

The Usefulness of Waste:
Filth and Waste in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*

and George Gissing's *The Nether World*

by

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ABSTRACT

Victorian London was often confronted with the filth and waste that was the result of urban civilization. The Victorians saw themselves as a race of humanity above the savage tribes. While steps were taken to repress these natural and instinctual products of humanity, human waste and filth were powerfully incorporated in the fictional writings of Charles Dickens and George Gissing. I argue that this incorporation of filth and waste in both *Our Mutual Friend* and *The Nether World* serves as a metaphorical statement on the living conditions of the Victorian lower class. Using the urban travelogues of Dickens and Gissing's contemporaries, along with the analysis on waste and filth done by Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva, I argue that the interpretation of waste by Dickens and Gissing define a permeable boundary between London's residuum and the rest of urban society. Oftentimes, the definition of waste and filth become intermixed with the definition of value and money. While Dickens chooses to focus on an optimistic outcome of the use value of waste; Gissing sees no hopeful future for the inhabitants of London's slums. I argue that Dickens, throughout his novel, showcases a modernistic use value for the waste of civilization through the recycleable qualities of waste. Gissing, in opposition to Dickens' optimism, sees a more fatalistic future for civilization. Both novels are able to provide a blueprint for the future of urban society, by establishing that filth and waste is a unifying element of civilization, and by establishing the important role that filth can play within the value system of Victorian London.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In his book The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World, Steven Johnson describes London in 1854 as "a city of scavengers [whose] names alone read now like some kind of exotic zoological catalogue: bone-pickers, sewer-hunters, dustmen, night-soil men [and] shoremen"(Johnson 2). These scavengers were profiting industrially from the waste of society and were members of London's working underclass. They made up a large percentage of the city's population and contributed greatly to the commercial market. London's citizens were "trying to make do with an Elizabethan public infrastructure" in a world that was becoming more industrialized in the years before The Great Stink of London in 1858 (Johnson 4). The Great Stink of 1858, in response to this convergence of the pre- and post-production of waste, created an organic problem that brought the issue of waste removal to the forefront of Victorian sanitation reform.

The middle-class members of London's population did not become as heavily involved with the eradication of filth and stink until 1858. The Great Stink of London refers to the overpowering smell of human waste that permeated the air of London. The Great Stink also included the effects that a flawed water sanitation system had on cleanliness that was caused by unusually dry summer weather (Barnes 15). Previous to the reform of London's sanitation system (in the 1830s and 40s), the human waste of the city's inhabitants was dumped into the river Thames and numerous cesspits that developed throughout London. Since the

water source for many of the middle-class and aristocracy's homes was the Thames, a cycle began that returned the waste previously dumped into the river back into the water that was used for daily household activities which included bathing, drinking, and cooking (Chadwick 83). Edwin Chadwick helped to stoke the fascination that Victorians had with sanitation when he published his report The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Populations in 1842. The result of society's growing obsession with reforming sanitary conditions was the realization that the city needed to create and enforce regulations that dealt with the problem of waste and filth. The growing problem of waste and filth was an inevitable production of city life.

Victorians, seeing themselves as a race of humanity above the savage tribes that were presented in magazines and newspapers, began to develop expectations regarding the level of cleanliness that was required by upper and middle-class populations. The Great Stink and the outbreaks of disease that occurred as a result of poor sanitation created a modern notion of sanitation that became associated with the removal of waste from the center of the city. Sigmund Freud later studied and expounded on these changing ideologies that occurred in the Victorian era.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Freud observed that the roots of civilization rested in these expectations. The midpoint of the nineteenth century saw the inhabitants of London expecting "to see the signs of cleanliness and order" (Freud 46). Urban civilization developed into a place where "dirtiness of any kind [became] incompatible" with society's increasing obsession with sanitation (Freud 46). As a result, the Victorians began to fixate on the repression

of all that was considered to be disgusting and filthy. The regulation of sanitary conditions that appeared in the Victorian era was successful in affecting the physical appearance of the city streets. The waste from the neighborhoods of the upper and middle class was deposited in the low-income neighborhoods. The physical removal of waste added to the growing psychological repression of filth. The upper and middle-class members of Victorian society began to see the psychological importance of repressing excretion and the importance of its physical removal from the more affluent sections of the city.

Freud saw the psychological repression of filth in psychoanalytical terms and was “not surprised by the idea of setting up the use of soap as an actual yardstick of civilization” (Freud 46). A footnote from Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents, added after the initial publication of his work, describes the importance of excrement to the repression of humanity’s natural instinct for pleasure. Freud explains that the “incitement to cleanliness originates in an urge to get rid of the excreta”(Freud 54). The progression of Nineteenth-Century society to develop a physical and psychological obsession with cleanliness and the massive efforts made to abolish filth and waste led to the existence of excrement becoming a newly heightened sensitivity that was offensive to civilization’s senses. Freud believed that the ideology of organic repression only finds itself concerned with the excreta of others and that man does “not find his own excreta repulsive, but only that of other people,” despite the developmental advances of humanity (Freud 54). The view that humanity is destined to develop upwardly was popular to the Victorians, who subscribed to a doctrine of

inevitable progress. Freud observes that the concept of filth, and its conceptualization by individual members of society, is not always associated with a negative connotation. The concepts of revulsion and disgust, brought on by the moral repression of filth in Victorian society, are mediated through a social system. The sanitation reform that resulted from The Great Stink had a profound effect on the ways that filth and waste were psychologically appropriated by society.

Norman O. Brown expounded on Freud's theory regarding the natural instinct of excretion of waste. Humanity can experience pleasure from the act of excreting their filth, and must be taught that their own excreta is disgusting. According to Brown, "sublimation changes both the aim and the object of the instinct" (Brown 138). More so than in previous centuries, Victorians became affected by the repression of natural instinct and the negative connotation that developed as a result. Brown saw this effort towards sublimation as a fight occurring principally within the psyche of the subject, one that could have a possible impact on the relationship between individual and society (Brown 139). The fact that the waste ended up in the slums succeeded in enhancing the divide between rich and poor. Brown, and also to an extent Charles Dickens in Our Mutual Friend, sees the satirical elements that arose from such a concept. Freud exposes the "disbalance in the human organism between higher and lower functions" of a bodily nature that exists among the high and low of an urban population as well (Brown 187). Freud and Brown saw the growing gap between natural instinct and the repression of excreta as a sign of cultural modernity

The middle class's interactions with filth and excreta production was explored in the literature of the nineteenth century. British novelists, as well as French writers like Victor Hugo and Honoré de Balzac, began to explore a "propitious conjunction of literal and metaphorical filth"(Cohen vii). When used as a way to explore the relationship between the upper and lower classes, through the production and redistribution of human waste, Charles Dickens' Our Mutual Friend (published serially in 1864-1865) explored the redeeming and damning, sometimes comedic, elements of London sanitation. The end of the nineteenth century saw the filthy waste-covered slums of London's population as no longer a source of comedic characters. Literature continued to compensate for the death of Dickens and new novelists explored the failings of society to take care of its poor. George Gissing's novel The Nether World (published in 1889) explored the bleak world inhabited by London's residuum. The characters of Gissing's novel were denied the hope of upward mobility that Dickens gave to some of his characters and instead his novel represented the fatalistic views of its author. Gissing saw no point to charitable reform or middle-class philanthropy. In The Nether World the poor were trapped in the slums. Dickens' saw human excrement as an equalizing part of humanity that transgressed the boundaries between upper and lower class. Gissing's fatalism configured the idea of filth and human waste as one identifier of class hierarchy. In Gissing's The Nether World, the slums are places of filth and therefore irredeemable.

Populations of people create waste and the act of its disposal is a common development of civilization. The human production of waste serves as a common element between the lower and upper classes of London society and when combined with the psychological response that contact with human waste invokes, this response of disgust can serve as “the psychic equivalent of the [wall between Self and Other] in its ability to exclude those influences judged to be more damaging than beneficial” (Miller, Susan 191). The middle-class of Dickens’ and Gissing’s novels possess the ability to remove their waste from sight and the inhabitants of the city’s slums have no other choice but to live amongst both their own waste and accept the waste of those socially higher than themselves. Dickens and Gissing explore the various ways that the disposal of waste can effect both the people that profit from it and those forgotten and overlooked lower classes of London that were forced by poverty to live among the waste of their betters.

CHAPTER 2

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

Dickens and Gissing wrote and published their novels at different times during the Victorian era. Charles Dickens' Our Mutual Friend was written immediately after the effects of sanitation reform were beginning to manifest on a psychological level. Our Mutual Friend describes a city of London that is covered in dust and fog. Dickens' city is an "animate London, with smarting eyes, and irritated lungs" and this London becomes a "sooty specter, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and in so being wholly neither" (Dickens 420). Through the foggy air, London's gaslights "flared in the shops with a haggard and unblest" nature (Dickens 420). Dickens gives special attention to the distinct nature of London fog compared to the fog of the surrounding English countryside. London fog is different due to its elemental contribution of human filth and excreta. The fog in the city was "at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the city [it] was rusty-black"(Dickens 420). The description of the gradient of air quality draws attention to the dichotomous relationship that exists between life in the slums and the lives of London's middle class; between the visible and the invisible inhabitants of London.

Dickens draws a metaphorical line between the poor and the middle class in Our Mutual Friend through literal depictions of waste and filth. Overall in Our Mutual Friend, Dickens presents the production of waste and society's creation of filth as unifying elements of mankind that cross over London's class boundaries.

Characters like Mr. Boffin fluctuate under the pressures placed on them by this mobility. Mr. Boffin becomes the Golden Dustman and functions as an object lesson for Bella on the miserly and corrupting nature that money can awaken in an individual. Dickens pays special attention to the various laboring characters of this novel, often exemplifying them with the characteristics of Henry Mayhew's social narratives. The dustman is one of those professional middle class careers that takes a prominent place in the plot of Our Mutual Friend.

John Harmon's father is a member of the professional middle class and a visible member of London society. Harmon has gained this position through his successful Dust business

. The elder Harmon, who is deceased by the beginning of this novel, is the professional overlord of a very successful dust collecting business. The dustmen that work under him were an invisible but very important part of Victorian London's desire for control over the city's production of filth. In addition to Dickens' fiction, many journalists like Mayhew and Greenwood explored the lives of the residuum. James Greenwood, a social explorer during the nineteenth century who published extensively on the conditions of London's poor, observed that the dustmen of London performed an "eminently useful service" since the inhabitants of the city were guilty of not having "troubled ourselves [at all] in their concerns" (Greenwood 116). Greenwood wrote of his experience of being invited to a tea-party that was thrown for the city's employed dustmen and described the affair as an "experimental gathering"(Greenwood 116). Greenwood observed that the job of dustman was "one of the most disgusting and degrading,

if not the most disgusting and degrading application of [labour]” (Greenwood 118). Dickens, in contrast to Mayhew, saw the dustmen as more than merely distinct members of a separate tribe of humanity but instead celebrated their humanity and individuality.

The profession of dustmen and the disposal and redistribution of waste was work that often found the dustman “represented as a cultural hero [who was] also present as a dirty, threatening, uncivilized, irredeemable proletarian vulgarian” (Maidment 7). Despite the nature of the Dustman’s job, most were members of the middle class and successful enough to afford comfortable living conditions. According to Henry Mayhew’s observations of the dust trade, the “persons [together with a plot of waste ground whereon to deposit the refuse]” that collect the waste were “called ‘dust-contractors’, and are generally men of considerable wealth” (Mayhew 219). Mayhew breaks down the various stages and processes of the dust trade while also establishing the dustman’s labor value as big business in the city of London. Mayhew describes these characters with a comedic charm that Dickens must have found appealing in his creation of Our Mutual Friend’s lower-class personalities. Mayhew found the “industrious poor a thousand-fold more veracious than the trading rich” (Mayhew 222). Dustmen and mudlarks existed in a special place among the middle classes of London as a result of their deplorable working conditions. These mud-larks, or “river-finders”, are “about the most deplorable in their appearance” (Mayhew 209). Like the dustmen, the mud-larks were a “London phenomenon, and they belonged to a group of trades that collectively took responsibility for public cleanliness and convenience”

(Maidment 14). It is a sign of industry that mankind can find a way to turn the basest of human production into gold. Freud finds that civilization's valuation of gold is directly related to its repression of filth and human excrement (Freud 187). The dust that existed in London during the nineteenth century had value as a commercial enterprise and existed as an industry for the poor laborer. Dickens also showcased this assertion within his novel and satirized the exchange economy by making filth and money interchangeable.

Mayhew is specific in his description of the elemental component of the term dust. Unlike the mud-lark and his (or her) concern for the treasure to be found among the various waste products of civilization, the dust that is collected from the streets and homes of London's upper and middle-class population is not made up of human excreta. Mayhew describes the dustmen's main laborious concern as being the emptying and collecting of dustbins filled with the residual production of coal fires (Mayhew 218). Dickens incorporates the distinct profession of a mud-lark or waterman elsewhere in Our Mutual Friend and implies that the dust that contributes to Harmon's financial success is comprised of both ashes and human waste. The London described in the novel, is "at its worst. Such a black shrill city, combining the qualities of a smoky house and a scolding wife; such a gritty city; such a hopeless city" (Dickens 145). Dickens wishes to present to his reading audience a sensory image of London as a city that is covered in layers of its own excremental production.

Dickens' Boffin is the fictional embodiment of the dustman. Mayhew, in his urban travelogue among the residuum of London society, makes the distinction

between dust and human waste. Despite Mayhew's observational statements about the profession, it remains unclear whether the dustmen of Victorian England "were involved in the disposal of human ordure as well as household waste" (Maidment 11). Literary critics such as Stephen Gill claim that "in view of the symbolic significance of the dust in the novel," it is highly likely that Dickens meant to conflate both in human organic waste (Gill 897). I would argue that Gill's opinion of the inclusion of human excrement in Dickens' version of Dust is the correct way to read the composition of Dust in the novel.

Dickens conveys to his reading audience the humorous connection of Dust and the poorer class's relation to upper-class London society. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, in their book The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, argue that the "nineteenth century city was organized around the binary of filth/cleanliness" (Stallybrass and White 136). Dickens problematizes this relationship between filth and cleanliness by making the waste in Our Mutual Friend an embodiment of both concepts. It becomes the commercial aspect of the waste that is representative of society's filth and the idea of cleanliness remains an unattainable ideal. By the conclusion of Dickens' novel, the Dust of London is realized as an element that "each thing contains both the principle and its opposite," that there exists no binary relationship between the clean upper-class and the filthy lower-class, and that through the production of waste "man is revealed in his earthiness as eternally, hopelessly soiled" (Laporte 34). The London that Dickens describes in Our Mutual Friend includes the Dust as being an inescapable element of city life. The inclusion of excrement as a property of

Dust extends into Dickens' satirical commentary on the filthiness of gold and gold as dust.

The character of the dustman in Our Mutual Friend is not concerned with whether or not the dust of London contains the excreta of humanity. The Dust would have contained some form of excremental element (most likely horse or other animal feces). Despite some clear historical references to the separation of dust and human excrement, Henry Mayhew observed in London Labor and the London Poor that "the dustmen, scavengers, and nightmen are, to a certain extent, the same people" (Mayhew 172). Mayhew consolidates the ambiguous nature of dust in his description of the London mud-lark. Under the general descriptive title of "savengers and cleaners," the mud-larks are "grimmed with the foul soil of the river, and their torn garments stiffened up like boards with the dirt of every possible description" (Mayhew 209). The professional endeavors of the mud-lark encompass all manner of poor, including women and children. Dickens uses Mayhew's descriptions of mud-larks, in addition to his description of dustmen, to create the industrious characters of Our Mutual Friend. Mudlarking and the job performed by the city's dustmen share common elements since these lines of work involve the re-appropriation of the city's waste products. The work of the dustman is depicted by Mayhew as being a noble profession. In contrast, the work of the mudlark is paradoxically necessary and deplorable. Dickens combines elements from both professions in his depiction of London's sanitation workers in Our Mutual Friend.

John Harmon is Dickens' connection between London's visible and invisible peoples. Harmon is responsible for bringing the waste of society to the attention of the upper classes. Both these classes live among waste, but the upper class has the ability to turn excrement to gold while the lower class lives with the discarded waste of civilization. This is an important satiric element in the novel that shows the comical effects resulting from a profit through filth and waste of others. The reader's attention is drawn to the idea that dust has an economical value during the nineteenth century. John Harmon, the main protagonist in Our Mutual Friend, is heir to the fortune his father amassed by reclaiming the city's waste and turning it into financial profit. Harmon's father is known as a man who "made his money by Dust" among the upper class of Dickens' novel (Dickens 13). Mortimer, in his description of Harmon's father and his career as a Dust contractor, describes him as living "in a hilly country entirely composed of Dust"(13). John Harmon's father lived his life through the appropriation and redistribution of Dust eventually using an "immense" amount of Dust for his daughter's dowry (Dickens 13). Everything about Harmon's life rested on the importance of waste and its re-appropriation into money. The Harmon's financial success is the result of recycling Dust comprised of "filth [that] was rotten, decomposing waste, especially animal and human waste, and most especially feces" (Gilbert 78). When put into more modern and simplistic terms, Harmon's life was built on shit and his daughter's dowry consisted of piles of shit. It appears that Dickens' hope was for his readers to embrace the humor of this situation and realize the ecological truth of excrement becoming financially useful.

Bella Wilfer is one of the novel's redeemed characters. She has seen the damaging effects that greed has on an individual by the conclusion of the novel. Bella becomes a "domestic cherub" humbled by the negative effects of wealth evoked through Boffin (Dickens 454). The result of this personal reflection of character is that Bella is able to graciously accept her place as John Harmon's bride. Bella confesses to her father that she saw "how terrible the fascination of money is" and renounces the real filth of Dickens' novel (Dickens 460). Instead of resigning herself to be an object of pride to Boffin and his wife, Bella seizes on her own self worth. She becomes a selfless and domesticated young woman instead of the selfish girl that existed before she encountered the negative effects of wealth on Boffin. Her newfound ability to put herself to work, in contrast to her previous yearning for unearned wealth, is crucial to the novel and the importance placed on performing labor. Her family observes this change in her and says with surprise that "Miss Bella condescends to cook" (Dickens 453). The scene of Bella cooking for her family is an example of Bella finding her worth as a member of her family. The result of taking her place among domestic labor is that Bella is able to elevate herself from being waste to achieving her own value as gold.

This returns us to one of the main protagonists of Our Mutual Friend, the servant Nicodemus Boffin. Boffin is a man "unpolished" and "uneducated," who exemplifies the myth of the Golden Dustman (Dickens 48). I've previously discussed how the profession of dustmen was observed by Henry Mayhew in his writings on the London working poor in 1850 and the ways it was appropriated by

Dickens for narrative effect. From a historical perspective, the Victorian dustmen were considered “figures of outstanding interest and importance, with distinctive cultural history of their own which was distinct from other trades” (Maidment 4). The dustman was “not inferior in intelligence to the brute creation” (Greenwood 124). The distinct cultural history of the dustman concerned both the physical as well as the metaphorical. The dustman represented an embodiment of the elemental particles of civilization and “thus [they were] binding together the literal and incommensurable presence of dust on the streets of the metropolis with deeper meanings [which] figure dust as the symbolic fabric of life and death” (Maidment 2). Boffin, in his new role as the Golden Dustman, pretends to become a tragic miser for the purpose of teaching Bella the damaging effect caused by gold. Bella observes that “every day he changes for the worse and for the worse [...] Before my eyes he grows suspicious, capricious, hard, tyrannical, unjust. If ever a good man was ruined by good fortune, it is my benefactor” (Dickens 460). The tragic effects of the accumulation of wealth become intertwined with the dust mounds of Our Mutual Friend. The entanglement of the dust mounds with the accumulation of wealth is meant to teach Bella the effects that wealth can have on personal character. Boffin’s charade is successful in demonstrating that unearned wealth does have a powerful negative effect on even the simplest of characters. Dickens keeps the charade of Boffin a secret from the audience, unlike the manipulation of Harmon. The result is that Dickens is able to effectively demonstrate the same lesson about money to his readers as well as to Bella.

The dustman in Our Mutual Friend seem to “derive from a particular set of Mid-Victorian imperatives which include the wish to celebrate the technological feats and collective responsibility shown by Victorian management and re-use of waste” (Maidment 13). The useful properties of waste give it value and make excrement a valuable commodity. The introduction of the audience to Boffin is a scene of comical self-improvement. Boffin is attempting to hire Silas Wegg to come to his house and read him poetry. Boffin wishes to become a better educated and more literate man despite being plagued by his current educational station. It is apparent that Dickens has created a situation of comical proportions and that both Wegg and Boffin are illiterate members of the lower class. When Wegg arrives at the home of Boffin, called Boffin’s Bower, the reader is treated to a description of the “charming spot” of the successful dustman (Dickens 57). Boffin describes his home among the mounds of Dust as “a spot to find out the merits of, little by little, and a new [one] every day” (Dickens 57). Dickens incorporates the social observations of Greenwood in these descriptions of a home in the dust heaps. These dust heaps are no cesspits or “dismal swamps” (Dickens 213). Boffin regards the dust heaps as symbols of life and industry. The dust heaps symbolize Boffin’s life and industry and he observes that home would “look but a poor dead flat without the mounds” (Dickens 185). Boffin visualizes himself as “a pretty fair scholar in the dust”(Dickens 185). Dickens endorses Boffin’s pride as he surveys the view from his house. The reader, by paying attention to the lofty views that the Golden Dustman has from atop the dust heaps, can understand the pride of a profession based on turning excrement into gold.

Following his established comedic style, Dickens characterizes Boffin as a man who lives disillusioned about his place within society. Following the meeting between Wegg and Boffin, Boffin becomes the legal heir to the Harmon fortune. The inheritance of the Harmon dust mounds occurs after the alleged body of Harmon's son John is fished out of the Thames by Gaffer. Boffin has become the heir to mounds and mounds of Harmon's Dust. To the middle class lawyer Mr. Lightwood, the Dust heaps that Harmon has left to Boffin amount to nothing and metaphorically Boffin has inherited the waste of civilization. Lightwood is able to see excrement as an elemental component of the invisible London. Boffin sees the inheritance as "a great lot to take care of," undermining the upper class's notion that the profession of waste recycling and removal is of little importance after it has been swept from view (Dickens 89). Dickens uses the inheritance and its monetary importance to several of the novel's characters as a fictional way to "show interest in the immense wealth represented by dustheaps" (Maidment 23). In order to solidify the economic importance of the dustmen, Boffin embodies the ideal of a Golden Dustman. Dickens uses the Golden Dustman to satirize the excreta of London's society being recycled into monetary compensation.

Dickens' use of the imagery of waste exemplifies the lower classes' relationship to the upper class through the concept of a lower-class Self set against the upper-class Other by organic waste. It is not just human waste that makes up the components of Dust but this strongly implied element prevails in the interpretation of Dickens' Dust. Cast out by London society to live side-by-side with the waste of civilization, the city's residuum became equated with the

sensory response of disgust. The ambiguity that surrounds the sensory response of disgust needs to be taken into account by the reader. Our Mutual Friend invokes a disgusting response from its reading audience despite the fact the London's residuum did not express disgust with their own conditions of life.

Disgust has already been described as an ambiguous emotion. Dickens uses elements of disgust for comedic effect and in Our Mutual Friend "laughing at something [is] an act of repulsion, resembles in itself the act of rejecting" (Menninghaus 11). Theorists like Winfried Menninghaus regard the emotion of disgust as "a symptom of modernity" (Menninghaus 9). The city of London embraced industry and the growing importance placed on capitalism and labor. At the same time that London was embracing modernity, the city also began to desire the removal of filth from the center of the city. The filth and waste from the streets began to disappear as London's upper classes desired its removal from their close vicinity. Menninghaus claims that this move toward the repression of filth put London on a trajectory toward a more modern city (Menninghaus 84). Freud claimed that "the incitement to cleanliness originates in an urge to get rid of the excreta, which have become disagreeable to the sense perceptions" (Freud 54). Civilization, according to Freud, moves forward in advancement while at the same time "a person who is not clean - who does not hide his excreta - is offending other people" (Freud 55). It is this categorization of disgust that creates zones which define what is meant when we use the term civilized society.

The inhabitants of London's slum neighborhoods, despite their attempts to be both clean and fashionable, were still considered to be tainted by the filthy

qualities of human waste. Gaffer, whose profession requires him to profit off the most significant of human waste -- the corpse -- is described by Dickens as “half savage [...] with such dress as he wore seeming to be made out of the mud that begrimed his boat” (Dickens 2). Gaffer is not simply filth as he possesses a “business-like usage in his steady gaze” (Dickens 2). Gaffer’s profession is meant to provoke disgust from the reader and the profiting from dead bodies can “signify the end of life and consciousness of another, [just as] they remind us of the possibility of such a state for oneself” (Miller, Susan 188). The corpse is an important physical object in Dickens’ novel. The corpse is an object that represents satirical elements in Our Mutual Friend at the same time that it symbolizes the seriousness evident in profiting from mankind’s waste. The corpse has value as recyclable material in the Victorian era because it represents the dual nature of filth and human waste. The corpse forces society to come to terms with a desire to repress all the waste products of a civilization as excreta and therefore useless matter. Mankind finds itself unwilling to dismiss the corpse so quickly if it represents a loved one, therefore suggesting that man is comfortable around some of his own waste products.

In a different category than human excrement, which is only repulsive for its abject quality of connection with the living, the waste that is a corpse produces a much higher psychological response. Freud saw the powerful emotions of confronting waste as problematic. Man appears to be fascinated by the waste he produces, yet repulsed when confronted with the waste of his neighbor. The repulsion seems to grow when the waste matter in question is a dead body. Julie

Kristeva, in her book Powers of Horror, explores the concept of the corpse as “cesspool and death” (Kristeva 3). The corpse is an object of abjection, with no useful qualities other than to show what is “permanently thrust aside in order to live” (Kristeva 3). Our Mutual Friend is able to show the financial usefulness that can be produced out of the corpse which becomes not merely “a border that has encroached upon everything” but a usable object of sustainability for the living (Kristeva 3). Dickens is not removed from the “symbolic system” that the corpse “without either wanting or being able to become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts. It abjects” (Kristeva 3). The corpses in Our Mutual Friend re-integrate into the system. They are, by virtue of just being corpses and not the waste of the people they once were, useful as a waste product. the corpse is used for comedic and economical effect by Mr. Venus in the form of human skeletal remains.

All of the characters in Our Mutual Friend “traffic in dust and waste. It is part of their human condition to be intimately associated” with Dust (Metz 71). It is only Gaffer that is shown making his living off of a corpse. There is a distinction to be made here as Dickens seems to show the hierarchy that separates human waste and the dead. This presentation of labor hierarchy among the industrious poor allows Dickens to subvert the separation with the inner nobility of Gaffer’s daughter Lizzie. Mortimer claims “that there is no better girl in all this London than Lizzie Hexam” (Dickens 294). Lizzie, by the end of Our Mutual Friend, has become a symbol of humanity’s good qualities regardless of her upbringing as the daughter of a London waterman. Lizzie is a counterpart to Bella

and serves as Dickens' glimmer of hope for the redemptive qualities of the residuum.

The abject concept of a corpse and Gaffer's profession as waterman are important to the plot of Our Mutual Friend because of the connection it has to the Thames river. The Thames plays an important role in the novel. Our Mutual Friend opens on the Thames as the reader is first shown the professional pursuits of Gaffer which establishes the novel's concern with the financial gain of waste disposal. The river Thames metaphorically represents the waste and filth that flows through London. The river covers Gaffer's boat with a layer of "slime and ooze," which results in affecting everything that comes in contact with its filthy nature as being placed in a "sodden state" (Dickens 1). In the fictional narrative of Our Mutual Friend, the river serves as a location to distinguish the good from the bad. The dumping ground of both human filth and dead bodies, the river is also the place of much of the action involving the evil character of Riderhood and the birth place of John Harmon's false identities in the novel. Harmon's identity is an important plot in the novel and his rebirth from the Thames leads him to renounce his old identity in order to take on false identities. The Thames ultimately becomes the physical location for Harmon's rebirth. The river is important to the overall commentary that Dickens provides for the current social state of London; the Thames is "[transformed] into the primary site of London filth and a symbol of the dangers of uncontained fluids" (Gilbert 90). Gilbert refers to this fear of the abject as un-contained bodily fluids as being a fictional manifestation of the "leaky body" (Gilbert 81). Her theory of a Victorian fear of unrestrained human

waste and its metaphorical representation in the disgusting waters of the Thames helps the reader to understand the problematic redemptive qualities that Dickens has granted to this river of filth. The river is the figurative birthplace of the novel's main character John Harmon and comes to represent the place of his return.

In Our Mutual Friend, the Thames becomes a waste receptacle for the rotting corpses of London that have been forbidden a proper burial and instead left for the enterprising hands of waterside men like Gaffer. It is not the cause of waste production by both the upper and lower classes of London society, but instead serves as a cesspool of merging definitions of Self/Other as the individual loses subjectivity to become nothing more than a rotting pile of dead flesh. Death is the ultimate human shared experience because everybody dies, whether middle-class or poor. Dickens' Thames is a place that is itself haunted by the dead. Dickens observes Old Betty as she hallucinates "the forms of her dead children and dead grandchildren [...] waving their hands to her in solemn measure" as they float down the Thames in a barge (Dickens 508). Despite its location as a place of death, the Thames also becomes a place of birth in the novel, thus making the distinction between death and resurrection an important element.

The rebirth of John Harmon, as he emerges from the death-grip of the Thames, is an important metaphor for Dickens' character. Since the novel is one that is rife with metaphors regarding the subjectivity of corpses, the fact that the river resurrects one is important. Harmon enters and exits the river as a dead body, despite the fact that he himself is very much alive. For all intents, the corpse

of Harmon is pulled from the river. Despite the existence of a corpse, the body of Harman is a living thing as he reinvents himself as Rokesmith and Handford. It could be interpreted as Harmon becoming a recycled product, with the corpse of one becoming the body used as a new identity. Dickens explores the importance of this resurrection, describing Harmon in terms both alive and dead. For Harmon, he observes that “dead, I have found the true friends of my lifetime still as true, as tender, and as faithful as when I was alive” (Dickens 372). As a result of being suspended between death and life, Harmon is able to learn “what the dead could know, or do know [about] how the living use them” (Dickens 373). Harmon pays attention to the fact that “if [he] had come back, these noble creatures would have welcomed [him] wept over [him], given up everything to [him] with joy”(Dickens 373). He observes that “I did not come back, and they have passed unspoiled into my place”(Dickens 373). It is here in the novel that the concept of Harmon’s subjectivity becomes evident. Harmon chooses to rejoin the novel as a different person than he was before falling into the Thames. Dickens describes Harmon, at times, as encompassing these two bodies as both one and the same, in moments of surreal observation, as the “present John Rokesmith, far removed from the late John Harmon, remained standing at a distance” (Dickens 374). Harmon’s rebirth from the Thames river causes him to become a detached and manipulative character as he embarks on the testing of Bella’s character. He is not fully redeemed and resurrected until the conclusion of Our Mutual Friend, as the tricks and manipulative actions of both Harmon and Boffin are finally revealed.

Dickens' ideas of what is and is not waste culminate with the return and redemption of John Harmon. For it is not only the juxtaposition and return of his body, but the redemption of character that is important to Dickens. The river, at least to Dickens in Our Mutual Friend, is a place "that the principle characters must still go [and] face the worst of the river to claim their true identities" (Gilbert 95). It is the location of the river and the misidentification of his corpse that cause Harmon to first lose his own identity. Harmon emerges from the waste and filth as someone else as a result of this self-conscious lose of original identity. It is this idea of the river as a place of rebirth out of waste that causes Harmon to reflect that "there was no such thing as I" as he brushes with death while drowning in the waters of this significant river (Dickens 369). While submerged in the river and struggling to live, there exists no sense of Other to play against Harmon's sense of Self, as he realizes that it is "I who was struggling alone in the water" (Dickens 370). This scene is the point at which Harmon is able to visualize his own subjectivity in direct relation to the idea of an Other. While not distinctly a human Other, the rebirth from the river seems to represent a place of subjective cognition, where Harmon is able to recognize his own rebirth of Self from this in-human Other of the river (or womb). By saving himself, and gaining agency over his own subjectivity; Harmon is resurrected from the disgusting waste water of the river with a gained knowledge of the "definite boundaries between land and water [that match] the project of defining and defending clear boundaries of the self" (Gilbert 96). The elemental qualities of the Thames and its location within the urban landscape of a city that Dickens saw as rotting from the inside outward

becomes important to the concept of social unification between the novel's middle class and their relationship to the residuum.

Harmon, seen in the terms of separation, is a problematic figure in Our Mutual Friend because the novel depicts him as a troubling figure of manipulation. I believe that the boundaries placed on Harmon following his resurrection from the Thames serve to place Harmon in a position of mad behavioral scientist or puppeteer. As a result of his resurrection from the river, Harmon emerges detached and removed from the other characters that he encounters. Since the audience is aware from the beginning of Harmon's purpose in manipulating Bella in order to discover if she is worthy of marriage, it separates Harmon from the other characters of the novel since the audience sees him as the manipulating element. The reader is able to see the self-fashioning that takes place as Harmon impresses his alter egos on others. It is a question of reader response as to what point in the novel the audience figures out that Harmon is Rokesmith. Dickens further complicates the idea of manipulation and its affect on the reading audience by keeping the actions of Boffin a secret until the novel's conclusion. The audience remains unaware that Boffin's miserly actions have been a charade, and as a result Boffin remains in close relation to the other characters he interacts with. It is the deception and manipulation of Boffin that contributes to the redemptive conclusion, more than the manipulation placed on Bella by Harmon. Boffin, at the novel's end, has redeemed himself from having dishonorably "fallen from the high estate of his honest simplicity" (Dickens 660). The audience has been shown the depth and manipulation that went into Boffin's

performance throughout Our Mutual Friend. The characters that remain living at the novel's conclusion return to their proper places. This successful attempt at subterfuge was Dickens' purpose for the novel, attempting to complicate "the likelihood that a class of readers and commentators would suppose that I was at great pains to conceal exactly what I was at great pains to suggest" (Dickens 821). Just as Harmon has fooled Bella, and Boffin has manipulated the actions of Harmon, so Dickens manipulates the audience by playing on supposition.

Humanity, specifically in relation to Our Mutual Friend and its version of the Thames, is defined and ultimately redeemed by its own waste. Since all of humanity will ultimately decay and die, their corpses become the means of both financial and elemental production. Whether rich or poor, mankind will find itself subject to being recycled in some capacity. To Dickens, the Thames serves as a symbol of the unification of society through its demolition of the boundaries of rich or poor, as it becomes unclear whose waste belongs to whom. By becoming involved with the removal and re-appropriation of our waste, civilization upsets the Victorian fascination with boundaries between filth and morality. The corpse becomes bones, its own specific form of waste production that eradicates a clear distinction between social hierarchies. The idea of bones, different than the concept of a corpse, eradicates this hierarchy by taking away an element of identification. There is no room for personal identity when encountering bones. The bones of humans are faceless and nameless remnants of life. This absence of humanity allows for the bones to become an emotionless product of waste.

Dickens seems to acknowledge this with the character of Mr. Venus, a man intent on the collection and reestablishment of skeletal remains.

Mr. Venus, a member of the middle class, is seen in a more favorable light compared to that of Gaffer and Boffin. His intention to gather up the forgotten skeletal waste of London is presented as a noble endeavor, one removed from other waste-collecting professions. The skeleton is no longer identified in the abject terms that are given to a corpse. No longer a source of disgust, Mr. Venus is free to indulge in his professional endeavor as a bone collector. Mr. Venus, a few steps removed from the profession of a waterman or mudlark, sees the potential for treasure among the dust mounds that surround Boffin's residence. Venus notes that because of the treasure to be had in the appropriation of bones the dust heaps "[were] surely never meant for nothing" (Dickens 304). The scientific uses of the bones hints at the invading modernity of the nineteenth century. Venus and his career as an appropriator of bones successfully calls attention to the "miscellanies of several human specimens" through his labor (Dickens 496). Not only interested in the money that is made from the possessions of a corpse, Venus instead makes money off of the corpse itself. As Silas Wegg notes in conversation with Venus, "you can't buy human flesh and blood in this country, sir; not alive you can't [...] then query, bone?" (Dickens 297). Venus, the only character in Our Mutual Friend to do so, is successful in the resurrection of the corpse as a means to a financial end. This duality between the profession of Venus and the accusations made by Riderhood towards Gaffer's profession represent a conflict of interest for Dickens and his reading audience. While the

resurrection of Harmon is meant to be seen without satire, the professional commercialism that goes into both Venus and Gaffer's professions should be seen as being satirical of the Victorian economy. Dickens uses both characters to represent the satirical idea that society can easily exchange human bodies instead of money, therefore creating an exchange economy based on a product that is just as ridiculous as the exchange of money. While both Venus and Gaffer deal in death, and therefore have an interest in the creation of more dead bodies in order to boost their chances at financial gain, it is Gaffer and his association with the corpse itself (instead of the bones left behind) that dooms him to a tragic fate.

In the tradition of other Dickens novels, the plots of both upper and lower class characters are placed side-by-side within the narrative. This serves as a strong way to present the dichotomous relationship that exists between these two classes of London civilization. For Dickens' characters, the intermingling of social status is unified with the element of waste production in Our Mutual Friend. We are all the same, because we as humans have the ability to make our own waste, either through daily production or the final waste creation of death. The element of human waste, especially excrement, serves as the binding agent between the lower and upper class characters of the novel. According to the narrator, "we turn up our eyes and say that we are all alike in death, and we might turn them down and work the saying out in this world" (Dickens 514). The filth and dirt of London affects not just the slums, but the entire habitation of the city itself. The voice of the novel's narrator, likely meant to be Dickens himself, makes a plea for the "lords and gentlemen and honorable boards" to think hard on

the “mountain of pretentious failure” that has been created from the waste of society (Dickens 503). The conversion of waste into value through the use of labor is not merely a job for the laboring poor. The upper and middle class must also “off with [their] honorable coats for the removal of it, and fall to the work with the power of all the queen’s horses and all the queen’s men, or it will come rushing down an bury us alive” (Dickens 503). The job of the dustman, and the problem of waste removal and urban sanitation, effects every member of an urban society, from the very rich to the very poor.

While the middle class characters have found a way to gain financially from the recycling of this waste, by turning it into “golden Dust” and creating an inheritable fortune that plagues the main plot of the novel itself, the lower characters also interact with the filthy aspects of money (Dickens 503). Freud argued in *Dreams in Folklore* that “this connection between excrement and gold” is an old one and spent a lot of his career discussing and analyzing the fascination of children with their own anal excretions (Freud 187). In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud finds this fascination with anality to be part of the instinctual nature of mankind, therefore making the “sublimation of instinct [an] especially conspicuous feature of cultural development” (Freud 51). Norman O. Brown has suggested that this need for sublimation “is an attempt to relate not only body and spirit, but also individual and society” (Brown 139). What both Freud and Brown claim is that “sublimation is the result of repression” and creates more challenges than it eradicates (Brown 139). With that in mind, it would appear that the connection between feces and gold in Our Mutual Friend configures financial

success into the same category as the natural act of defecation. This satire regarding money and human waste is an important concept in Dickens' novel, despite the fact that there lacks a satirical element when Dickens' explores the resurrection and redemptive themes that are also elements of waste production in society.

Where to draw the line between what should be read as satire and what should be interpreted as seriousness on the part of Dickens is problematic in Our Mutual Friend. It is easy for the reader to interpret the metaphorical use of Dust and the filth of money as being satirical. Meanwhile, the redemptive storyline of Harmon's character and his manipulation of Bella can be read more seriously. Satire in Dickens appears to be an ambiguous state that often problematizes the established definition of what is serious and what is comical. This issue of how to read the satire in the novel can be explained by the idea that "the art of living in a world that cannot be comprehended whole or at once, underlies Dickens' treatment" of the varying plots and themes in his last completed novel (Metz 61). This could be because unlike previous novels, Our Mutual Friend is missing the "artist-hero whose expanding perceptions guide us through the world of the novel" (Metz 61). The result is that the reader must follow Dickens without a guide and be forced to make his own interpretations of the novel's meaning. The conclusion of such a reading is evident in the mutable boundaries between drama and satire. It is obvious to a reader that the Veneerings are purposefully satirical but the character of Gaffer is not meant to be interpreted the same way. In some instances the serious becomes satirical. The best example

of this is the appropriation of the corpse by Gaffer and Mr. Venus. The horror associated with the materiality of the corpse is conveyed in the Gaffer storyline, while the recycling of human bones is used for practical purposes by Mr. Venus. The complex ways that Our Mutual Friend utilizes satire and drama add a deeper underlying meaning to the novel that is unique to other Dickens' creations.

The residuum population of Dickens' London lived their lives covered in the filth and shit of their upper class counterparts. Much like Harmon's father has found a way to cash in on the natural process of waste production, the poor of London have also found a way to benefit from this abundant source of organic matter. Some of London's poor earned livings as Dustmen, a thankless job that found men and women (as well as children) set about in the task of gathering up that waste that would eventually be recycled into Harmon's precious Dust. However, this Dust carries with it a constant association with the idea of the abject. It is the "waste products of the body" that Dickens utilizes as cultural metaphor that "point to the non-closure and non-sufficiency of the body, its liability, through the mechanisms of desire and need, to take filth into itself and to produce filth" (Gilbert 82). The importance of recycling waste, a common enough profession and commercially successful enterprise in the twenty-first century, emerges in Our Mutual Friend as not only a way to unify the Self/Other relationship of the lower and upper classes, but also a lead-in to modernity.

The optimistic views surrounding Dickens' ideas of waste in Our Mutual Friend create a sense of the success that could result from a more modern re-appropriation of waste as a future means of sustainability. The character of Mr.

Venus seems to showcase the scientifically modern ideas of uses for bones. These encouragements of ideas pertaining to the sustainability of civilization through waste removal and recycling, as financial gain or usable product, is a very modern idea Dickens is able to provide his audience with the idea that recycling waste can convert the unusable into something valuable. By connecting the residuum of London to the waste produced by society, Dickens is giving these characters a value of their own within society through their existence as commodities. As a result, the modern idea of Our Mutual Friend is one that is occupied with the notion that the modern revaluation of labor power makes everyone who labors of some value. Dickens seems to imply that the upper and middle class of London should see the poor as possessing a labor value that can ultimately benefit the city and therefore eradicate wasteful product. With the importance placed by Dickens on the corpse, and Mr. Venus's appropriation of human bones, Dickens shows that everybody can have value to a society through their death, even some of Dickens' less-likable characters. Dickens, writing in the Victorian era, obviously predates the twenty-first century and its current popular fascination with a sustainable economy centered around natural production. Catherine Gallagher states in her book The Body Economic that it was the "sanitarians' determination to plow the remains of consumption back into the process of production [that] seems to have inspired Our Mutual Friend" (Gallagher 104). Dickens' novel was not unique in its presentation of sanitation reform. Gallagher observed that "proposals abounded for returning the remains of spent human vitality [...] to the earth for use in further rounds of production," solutions that were championed by

Chadwick and Ruskin (Gallagher 104). Our Mutual Friend's residuum characters become ultimately redeemable through their industrious uses of waste, while there are some exceptions to this, the importance of the dust heaps to the living is stated throughout the narrative plot of Boffin and his regressive decline into a miserable miser. It is not the waste that corrupts the character of Boffin, but his growing obsession with wealth, that "one might have said that the shadows of avarice and distrust lengthened as his own shadow lengthened, and that the night closed round him gradually" (Dickens 588). As a result of this growing degradation of character, brought on by the financial production of the dust mounds, the mounds themselves must be taken away from Boffin. It is stated that "the Little Mound" that is given to Boffin by John Harmon "is quite enough for him," with the "whole rest and residue of his property [given] to the crown" (Dickens 493). Despite the fact that Dickens' was noted for his satirical responses to sociological problems; his optimistic view that the waste of the city should remain the product and responsibility of the city should not be read as purely satiric.

Money can also be interchanged with filth and disgust. As a result, the idea of Dust covering every corner of London recycles itself, with both the middle class and London's residuum finding themselves consumed by filth in one form or another. Despite the sublimation of filth, Dickens shows that that waste can still become a different form of filth: money. In Our Mutual Friend, Dickens also exemplifies the members of lower society that profit from the bodies of the dead. Much like human (and animal) feces, the dead body is also a form of organic waste. The dead body becomes the unifying Other to both the lower and upper

characters of Dickens. Much like the upper class, specifically Harmon's father, have found a way to profit from the waste of humanity, it is the lower class that finds a way to turn the corpse into commerce. The character of Mr. Venus, from Dickens' Our Mutual Friend is able to make a living off of the bones that he collects. He appears to be the only character able to successfully make money off of a corpse, through the disassociation of the corpse and the bones they leave behind. This disconnect between corpse and bones allows for Mr. Venus to acquire a successful financial gain. Mr. Venus and Gaffer are both scavengers but Mr. Venus is a member of the middle class because of the cleaner nature of his profession. Unlike Gaffer, Mr. Venus is able to remove himself from the social stigma attached to the work of a waterman or mudlark. Our Mutual Friend describes the watermen as scavengers that have discovered ways to "[convert] human lives into cash value"(Gallagher 101). Dickens does not reward the novel's characters that choose to profit from the corpse itself. The novel's other industrious characters succeed in merely profiting off of the waste that is produced by society. The other character in Our Mutual Friend that utilizes the corpse in order to make a financial profit is Gaffer the waterman. However, Dickens gives Gaffer a violent death, rendering his profession an ultimately unsuccessful one. According to Julia Kristeva, the corpse is "the most sickening of wastes, [it] is a border that has encroached upon everything" (Kristeva 3). The corpse in Our Mutual Friend plays an important part in the narrative plot of the novel, making its presence known even as it should be taking its place as waste. The corpse then, much like the excremental waste of society, is a form of abject in

the novel that serves to “uphold the ‘I’ within the Other” (Kristeva 15). The middle and lower classes become one and the same, when placed against the boundary of death and waste. By recycling waste, including corpses, into objects of commerce, both the dustmen and the waterside man established value on those items that had previously been discarded. Gallagher claims that the recycling of organic garbage created “the prototypical act of value creation” despite the fact that dustmen and watermen were successfully converting waste into money (Gallagher 109). The corpse itself is a boundary, places the living body “at the border as a living being” when in close contact with the physical form of death (Kristeva 3). Since there is value in the waste produced by society, specifically that which is produced of and from the body, then having a city covered in dust is the same as saying a city is practically made of gold. This value manifests in the importance that Dickens places on labor value and the commercial opportunities created for the poor through the productive uses of waste. In Our Mutual Friend, the ultimate filth is encompassed within money itself. In Our Mutual Friend the idea of money and the concept of filth and waste become interchangeable commodities.

The middle class of London have found their way of profiting off of the residuum, the members of the lower class, through the redistribution of waste matter in the form of Dust. Meanwhile, struggling to survive in the basest and forgotten corners of London society, the lower classes profit off of the middle class. This play for commercial dominance is powerfully presented for dramatic effect in Our Mutual Friend. On the side of the lower class, we have the

Dickensian character of Jesse Hexam, otherwise referred to as Gaffer. A member of the lower class that made their money off of the dead bodies that haunted the Thames river, Gaffer's profession is that of a waterside man. Dickens chooses to open the narrative of Our Mutual Friend, with a scene of Gaffer practicing his trade. Dickens makes it clear to the reader that the profession of waterside man was one of ill-repute, describing Gaffer's boat as being of "dirty and disreputable appearance" as it "floated on the Thames, between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone" (Dickens 1). With this description of the two bridges, Dickens places the profiting off of human waste as situated between the archaic and the modern. Our Mutual Friend is ultimately a novel concerned with the modernity of society. This idea that human waste can be invested with monetary value can "modify not only [the Self's] relationship to the totality of his body, but his very relationship to the world and to those representations that he constructs of his situation in society" (Laporte 29). While not reputable to members of Nineteenth-century society, the idea of waste becoming gold was associated with modern ideas of capitalism. Waste can be recycled into a useful commodity to be used by civilization. Even civilization can be recycled through its own destruction and the labor value that is produced through its reconstruction. Human waste is an undeniable aspect of an industrial and modern society, despite attempts at its repression, it can become far more profitable for all members of civilization if instead of ignoring the production and disposal of waste, society recycles this waste into profit and community sustainability.

CHAPTER 3

THE NETHER WORLD

Written several decades after Dickens' Our Mutual Friend, George Gissing's novel The Nether World explores a less optimistic and darker view of the filth-covered slums of London. Gissing writes with a penchant for cynicism, describing the urban landscape and its inhabitants with the same words that could be used to describe a Dante-esque descent into hell. The nether world is a place framed by the "inscription[s] of gravestones" (Gissing 2). The slums of The Nether World are "a death in abandonment and despair. This is Hell-Hell-Hell" (Gissing 345). Gissing was not the only writer in the later part of the nineteenth century that wrote about the despair and squalor that was the daily existence of London's residuum population. The journalist George Sims, in his urban travelogue How the Poor Live, described for London's middle class the living conditions of their poorer brethren. Written in 1889, the same year that The Nether World was published, Sims described in his "book of travel," the "dark side of life which the wearers of rose-colored spectacles turn away from on principle" (Sims 1-2). This is exactly the environment that Gissing fictionally explores in his novel.

Gissing prefaces his novel, The Nether World, with a quote from the French historian Ernest Renan: "A painting of a dung-heap might be justified if a beautiful flower grew out of it; otherwise the dung-heap is merely repulsive"(Gissing vii). The Nether World is that painting of a dung-heap. It is debatable if Gissing's London as dungheap has a flower growing out of it. The Nether World is a novel that provides no hope for its lower class characters.

Unlike Dickens, there is no upward mobility for London's lower class, they are doomed to remain trapped in the waste-covered slums of the city. As a result, Gissing's dungheap according to the Renan quote, is merely a repulsive place that is devoid of aesthetically pleasing attributes.

To Gissing, who has an antagonistic relationship with the upper class's treatment of London's poor, the dung-heap is the city of London itself. Gissing describes the city's underbelly as a place of no escape, both an intolerable hell and an inescapable prison. The novel has a noticeable lack of upper or middle-class characters and the part of London that Gissing shows us is only concerned with the inhabitants of London's poorest slums. The characters that Gissing creates in The Nether World live alongside "a ceaseless scattering of mud" that covers every inch of the "recesses of dim byways, where sunshine and free air are forgotten things" (Gissing 10-11). The living quarters of the fictional inhabitants of Gissing's dungheap reside in "black horror," living in a "slum [that] was like any other slum; filth, rottenness, evil odors, possessed these dens of superfluous mankind and made them gruesome to the peering mankind" (Gissing 74). This underside of London society is inhabited by the Other: the poor and unnameable of society that have been written off and left to rot as waste. Gissing's poor are an embodiment of the filth and human waste that have been dumped into the slums. Despite their metaphorical connection to the negative attributes attached to the production of excreta, these characters continue to maintain their humanity as a means of striving against their hopeless situation.

Seeing themselves as nothing more than suffering the humiliation brought on by excessive and long-lasting poverty, Gissing's characters evince disgust with themselves and their situation as inhabitants of London's dung-heap. Gissing gives character and personalities to the nameless Others cast out by London's middle class society. However inescapable Gissing knows their position to be, he creates Jane Snowden as a flower among the lower class. Instead of showcasing a desire to escape and mobilize to a higher station, Jane remains content to live among the poor and distributes her wealth among the inhabitants of London's underbelly. She is content to live a moral life of self-less charity.

Gissing shows no sympathy for the role of charity in the lives of London's poor. Using the voice of Jane's unrequited object of love, Sidney Kirkwood, Gissing expounds on the idea that London "is a vile, cursed world [...] where you may see men and women perish before your eyes, and no more chance of saving them than if they were going down in mid-ocean" (Gissing 102). Jane's predecessor of charitable action, her grandfather, becomes inhuman and monstrous by the end of his life - eventually consumed by the hopeless efforts of philanthropy. The novel presents Jane as an embodiment of outer and inner cleanliness. She has hair that "was plaited in a coil of perfect neatness" with eyes that reflected the "light [that] should be sacrificed", which is successful in misleading the reader into thinking her the flower of Renan's poetic quote (Gissing 97-98). There is no escape in Gissing's slum and Jane is "a poor animal that has been beaten from every place where it sought rest and no longer expects anything but a kick and a curse" (Gissing 98). Regardless of her humanitarian

efforts, the dungheap still breaks her. It does not break her spirit of sacrifice but the slum does break something even worse: the chance that Jane had for both happiness and a future is wasted by her choice to stay and help the poor inhabitants of the city's slums. In Gissing's version of the urban slum, the philanthropist is absorbed into the residuum, ultimately becoming a member of the class of people he/she wished to help.

In his travels and descriptions of life in the London slums, Sims uses his horrifying descriptions of waste and filth to make a plea for Christian charity and philanthropic efforts to be made in the lives of the residuum. Sims, and certainly other members of London's professional and idling middle class, saw the poor of London as capable of curing their miserable existences through donations and social reform. Gissing seems to have not shared these views on charity towards the residuum, instead looking at the employment of philanthropy and charitable work as a waste of both resources and labor. Gissing describes charity as "worse than imprudence to give the poor creature money or money's worth. It could only be hoped that the end would come before long"(Gissing 249). The person who devotes themselves to philanthropic work succeeds in wasting "the energy [brought] to this self-denying enterprise"(Gissing 229). The worst aspect of charity that Gissing describes in The Nether World is the idea that "of all forms of insolence there is none more flagrant than that of the degraded poor receiving charity which they have come to regard as a right"(Gissing 253). In the unhappy fate of Jane, Gissing leaves the happy life that she could have had in the minds of the readers by focusing on her self-entrapment. Jane is a girl that "was faithful to

the past, and unchanging,” a characteristic of her personality restrains her from finding true happiness and romance with Sydney Kirkwood (Gissing 390). Jane is “constrained to become the consoler of others” (Gissing 382). In this way, Jane represents “the nether world’s message of social inequality and political failure” (Bivona and Henkle 128). Engaged in Christian charitable work, Jane becomes farther used by the system that created her, while not making any lasting impact on the lives of London’s poor.

Jane retreats within her charitable obligations, while those around her scheme and manipulate. Gissing raises awareness of the negative effects of Jane’s charitable work. Gissing sees philanthropic efforts as pointless and a waste of resources. In The Nether World there is no hope of eradicating the waste that is encountered daily by the city’s poor. Throughout the novel, a man named Mad Jack appears to expound on the abysmal living conditions of the nether world. These parable-like speeches are meant to be the musings of an insane man that culminate in a final soliloquy. Mad Jack sees the similarities between the struggle of the residuum and the journey of “passing through a state of punishment” (Gissing 345). The Self/Other relationship in Gissing’s novel is between that of the upper and lower classes. The upper class exists outside of the novel itself and there are no members of the upper class that populate The Nether World. Gissing instead implies their existence as the inhabitants of an unattainable world that the residuum will never be a part of. It is a relationship of ambiguity that the “poor among whom you live; all those who are in suffering of body and darkness of mind, were once rich people, with every blessing the world can bestow”(Gissing

345). The rich have created their own waste: the poor. The upper class of London “produce many a monster, but the mass of those whom, after creating them, it pronounces bad are [...] guilty of weaknesses, not crimes” (Gissing 218). Gissing uses his embittered characters to observe that “this nether world has been made by those who belong to the sphere above” (Gissing 252). In Gissing’s The Nether World, the waste and filth of society has created the characters that inhabit the city’s slums.

As a result of this position of repulsive Other to the Self of London’s upper society, the characters of The Nether World never rise above the sensory appropriation of disgust. According to Winfried Menninghaus, “disgust is accounted one of the most violent affections of the human perceptual system (Menninghaus 1). This affection is what makes the poor of Gissing’s London “an acute crisis of self-preservation in the face of an unassimilable otherness”(Menninghaus 1). It is useless to help them out of the slums, because to the upper class they are merely remnants of human waste, that can only be recycled and distributed as a work force. Gissing takes a fatalistic approach to the poor work force, taking away the labor value that is usually a result of work. Gissing observes in the character of Joseph Snowden the common attribute of the poor to “[understand] quite sufficiently the advantages of wealth” (Gissing 192). Joseph might acknowledge the power of wealth but he still “lacked persistence” to gain this wealth through the means of honest labor (Gissing 192). Gissing, by observing the lack of motivation in the residuum toward financial gain, leaves the inhabitants of the nether world with no value at all in the eyes of upper and

middle class reader's of the novel. The residuum would have value to the upper classes through labor and work. Gissing shows that the common inhabitant of the slums has become resigned to their fate in the nether world and as a result they lack the motivation to change their own lives. They are the invisible inhabitants of London, that like a particle of dust must be swept under the rug. Gissing, in The Nether World, presents this sub-group of humanity as they truly are - the disaffected and forgotten, left to struggle hopelessly on their own.

Disgust is a humanizing emotion. According to William Ian Miller, the idea of disgust is a universalizing emotion, one in which “those who have very high thresholds of disgust and are hence rather insensitive to the disgusting we think of as belonging to somewhat different categories: proto-human like children, subhuman like the mad, or suprahuman like saints” (Miller, William 11). Gissing's London slums are inhabited by problematic members of each of those classes, from the doomed progeny of the poor, to Mad Jack and his existential ravings about hell, to the misguided and wasteful saintliness of Jane. Nature, according to Miller is not the identifier of the boundaries of filth and cleanliness, it is instead culture (or in the case of The Nether World, specifically Victorian culture) that “draws the lines between defilement and purity, clean and filthy, those crucial boundaries disgust is called on to police” (Miller, William 15). While disgust does serve successfully in its duties as a policing agent of the clean and the filthy, Gissing problematizes this idea by making the very objects in need of policing the personification of the upper class's waste.

Disgust, in both Miller's theory and Gissing's novel, can work as a political emotion. As disgust is utilized by Victorian society, as it is in modern society, "the socially low do not smell good to the high, and the high feel that the social and political orders are threatened by the polluting powers of the lower orders" (Miller, William 18). As a result of the polarizing effects caused by the emotional power of disgust, the political social boundaries between high and low culture are established and therefore policed by the affection of disgust between class status. This works well in The Nether World, as the dungheap created by London's upper society cannot ultimately produce a flower. "The gloom" of London's slums ultimately suggest "stealth and shame" (Gissing 73). This policing agent of disgust consigns the lower classes of Victorian London to remain simply waste, and as Gissing presents the plight of its inhabitants, they have no chance of upward mobility due mostly to the political power of disgust. The population of the nether world is doomed to failure because "poor devils can't afford to be what they'd wish, in the way of honesty and decent living" (Gissing 329). The poor of London, more in Gissing than in the novels of Dickens, are incapable of being anything else but the upper class's Other, at least in the arena of cultural and social history is concerned.

The Nether World is a novel that preoccupies itself with the point of view of London's residuum population. Gissing attempts to use the harsh despair of their reality to force his reader's into becoming part of the tragedy that exists in the city's slums. The poor in Gissing's novel see themselves as "the most desperate class of hungry mortals [...] which make life an unending fever"(Gissing 192).

Clara's act of escape, and her attempt at upward mobility, are presented as a noble and innately human endeavor. The lack of desire for personal betterment is seen by Gissing to be against the instinctual nature of man to rise out of his filth. The poor that live in the nether world seem to resist the "uncertainty of modernity" (McCracken 87). Despite their attempts at cleanliness, they remain comfortable in the state of savage habitation. Gissing offers them no means to escape the confines of the nether world. The character of Jane Snowden exemplifies the tragedy that falls on anyone given the means to escape a life in the slums but who does not actualize such an escape. The characters that Gissing employs in his novel lack upper class or middle class counterparts and instead his characters are "exiled as a social being" and therefore are without a place in a repressive society" (McCracken 103). Gissing does not present for his readers a sense of sympathetic displacement with the lower class in The Nether World, they remain characters on the side of the Other. Instead, the inhabitants of the nether world serve the purpose of projecting to the middle class the bleak conditions of London's slums. The presentation of the nether world in Gissing's novel attempts to portray the harsh reality of the the lifes of the poor and pays special attention to the inadequeses of charity and philanthropic efforts.

The Nether World is less a novel about characters than it is about the city of London. The disreputable and disregarded underworld of London becomes a character in and of itself. Gissing appears to be creating a different form of social geography by exaggerating the filth and bleakness that resounds throughout his novel. Gissing's depiction of London as a city shrouded under "thin clouds of

unsavory dust, mingled with the light refuse of the streets” creates an affect of disgust from the novel’s audience (Gissing 2). Gissing’s London is a place of “pest-stricken regions,” and the novel’s plot takes place “across miles of a city of the Damned” (Gissing 164). Gissing sees this underside of London as being Hell on earth. It is a necessary hell and one that must exist in order to affirm the clean existence of the upper class. The upper class treats the poor much like he treats his own bodily waste, unable to ever “reconcile himself to his ‘remnant of earth’ and will go to great lengths to conceal it, to sneak it past even the words that name it” (Laporte 76). Gissing’s novel, despite its fatalistic portrayal of life in the slums, also appears to pay tribute to “lives [that] would remain a protest against those brute forces of society which fill with wreck the abysses of the nether world” (Gissing 164). While the dungheap is still a place without hope for betterment, it is still a world that is inhabited by strong-willed and hardworking characters.

The result of this disillusioned and bleak presentation of life in the slums of London is a sensory affection of disgust that is rampant throughout the novel. These are places that are covered in the filth and dirt of the city. The slums are a place invigorated with the “passes [of] a voice half-menacing, half mournful through all the barren ways and phantom-haunted refuges of the nether world” (Gissing 247). The residuum of the city live in the part of London that “shows as a dark, irregularly rounded patch against the whiteness of suburban districts” (Gissing 364). Gissing observes that in “another decade [the] dark patch will have spread greatly,” the poor’s efforts to blemish the appearance of incoming modernity (Gissing 364). The response to the creeping threat of filth and disgust

to overpower society invokes the emotion of disgust in such a way that appears intentional on the part of Gissing. This purpose of this emotional response seems meant to invoke a sensationalized connection between the reader and London's lower class. Gissing wishes to immerse the reader into the emotions of the dungheap itself, hoping to create an understanding for the miserable way of life of London's poor. Unlike Henry Mayhew and his journalistic travels among the lower classes of society in his book London Labour and the London Poor , Gissing empathizes the sensational effects of fiction to dramatize the response of disgust. More powerful than the connection of sympathy, this emotive response of disgust adds a fatalistic tone to the narrative plot of The Nether World.

In contrast with Dickens, whose characters move from lower to upper class status with sometimes comedic effect, the characters of Gissing's novel have no hope of upward mobility. Gissing uses this idea as the ultimate tragic event of the novel, Clara's rebellion against her place among the lower class. In an attempt to escape the squalor of London's poor, Clara runs off to become an actress. Later the victim of an attack, Clara returns home scarred by acid, a physical reminder of her "rebellion", and as a result she "had paid a price that might well have been spared" (Gissing 280). Gissing observed that life in the nether world will break even the strongest and noblest of intentions. Not only a statement on the punishments that are inflicted on those that strive for upward mobility in social status, the physical scarring of Clara also showcases the need for a more tangible symbol of disgust on, quite literally in the case of Clara, the face of the poor. With her scarred face and doomed physical appearance, Clara inspires a melancholic

reflection that the upper class feels towards the lower. Dickens often saw the scarred face as an opportunity to garner sympathy from his reading audience; Gissing does not use Clara's scarred face for that purpose. Instead, the reader encounters a scarred woman that is ultimately devoid of any redemptive meaning. There are no redemptive characters in Gissing's novel, although characters like Jane and Clara are given the chance to elevate themselves above life in the slums. Clara maintains her previous personality traits as a way for Gissing to expose the despair that is reality to the inhabitants of The Nether World. Unlike her previous explications on strength of character, Clara's physical descent is what ultimately communicates across the social boundaries set up by Gissing in The Nether World. Clara, like the other characters in the nether world, is never allowed to escape the tragedy of London's residuum.

Gissing's use of physically scarring Clara's beauty is meant to confuse aesthetic ideals of beauty as defined by a refined society. By making Clara's face ugly through the ambiguous nature of an acid scar, Gissing complicates the reactions that occur when other characters come in contact with her changed physical appearance. Clara's face becomes a "dead thing" that forces her to find other ways to gain an emotional connection (Gissing 294). Ugliness is itself an ambiguous term in the fictional realm of The Nether World. While a fruitless endeavor that will lead to nothing, Gissing is not disavowing that "the worship of the beautiful is an excellent thing" (Sims 2). Sims and Gissing are almost in agreement that the lives of the poor are meant to be seen by one capable of seeing "down deep in the mire to find the soul of goodness in things evil" (Sims 2).

Sydney is the only one that is able to see Clara as a decent human being, the reality of her personality is that of selfishness. Sydney's attempts to create a version of Clara that is good and decent is tragic because the reader understands that Clara has not gained any redemptive effects on her character following the scarring incident. She continues to be self-centered and collapses under the weight of her suicidal thoughts. While Sydney's tragedy centers around his marriage to Clara and his denouncement of a relationship with Jane Snowden; by the novel's end Sydney's purpose is to prevent Clara from successfully committing suicide. Sydney's efforts to love Clara are both noble and tragic, as it is clear to the reader that Clara lacks the character worthy of Sydney's self-sacrifice. This bleak conclusion of the novel seems to imply that by attempting to escape the nether world, Clara exemplifies the idea that there is no escape.

The social boundaries in Gissing's novel are not permeable. These are secure boundaries policed by the emotion of disgust. In Our Mutual Friend, Dickens creates a mutable boundary between class status and the implication of modernity is inherent in the professions of recycling and redistributing human waste. Gissing's novel and all of its doom and fatalism leaves no real hope for the future of human waste. Unwilling to see the benefit of turning excrement into gold, Gissing cannot see civilization at its most modern best. Gissing does not see society as redemptive, unlike the redemptive aspects that are found in the novels of Dickens. It is the industrial use of waste in Our Mutual Friend that shows the reader a certain hope for the future of those that live buried under the waste of civilization. Unlike the characters that inhabit The Nether World, the characters

found in Our Mutual Friend have found ways to profit off of the waste that has been dumped around them. Those willing to re-appropriate the waste of society become an important cog in the modernity machine, they utilize their ability to sustain the population. Dickens becomes hopeful for the future of human waste and believes that when it comes to money, “fortune has no origins” as related through an aesthetic filter and that “the beautiful is constituted by a primordial non olet that punctuates the alchemy of circulation” (Laporte 85). Dickens fictionalizes the concept that if “the beautiful does not smell” becomes the equivalent belief that “there are no beautiful smells” (Laporte 85). Humanity cannot escape living among its waste and it proof of modernity that mankind has capitalized on a way to profit from human excreta.

Similar to Dickens’ Our Mutual Friend, Gissing shows the filthy side of money in The Nether World. It is money that corrupts the seemingly good souls of the novel and not the filthy environment that they live in. “That accursed money” is the controlling factor in the poverty stricken lives of Gissing’s fictional characters (Gissing 236). Money is not the only cause of the downfall of the novel’s characters. The problem is the money set aside by Michael Snowden that is to be used for charity. The money that is for charitable endeavors “will be the cause of endless suffering to those [really loved]” (Gissing 236). And indeed, the money does exactly that, taking Jane’s grandfather Michael down “the last step in that process of dehumanization which threatens idealists” (Gissing 255). It seems there can be no winning where money is concerned, unless a delicate balance can be struck. It was Dickens’ Boffin that became dehumanized as a result of money

hoarding, and Gissing's Michael Snowden degenerates when he gives it all away and leaves none for his daughter to escape the confines of slum life.

Gissing's characters fight daily to eat and find shelter, leaving no room for noble thoughts of justice and charity. In this way, Jane's character (and her grandfather) do not have a place until the end of the novel when she finds herself returned to the life of the poverty-stricken poor. "Morality" becomes a "social construction" that Gissing creates as a means to connect his readers to the suffering of the Other (James 85). Poverty becomes the disgust factor of the novel, presenting the nether world as a place where "money ennobles [and] poverty degrades [is] a central theme" (James 112). The residuum suffer the humiliation of being victims of poverty and this humiliation multiplies the effects of filth and disgust that are an evil effect of living in the slums. Gissing's poverty ruins lives and serves as the ultimate psychological evil that the residuum fight against every day. I believe that filth and waste do not cause the degradation of the poor. It is poverty that ultimately condemns the residuum to the disgusting living conditions described by Gissing.

The Nether World is concerned with a tragic and bleak portrayal of the realistic conditions that exist in London's slum communities. His novel lacks the element of imagination that can be found Dickens' writings. Instead of incorporating imagination into his fiction, Gissing uses realistic depictions of the city and its residents to create an emotional response from his audience. Our Mutual Friend is often referred to as one of Dickens' more imaginative novels. In her essay on the novel, Nancy Aycock Metz explores the power of imagination

that helps to regenerate the disjointed world of Victorian London class relations. Dickens uses this quality of humanity, imagination, as a means to offset the “challenge to the imagination, so defined, is that monstrous image of vulgarity and unloveliness, the dustheap” (Metz 68). Critics have argued that this imagery of mounds of human waste was Dickens’ own way of standing up to the repulsive greed of upper class society, accordingly called an “excremental vision” by Michael Steig in his essay of the same name (Steig 339). If Dickens’ vision of London is ultimately one of excrement then it is a more peaceful and positive organizational approach to the vertical relationship between London’s rich and the city’s poor than the vision that exists in The Nether World.

Despite their existence as members of the residuum, Gissing’s characters in The Nether World continue to struggle against the dung-heap that is industrial London. Instead of presenting ways to profit from the waste of society, The Nether World instead is smothered with the residual waste of incoming modernity. Gissing’s novel lacks faith in the potential transformative effect of labor that infuses Dickens’ book on the same subject matter. The importance placed on labor and industry when discussing modernity is a defining characteristic. Perhaps, by late into the nineteenth century, members of London society that were aware of the problems of the city’s slums had come to the realization that Dickens’ optimistic view of a modern world living harmoniously among their own waste was just a product of one writer’s imaginative daydreams. For Gissing, returning to the novel’s opening epigraph, the vision of London’s slums depicted in The Nether World, was not an example of artistic expression,

but a window into bleak repulsion that festered underneath the noses of the upper class. Despite the noble charitable efforts of the novel's flower, Jane Snowden, and in accordance with the criminal activities of the novel's other less-savory characters, Gissing's vision of London is a repulsive dung-heap, with the only hope of redemption lying in the hands of the residuum. The result of that type of reading the novel problematizes the possibility that Gissing believed that by writing a realistic account of life in the slums would lead his audience to perform the charitable efforts that his novel condemns as being hopeless endeavors. Gissing's nether world is populated with strong characters that need to hold on to these personality traits in order to claim a victory over London's more refined inhabitants because philanthropy and charity can not do that for them.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The unifying element of Our Mutual Friend and The Nether World is that of human waste and the disgust that arises when one finds oneself standing alongside a large pile of shit. The authors' two versions of London vary little in the idea that the modern world was one that would need to co-exist with its own waste. The world of Victorian London, both literally and figuratively, was covered in its own excrement, with its rivers a resting place for the ultimate in human waste - the corpse. Gissing and Dickens create a version of London as Hell that is constructed socially rather than theologically. Gissing believed that entering the slums of London was like walking through the entrance to hell, with the building's walls standing "in a perpetual black sweat [with] a mouldy reek [coming] from the open doorways; the beings that passed in and out seemed soaked with grimy moisture, puffed into distortions, hung about with rotting garments" (Gissing 248). Dickens saw the city of London as "such a black shrill city, combining the qualities of a smokey house and a scolding wife; such a gritty city; such a hopeless city, with no rent in the leaden canopy of its sky" (Dickens 145). Through the use of sensory descriptions to create a sense of the repulsive qualities of London, both Dickens and Gissing succeed in creating a strong image of the daily living conditions of the London residuum.

The importance of a sensory experience when discussing the Self/Other relationship between Victorian upper and lower classes is fascinating because of the anxiety that is created within the vertical social dichotomy of rich and poor.

Gissing and Dickens have the task of creating facts out of the fictional social creations that occur within the narrative itself. According to David Trotter, “the meaning and value” of these facts emerge and ultimately depend on the “fidelity to the observable social world” (Trotter 31). This can account for the level of repulsive realism that is present in Dickens’ imaginative novel, and the fatalistic elements of Gissing’s work. While a novelist of the Victorian era can successfully reinterpret a sense of both visual and auditory truth, the sense of smell is harder to recreate within the pages of narrative. Olfactory descriptions are problematic, because “smells are hard to define,” no matter their importance as a “disintegrative and agonistic principle in the literature of sanitary reform” (Trotter 38). It is seemingly easy for Gissing to describe the slums of London engulfed in “air [that] was poisoned with the odour of an unclean crowd” but it is another connection to olfactory disgust that the description should invoke in the reader (Gissing 274). While reading The Nether World, the reader does get the sense that this is more than description, that in fact the novel becomes an experience in the psychological affection of disgust. The Nether World and its revulsion with the social order that existed in the Victorian era seems to function as a catalyst for sociological change.

This concept of the idea of stink as an element of disgust is crucial to the anxiety that arises from narratives concerned with sanitation reform. According to theories of sanitation, especially the attitudes that were prevalent in the Victorian era, “a bad smell was itself something to be afraid of” (Trotter 42). For the purposes of the metaphorical implications that waste has on The Nether World

and Our Mutual Friend, the importance of the smells within the novel equate to the fact that something becomes bad because it smells. Anxiety over disgust occurs as a result of the smell, and is not then the cause of the stink. This can be applied to Gissing's novel of life in the London slums, because it solidifies the fatalistic idea that there can be no hopeful reform of these filthy living conditions. This disgusting smell creates a barrier between desire and negative objects. According to Freudian ideology, the element of disgust serves as a "reaction formation against an interest in and a desire for its object" (Freud 40). If we are told that a group of society, beaten down by the tragedies of life and condemned to make a living out of the filth and wastelands of upper society, is disgusting then the affective response creates that boundary between the proper Self and the abject Other. Freud agrees that the emotion of disgust was not something to be seen as a negative emotion, merely as a policing of boundaries established by anxiety to control the social mores of a society.

That disgust can be taken as a positive response to a social anxiety works when discussing Dickens' use of waste and filth in Our Mutual Friend. The novel, unlike Gissing's The Nether World is not necessarily concerned with the bleak and overtly abject that many critics bring up when discussing disgust for human waste. Dickens presents the unsavory and lower class characters of his novel with comedic whimsy that was he established writing style. The waste-full filth of the river Thames can be a location of redemption and rebirth because the social message created out of Our Mutual Friend is understood to be based on popular Victorian caricatures of society. Gissing's The Nether World succeeds where

Dickens does not and creates a sense of anxiety regarding the Other and its placement securely behind the barrier of disgust. It is why the reader cannot connect with the noble-intent of Jane, because we can never quite escape our disgust with her decision to stay in the waste and it is uncomfortable to watch her struggle against a losing battle with the poor of London's slums. Jane is the victim of her grandfather's plan, and she never achieves any of her own individual goals, sacrificing a life of happiness with Sydney in the process. The novel ends with an image of Jane as "unmarked, un-encouraged, save by [the] uprightness and mercy [...] brought some comfort to hearts less courageous than [her] own" (Gissing 392). Her instinct should be to escape out of this place of abject Otherness, and by showing the desire to stay among that which by the Freudian definition of social boundaries should be undesirable makes her, despite Gissing's attempts to create the opposite, an unsympathetic character.

Both Dickens and Gissing are able to bring to life the nether world of London. Inhabited by the residuum, the slums are given a sense of humanity through these two novels. Although both novelists are different in their views regarding the future of mankind and the human element of civilization, these novels succeed in pulling back the veil and showing the reading audience that the poor are not that different from the middle class. According to Sims, "the density of the population in certain districts, and the sanitary defects of the tenements are, at present, absolute dangers to the Public health" (Sims 109). It would be wise then, for the residuum to find a way to profit and recycle the waste of society, therefore contributing to their own betterment while also maintaining the growing

needs (and excrement) of an increasing population. The Nether World serves to convey to readers the harsh reality that exists in London's slums. It is possible that Gissing hoped his novel would excite action from his upper and middle class readers to find workable solutions to the problem of the residuum. Gissing's depiction of the residuum lacks the imagination that is evident in Dickens' Our Mutual Friend. The element of imagination when attempting to eradicate the disgusting living conditions of the poor is an important one. Imagination is what can ultimately lead to the innovation and invention that is a contributing factor to the modern trajectory of civilization.

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