The Man of Life Upright: Etiquette, Self-Mastery, and the Rise of the Victorian Bourgeoisie

Madeleine Cohen

In *The Gentle Life: Essays in Aid of the Formation of Character*, published in 1880, James Hain Friswen proclaims, "The men of one age are not those of another."[1] This commonplace points to an ambivalence about the present, as it does the importance of the past, and the development of character that occurs in the nebulous space between the two. Citing the words of 'a lady long known as a leader of society' Friswen continues, "I really do not know what to make of the young men of the day…they cannot talk, they lounge about, and are not fond of company."[2] These statements, as well as the anthology of social customs in which they appear, speak to a reliance on an understanding of the past as comfortable, unified, and unchanging, as contrasted to a chaotic, confusing, and fragmented present. It is within these distinctions that we find couched what Eric Hobsbawm refers to as invented tradition and the dialogue between past and present it creates. He writes, "'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a… symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour… which… attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past."[3] This 'suitable historic past' and the ceremony in

[1] James Hain Friswen, *The Gentle Life: Essays in the Aid of the Formation of Character, 26th Edition* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1880), 26.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.S

which it is shrouded, come to serve as the basis for our judgments of the present; our very understanding of the world.

Etiquette - the rules of social and moral conduct - illuminates the importance of, and reliance on, tradition. It became the most 'suitable' element of the historic past. Prevalent throughout much of the nineteenth century, this call to tradition through etiquette provided a sense of a solid backdrop to the increasingly rapid technological, social, and political change of the Western world. England in particular, a nation deeply concerned with its historic past, came to view tradition and the value set it upheld, as the ultimate benchmark of any progress which hinted at deviation from it. In this way, etiquette provided an opening between the seemingly discrete worlds of past and present, as the manners of modern subjects uncertain about their place in society channelled the accepted views of past times. In the multivalent concept of etiquette in nineteenth century England, as well as its prescribed rules and precepts, we see the search for a kind of containment within, and distance from, a world caught in a seemingly endless spiral of rapid change which threatened not only a bold break from tradition, but its ultimate dissolution. This is largely characterized by a social code which privileged, above all else, comportment: cultivation, propriety, containment, discipline, and polish. The belief of those who subscribed to the doctrine of etiquette - namely an upper class anxious about losing its footing in a progressively levelled society and a rising bourgeoisie attempting to gain their own ground – was that the inner self could be moulded by the outer; humanity itself constituted by human behaviour. Etiquette was therefore about more than presenting oneself to the world as a dignified subject; it was about presenting oneself to the world, and to oneself, as a moral agent. Etiquette was therefore "taken from a moral point as well as from a conventional one" which governed as much as it guided, not only social behaviour, but mind, body, and spirit.[4]

[4] Anon., *Manners and Rules of Good Society or Solecisms to be Avoided by a Member of the Aristocracy, 14th Edition* (New York: Frederick Warne & Co., 1887), 3.

The inward turn such etiquette brought about would prove to be of extreme importance to the rising bourgeoisie, who sought both escape from, and distinction within, a society they considered too heavily embedded in stifling traditional practices of the past. By adding a profound moral, utilitarian, and pragmatic dimension to what was seen as more ceremonial social practices of the past, the bourgeoisie stressed the importance of both their own value set and their ability to achieve and mirror those values in the project they came to make of themselves. English men and women attempted, therefore, not only to present themselves as, but truly to become, English gentlemen and English ladies. They wished through these two distinct but related ideals, to be worthy of a lengthy and illustrious historical tradition, rather than to artificially or dishonourably inherit it. In this, they were reacting, and refusing to react, to a dramatically changing society. Members of the bourgeoisie saw in etiquette a path to reason, morality, and authenticity in the face of a world which challenged all three. Additionally, this path enabled the bourgeois to engage in a real dialogue with the past wherein they negotiated on their own terms what space tradition was to play in this rapidly transforming society and equally rapid change in their view of themselves. Fuelled by anxiety and buttressed by tradition, etiquette illuminated not only broader social change, but a radical shift in the modern understanding of the creation, significance, and epistemological place of the self.

The appeal to history and tradition is often suggestive of the need for solid footing in a time when society's very foundations have been shaken. This is most certainly the case for Victorian England, wherein rapid industrialization, political reform, and increasing social mobility significantly altered its internal functioning, as well as its place on the world's stage. Despite the sense of optimism which accompanied much of the large-scale change brought about during this time, many were touched negatively by its stymieing effects: "…the revolutions that shook Western culture were traumatic too for their beneficiaries; cheering on

the innovators, many confessed to a vertigo generated by the disappearance of familiar landmarks."[5] Embraced for their forward movement as much as they were denounced for their departure, innovations of the nineteenth century sent English society reeling into an uncertain future. One reaction was a thrust towards rediscovering a more stable past. This tension between a desire to advance and the desire to retreat not only produced an atmosphere of anxiety, but fostered what Peter Gay refers to as an era of aggression. This climate, while affecting all of English society, was particularly potent for the rising bourgeoisie. In dealing with social and cultural uncertainties, we see a desire for certainty and a turn towards the individual in an attempt to find it. As Gay writes:

> …we can appropriately call Victorian bourgeois aggressive not merely because their hunt for profits and power exacted grave social costs from sweated labor, exploited clerks, obsolete artisans, or maltreated natives, but also be cause they expended energies to get a grip on time, space, scarcity – and themselves – as never before.[6]

In redefining the world in which they lived, bourgeois Victorians were forced, in turn, to redefine themselves. In the process of so doing, more than notions of progress and capital were taken into account. The dramatic social change of the era forced individuals to come to terms with the degree to which they were shaped by those processes of change, and the degree to which they could shape themselves. In an attempt to carve some kind of space separate from a dizzying world of new social realities and old struggles, the Victorian bourgeoisie looked to themselves and the very essence of their humanity as the ultimate embodiment of, and escape from, society at large.

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[5] Peter Gay, *The Cultivation of Hatred* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993), 425.
[6] Ibid., 6.

Implicit in this turn to the self is the importance of boundaries. Whether seen as a sequestering or constituting of the individual, a turn to self-mastery in the nineteenth century demonstrates an attempt to achieve some sense of self-space not made available in or by the broader social world. Despite the fact that the incitement to find such space had its roots in anxiety about social change, Gay argues that these aggressive attempts to self-fashion were not always negative. They were in fact, often quite the opposite, leading individuals to discover new modes and models of efficiency, knowledge, social improvement, and self-confidence, all of which were important issues for the Victorian bourgeoisie.[7] There is a sense in which a turning inwards as a reaction to external forces helped to foster an increasing rate of change in themselves. Whether against the aristocracy and working-class between which it was couched, in an appeal to greater morality, or stability, "[I]t was the middle ranks who erected the strictest boundaries between private and public space, a novelty which struck many early nineteenth-century travellers in England."[8]

Determinately adhering to a value set prescribed by neither the upper nor lower class, the bourgeoisie attempted to safely and comfortably define their own arena in the midst of the moral decay they observed on both ends. Reacting to the lavish and illicit manner of the aristocracy, while at the same time desirous to channel the long tradition from which it stems, as well attempting to distance themselves from the general decay and degeneracy commonly associated with the working class, the bourgeoisie stressed rationality, productivity, and utility. In so doing, the bourgeoisie not only grounded itself in a tradition and a past they saw as an integral part of life, but admitted themselves to the change of the future. In this way, "the middle class view was

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[7] Gay, *Hatred*, 424-6.

[8] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 359.

becoming the triumphant common sense of the Victorian age."[9] As such, bourgeois self-mastery – the erection of boundaries and the spaces created therein – proved to be enormously significant, not only to class development, but to the way in which class came to engage with external factors which affected all members of society. As Peter Gay writes:

> [m]astery simply gives pleasure. The gratified sense of closure, of sheer relief, experienced when one finally understands the workings of an intricate machine, solves an intractable riddle, gets a demanding skill securely in one's grip, contrasts with its cheerless counterpart, frustration."[10]

From the drawing of lines came more than a sense of pleasure about one's newly discovered or solidified identity, particularly in comparison to others, or even an escape from the frustration brought about by the loss or dissolution of that very identity. For the Victorian bourgeoisie, it came to signify a reconstitution and new understanding of the very concepts on which that mastery was founded.

A similar charge can be made of the history and development of etiquette, which came to play a significant role in the formation of the new 'space' of the bourgeoisie. Founded on notions of civility, morality, and general conduct, the word etiquette came to take on a variety of meanings during the nineteenth century. Originating in the concept of civility, rules of correct conduct have undergone many transformations. The first popular usage of the word civility can be found in Erasmus' *De civilitate morum puerilium*, published in 1530, in which it is "… associated with the notion of proper deportment…"[11] and "…spread the idea that propriety of

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[9] Ibid., 28.

[10] Gay, *Hatred*, 425.

[11] Jorge Arditi, *A Geneology of Morals: Transformations of Social Relations in France and England from the Fourteenth to Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2.

behaviour meant something important for the conduct of civil life – of life, that is, within the spheres of the body politic."[12] As such, civility was centred on the idea of maintaining social order, guiding the manner of the individual so as to better guide that of society. It is here that an appeal to Norbert Elias' work on the concept of civilization is useful, as he points to the significance of the factors and dimensions included in our very understanding of the word; that which we consider to lie in and outside the boundaries it sets out: "By this term Western society seeks to describe what constitutes its special character and what it is proud of: the development of its technology, the nature of its manners, the development of *its* scientific knowledge or view of the world, and much more."[13] To be civilized necessarily means, then, to adhere to the accepted social understanding of what civilization is; to be civil means to self-consciously give oneself to/be a part of society.

By the eighteenth century, however, the concept of civility as a socially governing power was replaced by that of etiquette. Previously, the notion of civility that predominated corresponded to "stages in a development" rather than constituting "an antithesis of the kind that exists between 'good' and 'bad'"[14] - in other words, a slow unfolding rather than an immediate prescription. 'Etiquette' set out a more clearly defined system of rules and conventions which sought to denote that very black and white distinction, and in a punctuating fashion. Even the word etiquette, derived from the French word for ticket which denoted the "list of ceremonial observances of a court"[15] clearly demarcated which "forms of behaviour were necessary to be observed" and thus "what behaviour was, or was not, 'the ticket.'"[16] Despite its clear-cut etymology, we must not suggest that etiquette – as both word

[12] Ibid.

[13] Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners: The Civilizing Process, Volume I* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 4.

[14] Ibid., 59.

[15] Oxford English Dictionary Online

[16] Friswen, *Gentle Life*, 36.

and concept - did not enjoy an intricate unfolding of its own. But it did set out to clearly delineate lines of power, appropriateness, and identity where previous social code sought to gather, assimilate, and guide. As the opening chapter of *Manners and Rules of Good Society* (1887) makes perfectly clear, nineteenth century etiquette was as much about what was not done as what was; what was excluded from the strict realms of appropriateness being drawn carried as much weight as what was included:

> Not only are certain rules laid down, and minutely explained, but the most comprehensive instructions are given in each chapter respecting every form or phase of the subject under discussion that it may be clearly understood, what is done, or what is *not* done, in good society, and also how what is done in good society should be done.[17]

In addition to clearly marking social space by the measure of behaviours, the systems of etiquette also came to clearly define the individuals who adhered to such definitions. In short, etiquette provided for various social values a structure that civility lacked; etiquette carefully created a well-defined space for individuals within which to operate. As Jorge Arditi suggests: "The word [etiquette]… marked the breakdown of what had been taken as a necessary connection between manners and ethics, and just as important, their reconnection to a different ground: the group in itself."[18] In other words, new rules and systems of etiquette came to speak as loudly to the group through which they were enacted as the foundational moral base from which they originally drew.

Furthermore, these systems enabled newly demarcated social groups to cohere and develop internally and, thus, to pay less heed to the greater social schema of which they were a part. In this way, Arditi suggests that after the eighteenth century, etiquette

[17] Anon., *Manners and Rules*, 1.
[18] Arditi, *Geneology of Manners*, 3.

can be viewed as "a transformation in the nature of the experience of detachment…" wherein social groups developed through their own self-identification as buttressed by the social codes they themselves had created. This would prove to be of great significance to the rising Bourgeoisie. Moreover, "…the boundaries that started to form between people provoked a changed experience of other and, by extension of self",[19] suggesting that the governing social systems led to increased self-consciousness and, inevitably, self-mastery.

The rise of etiquette not only sparked a tendency of certain pockets of society to turn in towards themselves (and within their own self-imposed borders), but to turn inwards altogether. Founded on the belief that etiquette was the utmost expression of humankind's inner condition, the individual was viewed as a project which could be worked upon from many angles. "Bodily carriage, gestures, dress, facial expressions – this 'outward' behaviour with which the treatise concerns itself is the expression of the inner, the whole man."[20] Despite the extreme importance placed on exterior comportment, the interior state to which it spoke took precedence: "Can manners be learnt by rote, and the gentle life assumed? We think not; first make a man good and good-wishing, and you will then make his manners good; all else is mere ceremony, although that is a great thing."[21] It was the responsibility of the individual, then, to either find or harness within themselves a morality that would then be enacted extrinsically.

This conflation of exteriority or appearance and internal condition carried further depth, as it was also believed that, if working with a firmly rooted though perhaps hazy moral base, exterior work could, of one's own volition, enhance one's internal condition. "The duty to be moral, they [the Victorians] believed (or wanted desperately to believe), was not God-given but

[19] Ibid., 5.
[20] Elias, *Manners*, 55-6.
[21] Friswen, *Gentle Life*, 35.

man-made, and it was all the more 'peremptory and absolute' for that."[22] Despite this emphasis on individuals' roles in constituting themselves as moral beings rather than relying on a belief that they were such from birth, much of nineteenth etiquette was centred on characteristics specifically associated with Christianity which largely stressed humankind's inherent good nature. "[G]entleness, mercy, humility, sweetness, self-abnegation, love…"[23] were all considered of the utmost importance for a truly moral constitution. Without the foundation these virtues provide humanity, there could not exist any true etiquette regardless of the level of self-mastery achieved:

> "…manners, rightly regarded, are the style of the soul, and they can never be genuine, never be anything more than veneer or polish, unless they proceed as naturally as the exhalation of a rose from the inmost beauty of the spirit, that is to say, from humility, tenderness, loving-kindness, and desire of excellence."[24]

By improving oneself, tending to one's manner and caring for one's appearance, the nineteenth century individual proved themselves as an ever-evolving being, seeking greater morality and greater strength: "Morals, with Christ, had to do with man as he was; Manners with what He was becoming."[25] As dictated by the etiquette of the day, this evolution, or, further civilizing, was to come about as a result of greater refinement and containment, both made manifest by the denial of humankind's 'animalistic' tendencies; its most basic drives. Samuel Smiles, a popular public moralist of the late nineteenth century wrote: "to be morally free –

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[22] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Marriage and Morals Among Victorians* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1986), 21.
[23] Anon., *The Glass of Fashion, Some Social Reflections by A Gentleman with a Duster* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921), 114.
[24] Ibid., 123.
[25] Ibid., 117.

to be more than an animal – man must be able to resist instinctive impulse, and this can only be done by the exercise of self-control."[26] This emphasis on self-control was evident in all forms of etiquette, expressed from advice literature of the day to satirical cartoons and, as Peter Gay suggests, "… appears as among life's most precious goods..."[27] Like all important Victorian values, however, this was something that could only be gained through hard work, dedication, and perseverance: "…since it is contrary to human inclinations, it is also among the hardest of lessons to impart. It demands nothing less than the triumph of reason over passion, of one's higher over one's lower nature."[28] This call on the inner depths of humankind's morality not only signified the importance placed on 'proper' behaviour in society, but on individuals' ability to deny all their 'improper' tendencies in order to access it.

This curbing of humankind's inner passion with staunch reason speaks to the rise of etiquette as a new kind of bourgeois religion which not only governed society from above, but individuals, their minds and bodies, from within. "Control over the countenance is a part of manners",[29] and quite an integral one for a bourgeois sphere preoccupied with the notion of self-mastery. In particular, this was made manifest in the meticulous attention paid to outward appearance which displayed for the world what, if anything, remained of humankind's natural 'savage' state. For men and women, however, the inner nature to which one's outer appearance adverted came to take on vastly different meanings, with man expected to thoroughly suppress his nature, while women had merely to channel the altogether more gentle nature they were believed to have had.

Working within this contradictory conflation of nature and

[26] Gay, *Hatred*, 505.
[27] Ibid., 494.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Joan Wildeblood and Peter Brinson, *The Polite World: A Guide to English Manners and Deportment from the Thirteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1965), 244.

gender, man's association with a particular kind of artifice was increasingly considered beneficial, while, by the same token, it was considered detrimental for women to appeal to the same kind of distance from nature. "Nature, rather than Art, was to be the young lady's guide",[30] while the exact inverse would be said for young men. In this turn away from man's nature, Evelyn Waugh suggests that "If you examine the accumulated code of precepts which define the gentleman you will find that almost all are negative."[31] While viewed in a masculine context, nature symbolized all that threatened good morals and good manners, within a feminine one, it illustrated everything that must be guided in order to attain either. While this type of division between the origins and expectations of the genders was not, by any stretch of the imagination, particular to the nineteenth century, its continued implacement speaks not only to that century's increased appeal to a more traditional past, but also to an attempt to sort out how, in the future, women were to factor into a society increasingly opening to them.

One author of a book on contemporary etiquette and manners suggests that much of the uncertainty and anxiety of the age was, in fact, *caused* by women: "One markedly new thing in English life has accompanied the decline in morals and manners. This new thing is a new spirit in women."[32] This 'new spirit' is touched upon by many authors of the day, who saw in women the root of the dissolution of a more comfortable traditional society. "The ambition of the modern woman is to show herself everywhere. She is no longer content with the drawing-room, the ballroom, and theatre; she must reign in the open air…"[33] These feelings of hostility are largely attributable to the movement of women outside the

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[30] Wildeblood and Brimson, *Polite World*, 244.

[31] Jacques Carré ed., *The Crisis of Courtesy: Studies in the Conduct-Book in Britain, 1600-1900* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 74.

[32] Anon., *Glass of Fashion*, 153.

[33] James Laver, *The Age of Optimism: Manners and Morals, 1848-1914* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 186.

strictly demarcated areas that were meant to be their 'place'. Ironically, the traditionalism of this place which trapped them equally appealed to them. Even with regards to a sojourn out of the home, women were expected to make their presence known to any friends or acquaintances they might have had in the visited area: "Ladies arriving in town or country should leave cards… to intimate that they have arrived, or returned home, as the case may be."[34] Refusal to do so, or, even worse, a robust predilection for time spent outside the company of those included in respectable society thrust women into a new realm of ruin. One author goes to far as to suggest that, "[t]he equipoise of the sexes is…destroyed… On her part, woman has done a good deal to deserve this: she has ceased to be wholly domestic and feminine, and therefore interesting and real. She has abandoned her own exclusive province, and has not established herself in another."[35] This same author suggests that in leaving her place in respectable society, woman abandoned her own agency, her legitimate claim to that place: "A charmed circle surrounds women. They can always acquire the love, respect, and due observance of man, if they choose to demand it. To do so they must be themselves. It is their fault if they step out of bounds."[36] Accordingly, women were allowed to exhibit agency so long as that agency manifested the socially acceptable. Any deviation from acceptability thus created a self-imposed limbo into which women were to remain lost. The only escape seemed to be recourse to a tradition which now proved to be more strangling than the anxiety it was originally meant to alleviate. Viewed in such a way, movement outside, or even, in some cases, within such acceptable areas, signified such horrifying change that the immediate reaction was to create ever stricter boundaries.

With regards to men, this appeal to airtight perimeters and the containment it promised was made manifest in a slightly different fashion. While a certain sense of respectability and modesty

[34] Anon., *Manners and Rules*, 18.
[35] Friswen, *Gentle Life*, 26.
[36] Ibid., 27.

was expected of women – indeed the common belief that "[w]oman was held to be of a finer kind of clay than man; just as Dresden is somewhat finer and more fragile than Berlin ware"[37] guaranteed that women were expected to hold and carry themselves with a certain degree of control, refinement, and poise - the same expectation made of men appealed less to the enactment of their natural innate grace, than their command over their very nature. The English gentleman "must fulfil his obligations and live up to his standards. He should accept and exercise leadership"[38] with and for society and with and for himself.

But to what end and for what reasons? Catherine Hall suggests the answers to these questions were not as clear cut as they perhaps appear due to the uncertainty surrounding the definition of masculine middle class identity in the nineteenth-century. As she suggests, it was "still in the process of being forged and always measured against the background of condescension from the gentry as well as the long tradition of artisan pride."[39] While it is unfair to exclude women from these same tensions, the role men played in the public sphere versus the private realm of woman's domain does emphasize the degree to which pressures from other social classes factored more significantly into the making and development of their identity. So great was the uncertainty surrounding this identity that manifesting the identity was required even in the more trite practices of the day: "'the Englishman does not gesticulate when talking and in consequence has nothing to do with his hands. To put them in his pockets is the natural action, but this gives an appearance of lounging insouciance.' The best substitutes, therefore, were the cane or umbrella…"[40] This type of commentary, the product of anxiety about the proper way to appear in society and what specifically that appearance had to say

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[37] Friswen, *Gentle Life*, 27.
[38] Philip Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1982), 12-13.
[39] Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 229.
[40] Wildeblood and Brinson, *Polite World*, 240.

about one's inner nature, further stresses the greater social anxiety of the time. Such boundaries allowed for the creation of carefully constructed categories of the self which followed the lines of authority, be it tradition, religion, or nature. Even though these strict conceptual models were not necessarily pleasing – the next century would prove to be a fight to escape from them – they helped to serve their function as creating safe space for the subject amidst unrepentant uncertainty. As Gay suggests, "Paradoxical as it might sound, character was freedom won by submission to rule."[41]

If the importance we see in the reforming and forming of individual character in nineteenth century etiquette speaks to a need for self-mastery and a broader authority to which it answered, then we must also see in it an appeal to tradition as a similar authoritative power. The author of *The Manners and Rules of Good Society* (1887) declares: "[o]ur present code of etiquette is constructed upon the refinement, polish, and culture of years, of centuries. Wealth and luxury, and contact with all that is beautiful in art and nature, have in all ages exercised a powerful influence on the manners of men…"[42] In etiquette, one certainly sees a reliance on, and desire for, the past as a reservoir of all that contemporary behaviour attempts to both channel and access. Despite the promise afforded by etiquette viewed in such a way, this kind of idealistic call on history was not powerless against the greater social forces to which it was made subject.

Etiquette during the nineteenth century, despite roots as strong as they were deep in history, tradition, and class division, was being pried from the ground out of which it grew. This was due to a process wherein the decline of the aristocracy was primarily a fact only in respect of the rise of the bourgeoisie: "If aristocratic values were thus gradually losing ground, it was largely

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[41] Gay, *Hatred*, 505.
[42] Ibid.

due to the energy of the urban middle-classes."[43] With the rise of the bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century, etiquette was infused with a rational spirit which emphasized the use to which it could be put, rather than the ceremony and tradition for which it stood: "The rules of etiquette are indispensable to the smooth working of society at large."[44] As Arditi puts it, "Being an expression of civility, manners themselves thus become an expression of the useful."[45] In moving from a function of moral behaviour within aristocratic society, through the identification and authority of social groups to stringent self-regulation, "…the spirit was lost, and only a mechanical application of some isolated recommendations, supposed to procure immediate gentility, was proposed..."[46] Regarding British conduct-books of the nineteenth century, Jacques Carré suggests that "[o]ne finds in them a distinctly pragmatic, even utilitarian strain. They are very largely about what one might call the grace of authority"[47] rather than the ceremony and courtliness for which they once stood. This shift from a decorative to a moralizing practical sense of etiquette can be seen in the changing definition of what it meant to be a gentleman.

William Thackery asks, "What is to be a gentleman? Is it to be honest, to be gentle, to be generous, to be brave, to be wise, and, possessing all these qualities, to exercise them in the most graceful outward manner?"[48] The commonly held answer to these questions was yes; in order to be a gentleman, a man had to exhibit many qualities which not only emphasized his moral comportment but his good breeding. Indeed, to be respectable and exacting was of the utmost importance. Without the proper lineage, however, a man was considered little more than common: "a gentleman should be extracted from 'an ancient and worshipful par-

[43] Carré, *Crisis of Courtesy,* 4.
[44] Anon, *Manners and Rules*, 4.
[45] Arditi, *Genealogy*, 189.
[46] Carré, *Crisis of Courtesy*, 7-8
[47] Ibid., 2-3.
[48] Friswen, *Gentle Life*, 1-2.

entage…'"[49] At the same time, the rising bourgeoisie introduced the importance of duty, productivity, and taste. As Remy G. Saisselin writes, stressing the growing significance of principles, containment, and utility, "one might be a gentleman and yet be ill-mannered, ignorant, and vulgar. Taste became necessary to distinguish qualities superior to the mere rank of gentlemen." In this way,"[o]ne might say that taste would 'moralize' wealth."[50] The rise of bourgeois etiquette ensured that "…the rich and the successful were required to be morally worthy of their social status, in short to be what they appeared."[51] This new attitude towards not only gentlemanly behaviour, but gentlemanly constitution significantly coloured the dialogue the bourgeoisie had with the past. Both originating and contaminating the very precepts of gentlemanliness, the past and the stronghold of aristocratic rule to which it spoke became an idea from which the bourgeoisie both took and dismissed.

According to Hobsbawm, the great effort made by the bourgeoisie for distance from a morally questionable yet attractively safe past resulted in an even greater need for that from which the distance was sought: "…the nineteenth-century liberal ideology of social change systematically failed to provide for the social and authority ties taken for granted in earlier societies, and created voids which might have to be filled by invented practices."[52] This sent many, including much of the bourgeoisie itself, reeling towards a past which had so consciously been abandoned. This chimes with Gay's conception of the Victorian bourgeois as a culture of anxiety and aggression, viewed as "an evolving amalgam of heritage and environment"[53] which carried with it a nostalgia for the past as weighty as its radical thought about the future.

This paradoxical combination led many to believe that

[49] Ibid., 2.
[50] Carré, *Crisis of Courtesy*, 120.
[51] Ibid., 7.
[52] Hobsbawn and Ranger, *Tradition*, 8.
[53] Gay, *Hatred*, 501.

manners and etiquette as such had been robbed of the very components of which they were constituted. Cutting ties to the past inevitably led to an experience of free-floating within uncertainty: "The development of the nation has also tended to destroy true quietude and repose in manners. Formerly there was a courtesy and gentleness in the behaviour of the gentleman which distinguished him entirely from inferior grades. To behave well in society was the study of a life."[54] However, the rise of the bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century saw the decline of this attitude towards the 'study of a life' as one of behaviour in the name of gentility and towards one of pragmatism in the name of progress. In this way, the bourgeoisie came to identify itself and its own outlook on life through its unique approach to the rules of social behaviour. Viewed in this light, the systems of etiquette adopted by the bourgeoisie regulated more than its place within the social strata, they regulated its very essence. As Gay writes: "The guidelines governing conduct in polite society, at least according to those who produced books about them, rose above snobbery and penetrated beneath artificial glitter to the core of middle-class virtuousness itself."[55]

Despite the forward looking nature of this rising bourgeoisie, the etiquette it adopted still pointed to a desired and perhaps much needed dialogue with the past, wherein not all that was courtly, fanciful, and idle was lost to the practicality and virtuousness of self-regulation. As Norbert Elias writes:

> …in the nineteenth century were to be heard the voices of those who for one reason or another opposed the transformation of society through industrialization, whose social faith was oriented toward conservation of the existing heritage, and who held up, against what they took to be the deteriorating present, their ideal of a better past.[56]

[54] Friswen, *Gentle Life*, 26.
[55] Gay, *Hatred*, 496.
[56] Elias, *Manners*, 236.

Despite their emphasis on progress – its play in the very essence of their increasingly solidified identity - the English bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century saw the past as a route to all that was inaccessible in the present, and etiquette as the guide to finding it. Whether considered an invented tradition or the playing out of an authentic one, the systems of etiquette with which the bourgeoisie engaged came to constitute that class, not only as a solid social entity, but as a self-reflexive one based on morality, improvement, and self-mastery. If, upon the rapidly changing landscape of nineteenth century England "[a]ll beauty seemed to have departed – to have fled into the past…" then, despite its attempt to distance itself from the traditional systems on which that past was built, the bourgeoisie found in them great appeal. The past "…appeared all the more enchanting; thither everyone turned to seek for an ideal of great deeds, noble men, and dignity of life."[57] Although nineteenth century bourgeois etiquette pointed to the possibility of attaining, or, capturing the essence of all three through discipline, containment, and heavily freighted inward turning, there remained a sense that these ideal notions were forever lost to a past increasingly being subsumed by a relentless present. Etiquette, while not offering grounds for stopping the uncertainty, anxiety, and aggression brought about by this process, indicated a small window in which the past could enter in dialogue with both the present and the future, providing glimpses, if not promise, of stability.

[57] Dr. Oaskar Fischel and Max Von Boehn, *Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century As Represented in the Pictures and Engravings of the Time* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1970), 56.