hannah More Counters Thomas Paine and the Radical Threat* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002).

¹⁴⁵ Susan Pedersen, “Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century England.” *Journal of British Studies* 25.1 (1986), p. 84-85.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Rookery orange seller, as she transforms from a lowly beggar to a devout, successful storeowner. Throughout the tract, More continually reminds her lower class audience of the contemporary upper class's benevolence, positioning the bourgeoisie as a godlike body that providentially cares for the poor. She argues that gin-drinking and strong lower-class communal ties entrap poor individuals in indissoluble cycles of poverty and sin. Overall, More argues that by giving the poor charity in the form of religious education and practical financial teaching, upper class benefactors can save the inherently industrious and moral poor from the corrupting circumstantial influences of poverty, and can inspire these individuals to become exemplars of bourgeois values in the slums.

As with Hogarth, More explicitly pinpoints gin drinking and proletariat community relationships in *St. Giles* as sinful. She argues that lower class communal loyalty entraps individuals in a cycle of immoral behavior under the guise of friendship, tempting even inherently moral individuals such as Betty to engage in vice. The narrator emphasizes that before becoming involved with Mrs. Sponge, the keeper of a dilapidated Rookery public house, Betty was completely independent, acting with "quickness and fidelity" when given a task.¹⁴⁷ She also displayed a strong sense of inherent morality: when fetching porter, she "never was once known either to sip a drop by the way, or steal the pot."¹⁴⁸ However, after Betty becomes friends with a dishonest cook, who subcontracts her to sell small, pilfered household items, Betty's communal ties draw her into increasingly deceitful interactions. Through this cook Betty becomes acquainted with Mrs. Sponge, who pays for Betty to become an orange seller but teaches her to lie and steal from customers. Mrs. Sponge entraps Betty financially by lending her money at very high interest and by forcing her to buy an expensive supper with gin and lodging from Mrs. Sponge every night. Thus, Betty becomes tied in with "a number of others from her own class"

¹⁴⁷ Hannah More, *The Complete Works of Hannah More*, Vol. I (New York: J.C. Derby, 1854), p. 247.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

who are similarly under the control of Mrs. Sponge.¹⁴⁹ More implies that the ensuing social pressure from her fellow Rookery inhabitants to overindulge in sinful gluttony forces Betty to assume a lifestyle which makes it economically impossible for her to repay Mrs. Sponge. As Susan Pedersen notes, in More's *Tracts*, "evil company—and, in some cases, *any* company—is tied to drink" and thus to sin.¹⁵⁰ More argues that communal ties within the Rookery corrupt inherently moral individuals, such as Betty, by pressuring them into sinful behavior under the guise of camaraderie.

However, the narrator emphasizes that Mrs. Sponge manages to trick Betty into this situation ultimately because Mrs. Sponge fills a void created by Betty's lack of tangible benefactors, moving Betty to such gratitude that she cannot realize Mrs. Sponge's true deviousness. After Mrs. Sponge agrees to pay the initial capital to set Betty up as an orange seller, "poor Betty's *gratitude* blinded her so completely, that she had forgot to calculate the vast proportion which this generous benefactress [Mrs. Sponge] was to receive out of her little gains" (my emphasis).¹⁵¹ In pretending to be Betty's friend and benefactress, Mrs. Sponge ensnares her in a continual cycle of sinful behavior—Betty must work dishonestly to repay Mrs. Sponge, place herself in a situation where she is pressured to overindulge in food and gin, and lodge there with her fellow workers, thus incurring even more debt. However, the narrator emphasizes that Betty would have been able to recognize Mrs. Sponge's deceitfulness if she had not been overwhelmed by her delight in finding a benefactress. Because Betty grew up friendless, without a positive (upper class) benefactor to encourage her to devote her industriousness to honest ends, Mrs. Sponge fills this position; therefore Betty's gratitude, which should have been bestowed on a charitable member of the bourgeoisie, instead creates ties of allegiance to the Rookery.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 249.

¹⁵⁰ Pedersen, p. 91.

¹⁵¹ More, p. 248.

More continually emphasizes the contemporary bourgeoisie's beneficence, exhorting her lower class audience to appreciate the charity the upper classes constantly bestow. She utilizes narrative asides to highlight that, unlike Betty, her contemporary lower class readers have many upper class benefactors, and thus do not need to express loyalty toward immoral Rookery leaders like Mrs. Sponge. When describing Betty's upbringing, the narrator states:

She came into the world before so many good gentlemen and ladies began to concern themselves so kindly that the poor might have a little learning. There was no charitable society then as there is now, to pick up poor friendless children in the streets, and put them into a good house, and give them meat, and drink, and lodging, and learning, and teach them to get their bread in an honest way, into the bargain. Whereas, this now is often the case in London; blessed be God who *has ordered the bounds of our habitation*, and cast our lot in such a country!¹⁵²

More argues that the poor have no justification for complaining about their poverty or Britain's wealth divide, as the contemporary poor receive far more generosity from the wealthy than ever before. Here, the narrator portrays Britain's large wealth disparity as a Providential blessing from God, who has "*ordered the bounds*" that delineate contemporary society. To "order" can be used both in the sense of "to arrange in a particular order"¹⁵³ and "to give an order."¹⁵⁴ More, acting as narrator in this aside, utilizes both meanings to assert that God has methodically constructed the contemporary social hierarchy, and has personally commanded that the boundaries of the

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁵³ "order, v." Def. 1. OED Online. September 2013. Oxford Univ. Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132335?rskey=C5n9hL&result=3&isAdvanced=false> (accessed August 28, 2013).

¹⁵⁴ "order, v." Def. 7. OED Online. September 2013. Oxford Univ. Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132335?rskey=C5n9hL&result=3&isAdvanced=false> (accessed October 28, 2013).

existing social order remain intact. Therefore, social upheaval against the status quo is tantamount to rebellion against God.

As such, More argues that any charity given by the upper classes is not a just redistribution of wealth, but rather an entirely benevolent gift, above and beyond the equitable system put in place by God. The narrator contends that if Betty, who was raised before all of these charitable offerings were available, could rise to “so good a situation,” then the contemporary poor should certainly be able to do the same.¹⁵⁵ By assuming an admonishing tone, like that of a parent reprimanding a child, the narrator (meaning a loosely-veiled More) directly addresses the text’s underprivileged readership, stating that the poor should be grateful that the wealthy, who have much more important affairs, have “so kindly” decided to take an interest in their needs.¹⁵⁶ The narrator specifically praises institutionalized charity (in the form of charity schools) as one of the most beneficial new means developed by the upper classes to help those living in poverty, and argues that these organizations are largely responsible for raising poor children to become moral adults. The narrator also lists the necessities that charity schools provide to poor children, continually repeating the word “and” to emphasize the sheer diversity and amount of gifts. In doing so, he implicitly refutes the claim that the upper classes, which have so much wealth, do nothing to alleviate the suffering of the poor. The narrator argues that the upper classes have no obligation to care for those beneath them, but do so purely out of generosity, just as God remains benevolent despite humanity’s egregious sins. More furthers this parallel between God and the upper classes by emphasizing the narrator’s exaltation of God in italics, an outburst that directly follows his glorification of the bourgeoisie’s munificence towards the poor. The semicolon conjoining these two thoughts strengthens this connection between Britain’s two benevolent bodies: the upper classes and God. Ultimately, More positions

¹⁵⁵ More, p. 247.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

the bourgeoisie as akin to a divine body to admonish the poor for their irreverence towards the upper classes, arguing that they should halt their sinful insubordinations against the existent social hierarchy and instead appreciate the extraordinary opportunities given to them.

Making this connection between the bourgeoisie and God even more explicit, More constructs an interpretive allegory when portraying Betty's relationship to the lady, mirroring their first meeting with the biblical events when Jesus is baptized and then goes into the desert to fast and be tempted by Satan. The lady, the narrative's upper class godlike figure, tests Betty, who symbolizes Jesus, to resist the sinful temptations of Mrs. Sponge, who represents Satan (as the alliteration suggests). In the New Testament, this episode begins with God proclaiming Jesus' goodness after his baptism: "And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."¹⁵⁷ Directly after this event, Jesus is "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil."¹⁵⁸ Jesus then forsakes food and drink for forty days in an act of devotion to God, rejecting Satan's attempts to trick him into betraying God by eating. He perseveres by relying on spiritual nourishment instead, and God rewards Jesus for his loyalty by sending angels to tend to him. Very interestingly, the place where Jesus enacts this fast is called "quarantine" in Christian theology.¹⁵⁹ As such, I suggest that More's choice of this passage may resonate much more strongly with popular conceptions of the Rookery as a historical quarantine area (which I have analyzed extensively above) than has previously been realized. At any rate, like Jesus, Betty is similarly assailed by a voice "from a window [that calls] out to her [...]."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Matthew 3:17. *The Holy Bible, King James Version*, (New York: Oxford Edition, 1769). *King James Bible Online*, 2008. <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/>.

¹⁵⁸ Matthew 4:1. *The Holy Bible, King James Version*.

¹⁵⁹ "quarantine, n." Def. 1. OED Online. September 2013. Oxford Univ. Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/155959?rskey=6MQrFH&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed October 17, 2013).

¹⁶⁰ More, p. 249.

Like God praising Jesus, the lady similarly commends Betty, applauding her “honest countenance and civil manner,” and afterwards commands Betty to abstain from her regular nourishments:

Give up that expensive supper at night, drink only one pint of porter, and no gin at all. [...] If you can make a shift to live now, when you have this heavy interest to pay, judge how things will mend when your capital becomes your own. You will put clothes on your back, and, by leaving the use of spirits, and the company in which you drink them, your health, your morals, and your condition will mend.¹⁶¹

The lady’s commands mimic the common biblical dialogue structure in which a member of the Holy Trinity (God in the Old Testament, usually Jesus in the New Testament) commands followers to follow a specific set of instructions in return for future repayment.¹⁶² Her usage of the passive verb “will mend” highlights the heavenly nature of these rewards. The lady promises that in return for relinquishing her present physical delights, Betty will be Providentially rewarded with better health, morality, and a (slightly) higher social situation. Thus, More strengthens her claim that contemporary English society is structured according to God’s will by constructing a biblical allusion to highlight the similarities between the bourgeoisie and God and presenting social conformity and gratitude for charity as a moral imperative, rather than a sociopolitical choice.

In addition to instructing the poor on how they should view the upper classes and endure destitution cheerfully, More also provides a model for her upper class readership on how to provide useful charity to the poor without rewarding laziness. As Pedersen notes, More saw the

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² For specific examples of this structure in the Old Testament, see Isaiah 6:9-10 and Exodus 3:1-11. For examples in the New Testament, see Matthew 4:19 and Luke 6:35-38. Many more instances exist besides the ones I have chosen; these are meant as general structural examples, rather than a comprehensive survey of biblical commands.

“reinvigoration of the ties of hierarchy and dependence between rich and poor” through “discriminating charity” as essential in combating dangerous lower class communality.¹⁶³ To convince her upper class audience of the dire need for such charitable efforts, More first reframes the plight of the poor as that of slaves who have been kept in economic “poverty and bondage all their lives” to gain sympathy from those readers who may have been sympathetic to abolitionist but not domestic reform goals.¹⁶⁴ More herself was a committed abolitionist, and thus it is probable that her upper class readership would have included many such individuals.¹⁶⁵ More positions Mrs. Sponge as a slave-trader who takes advantage of Betty and her fellow orange-sellers’ innocence. When referring to the money Mrs. Sponge makes from these individuals, the magistrate notes that Mrs. Sponge makes a “fixed income of one hundred guineas a year.”¹⁶⁶ The British government created the guinea in 1663 to be used by the slave-trading company called the Company of Royal Adventurers.¹⁶⁷ By connecting Mrs. Sponge’s income to a form of currency historically associated with the slave trade, More further associates Mrs. Sponge’s practices with the injustices of slavery, prompting her upper class readership to visualize the plight of the English poor as akin to that of African slaves. In doing so, she appeals to members of the upper class that oppose slavery, but cannot see that the domestic poor live under similar circumstances of entrapment.

However, More argues that even as the bourgeois have an obligation to help the English poor, she argues that this duty only applies to those members of the poor who are intrinsically

¹⁶³ Pedersen, p. 94.

¹⁶⁴ More, p. 249.

¹⁶⁵ Kerri Andrews, “ ‘More's Polish'd Muse, or Yearsley's Muse of Fire’: Bitter Enemies Write the Abolition Movement.” *European Romantic Review* 20.1 (2009), p. 21.

¹⁶⁶ More, p. 249.

¹⁶⁷ “Guinea, n.” Def. 3a. OED Online. September 2013. Oxford Univ. Press. 1 October 2013.

industrious and moral but have been corrupted by the unscrupulous slum environment.¹⁶⁸ The narrator applauds the lady's unwillingness to provide Betty with money or material necessities until she has tested her morality and industriousness. After the lady learns of Betty's plight, the narrator states that she "would willingly have given the girl the five shillings; but she thought it was beginning at the wrong end. She wanted to try her."¹⁶⁹ Although the New Testament advocates that Christians should provide charity indiscriminately to those in need, the lady eschews this logic in favor of a more pragmatic approach to charitable giving.¹⁷⁰ She decides that teaching Betty how to manage her finances economically will be more helpful than simply giving Betty the five shillings she needs to repay her debt. A magistrate later commends the lady's logic, stating, "It is not by giving to the importunate shillings and half crowns [...] that much good is to be done."¹⁷¹ The magistrate references Benjamin Franklin's adage "God helps them who help themselves"¹⁷² as evidence that the lady's course of action is just, and agrees with the lady that "one of the greatest acts of kindness to the poor [is] to mend their economy."¹⁷³ More utilizes the magistrate's speech to clearly summarize the lady's shrewd approach to charity, justifying the conservative viewpoint that giving money to the poor will only create an idle, lazy population that relies completely on handouts. The lady's charity, which comes in the form of education, places responsibility on Betty to take advantage of the opportunities provided to her. By reframing the problem of poverty in capitalistic terms, More argues that teaching

¹⁶⁸ David Fairer, speaking in the context of Blake's "Holy Thursday" poems, notes that charity school trustees "undertook to feed and clothe the children of the deserving or 'industrious' poor [who were] carefully differentiated from the dissolute or indigent poor" (Fairer 543).

¹⁶⁹ More, p. 249.

¹⁷⁰ "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matthew 5:42).

¹⁷¹ More, p. 249.

¹⁷² Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanac* (New York: H.M. Caldwell Co., 1900), p. 8.

¹⁷³ More, p. 249.

financial management skills, rather than giving monetary or material assistance, is necessary to address the roots of poverty by galvanizing poor individuals to improve themselves without creating the unwanted side effect of lower class idleness.

More portrays the lady's utilitarian practical approach to charity as overwhelmingly successful, emphasizing Betty's passionate outpouring of gratitude towards the lady and intense religious conversion after she separates from Mrs. Sponge. After Betty displays her frugality and industriousness by successfully repaying her debts, the lady bribes Betty with a dress, hat, a bed, household necessities, and dinner every Sunday, on the condition that she go to church and live respectably. Betty agrees, and her new religious education, combined with the lady's sermonizing, persuades her to accept her lowly situation as God's will. As Sam Pickering argues, providing religious education for the poor was very attractive to the upper classes not only for higher religious reasons, but also because it had the added perk of increasing "the stability of society by making the lower classes both moral and satisfied with their lots in life."¹⁷⁴ In persuading Betty to accept her situation, the lady tells her, "In this great town there must be barrow-women to sell fruit" and that although being an orange girl is "a dangerous trade, it need not be a wicked one." The lady reminds Betty that until "Providence points out some safer way of getting your bread," she must set a good example for her fellow workers. Betty responds to the lady's sermon with "tears of joy and gratitude," displaying overflowing emotion at the lady's insistence that she gain a religious education and live according to the lady's dictates.¹⁷⁵ By thus portraying Betty as a docile follower who spreads the lady's message to the rest of her friends in St. Giles, More illustrates that charity is a highly useful means of spreading upper class ideological values to the proletariat, almost like a sort of positive disease. More was consciously aware that the same message has very different impacts depending on the source, as shown by her astute aesthetic

¹⁷⁴ Sam Pickering, "The Cheap Repository Tracts and the Short Story," *Studies in Short Fiction* 12.1 (1975), p. 16.

¹⁷⁵ More, p. 250.

choices in the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, which mimic popular literature in an attempt to disguise the upper class Evangelical roots of the publication.¹⁷⁶ Through Betty, More essentially argues the same message—that creating lower class exemplars of bourgeois values is infinitely more effective in promoting social change than reform efforts that come directly from the upper classes. Overall, she contends that charity is vital in creating industrious and religious paradigms who actually belong to the slum communities that reformers were attempting to improve.

Thus, in “Betty Brown” More admonishes her lower class audience for their animosity towards the upper classes, arguing that the current social order reflects God’s will. She reminds them of the numerous instances of charity that the upper classes present to them, and ultimately encourages them to follow Betty’s example and eschew gin drinking and communal ties, manage their money more wisely, and thus help themselves to achieve a better life. Addressing her upper class audience, she argues that the poverty of inherently moral, hardworking individuals is tantamount to slavery, and that wealthy individuals have a moral responsibility to help those people (and only those) to pull themselves out of destitution through religious and financial education. Ultimately, More provides behavioral templates for both upper and lower class individuals, arguing that poverty and lower class immorality can be ameliorated in deserving individuals by following her guidelines.

In contrast, William Blake portrays the more complex and negative aspects of charitable giving by first espousing an upper class perspective (similar to Hogarth’s and More’s) by praising institutionalized charity in his poem “Holy Thursday” from *Songs of Innocence*. Blake then directly contradicts these sentiments in “Holy Thursday” from *Songs of Experience* to illuminate the darker sociopolitical motivations behind bourgeois charity.

¹⁷⁶ Pedersen, p. 106.

In “Holy Thursday” from *Songs of Innocence*, Blake depicts the annual Holy Thursday procession of six thousand London charity school children to St. Paul’s Cathedral from the perspective of an upper class advocate of institutionalized charity, emphasizing the children’s innocent cleanliness, benign communality, and agency.¹⁷⁷

Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green
Grey-headed beades walkd before with wands as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow

O what a multitude they seemd these flowers of London town
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own
The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs
Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of Heaven among
Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door

The narrator continually emphasizes the children’s virtuousness to highlight the benevolence of charitable institutions, which he credits with preserving the simplicity of these poverty-stricken children. He describes the children as having “innocent faces clean” and “innocent hands,” depictions that actively construct an image of the childhood as pure and unsullied by the corruption and sins of adulthood.¹⁷⁸ Fairer notes that the children’s role as a “symbol of Innocence itself” in the Holy Thursday ceremony was consciously geared towards allowing the preacher to exploit this quality in his appeal for money.¹⁷⁹ The narrator’s overt glorification of *these* children’s purity inherently contrasts the widespread upper-class conception (as seen in Hogarth and Weir) of poor children as highly experienced in sin almost from birth. Thus, the narrator implies that these children have remained untainted due to the benevolence of

¹⁷⁷ Fairer, p. 536.

¹⁷⁸ William Blake, “Holy Thursday.” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977). Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. For visual images of the poem, see Fig. 3 in the Appendix.

¹⁷⁹ Fairer, p. 553.

institutionalized charity, which has saved them from the sinful filth and squalor they were born into. He praises charity schools for improving the spiritual morality of these children, who exalt God and King in the songs they “raise to heaven.”¹⁸⁰ Moreover, in using the word “clean,” the narrator specifically portrays the charity children as physically clean—as sanitarily uncontaminated by the filth of London’s streets.¹⁸¹ Compared to the chimneysweepers in *Songs of Innocence*, who are “lock’d up in coffins of black,”¹⁸² the “Holy Thursday” children dressed in “red & blue & green”¹⁸³ are radiant and even colorful in their innocuous cleanliness. Just as they have been saved from the moral evils of the streets, these children have also been preserved from physical urban filth and disease.

The narrator also depicts the children as orderly and regimented, in accordance with the values of their upper class benefactors. As David Fairer notes, this “disciplined innocence was part of a wider context of regulation” within the charity school system at a time when society’s intense focus on the charity children’s “innocent simplicity [...] could be a function of society’s fears for its own stability.”¹⁸⁴ The narrator, displaying this same intensity of focus, portrays the children’s entrance as a sanctified procession, highlighting the ceremonial deliberateness of the occasion. Metrically, the entire poem is written in fourteeners. However, the tone created by the metrics of the first line, which includes two very uncomfortable consecutive stresses on “Thursday,” contrasts highly with the second line, which is much more conventionally regular. This break from a more expressionistic tone into a highly constrained format mirrors the actions

¹⁸⁰ Blake, “Holy Thursday,” *Songs of Innocence*.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Blake, “The Chimney Sweeper,” *Songs of Experience*.

¹⁸³ Blake, “Holy Thursday,” *Songs of Innocence*.

¹⁸⁴ Fairer, p. 547.

of the children in that line “walking two & two in red & blue & green” into the cathedral.¹⁸⁵ The narrator portrays the children’s movements and attire as highly homogenized. He depicts them all performing the same action (walking) in the exact same manner: the children do not flit excitedly about, or skip, or bounce in place, as children in line are often apt to do. Rather, they all walk purposefully in distinct, well-behaved pairs. The narrator’s descriptions also do not allow for any variety in the children’s attire. Although the children wear different colors—as historically they would have been dressed in the color belonging to their charity, along with a badge—the narrator produces a highly simplified description of their wardrobes, portraying them as red, blue, or green, ignoring any variations of shade or texture.¹⁸⁶ In simplifying the visual significations of difference between the children, the narrator represents them as happily diverse, but only within accepted, disciplined boundaries.

The narrator portrays the children as orderly and regimented to juxtapose them with the agitated masses. As David Fairer notes, charity children were highly politicized in the eighteenth century, as politicians and other upper class activists actively portrayed them as a symbol of the state’s munificence towards the poor.¹⁸⁷ As such, charity children existed as an important model illuminating the potential for charity to organize the vulgar masses—they belonged to the multitudes by birth, but could be transformed into orderly dutiful workers through institutionalized charity. The narrator acknowledges these children’s class status, stating “O what a multitude they seemd these flowers of London town.”¹⁸⁸ In depicting them as fresh, healthy flowers in an urban environment, the narrator connects these children to the idealized idea of the rural poor as natural and industrious in their bucolic innocence. The narrator argues that these

¹⁸⁵ Blake, “Holy Thursday,” *Songs of Innocence*.

¹⁸⁶ Fairer, p. 536.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 540.

¹⁸⁸ Blake, “Holy Thursday,” *Songs of Innocence*.

children, like the rural poor, exist unsullied in a more natural state of poverty separate from the completely degrading, sinful experience of the urban poor. The narrator furthers his distinction between these children and the urban poor by using the word “seemd,” implies that although the children may appear to be part of the mob, in values and behavior they belong instead to the pastoral, industrious class of workers idealized by the bourgeoisie. The narrator makes this juxtaposition explicit by stating, “The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs.”¹⁸⁹ These children have been protected and shepherded, like lambs, from the sinful poverty of the urban working class by upper class benefactors, charitable organizations, and religion. Here, the narrator accentuates their docile and submissive nature to state that these children, like the multitudes, have a single identity, but one that characterized by harmless and ingenuousness—in short, an identity that is essentially antithetical to that of the popular masses. Although are “thousands of little boys & girls,”¹⁹⁰ their multiplicity serves only to more forcefully exalt God, rather than potentially engage in insurrectionary activity. Thus, by recognizing that the children belong to the same socioeconomic class as the vulgar masses yet reclaiming them through their benign and moral nature, the narrator implicitly argues that charitable institutions have the ability to transform the urban proletariat into the orderly, dutiful working class idealized by the bourgeoisie.

In addition, the narrator emphasizes the charity children’s agency to contrast them with the powerless urban poor, contending that charitable institutions have the ability to save the poor from their downward spiral into inertia and sin by giving them opportunities to become devout and industrious. When describing the children’s entrance into St. Paul’s Cathedral, the narrator states “they like Thames waters flow.”¹⁹¹ In highlighting the fluidity of the children’s

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

movements, the narrator argues that even as the children exist in a highly ordered structure, they still have a certain naturalistic freedom. Said another way, the narrator contends that the charity schools' physical and ideological constraints upon these children do not subjugate them, but rather allow them more freedom—they enable the children to escape the mire of poverty that essentially paralyzes the idle urban poor. This association is highly similar to Blake's comparison in "London," where he connotes the speaker's agency by comparing him to the Thames. In both poems, this mobile nature imbues the individual(s) with a sense of agency: they have the ability to navigate spaces freely, in contrast to the strict constraints that bind the urban masses. Like the speaker in "London," these children do not have the same identity as that of the urban poor, although they exist within the same physical urban space. Here, the narrator asserts that the children gain this agency that allows them to escape from the paralyzing slum environment through the benevolence of charity institutions. The implicit paradox, however, is that this upper class benevolence homogenizes and regulates the children's identity by forcing them to exist within the limits forged by bourgeois values, even as it affords them a kind of agency not available to those living in the slums.

Thus, the narrator portrays the children as having agency mediated by institutionalized oversight, a depiction that directly addresses the desire of the upper classes to enable the poor to work industriously but not allow them to gain real political or socioeconomic power that could help them to challenge the existing status quo.¹⁹² In depicting this agency, the narrator contends that the charity children gain a pure and sacred "radiance all their own" by ceremonially praising God and the benevolence of the charities.¹⁹³ Their obedient and grateful outlook on such charity enables them to honor God through the "harmonious thunderings" of song, which "like a mighty

¹⁹² Fairer, p. 543-544.

¹⁹³ Blake, "Holy Thursday," *Songs of Innocence*.

wind they raise to heaven.”¹⁹⁴ However, unlike the vulgar masses, whose multiplicity dangerously undermines established institutions, the narrator depicts the communal agency of these children as innocent and highly positive. The narrator argues that their agency is positive for the upper classes because it enables them to exist (and work) within the confines of bourgeois society, and benign because they gain it by upholding upper class values—by praising state religion and institutionalized charity through song. Furthermore, unlike the collective agency of the mob, which is unrestricted and in conflict with upper class society, “aged men wise guardians of the poor” effectively supervise and define the children’s communal identity, ensuring that they do not invoke their communal agency in ways that would challenge the existing social hierarchy.¹⁹⁵ In short, the narrator applauds the charity system for helping these children out of poverty and giving them agency, while assuring that they will only act in accordance with bourgeois values. Even as he argues that these children’s agency affords them an identity distinct from that of the urban poor, he concurrently emphasizes that the children can only access this agency through established conduits—the children gain power through their newfound status as charity children but remain politically benign, socially confined to behavior allowed by upper class values, and under the control of elderly males. Thus, the narrator emphasizes these children have agency, but of a kind that is politically benign and benefits the upper classes by validating the goodness of religious and charity institutions—essentially, of a kind that is highly tempered by the confines of the existing status quo.

In contrast to the *Innocence* narrator’s viewpoint, in “Holy Thursday” from *Songs of Experience*, the *Experience* narrator decries the orphaned children’s poverty, critiques England’s sizeable wealth divide, and denounces supporters of institutionalized charity who capitalize on the misery of children to glorify the state’s benevolence and prosperity. The speaker argues

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

against the upper class viewpoint that charity children are joyfully grateful of the institutional benevolence afforded to them, arguing that such “charity” is only nominally munificent. He also admonishes those who exalt England’s global prominence, arguing that a nation’s status should be measured in terms of the prosperity of its poorest people, not its richest. In utilizing this pair of poems to analyze the complexities of institutionalized charity, Blake argues that both viewpoints are necessary for the reader to fully understand the issue, but ultimately creates a more persuasive argument for the *Experience* narrator’s viewpoint: namely, that charity is a form of social control that benefits upper class benefactors much more than their destitute recipients.

In “Holy Thursday” from *Experience*, the narrator questions the very tenants of the Holy Thursday ceremony that the *Innocence* narrator exalts, arguing that such an event cannot be joyful or holy when the charity children remain poverty-stricken. He relates the same Holy Thursday processional scene as the *Innocence* narrator from a drastically different perspective:

Is this a holy thing to see,
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine.
And their fields are bleak & bare.
And their ways are fill'd with thorns.
It is eternal winter there.

For where-e'er the sun does shine,
And where-e'er the rain does fall:
Babe can never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.

Directly addressing the audience from the outset, the narrator asks, “Is this a *holy* thing to see [?]” (my emphasis), prompting the reader to question the sanctity of a ceremony that has clear sociopolitical benefits for the presenters, but does not enhance the welfare of the charity children.¹⁹⁶ The narrator contrasts the supposed liturgical holiness of the date with the superficiality of the ceremony, which he portrays as an upper class event celebrated for the

¹⁹⁶ Blake, “Holy Thursday,” *Songs of Experience*. For visual images of the poem, see Fig. 4 in the Appendix.

purpose of exalting the bourgeoisie's own munificence.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, he contrasts supposed England's "rich and fruitful" nature with the charity benefactors' "cold and usurous" hands to critique the bourgeoisie's glorification of England as a land of prosperity and greatness while ignoring the fact that children continue to live in poverty. He emphasizes the power disparity between the helpless and young "babes" and the wealthy and powerful "hand" of institutionalized charity to critique the bourgeoisie's exploitation of child poverty for their own gain.¹⁹⁸ Blake's engraving, which shows an unclothed child's corpse lying rigidly on the ground while a standing woman in a gown aloofly looks on, visually depicts this same theme. And, as Fairer notes, Blake's depiction of the stream in the distance as beyond the child's reach can be seen as a commentary on "trickle-down" theory, which was often depicted in terms of streams and rivers in sermons to charity children and charity school songs.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, the narrator's usage of the word "usurous" highlights that fact that the upper class benefactors expect a return on their generosity: their charity is not charity at all, but rather a loan with callously high interest. By using the word "usurous," which has a strong monetary connotation, the speaker highlights the fact that these benefactors expect the charity children to become industrious members of the labor force in return for the money bestowed upon them. As such, the speaker critiques upper class benefactors for promoting their deeds as morally sacrosanct, when in reality their actions amount to little more than commercial investments.

In the second stanza, the narrator expands upon his previous usage of leading questions, undermining the *Innocence* narrator's characterization of the children's song as mighty and

¹⁹⁷ As the ceremony's title conveys, the Holy Thursday ceremony took place on Holy Thursday, which (in Christian theology) is the day that Christ's Last Supper took place before his crucifixion on Good Friday and ensuing resurrection on Easter Sunday.

¹⁹⁸ Blake, "Holy Thursday," *Songs of Experience*.

¹⁹⁹ Fairer, p. 550.

joyful. Rather, *Experience* narrator characterizes the children's song as a "trembling cry,"²⁰⁰ a portrayal that directly contradicts the *Innocence* narrator's depiction of the children's "harmonious thunderings."²⁰¹ In doing so, the *Experience* narrator questions the assertion that these children could possibly express joy while living in destitution. The narrator's repetition of such leading questions throws uncertainty upon the *Innocence* narrator's most impactful observations, thus prompting the reader to question every premise that individuals with similar viewpoints put forth. After casting suspicion on such argument, the narrator powerfully summarizes the message behind his rhetorical queries in the last line of the stanza, exclaiming, "It is a land of poverty!"²⁰² This sharp switch between the interrogative structure of the first three lines and the imperative nature of the last line forcefully confirms the suspicions that the narrator's initial questions had provoked within the reader as to the unreliability of the *Innocence* narrator's observations. By using this Socratic method, the narrator persuasively leads the reader to form conclusions that he then confirms in the last line—that these charity children live in miserable poverty, and that England is not a glorious and benevolent state, but rather a place stricken with wretchedness and destitution.

In stanza three, the narrator challenges the notion of England as a "rich and fruitful land" by creating an alternative characterization of England based on the experiences of the charity children, thus arguing that the reigning identity of a country is not objective; rather, it is a subjective conception based on the experiences of the most powerful and successful.²⁰³ The narrator anaphoristically begins each of the first three lines with the phrase "and their," emphasizing that the charity children's lived experience is distinctly different from that of the

²⁰⁰ Blake, "Holy Thursday," *Songs of Experience*.

²⁰¹ Blake, "Holy Thursday," *Songs of Innocence*.

²⁰² Blake, "Holy Thursday," *Songs of Experience*.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

upper classes. When describing the children's England, he states, "And their sun does never shine. / And their fields are bleak & bare. / And their ways are filled with thorns; / It is eternal winter there."²⁰⁴ Here, the narrator expands upon his geographic metaphor from the first stanza that living in poverty is akin to living in a completely different region. By repeating "their" in his depiction of objects, such as the sun, fields, and roads, that the poor children experience differently than their wealthier fellow countrymen, the narrator emphasizes the subjectivity of the phenomenological experiences: he argues that even the most commonplace elements of the human experience can alter depending on the identity of the individual(s) experiencing them. Interestingly, this farming metaphor has parallels with many of the charity children's songs, which often applaud economic trickle-down theory in agricultural terms.²⁰⁵ Here, however, the narrator makes it clear that these children do not experience the happy lives of prosperous rural farm workers (as intimated by the *Innocence* narrator), who live in an idealized land of warm sunshine and rich fields, but rather exist in a never-ending state of coldness and penury. The periods at the end of the first two lines as well as the alliteration in "bleak & bare" further accentuate the austerity of their existence, creating a curt tone that leaves no opportunity for hopefulness on the part of the narrator or the reader. As in stanza two, the narrator sums up his message explicitly in last line, declaring, "It is eternal winter there."²⁰⁶

Ultimately, in constructing a pair of poems that directly contradict one another, Blake exposes the reader to the complex and often contrary viewpoints that govern the issue of institutionalized charity. In *Innocence*'s "Holy Thursday," the narrator praises charity schools, applauding them for raising children out of poverty, contributing to the stabilization of society, and promoting strong (bourgeois) morals. However, the *Experience* narrator espouses an

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Fairer, p. 549.

²⁰⁶ Blake, "Holy Thursday," *Songs of Experience*.

antithetical viewpoint, decrying the greed and falseness of the upper classes for indoctrinating impoverished children into the bourgeois value system to ensure they will eventually become industrious workers. Overall, however, the *Experience* poem causes the reader to reconsider the claims made by the *Innocence* narrator, and ultimately functions as a highly persuasive means of convincing the reader that institutionalized charity exists as an ostentatious show of benevolence and power but does little to mitigate the large-scale destitution of the English working class.

Throughout this section, I have analyzed different viewpoints on morality and charity within St. Giles to illuminate the social reasons for reform efforts within the region from the perspective of the upper classes and examine the issue's complexities through Blake's critique of such viewpoints. In *Gin Lane*, Hogarth depicts anarchy, widespread sin, and rampant destruction to swiftly catalyze lawmakers to enact tangible legal restrictions on gin drinking, which he sees as hazardous to the foundations of British society. Likewise, Hannah More asserts in "Betty Brown, the St. Giles Orange Girl" that poor individuals have the ability to improve their situation by adhering to bourgeois values of industriousness and morality, abstaining from gin, taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the upper classes, and becoming exemplars of assiduousness and moral behavior within their own communities. More also advocates for the upper classes to become increasingly involved in giving charity to industrious individuals, arguing that charity stabilizes society by forging hierarchical ties between the upper and lower classes, thereby preventing the formation of strong proletariat communal identities. William Blake's narrator in "Holy Thursday" from *Songs of Innocence* praises the upper classes for their munificence by emphasizing the Holy Thursday ceremony's holiness and extolling the benefits gained by the children through institutionalized charity. In contrast, the narrator from "Holy Thursday" in *Songs of Experience* portrays the children as miserable victims of the upper classes, who offer charity in return for a promise of future social conformity and industriousness. Overall, social reformers like More and Hogarth depicted the St. Giles poor as infected with sin,

laziness, and immorality and called for increased legal restrictions and charity to mitigate the situation before those living in the Rookery spread vices to the rest of society, while Blake ultimately criticizes this approach as one that benefits and flatters the upper classes while allowing children to remain in poverty.

IV. Conclusion

Over the course of this paper, I have examined the multifaceted ways in which early Victorian social reformers extensively deployed metaphors of disease to construct an identity of the Rookery as politically, ideologically, and morally infectious. I analyzed depictions of St. Giles by social reformers from an epidemiological background, examining the influences of anticontagionism and contagionism on their accounts. I discussed the strategies these reformers used to classify the Rookery as archaic and medieval, positioning the region as an impediment to modernity itself. In addition, I analyzed the ways in which reform depictions constructed Orientalist metaphors to represent the region as uncivilized and foreign. Furthermore, I showed how these constructed identities betrayed deeper bourgeois fears about the threat St. Giles posed to capitalist expansion in immediately adjacent neighborhoods and hazardous relationship to all areas of London.

In terms of politics, I explored the associations between the nation as a political body and the individual as a human body, analyzing how conservatives viewed revolutionary ideology as akin to physical disease. I investigated the relationship between St. Giles and political radicalism, detailing how the two were associated in the minds of the bourgeoisie and how writers like Dickens and Weir propagated this viewpoint to warn of an impending revolt. Through a discussion on Blake's poem "London," I discussed the inherent representational problems in these accounts.

Lastly, I discussed social reform efforts by William Hogarth and Hannah More that utilized St. Giles, examining how these reformers sensationalized street life in the Rookery to depict it as anarchistic and highly immoral. I highlighted the anti-gin focus of these campaigns and surveyed the reasons why reformers viewed improving the morality of the poor as the overarching solution to the variety of problems associated with urban poverty. In addition, I extensively analyzed the bourgeois viewpoint on institutionalized charity, relating the perceived benefits to those receiving charity and to the upper class benefactors. Through a discussion on Blake's "Holy Thursday" poems, I discussed the deeper sociopolitical reasons why charity was beneficial for existent power structures, as well as the degree to which the impoverished beneficiaries were victims in this exchange.

Overall, I assert that St. Giles held a unique, complex, and important position within the context of nineteenth century London. Condescendingly repudiated yet continually depicted, the Rookery held a "seemingly endless fascination" for early Victorian social reformers.²⁰⁷ Through their discussions on the region, these individuals touched on some of the most fundamental elements underlying their society: scientific progress and the foundations of modern medicine, the emergence of industrialized capitalism, the threat of democracy to traditional society, Britain's identity in an increasingly globalized world, and the role of religion in post-Enlightenment society. Although the Rookery was annihilated in the mid-1850s, the larger tensions the area embodied remained, shaping British society for centuries to come.

²⁰⁷ Kirkland, p. 19.

Appendix

Fig. 1: William Blake. *London*. Relief etching with some white line etching, hand colored on paper.



Copy F: 1789, 1794 (Yale Center for British Art)



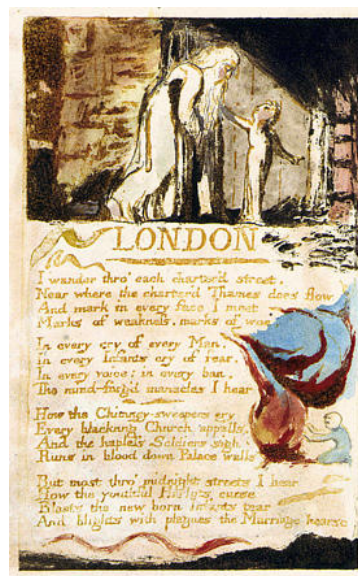
Copy Z: 1826 (Library of Congress)



Copy Y: 1825 (Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Copy T: 1789, 1794, 1818 (British Museum)



Copy C: 1789, 1794 (Library of Congress)



Copy A: 1795 (British Museum)

Fig. 2: William Hogarth. *Gin Lane*. 1751. Etching and engraving on paper. British Museum, London.



Fig. 3: William Blake. *HOLY THURSDAY* from *Songs of Innocence*. Relief etching with some white line etching, hand colored (copies C and L) on paper.



Copy C, 1789, 1794
(Library of Congress)

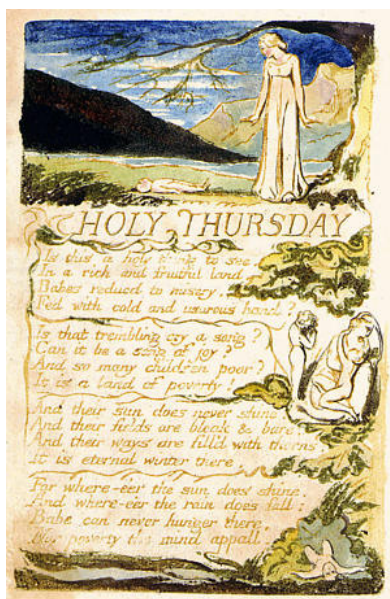


Copy L, 1795 (Yale Center
for British Art)

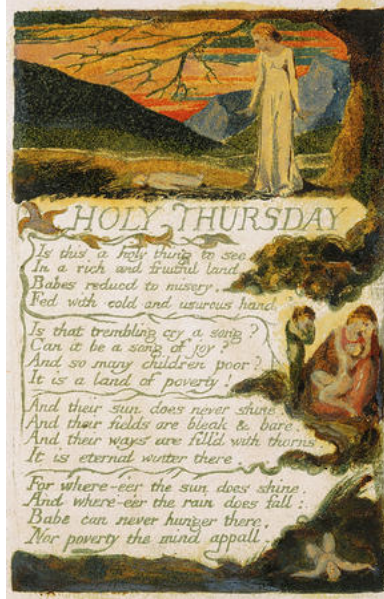


Copy U, 1789
(The Houghton Library)

Fig. 4: William Blake. *HOLY THURSDAY* from *Songs of Experience*. Relief etching with some white line etching, hand colored on paper.



Copy C: 1789, 1794
(Library of Congress)



Copy F: 1789, 1794 (Yale
Center for British Art)



Copy E: 1789, 1794, c. 1832
(Huntington Library)