Ambivalent Ambitions: The fin-de-siècle Bohemian’s Self-Division

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Abstract

This thesis examines the character of the bohemian artist in late-Victorian culture, with special focus on three fictional texts and one non-fictional account: George Moore’s *A Modern Lover* (1883), George Gissing’s *The Emancipated* (1890), George Du Maurier’s *Trilby* (1894), and Arthur Ransome’s *Bohemia in London* (1907). These texts frame countercultural painters and illustrators as possible saviours of modern art at the turn of the century. In each text, bohemian artists take the British art world by storm, infiltrating the bastion of middle-class aesthetics, the Royal Academy. In challenging the establishment’s artistic conventions (particularly its preference for classical works) and its commercial marketplace, bohemian characters like Moore’s Thompson, Gissing’s Mallard, and Du Maurier’s Little Billee produce offhand sketches and unfinished or careless paintings, working without working, or making art that remains in a liminal state between complete and incomplete. Their ambivalence towards artistic production reveals their suspension between a reluctance to participate in the commercial art market, and their need to do so to survive. In parallel with this conflict, all four texts end inconclusively, suggesting the potential of an avant-garde movement while remaining wary of its sustainability. Jed Esty’s study of bildungsromans, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (2012), argues that late-century novels of arrested development compromise the health of the British Empire. In a similar vein, I argue that these four künstlerroman critique the health of English art.¹

My first chapter examines the bohemian collective in Moore’s *A Modern Lover*, showing how this group rises and falls through its novel approach to artistic labour. My second chapter focuses on Gissing’s solitary bohemian Mallard in *The Emancipated* who prizes his hallucinatory dreams over the paintings that he submits for exhibition. In my third chapter, I study Du Maurier’s *Trilby*, analyzing how the on-the-spot illustrations of its protagonist Little Billee skewer bourgeois concepts of creative production. My fourth chapter on Ransome’s *Bohemia in London* explores the bohemian painter’s social escapes and the way they both invigorate and doom his artistic practices. A brief conclusion considers my texts in the context of other treatments of nineteenth-century creative labour, such as James Eli Adams’ *Dandies and Desert Saints* (1995) and Andrew Dowling’s *Manliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature* (2001). Despite vital work from Mary Gluck, Elizabeth Wilson and Jerrold Seigel on bohemianism, the fin-de-siècle bohemian in English literature remains understudied, a neglect which this thesis corrects.

¹ Though apparently non-fiction, Ransome’s highly stylized text follows the narrative pattern of the künstlerroman.
Résumé

Ambitions ambivalentes : Le conflit interne du bohémien fin-de-siècle

Cette thèse examine le personnage de l’artiste bohémien présent dans la culture à la fin de l’époque victorienne, mettant un accent particulier sur trois textes fictionnels et un texte non-fictionnel: A Modern Lover (1883) de George Moore, The Emancipated (1890) de George Gissing, Trilby (1894) de George Du Maurier, et Bohemia in London (1907) de Arthur Ransome. Au tournant du siècle, ces textes dépeignaient les peintres et les artistes contra-culturels comme des sauveurs potentiels de l’art moderne. Dans chaque texte, des artistes bohémiens captivent le milieu artistique britannique et infiltrent la Royal Academy, bastion de l’esthétique de la classe moyenne. En contestant les conventions artistiques de l’établissement (en particulier, la préférence pour les œuvres classiques) et le marché commercial, les personnages bohémiens tels que Thompson (Moore), Mallard (Gissing), et Little Billee (Du Maurier) créent des croquis désinvoltes et des tableaux inachevés ou insouciants. Ils travaillent sans travailler, ou bien ils créent de l’art qui demeure dans un entre-deux, un espace liminal entre achevé et inachevé. Leur ambivalence face à la production artistique démontre un conflit interne; ils sont déchirés entre leur hésitation à participer au marché commercial et leur besoin d’y participer pour survivre. Parallèlement, les quatre textes aboutissent à des fins imprécises et peu concluantes, indiquant le potentiel pour un mouvement avant-gardiste tout en demeurant à l’affût de sa pérennité. Dans son étude de bildungsromans, nommé Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development (2012), Jed Esty soutient que les romans fin-de-siècle portant sur le ralentissement du développement compromettent la santé de l’Empire britannique. Dans cette même perspective, je soutiens que ces quatre künstlerromans critiquent la santé de l’art britannique.2


2 Bien que l’œuvre de Ransome est apparemment non-fictionnelle, elle est hautement stylisée et suit le schéma narratif du künstlerroman.
Introduction

What he saw were those Bohemian horizons to which distance lends enchantment: romantic poverty, freedom from rule and restraint, liberty, absence of discipline, lack of responsibility, risk, adventure, daily encounters with the unexpected, escape from the domestic round, from the endless scramble of family life and the dullness of its Sundays, the voluptuous mystery of the female model, work without drudgery, the privilege of wearing fancy-dress the whole year through, as though always celebrating Carnival. Such were the images and enticements which the austere, exacting career of art aroused in him.

– Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, Manette Salomon (1867)

The subject of this thesis is the English bohemian artist of the late-nineteenth century, an elusive figure of London’s counterculture who seemed cast in the shadow of his Parisian counterpart. While locating this archetype in history and literature, I explore the fundamental conflict that defines it: the bohemian wishes to create art yet he remains wary of the very bourgeois audience that buys his paintings. In the late-nineteenth century and into the early-twentieth, George Moore’s A Modern Lover (1883), George Gissing’s The Emancipated (1890), George Du Maurier’s Trilby (1894) and Arthur Ransome’s Bohemia in London (1907) explore fictionalized depictions of bohemian visual artists who create art even as they seek to resist what they regard as the self-abnegation that comes with producing, exhibiting, and selling these pieces. In assessing these authors’ similar interests, I determine what use bohemianism may have for this range of novelists. Why do these authors center their fictions on bohemian painters? What aesthetic and critical questions do these bohemian stories allow the novelists to raise?

Throughout my dissertation, I answer these questions by showing how each of these writers use the bohemian artist as a conduit to redefine concepts of artistic work and non-work at

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3 As I later clarify, bohemians of this period were predominantly male; nevertheless I use the pronoun “he” with reservation, as I do not wish to perpetuate the sexism that kept women from participating in the countercultural art world of this era.
the turn of the century. In all four of these texts, the bohemian’s ambivalence toward a middle-
class art market and middle-class culture in general compel him to create pieces that challenge
the values or tastes of the marketplace; these pieces bear the mark of an artist who would rather
not be working for the pleasures of the public. In fact, in each of these narratives, bohemian
characters periodically flee from their studios to experience the pleasures of the artistic life,
finding creative stimulation through conversation and debate in bars, pubs and cafés. Ironically,
however, the bohemian’s desire to resist his labours leads to the distinctiveness of his art: a
bohemian’s hastily made sketch or unfinished painting represents his aesthetic, namely art that
evolves his unique struggle between work and lifestyle. Such art skewers bourgeois values that
presumably prize discipline, conventionality and commerce, and thus symbolizes a radical
statement against normative society’s expectations of an artist’s role. Ultimately, the authors I
study express their hopes and fears regarding the state of art and art production in the fin-de-
siècle through the conflicted figure of the bohemian.

However accurate, the four authors distinguish the lifestyles of bohemian painters from
those of bohemian writers, suggesting that the latter do not exhibit visual artists’ distinctive
negotiation between their aesthetic work and their creative life. While the primary texts present
visual artists struggling to compose in much the same way they depict literary artists struggling
to write, these narratives nonetheless distinguish painters’ nightly escapes from writers’ all-
nighters. For Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome, the bohemian painter seems far more
likely than the bohemian writer to leave his labours for social interaction. Rather than simply
revelling in bohemian escapades as hedonistic pleasures, the novelists seem far more interested
in the general lack of structure in the rebel painter’s life and what impact this has on his
creativity. Moving from the question of what a bohemian visual artist makes in the studio, the
authors also question what stimulating experiences he may “create” in social settings. Herein lies the appeal of the bohemian visual artist over the bohemian author: the former works through his aesthetic ambivalence both in solitude and among society, making him a far more dynamic character study.

As I later explain, the authors identify the bohemian painter as a torchbearer for a subversive tradition of theatrical sociability developed against the more staid figure of the writer of the period. In a key moment of Arthur Ransome’s *Bohemia in London*, Ransome states that men of “pen and ink” will never understand that a painter’s life in bohemia “is almost like a life of a university [in] its friendliness” (81). According to Patrick Brantlinger, the bohemian tradition of visual artists typically stressed a sense of community as opposed to the literary “Grub Street tradition [which] views writers in isolation from other artists” (35). Though this statement generalizes these two camps, Brantlinger’s assertion nonetheless provides some explanation for the four authors’ fascination with the social endeavours of bohemian painters. Bohemian visual artists *seemed* to be bridging an exciting gap between artifice and life, the studio and the café. Through their unorthodox adventures in Paris and London, the fictional (and, in the case of Ransome, heavily fictionalized) bohemians in these narratives pursue modes of artistic behaviour as respites from the hardship of making actual art products. Further, each text suggests that these social experiences may be more artistically satisfying than anything an artist could create on a canvas.

Yet, even as Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome celebrate painters who wish to forego the private labours of the writer, the drudgery of the studio, and the humiliation of exhibitions, they also depict the impossibility of freedom from the marketplace, as even the most

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4 Again, I must reiterate that I am representing these authors’ concept of bohemia rather than a historically accurate study; obviously, this demarcation between writers and painters was a broad generalization.
subversive artists must sell their wares to make a living. Showing a myriad of young painters who see their works merely as symbols of their imprisonment within the studio, each narrative idealizes a leisurely life of creative experience while also stressing that artists must work to survive. Thus, these authors do not feature bohemian painters deciding between a life of work or non-work, but instead investigate how such artists deal with the somber realization that they have to produce art for the masses. Forever trapped in this ideological paradox, the bohemian constantly searches for a means of resisting his inevitable labours and his participation in a middle class art market.

While showing the authors championing avant-garde forms of aesthetic production (artists abandoning their paintings or sabotaging their works) and social behaviour (artists “holding court” during debates at a café), I explain how the contradictory bohemian characters—who repeatedly compose, destroy, and attempt to avoid production altogether—reflect an English nation at its own artistic crossroads. Mirroring the unfinished works of their featured characters, these bohemian künstlerromane feature inconclusive and ambiguous endings that allegorize the uncertain future of English art. Ultimately, in my study of the bohemian’s troubled narratives, I determine why the authors look to these figures at this point in history, thereby offering new research contributions on three subjects: the bohemian painter’s work, this artist’s non-work, and the bohemian künstlerroman itself.

Exploring late-Victorian bohemianism allows for a fresh perspective on a topic that scholars have seemingly exhausted: conceptions of nineteenth-century labour. Through their thoughtful examinations of physical and creative work in this period, critics including James Eli Adams, Herbert Sussman and Andrew Dowling have stressed the importance of male self-discipline and stoic labour as marks of Victorian virtue, as well as signs of English manliness.
Julie Codell suggests that the professionalization of artists in the fin-de-siècle led to new images of the “hard-working artist” in newspapers and interviews, as artists publicized their labour to align themselves with the presumed values of the middle classes (*The Victorian Artist* 1-10). My dissertation, however, shows the inverse of this trend: men on the social periphery who strive to work without working, affirming their worth through unorthodox approaches rather than regimented exercises. The bohemian’s story is thus an important counter-narrative to conventional understandings of Victorian labour and masculinity, and how the two concepts mutually influenced one another in this era.

Though the texts of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome show sympathy for bohemians who must sell their paintings to a bourgeois public, each text also suggests that the artists’ negotiation of this challenge represents the source of their creative imagination. The same sensitivity that compels the artists to escape from society also legitimizes their claim as documenters of society: they see too much and feel too much, and while they may wish to disappear into the darkness of bohemia, they simultaneously feel driven to express their sensations through art. Under such conflicted circumstances, the bohemian creates works that the public may enjoy but only he can understand, odd masterpieces of evasion and expression that reflect the countercultural artist’s wariness of what he, and his country, would become.

Beginning with the question, “what is a bohemian?” my study reveals one key agreement between these texts: the English bohemian’s creative work reflects his ambivalence towards producing art, as exemplified by the indiscernible “dreamscapes,” unfinished pieces, deliberately ruined paintings, and on-the-spot sketches that pervade each of these tales of bohemia.

While exploring their fictional painters’ unique approaches to labour, the authors infuse their own literary work with visual experiments. Both *A Modern Lover* and *The Emancipated*
feature many passages of ekphrasis; when the narrator of *A Modern Lover* describes an artist’s painting as jagged and choppy, he incorporates sentences of a similar style. Likewise, Gissing’s narrator immerses the reader in the imagery of his novel’s heroic artist, Ross Mallard, offering a perspective in which text and visuals seem strangely intertwined. Further, Du Maurier alludes to his own in-text illustrations throughout his narrative and often implements the language of painting in his storytelling, using words like “sketch” and “frame” during his character studies. Ransome’s blending is more straightforward than that of the other writers, as he self-consciously melds the two mediums when describing painters’ creative processes. While ground-breaking works such as Virginia Woolf’s “Kew Gardens” (1919) and James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1920) would later take inspiration from visual art movements such as French Impressionism, Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier and Ransome anticipate such developments as their texts themselves seem to mirror the unorthodox approaches and styles of their bohemian painters when these painters do work.

The authors’ interest in painters appears symptomatic of a late-nineteenth-century culture obsessed with the future possibilities of visual art. In a quotation that contextualizes the interests of these four authors, Kate Flint argues that Victorian writers were interested in “the question of how the world summoned up through language relates to artistic practices of the time,” particularly how visual art could address a “whole range of issues of representation and perception” in the modern age (26). Echoing Flint, John Plunkett states that the prevalence of “pictorial and optical tropes in [nineteenth-century] literary texts” reflects the era’s sense of the “intimate relationships between literature and the burgeoning variety of visual media” (222). He adds that Victorian literature “often defined its practice through visual tropes,” as visuality “was the crucible for working through [the] broader tension between the material and the ideal, imagination and reality, the seen and the unseen” (222). By blending mediums of the textual and
visual in their treatment of the bohemian’s struggle between the “material and the ideal,” these authors challenge the aesthetic possibilities for English literature just as their fictional characters challenge the conventions of visual art. Furthermore, Plunkett’s allusion to a “burgeoning variety of visual media” suggests that English visual art at this time seemed on the cusp of an aesthetic breakthrough, a suggestion Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier and Ransome also express in their works.

But while these four authors focus on the paintings of their characters, they seem as preoccupied by the moments when these artists make nothing at all. Ironically, Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome appear intrigued by visual artists not simply for the novelty of their art, but for painters’ willingness to forego their labours, however temporarily. Describing painters heading for a café to “see and be seen” by the artistic underground, Ransome states that these men live “a curious, unreal life like fragile puppets in a toy theatre,” an impression that all of these authors share (235).

Their depictions of painters’ performative behaviour evoke the bohemian’s origins in the early-nineteenth-century Parisian theatre. As Mary Gluck notes, the Parisian bohemian began as a theatrical figure performing his radicalism through satire and social protest. For Gluck, the opening performance of Victor Hugo’s Hernani at the Theatre Francaise on February 29, 1830 represented the birth of the modern bohemian (“Theorizing the Cultural Roots of the Bohemian Artist” 352). In a study I will later address more fully, Gluck describes a countercultural uprising at Hernani’s opening performance with young revolutionaries screaming at more traditional theatre-goers who disapproved of Hugo’s provocative style. In this instance, these bohemian audience members became “the play” through a performance that blended artifice and reality. Noting the influence of Hernani, Elizabeth Wilson argues that bohemia’s theatrical

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5 I cover this performance and its importance later in my introduction.
tradition continued throughout the later century, culminating in performances of George Du Maurier’s *Trilby* and Giacomo Puccini’s opera *La bohème*. Wilson states that 1896 stagings of both works “further popularized a picturesque version of bohemian life,” adding that “*La Bohème* inaugurated a revival in Paris of the romantic male fashions of 1830,” as the clothing of audience members seemed as much on display as the apparel of the cast members that inspired these fashions (223, 168). Like Gluck’s description of *Hernani*, Wilson’s study presents a pivotal event in bohemian history as one that turns the world into a stage, or in the words of Ransome, “a toy theatre.”

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige argues that subcultural styles, such as body language or clothing, act as cultural statements, everyday “performances” that run counter to the behaviour of the status quo. Hebdige states that “style . . . interrupt[s] the process of ‘normalization,’” thereby “offend[ing] the silent majority” and “contradict[ing] the myth of consensus” (18). In a similar vein, Sarah Burns argues that “the construction of bohemia . . . involved fabricating a stage or an area for its display,” asserting that it was “a kind of media-made theatre, operating in a space adjacent to that of ordinary life, but distanced from it, either by theatrical make-believe or nostalgic memory-making” (247). Thus, the bohemian began as a radical whose stage was wherever he liked, a concept that informs all four of the primary texts. However, these authors seem less interested in traditional actors, and far more interested in those who perform in life to escape their work. Thus, in their study of the Victorian painter, the authors I study appear to fulfill both their fascination with the future of visual art, and their interest in abandoning artistic production altogether.

If, as Ransome affirms, most bohemian writers were staying in to write while painters were going out to live, then we can see some explanation for why relentless workaholics like
George Gissing, George Moore, George Du Maurier and Arthur Ransome seemed so fascinated by this visual art subculture. For all of their characters’ struggles, the bohemian lifestyle nonetheless serves as an escape from bourgeois culture and its fetishization of art as product, particularly the product of conventional labour. However, I must distinguish the talented, non-working bohemians of these four texts from the image of the decadent, lazy, lethargic aesthete of the late-nineteenth century, an image that George Du Maurier often lampooned through his illustrations in the pages of *Punch Magazine*. Certainly Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome present many faux bohemians who wish to do little but masquerade as artists, but each writer also offers a counterpoint to such depictions, showing characters whose non-work (typically represented by characters’ social pursuits as well as their mental visions) requires its own modes of skill and commitment.

By the end of their narratives, the texts come to few conclusions regarding bohemians’ struggle between work and non-work. Obviously, these characters cannot make a definitive choice between these pursuits; rather, they live cyclical lives, constantly resisting work in favour of creative experiences only to return to making art once more. The rebel artist of these tales who finds success among a bourgeois public may later retreat into the obscurity of bohemian society to preserve his countercultural integrity. Alternatively, those who spend too much time among bohemia’s parties and pubs soon find themselves forced to return to their work to make ends meet. In this way, the bohemian narrative resists a teleological structure: by his very nature, the bohemian seems perpetually stuck between two worlds (bohemia and bourgeois society) and between two pursuits (making art and living art). What art the bohemian actually creates under these circumstances serves as a response to his feelings of stagnancy and a critique of an art market that reinforces this conflict.
Examining this bohemian paradox, I present these texts as unconventional künstlerromane, showing how their narratives disrupt artists’ path to creative fulfillment. Regardless of how the bohemians of these four stories define success, they all come to unsatisfying endings, finales that evoke their stasis rather than their development. Many scholars who have examined innovations in the English novel in the nineteenth century, including Sally Ledger, Rodger Luckhurst, Patricia Meyer Spacks, and Jed Esty, argue that fin-de-siècle authors rework traditional narrative structures to reflect an era of apprehension. More specifically, Esty clarifies that bildungsromans of this period thwart genre expectations by featuring “frozen youth,” protagonists who do not grow up: “the figure of youth, increasingly untethered in the late Victorian era from the model and telos of adulthood, seems to symbolize the dilated/stunted adolescence of a never-quite-modernized periphery” (7). For Esty, these characters’ failures reflect the failures of the nation: just as the teleological narrative of the mid-century bildungsroman reinforces England’s spirit of conquest, these late-century novels of arrested development reflect a country in crisis.⁶

As the quintessential “frozen youth,” the bohemians of the fin-de-siècle künstlerroman end in a similar state of uncertainty and paralysis: they become victims of an increasingly professionalized and homogenized commercial market whether they participate in it or not, and even when they are no longer young.⁷ Whereas the late-Victorian bildungsroman critiques the health of the empire, the revised künstlerroman condemns the health of its art. Contextualizing my readings within Esty’s work, I show how the struggles of these bohemians indict a British art market that stymies the growth of “true artists.”

⁶ Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre (1847) and Charles Dickens’s Great Expectations (1861) serve as two examples of more traditional bildungsromans. In both, we see characters growing from childhood to adulthood, as each develops emotionally and attains some degree of success.
⁷ The bohemian of literature often romanticizes dying young as a protest against a vulgar and unfeeling world.
Though the enigmatic nature of this cult figure would seem to invite critical study, there are very few scholarly texts concerning this archetype. Articles by Patrick Brantlinger on George Gissing and Janet Lyon on Arthur Ransome offer precedents for my work, but no scholar has taken on a comprehensive treatment of bohemian artists in literature. In their respective pieces, Brantlinger and Lyon imply that English bohemia is ripe for examination and that we may better understand bohemian history through its own myths of creation. With this goal in mind, I bring together works by Moore, Gissing, and Ransome that have received very little critical attention. In contrast, Du Maurier’s *Trilby* has been the subject of much academic discussion, but scholars have not yet discussed the link between Du Maurier’s own sketches and his novel’s fictional sketch artist; despite the novel’s air of absurdity and sensationalism, *Trilby* offers a complex examination of the bohemian illustrator. For all of these four texts, the strange art that encapsulates the bohemian’s divided character represents an undocumented phenomenon.

Though few studies of literary bohemia exist, scholars such as Mary Gluck, Elizabeth Wilson, Jerrold Seigel and Paula Gillett have identified historical bohemians by their fraught relationship with their public, showing how famous London visionaries such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and James Whistler remained suspicious of the bourgeois public who purchased their paintings. Defining this as a quintessentially bohemian struggle, Gluck and Wilson examine how this tension between artist and audience shaped the creative output of various countercultural uprisings throughout the nineteenth century, such as those involving the Pre-Raphaelites, the Aesthetes, and the Decadents; regardless of whether the artists of these respective collectives shared the same aesthetic vision or lived in the same bohemian haunts of London, their distrust of middle class values and tastes influenced their approach to art overall (Gluck, *Popular Bohemia* 1-15, Wilson 1-15).
As a figure that belonged to myth as much as to reality, the bohemian requires a study that combines historical facts with literary imaginings. As Wilson argues, biographical works on famous artists like Rossetti may reveal some information about his creative process, but most bohemians lived in relative obscurity and thus their experiences remain lost to history (1-10). Addressing the difficulty of defining the bohemian as a historical figure, Gluck echoes Wilson, asserting that historians struggle to connect what Gluck calls “the social and aesthetic dimensions of the bohemian” or, to put it simply, the question of how the bohemian’s life and ideals shaped his creative process and output (“Theorizing the Cultural Roots of the Bohemian Artist” 352). How did a “typical” bohemian deal with his ambivalence toward success? How did bohemians’ complicated relationship with art-making shape the art they did create? Are their claims of a countercultural orientation legitimate, or even possible?

While history fails to account for this human element of the bohemian life and culture, the aforementioned novelists of the late-nineteenth century at the very least offer possible answers to these questions. Rather than attempting to present a historically accurate picture of bohemia and its inhabitants, the authors use the novel to imagine the complexities of the bohemian’s social world, moving beyond facts to speculate on the cultural meaning of this figure. Through literary abstraction, Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome offer their own interpretation of what the bohemian signified in late-nineteenth-century England, co-opting this figure to voice their concerns about the state of British art. Thus the bohemian’s amorphous historical character gives these writers the freedom to build their own histories around this rebel icon. How these authors shape the bohemian, from his work to his life, represents the starting point for my dissertation.

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8 In fact, as I will show throughout this dissertation, an artist’s identity as a bohemian seemed to depend on a lack of success.
Regardless of the limitations of historical studies of bohemia, I nonetheless rely on several key historical studies of the English and continental counterculture to contextualize my readings. As already mentioned, for Gluck the bohemian originates in 1830s Parisian theatre as a rebel who attacked commercial art through his performances. In *Popular Bohemia* (2008), she contends that bohemians ironized sentimental art, thereby gaining popularity by challenging the popular aesthetics of the age. Like Gluck, Jerrold Seigel explores the “symbiosis between the Boheme and the bourgeoisie” throughout *Bohemian Paris* (1999), arguing that iconic nineteenth-century bohemians used their rebel status to appeal to the very bourgeois audience they appeared to denounce (117-118). Finally, in *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (2000), Wilson argues that the bohemian translated the chaos of the modern city for the middle-class public, sublimating ugliness and disorder into something beautiful and understandable. While analyzing the bohemian’s contradictory relationship to mainstream society, Gluck, Seigel, and Wilson all note the tenuousness of his countercultural status, though none of these critics explores how the historical bohemian’s pervasive aesthetic uncertainty affects his works themselves. Nonetheless, the work of Gluck, Seigel and Wilson provides an invaluable picture of bohemia in Paris and London, from its rollicking cafés to its dreary garrets. With very few works addressing bohemian history, these three highly comprehensive texts are critical to my project.

Along with these studies, I also rely on secondary historical texts including Julie Codell’s *The Victorian Artist: Artists’ Life Writings in Britain, c.1870-1910* (2012), Peter Brooker’s *Bohemia in London: The Social Scene of Early Modernism* (2004), Hugh David’s *The Fitzrovi ans: Portrait of Bohemian London, 1900-55* (1988), and *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self-Exiled* (1990) edited by Cesar Grana. Codell’s text offers a valuable counterpoint to these other works by tracing the rise of the “professional artist” in the visual art world of the late-
nineteenth century, a figure that the bohemian characteristically defined himself against. In turn, the works of Brooker and David trace the lingering effects of the Victorian counterculture in the twentieth century and the rebel artist’s struggle to find a place in the modern art market. Further, Grana’s text presents a collection of essays on bohemia from the nineteenth century to the nineteen sixties, including Christopher Kent’s useful geographical study of London’s influential bohemian locales. Finally, along with these historical studies, I also reference Pierre Bourdieu’s cultural theories on the bohemian and his analysis of the French Impressionists of the 1870s.

Before moving on to the historical origins of the bohemian, I must stress that while I wish to contextualize this figure of nineteenth-century Paris and London, my true aim is to examine these authors’ imagined bohemian, however biased, fabricated or romanticized their interpretation may be. Thus, while the demarcation between the counterculture and bourgeois society during this period may be infamously vague, the authors’ presentation of this division gives insight into how they saw fin-de-siècle bohemians place in (or outside) society. While employing a methodology that combines formal analysis with historical research, I reveal what literature of this period tells us about the relationships between bohemians’ ideology, art, and audience.

I. The Rise of the Parisian Mecca: The Beginning of French Bohemia

Locating the bohemian in history necessitates a study of how the varied movements, ideologies, and schools of art of the time intersect. While acknowledging the amorphous nature of bohemians in history, I wish to map out some shared characteristics, particularly among the largely overlooked English bohemians. Inspired by the rise of France’s counterculture in the early-nineteenth century, British bohemians seem to emerge only as the century reached an end. Perhaps for this reason, scholars have typically neglected English bohemia as a focus for
thorough study; though Gluck, Seigel, and Wilson certainly address the rise of an English bohemia, all of their scholarly works suggest that the truest form of bohemia was found in Parisian cafés, art galleries, and studios.

Nonetheless, when critics do examine the English bohemian, they come to similar conclusions about his distinctive qualities. For instance, Gluck, Seigel, and Wilson all agree that while French bohemians of this age tended to be political and artistic revolutionaries from disenfranchised, lower classes, their English counterparts were more likely to denounce bourgeois life through aesthetics alone. In fact, many English bohemians were Oxford-educated men from middle to upper-class backgrounds who adopted bohemian lifestyles after rejecting the rigidity of bourgeois culture (Brooker 3, Seigel 93, Wilson 1-10).

Moving from the 1830s to the end of the twentieth century, bohemians of Paris and London dabbled in principles of Romanticism, Decadence, and Aestheticism, while also becoming synonymous with a variety of leading art factions, such as the French Impressionists, the Pre-Raphaelites, and the Modernists. Focusing on bohemia’s debt to the Romantic movement in particular, Peter Brooker argues that bohemians, like the Romantics, present creative work as a reflection of the artist’s selfhood, elevating feeling over craft, personality over expertise and spontaneity over deliberation (viii–ix). Yet the bohemians were not merely modern romantics, nor were they just decadents or aesthetes. Making this point clear, both Ephraim Mizruchi and Brooker argue that while bohemians sometimes sought the solidarity of artistic collectives, they characteristically remained protective of their own independence (Mizruchi 1-19, Brooker 3). Thus, the bohemian seems to be a figure of mystery, maintaining an ambiguous or even

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9 In reality, the demarcation between bohemia and bourgeois life throughout both London and Paris was obviously fluid, a point Walter Benjamin in particular makes throughout The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire, written during the 1930s. Echoing Benjamin’s ideas, Kimberly Stern argues that the counterculture interpreted and reassembled the raw materials of modern experience for the masses and, in turn, this populace supported bohemians by buying their works (550).
conflicted relationship with the countercultural collectives of the day, even though the authors I study see him as a paragon of sociability. In fact, the complex etymology of the term “bohemian” only reinforces this figure’s enigmatic character.

To understand how the word “bohemian” became synonymous with Parisian artists of the nineteenth century, we must first turn to the history of the Romani people. According to Thomas Alan Acton, Gary Mundy and Ian F. Hancock, the bohemians of nineteenth-century Paris had no ancestral connection to this ethnic group, but many of the Romani people’s customs became linked to the later bohemians through a series of historical misunderstandings. Known for their nomadic existence (they typically were skilled in horseback) and their artistic lifestyle (music was especially vital to their culture), the Romani were an ethnic minority persecuted and enslaved throughout their existence. Originating in Northern India, the Romani began emigrating to Central Europe around the year 1000 and, by the fourteenth century, a high concentration settled in the province of Bohemia, now part of the modern Czech Republic. Due to the widely held belief among Balkan peoples that the Romani came from Egypt—an assumption likely based on the Romani’s dark complexion—they referred to these newcomers as “gypsies,” a term that remained synonymous with this group and their unorthodox lifestyle as they travelled further west. From the fourteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth, the Romani arrived in Western Europe in increasing numbers, and England and France, among other countries, responded by instigating “anti-gypsy” laws—Louis XII in particular attempted to expel them from the country in 1502. Just as Balkan peoples predominately saw the Romani as “gypsies” because they believed Egypt was their country of origin, Western Europe widely viewed these “gypsies” as “bohemian” because they assumed Bohemia was their homeland. Thus, through this conflation of two historical errors, the rightful term for these peoples became further buried
under misnomers. To this day, we owe the close association between “gypsy” and “bohemian” to the travels of the Romani and the confusions of the cultures that oppressed them (Acton and Mundy 1-25, Hancock 1-15).

By the nineteenth century, French writers began to disassociate the term “bohemian” from the ethnic group it appeared to introduce. During this period, Janet Lyon argues, dominant cultures of Western Europe generally dismissed Romani as “noble savages,” yet maintained a fascination for their quasi-artistic lifestyle of “itinerant freedom, voluntary poverty, [and] mysticism” (700). In the 1830 and 40s, authors George Sands and Honoré de Balzac apply the term “bohemian” to rising groups of artists in France who appeared to adopt the customs of the Romani through their restless ways and creative predilections while retaining little of their racial identity. Thus, the term no longer represented “strange” foreigners, but eccentric Frenchmen, radicals who resisted their country’s status quo. As Jerrold Seigel asserts, “written references to Bohemia as a special, identifiable kind of life” increasingly appear in French literature and journalism during this era, as ‘La bohème’ became entwined with the art, transience and subversion of an underclass of misfits (5). Regardless of whether writers celebrated French bohemians or denounced them, the modern bohemian would soon rise from relative obscurity to take over Paris’ Latin Quarter. But while we may now thus understand the origins of the term “bohemianism,” questions still remain: what led to this movement among France’s rebel artists and why did the Latin Quarter become their burgeoning mecca?

The influence of political and social revolution in Paris answers the first question, as Paris became an artistic epicentre due to the French revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848. These periods of political and economic upheaval led to greater individual liberties: noting this spirit of

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10 As Daniel Cottom explains in *International Bohemia: Scenes of Nineteenth-Century Life*, George Sand revels in the bohemian ideal in works such as *Consuelo* (1842) and *The Countess of Rudolstadt* (1844) (8). Further, Balzac’s *La Muse du Département* (1843) and *Un Prince de la Bohème* (1845) also examine the bohemian type.
change and its promise of new beginnings, Elizabeth Wilson declares that “the bohemian [is] a complex personification of the cultural moment of this crisis” (3). As both Wilson and Brantlinger note, there were certainly French bohemians who came from upper-class backgrounds, but the majority were sons of disenfranchised business owners and shopkeepers who inherited a healthy scepticism towards those in power (Brantlinger 25-30, Wilson 3).

Amidst the revolutionary spirit of the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, the Latin Quarter’s cheap housing, as well as its myriad colleges and cafés, provided the ideal infrastructure for the birth of the bohemian movement. Located on the left bank of the Seine River, this area was the site for influential art schools, from the Sorbonne to the École des Beaux-Arts; describing this scene, Lyon marks how Paris’s “uniquely centralized bohemian community [was] fed by the schools of the Latin Quarter,” noting how it galvanized young men who wished to discuss new theories on art, society, and politics (693). In his 1834 essay “Les Artistes,” French journalist and dramatist Felix Pyat (1810-1889) describes the “mania of young artists who wish to live outside their time, with other ideas and other customs, isolate[d] from the world [and] banished from society” (8-9). Luckily for French bohemians, they found a settlement in which to enjoy their mutual banishment, an outsider sphere that catered to their unorthodox schedules, strange habits, and experimental art.

Amidst a climate of possibility, bohemians officially took Paris by storm in the 1830s, ushering in a golden age of countercultural experimentation. As mentioned earlier, Mary Gluck situates the birth of modern bohemia with Victor Hugo’s provocative play, Hernani. Opening on February 25th, 1830, Hernani subverted preconceived notions of classical playwriting and production: the play renounced unities of time and place, while also featuring a new, naturalistic acting style. In anticipation of a conservative challenge to his innovative techniques, Hugo
invited groups of young Romantics to attend the opening night. Included among them was Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), a writer, poet, and critic who would later tout ideals of individualism and liberty that provided a foundation for the Aesthetic movement of the later nineteenth century. Throughout its run, the play polarized audiences, demarcating a new youth movement from the old guard of artistic conservatives. In this way, *Hernani* seemed to bring the modern bohemian into existence: this figure now had a viewpoint, an enemy and an artistic goal (Gluck 25-30).

While Hugo’s *Hernani* introduced the bohemian to French society, Henri Murger’s *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1851) popularized him. Murger’s novel, which follows a lovably ragged group of young bohemians in Paris, became a sensation among middle-class readers. Despite its numerous references to the threat of poverty, the text also evokes a carnivalesque atmosphere. In the preface to the novel, Murger asserts that the bohemian “live[s] in duplicate,” existing both as a “labourer that contrives to provide daily bread” and a “dreamer that dwells on the mountain heights” (xxvi). In fact, *Scènes de la vie de bohème* allegedly drove so many young men to Parisian bohemia that Murger spent the rest of his career reiterating the dangers of this world (Wilson 57-58). In the same preface, Murger anticipates his readers naively fleeing to the counterculture, famously warning them that bohemia is the “preface to the Academy, the hospital, or the Morgue” (Wilson 57, Murger xxiv). Nonetheless, Puccini’s 1896 opera *La bohème* further glamorized the very world that Murger cautioned against.

Along with Murger’s text and the works it inspired, Joris-Karl Huysmans’ later work *A Rebours* (1884) took up the mantle for France’s countercultural movement against conventional

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11 While living in bohemia in 1836, Gautier would go on to write a short piece called “The Glory of the Senses” in which he celebrates “the glorious privilege of drinking when without thirst, of striking a light and making love at all seasons” (264).

12 This came only after Murger had staged his short stories as a play to much acclaim and attention (Wilson 58).
artistic labour. As Richard Ellmann notes, Huysmans’ tale of an iconoclast leaving his debauched life in Paris in favour of an artistic lifestyle in the country served as a profound influence on Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (253, 316). In this narrative, the character Jean des Esseintes becomes disgusted with bourgeois society, detaching himself from his world and indulging in his own artistic experiments. Whether creating a garden of strange, poisonous flowers or trying to live out a Charles Dickens novel, Jean views his creative identity as dependent on how he lives rather than on any of the artistic works he produces.

While the Aesthetic movement of Paris as well as London in the late-nineteenth century suggested that an artist’s refusal to make art could function as a form of rebellion, writers from Murger to Huysmans situate the origins of this concept in the French revolutionary ideals of the earlier century. Much like his protagonist’s anger towards a middle-class public, Huysmans expressed his own disillusionment with the audience who would presumably buy his book, allegedly stating, “It will be the biggest fiasco of the year—but I don’t care a damn! It will be something nobody has ever done before, and I shall have said what I want to say” (Baldick 131). Whether young artists inspired by Huysmans defied society by making or resisting artistic production, this conundrum represented the quintessential negotiation of the bohemian artist from the early 1830s in Paris to the 1890s in London.

Regardless of Murger’s warnings, Paris’s Latin Quarter developed into a meeting ground for aspiring artists throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. In cafés, including the Café Momus and the Café de la Nouvelle-Athènes, well-known artists, such as poets Arthur

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13 During his infamous trial, Wilde all but admitted that Huysmans’ book served as the primary basis for *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Ellmann 316).
14 Though Robert Baldick recites this quotation in *The Life of J.K. Huysmans*, he notes that it is originally based on journalist Francis Enne’s remembrance of her conversation with Huysmans in her piece that ran for the French periodical, *Le Revêil* on May 22nd, 1884. Despite Huysmans’ apparent disgust for commerce, he nonetheless publicizes and markets this disgust, selling it to a bourgeois audience that admires “rebel figures,” and thus this reciprocal relationship continues.
Rimbaud (1854-1891) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), as well as French Impressionists, Edgar Degas (1834-1917), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) and Claude Monet (1840-1926), would rub elbows with aspiring unknowns. George Moore recalls meeting painter Édouard Manet (1832–1883) at the Café de la Nouvelle-Athènes: as Frederick Seinfelt explains, Moore framed their encounter as a seminal moment in his own artistic development (15). Regardless of whether these visual artists directly defined themselves as bohemian (Manet, for instance, neither self-identified as bohemian nor even as an impressionist), they created new forms of art within a world recognized as bohemian by the greater population (Dunleavy 59, Seigel 216, Miller 98-99).

From this training ground, bohemians revolutionized Parisian aesthetics. As Pierre Bourdieu explains in The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field, Edouard Manet and the French Impressionists would soon shock the classicists of the Parisian atelier scene in 1870 with their innovative painting style (133). According to Richard L. Herbert, the French Impressionist typically used thin brushstrokes and an intuitive approach to visual representation, exploring a much more personalized approach than that taught in classical art schools (17). Moore’s A Modern Lover celebrates this style of art, presenting the French Impressionists as the forefathers of his fictional bohemian group, the Moderns. Though critics typically associate the French Impressionists with their recreations of natural, rural settings, much of Moore’s admiration for these painters stemmed from their depictions of the life of urban bohemia. Examples of such pieces include Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s La Bohémienne (1868), which shows a woman of Romani heritage, as well as Edouard Manet’s A Bar at the Folies-Bergère (1882) and Edgar Degas’s L'Absinthe (1876), all of which depict life in seedy bars and brothels.
Ideally for French bohemians (and expats like Moore), artistic innovation allowed them to re-envision their city, making the disorder and squalor of modern life in Paris into something beautiful and poignant. Both Wilson and Seigel argue that bohemians modernized Romanticism by applying its principles to their visions of urban life. Wilson in particular states that Parisian bohemians found “wild and [...] strange beauty in the sublime desolation and ugliness of the industrial city” (28). Overall, the bohemian artist—who conflated Romantic and revolutionary ideals—recreated the city in his vision.

Just as Murger places a timeline on the career of the French bohemian, the end of the nineteenth century appeared to bring an end to Parisian bohemia’s glory days. Wilson argues that the “decline of bohemia as a distinct cultural space and radical identity has generally been attributed to its loss of autonomy in the twentieth century,” adding that the rise of consumer culture eradicated the demarcations between bohemian and mainstream culture; if rebel values could be bought and sold by the masses then these values lost their cachet (186). Also noting commercial influences, Gluck argues that “the decline of bohemia in 1885” stemmed from the “erasure not simply of the specific cultural spaces that had sustained creativity and identity for artists, but also of the more general urban culture that had provided the symbolic context for their activities” (162). Nonetheless, bohemia by nature seems perpetually on the brink of destruction, as its excitement depends on its tenuousness. Whether the golden age of French bohemia was reaching an end or just adapting, the countercultural fervour that began in 1830s Paris eventually made its way to London.

II. From The Left Bank to Soho: The Early Days of English Bohemia

Despite its rise from the mid-century onward, England’s counterculture could hardly compare with France’s. Though the revolutionary idealism of a lineage of Romantic poets from
the late-eighteenth century to the early-nineteenth century, such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, foreshadowed the ascent of English radicalism, two factors kept London from later equalling Paris as a bohemian mecca. Firstly, England avoided an uprising in 1848 when France and most of Europe erupted into violent rebellion; if, as Seigel argues, such political insurrections galvanized the French counterculture, then England’s bohems had no such catalyst.\(^{15}\) Secondly, London also lacked a university center that would serve as its bohemian headquarters: according to Lyon, “London’s dearth of universities (and therefore of starving students) meant that whatever bohemian outcroppings took hold in London did so without benefit of an established tradition and without a mainspring source for new recruits” (693). Thus, while trying to map London’s bohemia, Christopher Kent states that “the equivalent of the left bank [the Latin Quarter] was Soho and the area north of it,” though he stresses that London’s bohemia remained disorganized in comparison to its French counterpart (63).

But if British bohemia lacked visibility and centralization, mid-nineteenth-century London nonetheless saw the rise of experimental art groups, from the Pre-Raphaelites to the Aesthetes. While focusing on various sections of London, the four texts examined in this dissertation allude to the same real-life artists: along with mentioning Oscar Wilde, the four authors reference Gabriel Rossetti, James Whistler and Aubrey Beardsley as part of an experimental artistic community. One commonality among these historical figures is their ambivalence toward creative work: from Rossetti to Wilde, they imagined creative fulfillment merely though unconstrained living, fantasizing of a existence free from the responsibilities of making actual art for a public they disdained. Through allusions to these artists, Moore, Gissing,  

\(^{15}\) While revolutions occurred in France, Germany, Poland, Italy, and the Austrian Empire, the English owed their stability to the Reform Act of 1832. As Joseph Childers notes, this Act increased the electorate from approximately 366,000 to 650,000, thereby appeasing the middle classes (though not the working classes) (148).
Du Maurier, and Ransome suggest that English bohemia had a shared history of like-minded aesthetic rebels. While this through-line of English artists grounds the bohemian myth in historical reality, this counterculture would not emerge in London until almost thirty years after Hugo’s _Hernani_ ushered in France’s golden age.

Before the blossoming of visionaries like Rossetti, English art up to the mid-century mainly consisted of neoclassical painters who imitated the Old Masters, and mimetic painters who recreated nature. The neoclassical movement rose to prominence in the mid-eighteen-sixties as archaeological discoveries of the ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum provoked the British public’s interest in past civilizations. Christopher Wood notes that it was typically socially and aesthetically conservative professional artists who imitated the Old Masters of the Renaissance like Michelangelo and Raphael; he asserts that the correctness and precision of neoclassical painting paralleled the supposed orderliness of bourgeois life (284). From artists like Frederick Lord Leighton (1830-1896) to Sir Edward John Poynter (1836-1919) to Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912), depictions of Rome and Greece served as historical allegories for the English empire’s ascent (1-20).

Whereas neoclassicalists typically glorified the empire, many artists of this era celebrated the natural world. According to the most famous champion of mimetic artists who sought to reproduce nature, John Ruskin, those who painted nature could access the divine. As Joan Evans and Wolfgang Iser argue, Ruskin creates a hierarchy in which nature stands above man. Iser notes that “the mimetic and individualistic concepts of art are poles apart for Ruskin,” adding that “the moment [the Ruskinian painter] begins to look inwards he will shut himself off from the divine” (12). Rather than prizing his subjectivity, a painter of the natural world must paint, in
Ruskin’s words, “simple bona fide imitation[s] of nature” (3.626). Further, in the third volume of *Modern Painters*, from 1856, Ruskin writes, “the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way,” adding, “to see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, all in one” (3.333).

As this allusion to religion suggests, Ruskin believed that nature painters could be moral agents. Good art could benefit the multitudes by revealing some form of truth. Ruskin points to Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), the famous landscape painter and water-colorist of the period, as exemplifying his theories. Although Turner was an aesthetic radical and experimenter throughout much of his career, as well as a forerunner of the avant-garde, Ruskin praised his visual imitations of nature. Commenting on Turner’s dramatic pictures of land and sea, Ruskin commends him as a painter of aesthetic truths, clarifying that “Truth, as applied to art, signifies the faithful statement, either to the mind or senses, of any fact of nature” (*Modern Painters* 1.20). For Ruskin, Turner’s accurate portrayals of nature could enrich the Victorian public across classes.

Later painters of the nineteenth century would react against the constraints of both neoclassical painting and Ruskinian nature painting. With its famous “art for art’s sake” manifesto spearheaded by the theories of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, the Aesthetic movement rejected the didactic, mimetic aims of Ruskinian landscapes, while also denouncing the anachronistic subject matter of neoclassical works. Looking to a future of creative experimentation, this movement famously elevated artists’ whims above their public responsibilities.

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16 During his career, Ruskin would question the degree to which artists actually “imitated” nature, stressing that artists make “a statement” on this world through their art. Nonetheless, Ruskin’s most influential works always place the artist in a subservient position in relation to nature.

17 Turner’s paintings seem far more idiosyncratic than Ruskin attests, as many of them appear to anticipate the unique brush strokes of the French Impressionists.
Though Ruskin eventually became a symbol of the old guard of English aesthetics, his belief in morality was not entirely antithetical to the goals of individualist painters; he also believed in the artist as a romantic figure who must remain free from the influence of commerce. Codell notes that when a great majority of classical painters gained wealth through the art market surge of the 1860s, this “increased commercialism threatened the Ruskinian interpretation of art as an ideal expression and of the artist as exempt from economic and social demands” (“Constructing the Victorian Artist” 283-84). Therefore, though Ruskin felt that painters should serve the natural world, he still saw the artist as a freethinking individual in society, a concept one can find traces of throughout these four texts. Nonetheless, the English countercultural movement would soon react against many of his ideals at the century’s end.

Along with thwarting moral obligations, avant-garde groups from the Pre-Raphaelites to the aesthetes also broke from painting as imitation. Forward-thinking painters of these schools did not “trace” nature or the classical work of the Old Masters, but reshaped the world to suit their visions. Some painters, such as Edward Burne-Jones, continued to deal with classical subjects but reworked its tropes, while others, including James Whistler, explored present-day London as they saw it. Based on the commentary of Wilson, Seigel, and Gluck, the latter objective—the desire to reflect modern life—marks a quintessentially bohemian aim. Determining who is bohemian among England’s artistic community would seem to depend on an endless analysis of painters’ works, habits, and beliefs; yet, by focusing on the very basics of this archetype (artistic experimentalism, social dissent, and an interest in the modern city), we may come to better understand the concept of bohemianism and what it meant to the four writers, Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome, who explored it. For each of these authors, English bohemia represents the hope for something new, as English nonconformists seem poised to raise
the nations’ artistic prominence to the level of France’s. At the same time, the tribulations of the real-life icons that the writers reference also reveal the complications that come with pursuing the bohemian dream.

III. Rossetti, Whistler, and Wilde: The Rise of English Bohemianism

In her study of English bohemia, Elizabeth Wilson explains that English bohemians seemed “less defiantly hostile to bourgeois society then French bohemians” because the former had not experienced actual revolution (93). Consequently, for most countercultural English painters, their rebellion would be more aesthetic than political. All the same, their works inevitably conveyed political and social meanings, however implicitly. As we will see with Rossetti, burgeoning experimentalism seemed to go hand and hand with his distrust of normative society.

Foreshadowing the visual innovations of the fin-de-siècle, Rossetti made peculiar paintings that he was unwilling to show to the public, and by doing so, he helped shape the bohemian struggle we see depicted in *A Modern Lover, The Emancipated, Trilby, and Bohemia in London*. Although Ruskin’s theories of mimesis inspired the early art of the Pre-Raphaelites in the mid-nineteenth century, Rossetti as well as other members of this group began investigating new forms of expression in the mid-Victorian period. Denis Denisoff explains that this group, founded by Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and John Everett Millais, initially adopted Ruskinian principles, from Ruskin’s belief in mimicking nature to his maxim that “good art reflected the morality of the artist” (36). Yet, even in the early days of their development, the Pre-Raphaelites also challenged the status quo through sexually suggestive paintings that provoked middle-class sensibilities (Denisoff 35-36).
Exemplifying this provocativeness, one of Rossetti’s first oil paintings *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1850) depicts the Virgin Mary in her nightgown while she receives Gabriel’s message that she will give birth to Jesus. As Richard J. Lane notes, the painting was met with harsh disapproval from critics for both its innovations in style as well as in subject matter (particularly due to Rossetti’s sensual presentation of a religious event) and, as a result, Rossetti developed a wariness toward art exhibitions that he retained throughout his career (25-30). In fact, as Rachel Teukolsky notes, Rossetti went on to sell his pieces to private patrons and almost entirely refused to exhibit his works publically, thus sheltering himself from critical attacks or misinterpretations of his paintings (120).

After his retreat from art exhibitions, Rossetti’s creative life and work became more subversive, enigmatic and personal. Describing Rossetti’s creative lifestyle, Wilson states that at his home on Charlotte Street his “Pre-Raphaelite friends experienced a continental atmosphere in which political and artistic dissent mingled” (93). Jan Marsh also notes that along with the unorthodox spirit of his home, Rossetti exhibited his creative liberty through eccentric behaviour, shocking his neighbours by curating a small zoo in his backyard (268). When George Moore describes an eccentric character—a man known only as Frazier—who spouts anti-establishment ideas while also teaching his pet raven to say his own name, this fictional creation appears to be a cheeky allusion to Rossetti. However, whereas Moore’s Frazier possesses little talent for actual art, Rossetti painted masterworks.

Before Rossetti would go on to create famous paintings like 1865’s *The Blue Bower*, he began a work called *Found* in 1853, a piece he never finished. The painting depicts a modern subject, a prostitute in the morning who sinks in shame as she sees her lover, a man who has returned from the countryside to the city. He, in turn, grips her hands in amazement. Reading the
prostitute as a stand-in for Rossetti himself, Pamela K. Gilbert argues that the painting allegorizes Rossetti’s pervasive fear that he was selling himself to patrons and art buyers. She elucidates Rossetti’s distrust of critics, audiences, and a system that diminished his artistic contributions and his role as an artist—to show his wares and sell them appeared to be a mark against Rossetti’s artistic integrity (though she speculates that it may well have simply been a case of profound self-consciousness on his part) (113-114). In light of this reading, Rossetti’s inability to finish this painting becomes all the more intriguing; he seemed resistant to put it out into the world (113). In sum, *Found* evokes the aesthetic concerns that Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome would go on to define as essential to the bohemian identity: Rossetti experiments with a modern subject of urban squalor, evokes his distaste for artistic prostitution, and leaves his work unfinished. While Rossetti worked steadily and produced art throughout his career, his status as a rebel painter seems inseparable from his suspicion toward the conventional responsibilities of an artist, particularly those involving exhibition and reception.

Beginning in the 1860s, Rossetti’s experiments with oil painting introduced characteristics that would become synonymous with countercultural art in England. In particular, Rossetti’s later oil paintings of his lovers Fanny Cornforth and Jane Morris influenced the aims of the British avant-garde community. Shearer West describes Rossetti’s 1865 work *The Blue Bower* as “offer[ing] a glimpse of many of the elements that were to emerge more strongly in the art of the fin de siècle” (132). In depicting Cornforth, the painting plays with perspective, showing a strangely formed woman of massive proportions. The composition also contains hyper-stylized symbols of “exoticism,” such as the Japanese instrument the koto; references to Japan and Japanese arts would become fashionable among aesthetes in the 1880s. In 1874’s *Proserpine*, Rossetti presents a similarly executed portrait of Jane Morris, the wife of his
associate, William Morris. *Proserpine* recreates Jane Morris as the Roman goddess, known as the goddess of the underworld as well as of fertility; like *The Blue Bower*, Rossetti’s study of Jane uses highly stylized symbols (Proserpine stands in front of a heavenly backdrop while holding a forbidden apple) and odd dimensions (the subject’s hands and shoulders are exceptionally large) (West 132-33). In works like *The Blue Bower* and *Proserpine*, we see Rossetti’s desire to make something aesthetically new and yet, *Found* problematizes his hopes, standing as an unfinished work whose subject matter itself questions an artist’s relationship to his labours.

Along with their technical innovations, these paintings also represent Rossetti’s turn from the fantastical realms of his early Pre-Raphaelite paintings towards art that reflects his present world. Even as his work idealizes his subjects, Rossetti’s pieces reflect his intimate relationships with both women: *The Blue Bower* even contains cornflowers as a possible reference to Fanny’s surname. As such, Rossetti is not using models to access his vision of Roman goddesses; rather, he explores real women through classic imagery as his present reality inspires his imagination (West 132-33). No longer influenced by Old Masters of a bygone age, Rossetti follows his own predilections to make works of art out of his current experience, yet another aim we will see among the artists of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier and Ransome. Marking Rossetti’s rebellious demeanour and defiant compositions, Wilson argues that “Rossetti was the most bohemian” of the Pre-Raphaelites (93). At base, Rossetti’s paintings show him transcending Ruskin’s ideal of the autonomous artist painting nature to become an autonomous artist painting his own visions of contemporary urban life.

From the mid-century to its latter half, more and more young British men appeared to take inspiration from icons like Rossetti as well as from Paris’s countercultural heroes.
Brantlinger argues that “apart from a few romantic radicals like Blake and Shelley,” British bohemia began only when English artists imitated French Decadents (30). Spearheaded by the principles of Charles Baudelaire, the French Decadent movement prized artifice over nature: its artists found beauty in stylized images of decay and destruction, rejecting normative society’s ideals of progress. In “The Painter of Modern Life” of 1863, Baudelaire describes a decadent as a man of exquisite style and rarefied intellect (28). As Seigel notes, Baudelaire was fascinated by a life of creative contemplation, one in which the artist did not create works but merely engaged in his own mental processes, a concept both Huysmans and Wilde would later explore in their respective novels, *A Rebours* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. But despite Baudelaire’s desire to resist creative work, he never gave up on making actual artworks. Like Rossetti, he was torn between his desire to express himself to society, and his urge to withdrawal from it. Further, while critiquing societal notions of progress, Baudelaire’s decadents also heralded the need for aesthetic advancement in all forms of art (Seigel 105-114).

Like Wilson and Peter Brooker, Gluck notes that the decadent bohemian arose in Paris during the 1850s and spread to London, though she clarifies that this was only one type of bohemian. Asking “what is the connection between decadence and bohemia?” Gluck responds that “the phenomenon of decadence was directly traceable back to Baudelaire, especially as reinterpreted for the late-nineteenth century by Gautier’s ‘Notice’ of 1868,” a preface Gautier wrote for Baudelaire’s 1868 edition of *Fleurs de mal* (*Popular Bohemia* 108-09). In this preface, Gautier calls for new forms of art that reflect the changing times; he asks artists to move beyond the customs of past ages, an argument that echoes Baudelaire’s assertions in “The Painter of Modern Life” (1). Gautier asserts, “The characteristic feature of the nineteenth century is not exactly naiveté and it needs to render its thoughts, its dreams and its postulates in an idiom a
little more complex than the language of the classics" (*Baudelaire: A Life* 44). Pointing to such quotes, Gluck states, “Decadence, as presented by Gautier, was not exclusively a pejorative concept signaling moral decline and enervation, but rather an affirmation of the unique qualities of modernity” (*Popular Bohemia* 109).

The Decadent movement would later inspire the rise of Aestheticism in the nineteenth century in London. Noting the closeness between Decadence and Aestheticism, Denisoff explains, “Aestheticism is similarly anti-conformist, supporting an aesthetic doctrine that suggests that one’s private utopia is at hand, if one would only learn to ignore the domineering bourgeoisie” (32). While Decadence represented a revolutionary world-view, Aestheticism focused more closely on art alone, a relationship that parallels the differing aims of French and English bohemians. As Gillett clarifies, the Aesthetic movement, from the 1870s onward, “denigrated the native tradition of genre art . . . because of its emphasis on narrative content and moral persuasion and its accompanying lack of concern for purely visual criteria” (*The Victorian Painter’s World* 7). Like the Decadent movement, Aestheticism favoured freedom over convention, style over nature, and creativity over morality.

The writings of Walter Pater, the so-called “Father of Aestheticism,” show why this movement became synonymous with the artistic liberty of the English counterculture: like the French Impressionists or the Pre-Raphaelites before him, Pater’s Aestheticism modernizes the Romantic ideal of subjective experience, offering hope to English artists exhausted by the “correctness” of neoclassicism and nature painting. In the famous conclusion of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), Pater tells aspiring artists “to burn always with [a] hard, gemlike flame,” and “to maintain this ecstasy [while] testing new opinions and courting new impressions” (210). Likewise, he insists that viewers of paintings must also search for this
ecstasy. According to Teukolsky, Pater compels art patrons and artists alike to ask, “what is this picture [. . .] to me?” (109). Teukolsky adds that Pater favoured a “formalist aesthetic, where subject is no matter and truth to Nature is a bore” (128). Massively influential, Pater’s concepts offered aspiring avant-garde artists a path to innovation and, if one wanted to live a life of endless “new impressions,” then bohemia would seem to represent the obvious destination.

Inspired by this individualistic ideology, great English painters of the later nineteenth century increasingly began to experiment with new styles. Along with Rossetti, who became a figurehead for Aestheticism, Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) came to embody this new movement (West 131). Describing the beginnings of The Yellow Book, the fin-de-siècle periodical that would help define late-nineties decadence in London, Denis Denisoff notes that through Beardsley’s role as art editor—he worked alongside fellow editor Henry Harland (1861-1905) and publisher John Lane (1854-1925)—Beardsley encouraged prospective readers to expect something risqué. Denisoff adds that Beardsley drew images of shocking, often grotesque sexuality that nonetheless had an air of elegance (41). As Margaret D. Stetz writes, John Lane often sought to censor Beardsley’s art pieces, works that seemed created to provoke, tease or trick his bourgeois audience through various visual jests. In fact, Stetz states that “when the social and legal scandal involving Oscar Wilde (whose books Lane was publishing) exploded in April 1895, Lane almost immediately withdrew Wilde's volumes from his list and then fired Aubrey Beardsley, a lightning rod for controversy, from the art editorship of The Yellow Book” (120). While Rossetti removed his pieces from public exhibition and Beardsley confronted the public through his illustrations, both artists negotiated a new role for the rebel artist and a new aim for his works (or “non-works”) in relation to bourgeois society, issues that Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome address throughout their bohemian texts.
Along with Rossetti and Beardsley, James Whistler represents perhaps the most important visual artist of London during this period, bringing French Decadence to the British avant-garde. An acquaintance of Baudelaire, the American-born Whistler (1834-1903) spent his youth in the Latin Quarter, taking inspiration from the innovative techniques of the French Impressionists. Despite his many masterpieces, Whistler gained an unfair reputation for laziness throughout his career, as Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) in particular criticized his work ethic. According to Fiona MacCarthy, Burne-Jones initially dismissed Whistler as a con-man whose self-fashioning and flamboyant character reflected his lack of commitment to art. Such criticisms were unwarranted both because Whistler, like Rossetti, worked regularly throughout much of his life, and because Whistler’s approach to visual aesthetics shows him reworking conventions of creative labour rather than simply giving into indolence (297-98).

Prizing art for art’s sake, Whistler recreates his vision of the world with little regard for realism, typically employing sporadic brushstrokes that break from the customs of neoclassical or nature painting. Titling many of his works to draw attention to his manipulation of the surrounding world, such as his piece *Arrangement in Pink, Red and Purple* (1883–1884), Whistler helped usher in a new age of British aestheticism–even Burne-Jones would later come to regret his criticisms of Whistler’s innovative techniques (MacCarthy 297-98). Though Whistler was obviously not a lazy charlatan, he simultaneously resisted the suggestion that he was merely a producer of art, as though he had to transcend his own creations by becoming art itself. Adopting eccentric styles and habits, Whistler lived the carefully curated life of an aesthete, an archetype that Huysmans laid the groundwork for in *A Rebours* (MacCarthy 298). In sum, from his life to his works, Whistler troubled established concepts of creative labour as well as the role of the artist, and all four bohemian texts contain allusions to this countercultural icon.
In an episode that represented the old guard of aesthetics fighting the new, Ruskin infamously attacked Whistler’s 1877 exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery. Writing in an epistolary style as part of his *Fors Clavigera* series, Ruskin expressed his distaste for Whistler’s art, denouncing Whistler’s piece entitled, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875). Addressing this painting, Ruskin accused Whistler of “ask[ing] two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face” (MacCarthy 294). Whistler filed a libel suit against Ruskin and the dispute soon went to a very public trial. Supporting Ruskin’s side at this event, Burne-Jones testified that Whistler’s painting was “an admirable beginning of a work of art, a sketch, in short” (*The Times* 11). In the painting, Whistler depicts an industrial city park in London through muted colors and deliberately diffuse images—overall, his work has a dream-like effect that clearly breaks from the norms of British painting. By criticizing this work as a “pot of paint,” Ruskin implied that art should convey an understandable moral message. Further, both he and Burne-Jones suggest that art should reflect a Victorian work ethic, representing the hard won labours of a dedicated painter. Though Whistler won this trial, he received only one farthing as compensation; nonetheless, his “sketch” would become highly influential (Weintraub 217-221). Like Rossetti’s unfinished painting and Beardsley’s visual provocations, Whistler’s work challenges a middle-class public’s expectations of work, an artistic aim that the four primary authors define as quintessentially bohemian.

Despite Ruskin’s indignation on behalf of the public, increasing numbers of English patrons, critics, and buyers were looking for new forms of visual art by the latter half of the nineteenth century. Describing this period, Paula Gillett states that “the most advanced segments of the art public had tired of Victorian earnestness and were glad to turn away from sentimental moralizing in art and even to enjoy Whistler’s studied iconoclasm” (*The Victorian Painter’s*
This acceptance only seemed to problematize the identity of artists like Whistler: more specifically, what happens to a countercultural artist when society accepts him? One sign that bourgeois English patrons began to prize aesthetic individuality was the success of the Grosvenor Gallery that exhibited Whistler’s work.

During the 1880s, the Grosvenor Gallery established itself as an artistic alternative to the more conventional tastes of the Royal Academy. Founded in 1768, the Royal Academy had long stood as a bastion for classical painting as well for the social conservatism of British culture. Its influence in the English art world was so pervasive that even painters who railed against it found themselves submitting their works to its committee. As Gillett explains, “No aspiring painter[s] . . . could be indifferent to the Royal Academy, whatever their feelings towards that institution” (“Art Audiences” 193). Thus in each of the texts of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome, bohemians offer the Royal Academy paintings far different from the works of “professional painters” and typically receive rejections. The Grosvenor, in turn, was more open to the changing affinities of English artists and art patrons, a point Colleen Denny makes clear in *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890.*

Established by Sir Coutts Lindsay and his wife Blanche Lindsay, the Grosvenor housed many challenging visual artists of the period, including Rossetti’s fellow Pre-Raphaelite William Holman Hunt (1827-1910). Though it would close its doors in 1890, after the Lindsays’ divorced, the Grosvenor Gallery initially found great success, offering Whistler and many other painters of the Aesthetic movement a place to exhibit paintings that broke from accepted modes (Denny 1-8). Both galleries, the Royal Academy and the Grosvenor, play a vital part in these four texts.

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18 All four of these primary authors show their bohemian characters’ wariness towards the Royal Academy, an establishment that these characters see as too “bourgeois.”
If Whistler represented the visual artist of Aestheticism’s rebellion, Oscar Wilde served as its foremost writer. Pater’s former pupil, Wilde arguably did more to shape the iconography of the rebel artist than anyone else in Victorian history. Oddly, though he would come to inspire subversive artists of endless types, Wilde rarely mentioned bohemianism directly throughout his career. At a speech at the Bohemian Club of San Francisco in 1882, Wilde noted how this club, which once housed bohemian writers, had more recently become a gathering place for the wealthy. Marking this irony, Wilde allegedly stated, “I never saw so many well-dressed, well-fed, business-looking Bohemians in my life” (Morris, Declaring His Genius 140). Also during Wilde’s 1882 trip to America, an anonymous reporter for the St. Louis Globe-Democrat told him of an informal “Sketch Club” among their city’s leading artists to which Wilde exclaimed, “How truly Bohemian!” (Hofer 80). Though Wilde seemed to feel a kinship with the subversiveness of bohemian life, he never publicly self-identified as bohemian, and he never mentions the term in any of his fictional works.

These facts seem surprising considering not only that, as Guy Deghy and Keith Waterhouse explain, Wilde frequented bohemian haunts such as the Café Royal, but also that his persona alone gave shape to endless archetypes of artistic uprising in fin-de-siècle England (58-58). Regenia Gagnier notes the closeness between Wilde’s radical character and the bohemian spirit, comparing Wilde’s “pursuit of individuality and freedom of thought and expression” to the aims of “bohemian artists in particular” (26). Brooker, in turn, describes “Wilde [as] a type of the bohemian-dandy whose ‘private artistic morality’ came to pose a particular threat to the norms” of the middle classes (2). Describing “Oscar Wilde’s version of [the] bohemian,” Wilson states that Wilde’s “peculiarly English” bohemian mingled “raffish

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19 In nineteenth-century America, “bohemian” came to define writers and journalists, as Joanna Levin explains in Bohemia in America, 1858–1920 (1-20).
elements of the aristocracy and upper class” with the seedy underworld of the working classes (65). Like Wilson, Gagnier ultimately characterizes Wilde as “a figure of paradox and contradiction,” a description that could easily define the classic bohemian of the era (18).

Finally, along with these other critics, Richard Dellamora centers Wilde’s contradictory identity on his approach to art, noting that while Wilde himself was hardworking, he also celebrated the pleasures of leisure throughout his career (208). Perhaps therein lies Wilde’s prime influence on bohemian culture: he spearheaded an ideology that allowed artists to embody vast contradictions, particularly through their complex approach to work.

Though Wilde possessed an intense work ethic and cherished well-crafted artwork, he often promoted a life of sensual experience over a life of creative production. Like Baudelaire, Wilde fantasized about a liberating existence beyond the limits of materialistic production, even as he created some of his age’s greatest literature. Many of his most famous aphorisms express a desire to leave his labours behind, including famous assertions such as, “All art is quite useless,” “One should either be a work of art, or wear a work of art,” as well as his statement, “To do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world, the most difficult and the most intellectual” (Oscar Wilde’s Wit and Wisdom 37, 53, 27). As Wilson notes, Wilde always “claimed to have put his genius into his life and merely his talent into his work” (65). She adds, “Wilde was one of the most important aestheticists and decadent artefacts of his era, performing its shift from the productivist ethos that characterised the industrial revolution to a cartoonist one in which the display of taste and ownership became a key marker of identity” (65). To put it simply, Wilde ushered the avant-garde artist into the end of the century by suggesting that an artist’s persona, taste, and style could transcend his art and labours. For Wilde, the artist was a creative being rather than simply an artist—this figure could create works of art, but his ultimate goal was to live
a life of stimulation and sensation. If Wilde believed his true genius lay in his social life, from his performativity to his speechifying, then one could forgive him for wanting to leave his writing in favour of the café. The concept of living as an artist without working as an artist and thereby escaping into a world free of discipline or restraint, would appeal to many young men in the late-nineteenth century who would flock to London’s bohemia. Whether Wilde self-identified as a bohemian or not, his notion of the creative life reflects a particularly bohemian dream.

Wilde’s fascination with the limits of artistic production reveals itself in The Picture of Dorian Gray, his seminal text of the Aesthetic movement, and a novella that famously concerns itself not with the painter of Dorian’s portrait, Basil Hallward, but with the artistic experiences of Dorian himself. For each misdeed Dorian commits while exploring the seedy underbelly of London, Basil’s portrait of him changes to reflect its subject’s moral degeneration. Driven mad by Basil’s work, Dorian eventually murders the painter and then, in the final scene of the novel, stabs his portrait with a knife, an act that magically leads to his own death. Throughout this tragic narrative, Lord Henry, a charming yet lethargic wit, treats Dorian as his personal art project, noting that “talking to him was like playing upon an exquisite violin” before asserting his desire “to project [his] soul into [Dorian’s] gracious form” (29). Seducing Dorian into a life of aesthetic experiences rather than a life of aesthetic labours, Lord Henry seems intent on creating another Jean des Esseintes, the non-working artist figure from Joris-Karl Huysmans’ A Rebours. As Ellmann notes, the yellow book of decadence that Lord Henry gives to Dorian, a narrative that inspires Dorian’s trips to various tawdry establishments in London, represented Wilde’s reference to Huysmans’ A Rebours (316).20 Through this reference, Wilde establishes

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20 As Denis Denisoff explains, the term “yellow book” referred to books in Paris that were covered in yellow packaging to connote their provocative subject matter (39). While Wilde’s reference in The Picture of Dorian Gray alludes to Huysmans’ work, The Yellow Book (1894-1897) periodical featuring Aubrey Beardsley would also take its name from this practice.
The Picture of Dorian Gray as a key conduit between French Decadence and British bohemianism, much like the works of Whistler. Though Lord Henry does not visit the bohemian haunts that Dorian eventually frequents, the former’s desire to make Dorian his “masterpiece” influences Dorian’s own desire to seek artistic fulfillment through lived experience.

The complex symbolism of The Picture of Dorian Gray’s conclusion has sparked endless scholarly debate but, at the very least, the novel stresses the constraining effects of art in comparison to the freedoms of life. Dorian can live however he likes (he frequents opium dens and other underground London gathering spots), but cannot free himself from the frame of the portrait: he remains a slave to the artwork that characterizes him. Of course, Dorian did not create this work and here is where the novel differs from the works of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome: Wilde’s text seems less interested in exploring an artist’s choice between producing artwork or living his art, and far more intrigued by Dorian as a symbol of liberation from conventions and constraints of any form—more specifically, Dorian never seems truly compelled to create art, visual or otherwise.

The Picture of Dorian Gray may ultimately critique the villainous Dorian for his self-indulgence, but Wilde’s novella nonetheless basks in the concept of a workless life. Along with the narrator’s lively descriptions of Dorian’s sensual experiences, Lord Henry serves as the text’s spokesman for a vision of life as art, particularly through statements that parallel Wilde’s own aphorisms. Insisting that Dorian “be always searching for new sensations,” he tells him that the “great events of the world take place in the brain,” later adding, “A grande passion is the privilege of people who have nothing to do” (18, 15, 40).21 Although Wilde does not mention bohemia directly in The Picture of Dorian Gray, the text explores many of the same concerns as

21 Tellingly, Basil is far less dynamic than Dorian: the painter seems intent on the presumably un-Wildean pursuit of putting his genius into his work alone.
A Modern Lover, The Emancipated, Trilby and Bohemia in London, namely a fear of endless, empty creative toil. Throughout their careers, Moore, Gissing, and Ransome all admired Wilde as a figurehead for the rebel artist. Though Du Maurier lampooned Wilde’s affectations in the pages of Punch magazine, through these parodies he at least recognized the cultural impact of works like The Picture of Dorian Gray.

Seven years before Wilde’s novel, George Moore’s A Modern Lover presents a scene in which a character (Lewis Seymour) also wishes to destroy a painting. The painting is Lewis’s own and thus Moore’s narrative differs from The Picture of Dorian Gray, but both Lewis and Dorian have similar aims: like Dorian, Lewis wishes only to live as an artist without the pain of having to succeed as a painter. In the course of his tragic narrative, Lewis finds himself aptly performing the role of a rebel (he joins a countercultural collective and practices eccentric habits), yet the poor quality of his actual work betrays his fraudulent status as a painter. Thus Lewis, like Dorian, comes to prefer the pleasure of London’s nightlife to the frustrations of the studio. Along with Moore’s text, the works of Gissing, Du Maurier and Ransome also reflect a debt to Wilde’s influence. While Ransome’s failing bohemians seem driven to sabotage their art, Gissing’s Mallard and Du Maurier’s Billee often attempt to discard their visual pieces. These artists’ simultaneous belief in art and their desire to renounce its material forms or artefacts seem to reflect a particularly bohemian problem with artistic labour. While The Picture of Dorian Gray evokes aspects of the bohemian struggle, we cannot label this a bohemian work. Along with never mentioning the word “bohemian,” the text’s narrative breaks from the narrative focus

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22 Moore was an acquaintance of Wilde’s and, along with adopting the traits of the aesthete, he shared Wilde’s interest in the “obscene” aspects of French culture (Seinfelt 20). Gissing, according to Diana Maltz, was “tickled by Oscar Wilde’s public performances as an aesthete” (“Practical Aesthetics” 55). Finally, Ransome exhaustively studied Wilde’s work, eventually producing a biography that caused Wilde’s lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, to sue him for libel. Upset with Ransome’s depiction, Douglas would eventually lose the case (Chambers 62).

23 His Punch illustrations of the 1880s often ridicule Wilde-like figures that Du Maurier attacks for their pretentions and hollowness.
of the other four works: again, Dorian is not an artist drawn to a life free of artistic labour, but a man who does not create in the first place. As a non-productive artist, Lord Henry seems more closely related to the bohemians of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome; yet he too never makes art and, due to his privileged class position, he never needs to do so. Further, the novella abandons its focus on the one working artist of the text, Basil, never exploring the ways this figure may negotiate his work and his life.

If these characters themselves do not evoke the bohemian’s ongoing struggle, a struggle based on financial need and the necessity of labour, the tensions between Wilde’s characters nonetheless introduce many of the concepts that the four primary authors explore. Through the increasingly estranged relationship between Basil and Lord Henry, *Dorian Gray* presents the growing distance between an artist who produces works and an artist who takes an aesthetic approach to life, as well as between a focus on art as product and on art as process. Further, Basil’s commitment to visual art and Lord Henry’s commitment to conversation also introduces a central conflict seen in the four bohemian texts. Through the relationship between Lord Henry and Dorian as well, Wilde’s novel examines two distinct ways of living creativity: whereas Lord Henry supports a life of artistic contemplation, Dorian plunges into a hedonistic pursuit of pleasure—the former lives as an artist, and the latter lives among artists, as Lord Henry has little interest in socializing with rebels at the margins.

The bohemians of my four primary texts represent a composite of Wilde’s three characters, embodying all of their conflicting desires. As their financial needs always come in opposition with their aesthetic desires, the bohemians of the four texts must constantly negotiate their role as both, in the words of Murger, dreamer and labourer; the conflicts among Wilde’s characters represent the conflicts this figure feels within throughout his career. Lacking the
luxury of choosing not to work, these bohemians define themselves through their anguished relationship to art—whatever creative life these artists may wish to explore (whether contemplative or hedonistic), they must at least make *something* to exhibit and sell. As I will show throughout this project, the bohemians at work in the texts of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome all carry a hope that making art will bring them artistic fulfillment (and some degree of financial security) even as they seem wary of committing themselves to their creative toils.

By the end of the nineteenth century in London, the bohemian dreams of many a romantic, decadent, or aesthete *seemed* to be coming to a collective close, as hordes of non-working bohemians appeared to delegitimize the countercultural movement.²⁴ Perhaps in response to the rebel artists’ ideological struggle with labour, or the towering influence of Wilde’s leisurely dandy that he developed through his fictional characters and his public persona, London’s bohemia increasingly consisted of artists foregoing work altogether, choosing an artistic lifestyle of drinking, conversation and pleasure over a life in the studio. Noting the noble ideals that fuelled this behaviour, Seigel asserts that bohemians “neglected the conditions of real artistic production for some form of pure natural feeling and sentiment” and Wilson, echoing Seigel, argues that “in many cases the work of aesthetic production played only a minor part in lives dedicated to the performance of bohemianism” (120, 24). Wilson then states that, “By the early years of the twentieth century, the artist’s role was no longer, perhaps, primarily to produce art,” but rather to challenge social conventions (25). Both Seigel and Wilson claim that regardless of their lofty, ideological aims, many non-working bohemians lived lives of poverty, hardship, and aimlessness, the existence that Henri Murger once warned against. Further, Wilson

²⁴ This counterculture, however, always seems in a state of flux, destruction and rejuvenation. One can find a parallel here to the Hippie Movement of the 1960s in England and America: this movement initially heralded new artforms and ideas, but later become synonymous with drugs, homelessness, and joblessness.
adds that the “Artist who did not create . . . was [also] suspected of being a mountebank, an imposter” either by fellow iconoclasts who made art or by a middle class public that desired art (25). The bohemian’s identity always depended on the middle classes viewing him critically, but in this context the rebel artist comes to be seen as more pretender than provocateur; a bohemian who merely lives uniquely hardly seems like an agent for artistic or social progress.

As English bohemians seemed on the wane, social critic Max Nordau attacked them as “imposter[s]” (535). In Degeneration (1892), Nordau criticizes the “degenerate artists” of London and Paris, such as Whistler, Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, and Baudelaire, among others (559). While Gillett argues that the “most advanced segments of the art public” in the late-nineteenth century began to accept eccentric artists, Nordau’s fanatical diatribe shows that bohemia was never without its critics (The Victorian Painter’s World, 8). That Degeneration was highly influential suggested that artistic traditionalists would staunchly protect values of conservatism and professionalism even as artistic styles seemed to be changing rapidly. Targeting any prominent artist who exhibits eccentricities of any kind, Nordau declares that literary and visual art of the late-nineteenth century shows “a contempt for the traditional views of custom and morality,” adding, “Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists” (5, vii). In particular, Nordau takes issue with artists who seek to live their art: along with mocking “the poet with no verse, the painter with no picture, the musician with no tone composition,” Nordau takes particular aim at Wilde. He states that “Wilde has done more by his personal eccentricities than by his works,” and then jeers that “what really determines [Wilde’s] actions is the hysterical craving to be noticed, to occupy the attention of the world with himself, to get talked about” (272, 317).
Despite the ludicrousness and fanaticism of many of Nordau’s claims, his description evokes a serious danger to rebel artists: to put it simply, if bohemians did not make anything, then did they not stand for anything beyond a “hysterical craving to be noticed”? Were all non-working artists merely hollow performers, desperately seeking the attention of a public that they appeared to denounce? What “art” did such men create while they publically performed their identities or held court in crowded cafés? Addressing these issues, Wilson notes that for every “authentic and dedicated” bohemian who pursued some form of creative experiences, there were innumerable “pretentious fake[s]” (9). Thus, bohemia could offer its members an existence outside society’s norms, but this way of life could become a “black hole,” a social vacuum in which artists lost themselves, their ambitions and their aesthetic aims. Just as the bohemian painter’s works may represent an expression of one’s self and a threat to one’s self, the non-working bohemian deals with his own paradoxical plight: by expressing his art or his artistic sensibility through his lifestyle, he becomes vulnerable to charges of charlatanism. The productive bohemian painter risks his legitimacy as an artist by exhibiting his art; the non-working bohemian does so by making nothing of note. More specifically, the working artist may see his participation in a middle class art market as a mark against his integrity, but he, at the very least, creates a tangible product of his artistry. Alternatively, how could an artist who did not create come to justify or prove his artistry or, for that matter, make a living? Whether this figure chooses to work or not, the historical bohemian seems torn between the ideal and the real, his unlimited aspirations and his limited circumstances.

Of course, most bohemians of this era did not simply choose to be either an artist of life or the canvas, as evinced by the dual pursuits of men like Whistler and Wilde. Instead, countercultural artists maintained an ongoing balance of both worker and non-worker. Noting the
contradictions that typify the bohemian, Gluck concludes that he is “notoriously difficult to grasp as a . . . cultural reality” (*Popular Bohemia*, 8). She further presents the bohemian’s complex relation to artistic work as the source of his destabilized identity, declaring that the “bohemian as social type appears detached from, if not in direct conflict with, the bohemian as aesthetic creator” (“Theorizing the Cultural Roots of the Bohemian Artist” 352). Gluck does not necessarily ask for a *reconciliation* of the bohemian’s contradictory identity; any attempt to consolidate the bohemian’s character would obfuscate the complexities that make-up this cultural phenomenon. Rather, Gluck asks critics to explore how bohemians of various forms sustained their dualistic identities in this period, a task I take on in this dissertation. Throughout my study, I reveal that these four writers use the novel (or, in Ransome’s case, a novelistic style) to examine the bohemian visual artist’s tortured identity, elucidating an era of cultural and aesthetic conflict through the personal struggles of this figure.

Whatever their ideological differences, the Romantic, Decadent and Aesthetic movements all prize the autonomy of the avant-garde artist while heralding a break from artistic conventions. As such, they help to contextualize the chief aims of the bohemian throughout the nineteenth century: as a figure in constant search of new art forms, the bohemian may embody whichever rebel art movement happens to rule the era. While Gluck presents bohemians’ origins in the Romantic period, and Seigel stresses the importance of Baudelaire’s decadent bohemian, Brooker describes the “aesthetes of the English nineties” as “The Bohemians of the moment,” a phrase he borrows from Hugh David (8). Thus the historical bohemian may associate with many artistic uprisings, but none of these movements can encapsulate a figure known for his shape-shifting. In a statement that could also apply to Romantics and Decadents, Brooker clarifies that “if aesthetes were to some degree bohemian, not every bohemian was an aesthete,” adding, “the
bohemian was the product of and reaction to changing forms of modernity, and the persona correspondingly altered” (7). Based on Brooker’s assertion, the bohemian epitomized a British artistic age in flux, one that carried the promise of a breakthrough and the threat of an implosion. Turning back from history to literature, I explore what purpose the bohemian serves in the fictional narratives of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome.

IV. Tales from the Margins: The Bohemian Text

In a crucial moment in George Gissing’s novel, *The Emancipated* (1890), the painter Ross Mallard asks his future wife Miriam, “Do you understand […] what is meant when one says of a man that he is a Bohemian?” (300). While Miriam humbly responds that she “thinks so,” the novel moves beyond speculation, searching for a precise understanding of the bohemian identity in fin-de-siècle England. Like Gissing’s novel, George Moore’s *A Modern Lover*, George Du Maurier’s *Trilby*, and Arthur Ransome’s *Bohemia in London* begin by establishing a basic outline of the bohemian: he lives a vagabond lifestyle, detests bourgeois values, and distrusts the British bastion of conventional art, the Royal Academy. Then, each novel moves from caricature to character study by examining how the bohemian iconoclast deals with the realities of the English art market.²⁵

Such a thorough treatment of the bohemian represents a rarity in English literature of this era. Other authors who show an interest in bohemians, from William Makepeace Thackeray to Mary (Mrs. Humphry) Ward, generally approach them as broad types rather than as complex artists. In fact, Thackeray’s early attempt to define the bohemian archetype betrays the difficulty of such a task, as exemplified in *Vanity Fair* in 1848. Marking the first time “bohemian” appears in English literature, Thackeray borrows the term from French culture, loosely and vaguely

²⁵ *Trilby* is the lone text that offers a slightly more sympathetic treatment of London’s Royal Academy.
employing it to describe Becky Sharp’s restless and eccentric spirit.¹⁶ Fourteen years later, in an 1862 *Westminster Review* retrospective on European writers entitled “The Literature of Bohemia,” an uncredited author also struggles to define the bohemian for an English readership.²⁷ After mentioning the influence of Romantics such as John Keats and Percy Shelley on countercultural figures of the later nineteenth century, the writer calls the bohemian “a certain kind of literary gypsy [who], no matter in what language he speaks, or what city he inhabits […] is simply an artist or littérateur who, consciously or unconsciously, secedes from conventionality in life and in art” (33). Despite this author’s use of the word “simply,” his numerous qualifications and tentative description of a “certain kind of” artist, show the challenge of simplifying the bohemian identity. In the four primary texts, we certainly see the bohemian “secede from conventionality,” but we also see the reasons for his resistance to the status quo, as well as how his artistic endeavours may embody his resistance.

As the twentieth century approached, works of English literature increasingly addressed the bohemian rebel, but even so, he remained shrouded in mystery. In Ward’s novel *The History of David Grieve* (1892), David lives with a bohemian artist, Elise Delaunay, who briefly appears in the middle section of the novel. Despite her commitment to self-expression and free love, Elise remains a secondary character—the novel does not focus on her creativity, as she exists primarily to seduce Grieve. As a small subsection of an already marginal group, female bohemians prove even more elusive than their male counterparts. Wilson notes that “while there certainly were bohemian women,” they were a rare breed (98). Echoing Wilson, Brooker adds

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¹⁶ When describing Becky Sharp’s wandering spirit and her unconventionality, the narrator of *Vanity Fair* states, “So our little wanderer went about setting up her tent in various cities of Europe, as restless as Ulysses or Bampfylde Moore Carew. Her taste for disrespectability grew more and more remarkable. She became a perfect Bohemian ere long, herding with people whom it would make your hair stand on end to meet” (822).

²⁷ This article focuses largely on Czech literary works of the original Bohemia, but nonetheless attempts to show how English writers, such as the aforementioned Keats and Shelley, influenced the concept of the bohemian that appeared more and more frequently in London by the mid-century.
that “the nineteenth-century bohemian was invariably male,” noting that women were relegated to the roles of “‘girls,’ seamstresses, dancers, ‘grisettes,’ courtesans and prostitutes” (8). Brooker then adds the qualification that “in the wake of the turn of the century ‘new woman’ and contemporary suffrage campaigns, women came much more to the fore as independent figures in political and cultural life” (8). Resisting this change in gender politics, the late-nineteenth-century works of Moore, Gissing and Du Maurier do not present or study female bohemians; Ransome’s Bohemia in London, my only text from the early twentieth century, features two female “gypsies,” yet, despite this exception, all four of these texts imply that bohemian artists were male, thus suggesting that female bohemians had yet to arrive within this artistic milieu. All the same, I do not want to reinforce the sexism or the strongly gender-based vision of these texts but rather explore how they are situated in time. For this reason I use the pronoun “he” throughout my dissertation as a gesture to the masculine predominance of the fin-de-siècle bohemian.

In comparison to The History of David Grieve, Fergus Hume’s When I Lived in Bohemia (1891) offers a more extensive treatment of the bohemian artist, periodically addressing writers’ difficulties in the world of publishing. A minor writer of mystery fiction, Hume wrote this novel about a fictional character named Peter (no last name given) as he tries to succeed as a writer in London’s bohemian circles. Yet, Hume’s text ultimately reads as a series of romps through bohemian scenes rather than as an analytical treatise on the aesthetic aims of its artists. Other novels of this period that feature creative radicals, such as Oscar Wilde’s aforementioned The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) and Thomas Hardy’s The Well-Beloved (1892), seem to describe bohemian lifestyles and art. However, neither novel focuses specifically on artists dealing with the realities of the art market, or characters struggling between their desire to live creativity and
work creativity. Furthermore, neither text mentions bohemianism explicitly.\footnote{In Thomas Hardy’s \textit{The Well-Beloved} (1892), the sculptor Jocelyn Pierston’s creative work seems to serve only as a means of exploring his many romantic relationships.} To my knowledge, no other texts of this era pursue this subject with the thoroughness of \textit{A Modern Lover, The Emancipated, Trilby,} and \textit{Bohemia in London.}

Though these texts encompass a variety of literary styles and genres, they present similar concepts of the bohemian aesthetic. The pessimistic realism of Moore’s and Gissing’s novels may cohere, but \textit{Trilby} offers a jarring shift in style from these novels.\footnote{Both writers were influenced by French naturalism, with Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) in particular serving as an inspiration (Letters of George Gissing 161, Collected Works of George Moore, vol. 9 368).} A highly sensational story of art, murder, and hypnosis, \textit{Trilby}’s narrative seems almost fantastical, and yet the novel still offers a stinging indictment of the conventionality of Du Maurier’s contemporary art world, much like the critique we find in \textit{A Modern Lover} and \textit{The Emancipated}. Ransome’s \textit{Bohemia in London} represents the lone text that at the very least gestures toward journalistic reporting, yet its stylized presentation still reads more like a tall-tale: often playing with hyperbole, Ransome presents simple acts such as drinking and talking as heroic undertakings. Thus, his “non-fiction text” reads like a fictionalized retelling of his actual experiences and features an almost magical world at society’s margins. Despite their differences in style and approach, each of these authors remains fascinated by the future possibilities of the English avant-garde art and the spirit of bohemia.

The authors’ shared interest in visual art likely stems from their own experiences in the bohemian spheres of London and Paris, as each writer took particular note of the forward-thinking painters from this era. As mentioned, Moore himself began as a painter in the Latin Quarter of Paris in the 1870s, fraternizing with French painters such as Degas, Monet, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1819). When his art career failed, he thrived as a novelist and art
critic throughout the 1890s (Seinfeld 3). Gissing, who lived amongst London’s impoverished bohemians during his early career in the late 1870s, also showed an interest in its rebels, particularly through his fascination with Rossetti. Just as Moore’s beloved French Impressionists seem to inspire his characterization of _A Modern Lover_’s Thompson, Gissing perhaps gleaned inspiration from Rossetti in his creation of _The Emancipated_’s Mallard.

Born in Paris, Du Maurier also studied art among its bohemian ateliers, living a similar existence to George Moore, albeit in the earlier period of the late 1850s and early 60s. Du Maurier would later go on to a successful career as an illustrator for _Punch_. Yet throughout his tenure at this publication, he felt that illustrators did not receive proper respect from London’s artistic community, and he criticized the Royal Academy’s unwillingness to admit illustrations into their committee ranks. In his 1890 essay, “The Illustration of Books from The Serious Artist’s Point of View–II,” Du Maurier declares that this stigma would someday change, as he envisions a time when draughtsmen would attain the same accolades as painters (_Magazine of Art vol. 13_ 371-375). Du Maurier’s novel _Trilby_ traces just such a movement, featuring the illustrator Billee as its catalyst.

Like Du Maurier, Ransome illustrated his own novels throughout his career, most notably for the children’s series he began in 1929, _Swallows and Amazons_. Twenty-two years before he began that series, a young Ransome wrote about the wild experiences of his youth, centering _Bohemia in London_ on painters who revel as much in pleasure as in painting. From the opening of his text, Ransome makes the aforementioned distinction between the discipline of writers who work alone through long evenings by candlelight and the adventurousness of painters who leave

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30 As biographer Paul Delany notes, Gissing himself showed a gift for illustration from an early age (6).
31 In my chapter on _The Emancipated_, I explore this possibility, particularly by assessing a letter Gissing wrote to his brother in 1890; in the letter, Gissing describes his admiration for Rossetti, referring to his paintings as a “dawn of beautiful imaginings” (_The Collected Letters of George Gissing_, vol. 4 181). Gissing made this declaration as he was working on _The Emancipated_ so Rossetti likely served as an inspiration for Gissing’s heroic painter.
their studios each night for a crowded pub. Drawn to the latter, Ransome finds a vitality he 
cannot quite describe. From Moore to Ransome, these authors all experienced bohemia first-hand 
and their texts envision its painters heralding a new aesthetic movement.

While these four texts focus on visual art, each work features literary characters 
attending to attain creative enlightenment by examining paintings. In The Emancipated, Gissing 
presents an aspiring yet failing novelist, Reuben Elgar, viewing Mallard’s paintings as a source 
of artistic motivation. In a similar fashion, Moore presents the writer Harding examining the 
Moderns’ paintings while desperately seeking right words to convey his astonishment. Further, 
Du Maurier and Ransome treat their literary characters as secondary, as they too imply that these 
writers must merely wait for painters to somehow show them the future of art itself. Finally, 
these four authors’ own aforementioned visual experiments (such as their liberal use of ekphrasis 
as well as their attempts to blend visual and textual description) also imply that the literary 
community should look to the innovations of the visual art community. Yet if the bohemian 
painter’s plight represents a visual art community in crisis, the supporting role of the author 
characters in these works suggests that they also feel spurned by the art market. By engaging 
with the rebel painter and documenting his career, these writer-characters (perhaps as proxies for 
the authors themselves) indirectly explore the status of art at the end of the century more 
generally.

Ultimately, even as the works of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome present 
different forms of bohemian artists, including the talented and the untalented and the elitist and 
the populist, all four texts centre on the bohemian’s struggle to find balance between his ideals 
and his art, his life and his labours. As will be seen, this tension threatens the bohemian’s ability 
to create but it also provides the spark he needs to make innovative works—paradoxically, the
bohemian artist seems to create only when he feels his creativity is in danger. As the countercultural heroes of Moore, Gissing and Ransome become wary of losing their status as non-conformists during their rise to artistic prominence, the bohemian characters deliberately challenge the presumed tastes of a middle-class audience. While *A Modern Lover*, *The Emancipated*, and *Bohemia in London* present staunchly countercultural heroes, though, Du Maurier’s *Trilby* depicts a hero, Little Billee, who has fewer qualms about appealing to a bourgeois audience. Yet even as Billee’s works gain popularity with a public that finds them “pleasant,” the populace do not grasp the subversive genius of his strange sketches.

Obviously, the path of these bohemians hardly guarantees success (Billee’s initial rise stands as an anomaly), as their desire to challenge, dupe and confuse the very audience that buys their paintings seems counterintuitive to say the least. Not surprisingly, many of these artists are more interested in surviving in bohemia than in attaining the wealth required to escape it. Though they may seek funding through exhibitions to support their haphazard existence, most of them would never deliberately create crowd-pleasing art. Thus, and ironically, an artist’s identity as a bohemian would seem to depend on his ongoing commercial failure. Nonetheless, my primary texts seem far more intrigued by bohemian visionaries who find novel ways of working within a system that seems “beneath them,” eventually championing artists who at the very least seek to create and sell their wares while retaining their countercultural integrity. For example, Gissing’s Mallard sells landscape paintings to the public yet, unbeknownst to this public, he inserts wild dream visions into this work much like Beardsley would insert salacious, visual jokes into his drawings. Ultimately, in chapters on each of these texts, I question how their characters negotiate an art market by reframing concepts of work and non-work.
In my first chapter, I examine George Moore’s *A Modern Lover*. When the Moderns’ leader, Thompson, an artist who resembles Édouard Manet, enters his work into the Royal Academy, he fears he will lose his credibility. In an effort to retain his autonomy, Thompson challenges his audiences with strange, disjointed paintings. Inspired by Thompson, the other Moderns, along with the befuddled protagonist Lewis, also aim to create jarring compositions. However, both Thompson and the Moderns struggle with the realities of art production, albeit in vastly different ways. Thompson obsesses endlessly over the balance between self-expression (creating and showing paintings) and self-protection (he remains wary of the middle class art public). In turn, the other Moderns preach individualism yet practice imitation; their eccentric styles merely follow their leader’s aesthetic. Ultimately, artistic production always threatens the well-being of Moore’s bohemian group, whether the Moderns fall into hypocrisy or Thompson struggles with his gifts. Despite these obstacles, Thompson’s torturous efforts eventually lead to a tenuous success: he becomes commercially successful while temporarily retaining his reputation as an unconventional artist through beautiful and jarring works, pieces that Thompson always seems to sabotage in some way. Looking closely at Thompson’s unorthodox work habits, I compare his visionary practices with the approaches of his fellow Moderns, men who seem to copy Thompson’s work in the name of originality. By the end of the novel, Thompson still finds himself torn between work and non-work, the Moderns fall into lives of drinking and socializing, and the narrative itself concludes with this sense of incompleteness and apprehension. Linking the uncertainty of Thompson’s labours to the uncertainty of the bohemian novel as a whole, I show how Moore’s examination of the trajectory of Thompson’s life and art represents, more broadly, an allegorical examination of an English cultural vision in crisis.
For my second chapter, I move from the bohemian collective of *A Modern Lover* to Gissing’s presentation of a solitary bohemian in *The Emancipated*. Gissing’s protagonist represents an anomaly in this collective of novels: rather than fleeing his work to seek society, Mallard flees work to escape into his own mental meditations. While David Grylls and Andrew Dowling argue that Gissing prizes a character’s work ethic as the defining mark of his or her worth, *The Emancipated* reveals and explores Gissing’s primary interest in a world of dreams beyond labour. Gissing’s heroic bohemian, Ross Mallard, wishes to leave his creative work behind in favour of a monastic life of visions, but he finds himself forced to paint to survive. Painting dreams masquerading as conventional scenes of the countryside, Mallard sees his pieces only as allusions to his hallucinations, a judgement which reveals his desire to escape from his work as well as from the public. Though his career becomes unsustainable, Mallard’s blend of painting and dreaming represents the bohemian’s two poles: the labourer and the visionary. Much like *A Modern Lover*, *The Emancipated*’s narrative ends with its hero painter in a state of conflict, as Mallard eventually acknowledges that the modern age seems to have no place for free-thinking artists. Both texts bring out the basic conflicts and tensions in the broader aesthetic realm at a key moment of cultural transition.

Turning to *Trilby* for my third chapter, I analyze Du Maurier’s examination of a popular bohemian, an archetype that seems far more comfortable appealing to middle-class tastes. In “The Painter of Modern Life” (1864), Charles Baudelaire praises a sketch artist, Constantine Guys, for capturing the chaotic world of Paris with intuition and quickness, a skill Baudelaire would later define as a bohemian trait. Though Du Maurier criticized Baudelaire as a pretentious fraud, *Trilby* also features a heroic illustrator of hurried works, though one who appears almost thirty years later. In his essays from this period, Du Maurier insists on the artistic value of
illustration and laments that the Royal Academy does not accept illustrators. Within this context, the rise of the sketch artist in *Trilby* serves as a symbolic affront to the current aesthetic establishment. While critics such as Seigel, Richard Kelly and Leonee Ormond declare that Du Maurier betrays the values of the counterculture by presenting Billee as an “artist of the people,” they do not take into account the nuanced system of inclusion and exclusion represented in Billee’s sketches. Though Billee’s aesthetic subjects differ from those of Whistler, the former’s impromptu works recall Edward Burne-Jones’s description of Whistler’s *Nocturne in Black and Gold – The Falling Rocket* as “an admirable beginning of a work of art, a sketch, in short” (*The Times* 11). As such, Billee’s approach challenges conventional notions of artistic production: Billee intuitively crafts his works with such artlessness and effortlessness that no one seems to grasp the rarity of his talents, even as the masses buy his “pretty pictures.” Despite his gifts, Billee actually prefers experiencing scenes of Paris and London firsthand without the need to recreate them in his drawings and, as a public following soon subsumes him and the stress of his newfound celebrity (coupled with his personal heartbreaks) leads to his untimely breakdown, he begins to despise his own pieces and himself. Throughout this chapter, I explore the connections between the sketch artists of Baudelaire and Du Maurier, and discuss Billee’s eventual death as a warning to bohemians who accept the artistic marketplace.

In my fourth and final chapter, I explore Ransome’s *Bohemia in London*, revealing how bohemians seem to find creative satisfaction in social spaces that they cannot find in the studio. Janet Lyon, one of the few scholars to addresses this work, suggests that Ransome’s text advocates a novel form of bohemian sociability; she presents a pleasant meeting between Ransome and some “gypsies” as evoking a spirit of democracy, openness and egalitarianism. However, Lyon’s optimistic reading neglects the reasons why Ransome’s painters always require
the support of others: his artists constantly seek crowded spaces because their careers remain rife with disappointment. Whether failing to fulfill their creative visions or failing to sell their paintings, these painters appear to live their artistic lifestyle in pubs and cafés because they fail as productive artists. The oddity of Ransome’s text is that he romanticizes this social world even as he shows the culture of discontent that renders it rote and predictable. The bohemians’ painterly pursuits at least bring the hope of creative originality (however faint), but their “wild” social lives become as regulated and ordered as the bourgeois existence they denounce. They go to the same bars for the same conversations with the same people night after night. Despite its often optimistic tone, Ransome’s text thus offers a sober vision of the future of avant-garde art: his bohemians’ paintings sometimes become strangely original in their erratic, often unfinished state, but these artists’ creative processes always involve self-torment at the studio and self-destruction at the pub. Rather than harmonizing the two sides of the bohemian identity (the labourer and the dreamer), Bohemia in London follows the thematic thread of A Modern Lover, The Emancipated, and Trilby, showing an artist in contradiction caught between creating and destroying his works, thereby evoking a nation seemingly at its own artistic crossroads.

In my conclusion, I summarize how the fin-de-siècle bohemian challenges Victorian concepts of aesthetics, labour, and the role of the artist at the approach of the modern age, while also further elucidating what purpose the bohemian serves for each of the respective authors. In particular, I return to the theories of Jed Esty on narratives of development, examining in greater detail how the unsatisfying endings of these künstlerromane mirror those of the bildungsromans Esty discusses. Though the bohemians of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier and Ransome ultimately fail at the hands of an unjust system, whether emotionally or artistically, the art they create before their demise answers Mallard’s question, “what is meant when one says of a man that he
is a Bohemian?” (300). Examining such questions, these writers seem look to bohemian painters in particular because English art appeared to be on the cusp of a possible aesthetic breakthrough (a collective aspiration I will elucidate in this conclusion), but also because, as mentioned, these writers saw the bohemian painter as occupying a unique cultural position between studio artist and social artist. At least according to the authors’ visions, the bohemian artist may spend his days in a studio making art, but he spends his nights at the pub making himself into art, as his performance begins as soon as he enters this bohemian social space. While looking closely at bohemian painters’ movements back and forth between these two impulses, A Modern Lover, The Emancipated, Trilby, and Bohemia in London all suggest that the bohemian artist’s conflicted and divided identity—one torn between aesthetic consciousness and aesthetic production—serves as the source of their characteristic brand of “doomed creativity.” Ultimately, the four authors look to the bohemian to express this mingled sense of hope and fear regarding the future of art in England.
Chapter One

“Original work is never dans le movement”: The Bohemian Collective in George Moore’s A Modern Lover

In a variety of fin-de-siècle fictional and non-fictional texts, George Moore explores the paradox of the individualistic collective, which describes a band of rebel artists built on conflicting ideals of self-expression and group solidarity. Drawing on characteristics of countercultural factions of the late-nineteenth century, Moore addresses how bohemian artists negotiated the apparent opposition between their desire for personal fulfillment and their need for mutual support. Critics Ephraim Mizruchi and Peter Brooker both note the tenuousness of this balance in their respective studies of international bohemian organizations, from the French revolutionaries of the early-nineteenth century to the American hippies of the nineteen sixties. Mizruchi argues that bohemians sometimes “g[ave] up [their] individuality and autonomy to a leader” but they more often “maintain[ed] a careful guard over [their] rights and prerogatives” (35). As a result, he adds, these factions tended to “dissolve after [a] relatively short duration” (35). In a similar fashion, Brooker notes that even as a group’s “open, dialogic and ‘irregular’ model” aimed for cohesiveness, its make-up remained experimental and volatile (8). Brooker argues that bohemian groups sought a “unity . . . of ideas, practices and settings” all while acknowledging “internal differences, rifts, rivalries and animosities within [the group]” (8).

Whether dealing with the French Impressionists in his essays or the Moderns in his fiction, Moore’s writings champion avant-garde art movements even as they suggest the unsustainability of such groups. In Moore’s texts—A Modern Lover, Confessions of a Young Man (1886), and Modern Painting (1893)—a rift between the artistically talented and untalented always threatens the cohesiveness of the bohemian collective. In particular, Moore’s texts tend to
hero-worship great artists of fiction and non-fiction, a practice that diminishes the influence of their group affiliations and their fellow group members. According to Moore’s principles, a genius may influence an entire countercultural group’s aesthetics, defining the conventions that others follow. Through such innovations, the artistic pioneer may subsequently gain notoriety and success, thereby jeopardizing his credibility as a bohemian. In turn, followers of the visionary leader may adhere so closely to his avant-garde maxims that their art ironically evokes a kind of conventional unconventionality, whereby supposedly free-thinking rebels in fact conform to the vision of their most gifted member. Thus, despite Moore’s valorization of a bohemian collective in his novel and in his essays, his texts depict the breakdown of this movement by showing followers who mimic their leaders, and leaders who distinguish themselves from their respective groups.

In *A Modern Lover*, Moore’s gifted and ungifted artists all react to these threats to their integrity by resisting artistic responsibilities. The more Thompson gains fame among the middle-classes, the more he seems intent on destroying or corrupting his work in some way, seeking to resist any labour that brings him closer to normative culture. Never relying on a preset plan for his creations, Thompson uses erratic brushstrokes to create odd compositions that resist the meticulous detail and polish of classical works. Bohemians without aesthetic talent in *A Modern Lover* typically dismiss their derivative works while pursuing more unconventional lifestyles, attempting in vain to distance themselves from the pain of peddling minor works to a middle-class public. Therefore, through their mutual apprehensions toward art production, the gifted and non-gifted in Moore’s bohemian collectives address the same central problem: how can they make art for a public they abhor yet depend on for survival?
By depicting how individual bohemians of various talents endure ambivalent relationships to their own artistic production, Moore’s text subsequently suggests why the bohemian group itself eventually stagnates. Beginning with the paradox inherent in an individualistic collective (individuals wanting freedom while wishing to be belong to a larger movement), Moore’s novel moves further to see how the symptoms of this paradox manifest themselves when its members actually get to work. In this context, his bohemian group’s shared resistance to labour itself never comes to represent a rallying cry. More specifically, gifted artists do not bond with the ungifted through their similar anxieties toward artistic creation: instead, all of these artists must face the reality of the art market and make money; throughout their participation in this marketplace, their differing abilities and the subsequent distinctiveness of their respective careers eventually overwhelm their investment in the collective. Therefore, even though Moore seeks to herald the rise of a new art movement, his künstlerroman A Modern Lover shows its dissolution, and thus this novel represents my first installment in these narratives of “frozen youth.”

“Manet, all Manet, and nothing but Manet”: Moore’s Confrontations as a Young Man as a Prelude to A Modern Lover

Before moving to Moore’s novel, we must establish the concept of rebel art that he explores in his non-fiction. In Confessions of a Young Man (1886), Moore attacks the Classical School and presents French Impressionism as a more creative genre of art. Centering on his experiences in bohemian Paris and London in the 1870s and 80s, Moore spends much of this text directing vitriol at all artists, critics and establishments that he deems too conservative.

Railing against a “respectability [that] has wound itself about society,” Moore focuses his anger on Paris’s École des Beaux-Arts and London’s Royal Academy, schools that have, in his
words, “destroy[ed] individuality” (145, 99). Both institutions, Moore argues, promote an artistic orthodoxy, conforming students to a classical aesthetic popular among bourgeois and aristocratic audiences. Moore describes the alumni of these institutions as all painting in the same style and populating their works with the same classical figures from Greek and Roman antiquity. He insists that true artists would never seek the aid of an artistic community because they possess the inherent skill needed to create great pieces of art; those with talent can presumably paint freely without requiring the doctrines of their chosen school. Subsequently, Moore criticizes art schools for presenting art as a pursuit that one can learn, as though a young hack can become the next Manet simply through careful education and dedicated labour.

Describing a rival artist in a Parisian atelier named Marshall, Moore elucidates this view of artistic education. He states, “Marshall’s mind, though shallow, was bright, and he understood with strange ease all that was told him, and was able to put into immediate practice the methods of work inculcated by the professors” (44). He then clarifies, “[Marshall] showed himself singularly capable of education; little could be drawn out, but a great deal could be put in” (44). Though Moore did not take to technical direction as easily, he frames his apparent weakness as a strength: “I have said I possessed no artistic facility, but I did not say faculty, my drawing was never common; it was individual in feeling, it was refined. I possessed all the rarer qualities” (44). For the untalented Marshall, his dependence on bourgeois education seems synonymous with his reliance on bourgeois concepts of labour: he abides by certain “methods of work” to paint in a style “inculcated by the professors” (44). In contrast, Moore explores his individuality, framing his unwillingness to learn or labour as a rebellion against the status quo. Based on this tale, Moore privileges “feelings” over any regimented practice of art. However, if Moore insists
that bourgeois art schools “destroy individuality,” then one wonders how avant-garde collectives could be any different.

Avoiding such questions, Moore urges aesthetic rebels to oppose painters for whom “conventionalities are rigorously respected” (144). He states that true artists have “always been […] outcast[s]” whose works represent “a practical protest against the so-called decencies of life,” and then adds that “if Bohemianism is not a necessity it is at least an adjuvant” against artistic conventionality (141). After defining his concept of a creative uprising, Moore points to the French Impressionists as the iconoclasts who most successfully embody these ideals.

For Moore, the French Impressionists took up the mantle of the counterculture, offering an alternative to the uniform aesthetics of “respectable art.” Rising to prominence in the eighteen seventies and eighties with the work of painters such as Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, this group resisted the hegemony of established art institutions and salons. During his own bohemian days in Paris, Moore met and befriended Manet and Degas at the Café Nouvelle Athènes, a typical haunt for the artists of this movement. Entranced by these painters, Moore felt they signaled a rebirth of Romantic self-expression in a world of mass-production, a feeling he affirms when describing an “exposition of the Impressionists” in the early stages of Confessions, in which the paintings transcend “the grammar of art, perspective, [and] anatomy” (40).

Despite Moore’s enthusiasm for an art free of “grammar,” the French Impressionists’ existence as a movement obviously depended on some shared conventions, conventions that help Moore eventually discern between the talented and untalented amongst this group. As Robert L. Herbert notes, the French Impressionists introduced stylistic innovations such as “strong color[s] and rippled brushwork” with the aim of capturing the immediacy of the modern experience (17).
They favored contemporary subjects over classical archetypes, though their painting’s subjects ranged from scenes of natural beauty to figures of urban decay. In their depictions of the latter, the French Impressionists often featured the Parisian bohemian: Renoir’s *La Bohémienne* (1868) and Degas’s *L’Absinthe* (1876) serve as merely a few examples of a shared interest in Paris’s artistic counterculture.

These common impressionist traits trouble Moore’s vision of an unstandardized art form. If Moore’s declarations of an art without grammar were true, then why would exhibitors group these artists together in the first place? Moore intermittently alludes to some parallels among respective French Impressionists, but he mostly celebrates the inimitability of artists like Manet or Degas, and his hero-worship undermines his concept of impressionism as a movement. Showering his attention on a few visionaries and largely ignoring the collectives in their wake, Moore devalues “typical” French Impressionists in much the same way he diminishes “typical” Classical artists. After affirming that Manet and Degas, "are the leaders of the impressionist school," Moore spends endless passages distinguishing their genius with little regard for the lesser talents who represent this school itself—presumably, these minor impressionists abide by their teachers just as Marshall abides by his own (90). Beyond *Confessions*, many of Moore’s essays express similar sentiments: in *Modern Painting* (1893), Moore touts Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s “very distinct and personal expression of his individuality” (69). In his 1894 review of English painter, Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942) for *The Speaker*, he praises the uniqueness of Edgar Degas’s work by resorting to tautology: “Degas is always Degas” (249). Similarly, in describing Édouard Manet’s painting, *Le Linge*, Moore states that this work “is Manet, all Manet, and nothing but Manet” (*Modern Painting* 38). Finally, in *Vain Fortune* (1891), a novel Moore
wrote eight years after *A Modern Lover*, a fictional art critic seems to clarify Moore’s approach to avant-garde collectives by declaring, “original work is never *dans le movement*” (89).

As *Confessions* comes to an end, Moore struggles to quell this tension between the true artist and the “rebels” who surround him. During a brief digression, he implies that impressionism serves as a gateway for all of its adherents to attain originality, regardless of their technical skill; he muses that painters may paint badly as “long as [they] don’t paint badly like other people” (99). However, Moore later reneges his democratic vision, ultimately declaring that bad art cannot be truly original and specifying that only those with rare talent may exhibit this quality in their work (78). Expanding on this idea, Moore affirms that the only “great divisions” in art are “those who have talent, and those who have no talent” (78). Moore continued to define this concept of genius in the aforementioned piece for *The Speaker*, stating, “[the] most certain sign[] of genius is the power to […] conquer[]” one’s influences (249). Even twenty-one years later in *Vale* (1914), the third volume of *Hail and Farewell!*, Moore reiterates that “bad Art reveals no personality,” adding, “the work of the great artist is himself . . . Manet’s Art was all Manet” (134). Through this qualification, Moore insists that even paintings freed from the “grammar of art” embody certain standards of quality, suggesting that similarities in the art of lesser impressionists serve only to help us perceive originalities in the works of the collective’s beloved masters. In sum, Moore makes individualism available only to specific individuals: he elevates a few virtuosos over an anonymous crowd of impressionist pretenders, a concept he explores later in *A Modern Lover*.

Describing the fall of the Impressionist movement as the nineteenth century neared an end, Gluck argues that the “Impressionists, who had been the standard-bearers of modernity throughout the 1870s, were no longer able to fulfill this role.” She adds that while “their well-
publicized campaigns against the academic establishment and their Salon system still caused them to be branded as revolutionaries and innovators,” they soon became “an integral part of the bourgeois establishment and invariably reflected its norms and values” (*Popular Bohemia* 119). Echoing Gluck, Adrian Frazier and Michael Grenfell both explain that despite Manet’s aesthetic rebellions against the Parisian salon system, he settled into the life of a well-to-do gentleman (63, 103). In this context, middle-class culture subsumed the leaders of this movement, like Manet himself, while derivative impressionists presumably faded into obscurity. As such, Moore’s concept of talent provides revolutionaries with two outcomes, both of which seem antithetical to the ideal of free self-expression. As I will explain in the next section, the irony of *A Modern Lover* rests on its celebration of the Moderns even as it shows why all of its members might resist picking up a paintbrush in the first place.

**Lewis meets Thompson: Following the leader in Moore’s *A Modern Lover***

Throughout *A Modern Lover*, Moore follows three main narrative threads involving Thompson, his fellow Moderns, and this group’s most conflicted member, Lewis Seymour. As each of these individuals attempt to align themselves with the bohemian group, their complex relationship to their own creations pulls them from away from their fellow brethren. While the Moderns of *A Modern Lover* usher in their own aesthetic movement based on individuality, its members soon find themselves studying and labouring under the tutelage of Thompson, a visionary who has no need for the group’s support. Lewis, in turn, oscillates between his commitment to the Moderns and his commitment to the classical school, never finding the creative spark he searches for throughout the novel. Though Lewis desperately seeks to understand how Thompson creates his masterpieces, the former’s desire for instruction, a desire shared by the other Moderns, reflects his lack of inherent talent. As a fictive counterpart to
Manet, Thompson appropriately creates works that are “all Thompson,” pieces that evoke skill rather than craftsmanship.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, his followers may try to emulate him, but Thompson’s supremacy reflects a difference in kind rather than degree: Thompson is no mere Modern, just as Manet, Degas or Renoir are no mere impressionists.

Looking up to Thompson, the Moderns, much like Marshall, work to paint according to an established doctrine, as their bohemian collective mirrors the bourgeois ideology it seeks to dismiss. Even as \textit{A Modern Lover} celebrates the Moderns, these contradictions persist, particularly during the journey of Lewis. Thompson’s influence comes to echo the individuality destroying effects of bourgeois education to such a degree that Lewis (along with other members of the Moderns) \textit{attempts} to live a life of “individual feeling” somehow removed from art-making. If such men cannot rebel through distinctive art, they will presumably do so through distinctive lifestyles. As \textit{A Modern Lover} moves through its treatment of Lewis, the Moderns, and Thompson, its many paradoxes never come to a resolution. Ultimately, by the novel’s end, the bohemian dream of an individualistic collective remains at odds with the realities of artistic production.

From the beginning of the novel, the narrator makes it clear that Lewis, like Marshall, has a facility for education because he has little personality to be “drawn out.” Introducing Lewis, the narrator states that he “long[s] [to] receive encouragement and advice” and that he “could not work instinctively in solitude . . . which is the true type of the artist” (154). Fittingly, when Lewis studies at the “Beaux-Arts,” he “learn[s] easily what can be taught” (117). The phrase, “what can be taught,” hints that there are qualities that cannot be taught, namely what Moore calls artistic faculty. Throughout these references to the unteachable both in the novel and in

\textsuperscript{32} Anna Gruetzner Robins, Adrian Frazer, and Anthony Farrow, who each present the Moderns as an English version of the French Impressionists, particularly note the personal and artistic similarities between Thompson and Manet (50, 89, 34-38).
Confessions, Moore’s target remains emblems of the artistic establishment, like the Ecole Beaux-Arts and The Royal Academy.

Offering an alternative to these schools, the novel tries to present the Moderns’ brotherhood as free from conventional instruction. *A Modern Lover* typically does so by voicing the Moderns’ contempt for Lewis’s classical pieces, works of a well-trained, diligent yet faceless painter. Describing Lewis’s painting, Harding admits that they are “fairly well executed” yet decries their “utterly outworn . . . classical formula” (271). Much more bluntly, Thompson calls their conventionality “piteous” (270). The narrator legitimizes these opinions, echoing the views of these Moderns while mocking Lewis’s cherubs and nympha. Even when Lewis experiments within the classical mode by painting a woman with “copper-coloured hair” against a “crimson curtain,” the narrator clarifies that “[Lewis] was only doing in red what Regnault did in yellow,” a reference to Henri Regnault’s *Salomé* (1870) (153). In the narrator’s own words, Lewis’s best works may be “fairly well drawn [and] well modeled” but they lack “individuality of feeling” because they “violate[s] in no way any of the recognised canons of art” (89). Like Marshall, Lewis makes carefully executed pieces that bare the mark of a craftsman, a dutiful student trying to paint “correctly.”

*A Modern Lover*’s satire of Lewis remains curious because the novel nonetheless insists that Lewis could paint more personally if only he accepted the ideals of the Moderns, paradoxically suggesting that Lewis need only follow the “right” school to become an individualist. Presumably Moore’s allegiance to all things countercultural causes him to overlook or dismiss such hypocrisies. In his analysis of the novel, Anthony Farrow asserts, “Moore stresses the importance of originality,” always insisting that “a mass-produced artist is not an

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33 As Peter Collister explains, Henri Regnault (1843-1871) was a French painter whose most famous work, *Salomé*, arguably represented him at the peak of his powers (831). The painting features a romantic, dream-like presentation of the Biblical figure.
artist at all because to be an artist means to have a significantly personal gift” (32). Yet, the Moderns only promote their own brand of mass-production. When Lewis joins their ranks, they shape his art to their artistic schema (customs that mirror the conventions of the French Impressions) despite their maxims of personal liberty, insisting that Lewis adopt their unique approach to painting. Lewis tries his best to succeed within this paradigm, but his attempts to express his creativity while adhering to the conventions of the Moderns seems counterintuitive to say the least.

Overlooking the novel’s presentation of hard-working artists as inherently servile and talentless, many critics have argued that Lewis eventually fails as a Modern because he does not fully commit to his avant-garde paintings. They describe a man too distracted by women, luxury and leisure to capitalize on his latent talent. For instance, Milton Chaiken asserts that Lewis fails creatively “because he has no integrity,” and for Richard Allen Cave, Lewis’s frivolity mars his “dedication to his work,” rendering “worthless . . . both his talent and his character” (27, 25). However, as Frederick W. Seinfelt has noted, *A Modern Lover* is not a tale of a young painter who wastes his talents but of a young painter who has little talent from the beginning (45-46).

Furthermore, Lewis *does* work hard: the narrator may mock his painting as “soft and delicate” and his “talent [as] neither original nor profound,” but Lewis’s lack of ability causes him to labour fanatically on his pieces (51). Yet whether he “work[s] very hard” at classical pieces of “conventional prettiness” or “works steadily” at unorthodox paintings in the avant-garde style, he will obviously never transcend the conventions of either school as, in the fatalistic world of the novel, he can only create derivative art (104, 61). Again, Lewis’s work ethic represents a symptom of his lack of talent: the harder he toils, the more obviously he reveals his
limitations as an artist. By neglecting to understand this character’s plight, critics overlook *A Modern Lover*’s complex and problematic treatment of art, education, and labour.

When Lewis seems to pledge himself one final time to the Moderns, the uselessness of his work ethic becomes evident. Gazing on the unorthodox compositions and strange color choices of Thompson’s artwork, Lewis feels only a sense of inferiority: the narrator states that he became a “disciple in theory, but only faintly in practice; for he was never able to shake himself free of the conventional prettiness of things” (61). The narrator also criticizes Lewis for not embracing the Moderns’ “new formula” (60). Ironically, this insistence that Lewis become a “disciple” who follows a “formula” only reaffirms the closeness between the Moderns and the schools of art they deride. This trend continues when Lewis “struggl[es] against his natural proclivities and work[s] steadily” (61). In a rare complimentary moment, the narrator states that Lewis “ma[kes] rapid progress, … learns to draw intelligently and correctly” and notes that he “might have lived to have conquered his passions, and to have done good work for art's own sake” (61). Oddly enough, this quotation inverts Moore’s assertion in *Confessions* that great artists must “conquer” their influences by *harnessing* their passions. If, as Moore states in *Vale* (1914), “bad Art reveals no personality,” then how can Lewis’s self-repression as a Modern lead to “good work” (134)? Furthermore, the narrator’s reference to drawing “correctly” once more mimics the academic language of the Royal Academy and the Beaux Arts. In fact, while satirizing the Academy in the *Confessions*, Moore states, “there is no such thing as correct drawing” (99). Therefore, by institutionalizing individualism, the Moderns merely offer a new form of conformity, one rendered all the more insidious because it is masked by the rhetoric of liberation. Within the world of Moore’s novel, an artist should choose to be an avant-garde hack rather than a classical hack, but its narrator gives little indication as to why beyond vague
pronouncements about the joy of the bohemian existence. Ironically, Lewis’s hard work to
become a Modern only brings him closer to the bourgeois concept of art as a learned pursuit
based on education and toil. Heartbroken, Lewis begins to view his paintings with disgust.

While the narrator chastises Lewis for his lack of skill, even the most gifted of the
Moderns can only hope to emulate Thompson. As the art market forces these artists to work, the
novel’s hero-worship posits that one bohemian will rise. Thompson, this novel’s bohemian
savior, heralds the need for strange, odd, and personal paintings even as his influence robs his
followers of creativity. Immediately, all of the Moderns become Thompsonians, rebel painters
who follow the doctrines of their leader. Describing Thompson’s influence, the narrator notes
that “[i]t was Thompson who served them as a sort of centre; he rallied them, theorised their
confused aspirations, and gave to many, if not the clue to the problem, at least strength to believe
that they were following the light of the truth” (60). Regardless of their respective dreams, the
Moderns assemble under Thompson because they will never have access to this “clue” or “the
light of truth.” Like Lewis’s desire for education, they seek this enlightenment because they lack
an aesthetic vision of their own. However, due to the narrator’s respect for these rebel artists, he
presents their weaknesses in a positive light. While he mocks Lewis for later clinging to
Thompson for encouragement, he presents the Moderns “rall[y]ing” around their leader, a verb
which veils their servility by foregrounding their spiritedness.

Just as Lewis’s attempts at avant-garde art seem overworked and overdone, even the
compositions of the most skilled Moderns betray their desire for idiosyncrasy, exhibiting a
contrived strangeness at odds with the unforced nature of Thompson’s later paintings. While
admiring Stanley’s deranged picture of a racecourse in which “the principal horse’s head [is] cut
in two by a long white post,” Frazer describes the piece as “a vigorous protest against the
conventional forms of composition” (158). Meanwhile, Frazer himself makes paintings of London sunsets in which “everything [is] violet” (88). Though Lewis understatedly tells Frazer that the world is not “composed exclusively of that colour,” the latter remains steadfast in his pursuit (88). Later, when he begins receiving more attention for his pieces, Frazer deliberately makes works “more strange than ever . . . so as to keep out of the crush of popular appreciation” (158). Even when the narrator praises Holt as the second most talented member of the Moderns, he states, “without having the great original talent of his master, [Holt] was strong enough to be able to reproduce what came to him at second hand, in a form sufficiently altered to be free of the plague spot of plagiarism” (166). The narrator actually congratulates Holt for not entirely copying “his master,” praise that ironically reveals the emptiness of these followers’ careers. In each of these descriptions, the narrator emphasizes that they are working hard: Frazer’s piece is a “vigorous protest” and Holt’s work is a “strong . . . reproduc[tion].” If, as Moore insists, education destroys individuality, then Frazer and Holt’s time under Thompson offers proof: both painters find themselves as blindly committed to labour as Lewis, ironically evoking the much maligned middle-class values of education, study and work.

Like Lewis, these Moderns have little trouble becoming ideologues in theory—they often spout maxims of individual freedom—but their paintings themselves always reveal the veiled hierarchy that threatens the ideals of their bohemian commune. Despite its apparent optimism, *A Modern Lover* offers a foreboding sense that the Moderns exist merely as collateral damage for Thompson’s rise. The way *A Modern Lover* justifies Thompson’s ascent and the Moderns’ suffering mirrors the *Confessions* discourses on great works of art. In the latter, Moore refers to the building of the Egyptian pyramids, shockingly stating, “It was well that [Israelite slaves] died that I might have the pyramids to look on . . . Is there one amongst us who would exchange them
for the lives of the ignominious slaves that died?” (118). Offering a more contemporary analogy, Moore also declares, “I would give many lives to save one sonnet by Baudelaire,” before lamenting that the “old world of heroes is now over” because society now “worship[s] . . . the Mass” (199). Even keeping in mind Munira H. Mutran’s assertion that Moore exaggerates his opinions for effect throughout the *Confessions*, these declarations remain jarring (75-84). If the *Confessions*’ hero-worship elevates the gifted from the mass of the general populace, *A Modern Lover*’s hero-worship elevates the gifted from the mass of the countercultural group. This novel may grant the Moderns some credit for their rebellion, but it still damns them to playing the part of decorated slaves. Through their “imperfect aspirations” and failed works, these followers only reaffirm the inimitability of their king. Like the French Impressionists who followed the conventions of their leaders, they too may be forgotten by history. In the larger context of the novel, this issue reflects the breakdown both in Moore’s dream of the bohemian collective and the narrative goals of the künstlerroman itself.

Sensing that their drudgery only reinforces their identities as Thompsonian followers, the Moderns, as well as Lewis, begin to detach themselves from the works they must create and sell, choosing to express their individuality through their lives instead. In describing archetypal bohemians of the nineteenth century, Jerrold Seigel argues that “True bohemian sectarianism is usually carried on by people of excitable imaginations and modest talents, a combination which disables them from an ordinary existence and forces them, as consolation, to a life of dedicated unconventionality” (24). For those without the talent to escape a life of poverty and struggle, the bohemian sect offers support, a means of identifying themselves as “misunderstood artistes” rather than accepting their failures.
Many of the Moderns in Moore’s novel engage in this form of self-fashioning, cherishing their creative experiences over making Thompsonian imitations. Describing Frazer as perhaps the most colorful character of the Moderns, the narrator notes that Frazer was “most the most fanatical [because he had] the least talent of the lot.” When presenting Frazer telling Royal Academy members “that a bombshell will destroy” conventional aesthetics, the narrator can barely contain his glee (43). Lewis of all people best explains Frazer’s penchant for oddity when he notes that the painter “used to keep a raven that he had taught to say, ‘Frazer is a great painter,’” adding that “he’s the most curious card you ever saw in your life” (275). Frazer also spends his days “dream[ing] of . . . new ideal[s]” while wandering through London (57).

For all of Frazer’s eccentricities, his behavior remains representative of the other Moderns: they may only depend on the appearance of individuality because their artistic productions will never escape anonymity. Like Frazer, Lewis also adopts an artistic pose toward life, basking in a hedonistic lifestyle in both London and Paris. According to the narrator, Lewis is “driven to distraction” and soon “neglected his drawing” (159). This statement foreshadows the conclusion of the novel when Lewis’s neglect of his drawing turns to outright hatred towards his art. For both Lewis and Frazer, their work comes to embody their enslavement to a bourgeois art system, as well as their limited role within the bohemian collective. One can understand why these artists choose to live a life of dreams if their reality offers so few options. Through their eccentric behavior, these Moderns introduce the defining quality of bohemians in my four texts: a desire to flee from work.

Regardless of the narrator’s enthusiasm for minor Moderns who live unorthodox lives, such artists seem stuck in a never-ending charade, as each attempts to escape the fact that he must sell his paintings. For all his charisma, Frazer languishes “on a shilling a day” and,
“incumbered with five children and a wife, [he] live[s] in a garret” (166). Holt, another Modern who follows Frazer’s path, lives “in despair” even as he attempts to live creatively (166). Despite their optimistic self-fashioning, they soon find themselves struggling: they may live artistic lives, but these characters do not progress in any way; instead, they remain caught in a liminal state much like Moore’s novel itself.

For all of these doomed artists, self-fashioning thus offers only a temporary respite from the reality of their situation. If the labours of the lesser Moderns resemble those practiced in bourgeois art schools, then their bid to live their art reflects a rebellion against the constraints of such rigid forms of art-production. More specifically, the Moderns paint like servants, but live like kings (if only for a moment). Referencing this phenomenon, Wilson states that the fin-de-siècle bohemian “brought into play all those aspects of daily life that were not central to the production of works of art” (24). All the same, Wilson describes the “impossibility of the bohemian role” as an “artist who did not create,” noting the pesky problem of making money (25). She adds that professional artists and critics, as well as a bourgeois audience, increasingly viewed the bohemian as “an imposter (a bohemian, in other words), who laid claim to a genius he did not possess” (25). *A Modern Lover* shows empathy for men like Frazer but does not counter such suspicions: even as the novel imagines a collective of artists who create works of respective originality, this dream collapses when the Moderns move from theory to practice and from life to art. Again, these artists never simply forego their work; rather, they look to their “wild experiences” in bohemia to replace what appears to be the never-ending toil of the studio, labour that seems curiously close to that practiced by classical painters like Moore’s real-life friend Marshall. Living a cyclical existence, men like Frazer seem perpetually torn between creating their work and neglecting it.
These contradictions reach a critical point when Lewis, broken, humble and in the later stages of his career, turns once more to Thompson for help, eventually witnessing the genius that separates the leader from his followers. After a brief trip to Paris, Lewis becomes so pleased with his aforementioned painting of a woman against a red curtain that he feels compelled to show his old teacher. Thompson tells Lewis that the work is well-constructed but “rather conventional,” adding that “between learning certain rules of drawing and developing originality . . . there is a difference” (155). He then urges Lewis to “draw by the character, not by the masses” through painting “more freely,” adding, “Did they not tell you at the Beaux-Arts' to draw the large masses of shadow, to decompose your picture, as it were, into so many pieces, and to construct it in that way?” (155,167). Thompson’s statements suggest that painting, at least for him, must remain in a state of decomposition: the student at the Beaux-Arts may deconstruct his picture but only in order to reconstruct it. Thompson, in turn, apparently leaves his works in an unfinished state, as his desire to paint freely opposes bourgeois concepts of labour. Unlike the other Moderns, Thompson’s genius somehow allows him to work without working: whereas Lewis seeks to “draw as Thompson did, by the character, and to get rid of the mechanical method he had learned at the ‘Beaux-Arts,’” he will always be of painter of mechanical method just as Thompson will always paint intuitively and effortlessly (159).

This distinction between the talented and the untalented of the Moderns becomes evident when Lewis describes Thompson’s pieces in greater detail. After Lewis returns to Thompson’s studio once more, he has a sudden crisis when seeing Thompson’s portrait of a lady against a Venetian blind: “There was nothing forced, nothing eccentric about it; it did not show any desire on the part of the painter to exaggerate; it had evidently come to him quite naturally . . . the face was modeled with a mere nothing.” The narrator adds, “Lewis look[s] at it again and again” and
“could not understand how it was done” (157). Unlike Frazer who presents contrived attempts at strangeness through his painting, Thompson’s original works seem to come to him quite easily. Lewis’s assertion that Thompson “modeled [his piece] with a mere nothing” emphasizes the almost magical quality with which this man can create. On the one hand, the “nothingness” of Thompson’s art affirms his genius as the leader of a new form of art and a new art movement, one that resists the overworked quality of classical aesthetics. However, Thompson’s unwillingness to work intensively on his paintings also suggests his misgivings toward the artistic marketplace: in this vein, he barely works because he fears having to show and sell his art—he would rather give away “nothing” than give a middle-class audience anything more substantial.

At this point in the novel, Moore connects the Moderns’ desire to escape the studio and Thompson’s practice of barely working: in both cases, the bohemian artist exhibits his misgivings toward art production. As much as Moore’s narrative seems intent on separating the countercultural collective according to ability, these bohemians share the same apprehensions toward the middle-class art market regardless of their level of genius. Thus the narrator of *A Modern Lover* seeks to present a hopeful story of an avant-garde savant guiding his disciples toward artistic transcendence, but none of these bohemians seems particularly comfortable with making paintings. As such, the bohemian comes to articulate a state of indecision at the turn of the century through his dualistic desire to create a masterpiece and “a mere nothing” (157). As *A Modern Lover* reaches an uneasy conclusion, Lewis and Thompson come together through their mutual apprehensions toward their participation in a Royal Academy exhibition: the talented and untalented of the Moderns thus bond—if only ideologically—through their retreat from work rather than through their commitment to labour, revealing a trait that seems quintessentially bohemian.
“The Hero of the Hour”: The Ironic Conclusion of *A Modern Lover*

The critic’s assertion in *Vain Fortune* that “original work is never dans le movement” elucidates the fracture that runs through *A Modern Lover*’s celebration of a movement and a man: due to his talent, Thompson will never belong to his collective just as Manet will never be “just” a French Impressionist (89). If, as Ephraim Mizruchi and Peter Brooker suggest, bohemians’ individual pursuits always threaten the strength of the collective, then Thompson’s ascent exemplifies this breakdown. By the end of the novel, Thompson’s gifts bring him notoriety from academicians and the bourgeois public. As he reaches the heights of the London art world, he reaffirms his commitment to his band of bohemians; nonetheless, he cannot help acknowledging his superior vision and the distance between his masterpieces and the paintings of the Moderns. Reluctantly participating in a public showing at the Royal Academy, Thompson reacts to his newfound fame with characteristic disgust: he hates himself for attending this event and questions why he ever created his painting in the first place.

Despite the vast differences in their skill levels, Lewis shares many of Thompson’s feelings: after somehow getting his work into the Royal Academy through his social contacts, he too comes to view his work as an apparent surrender to middle-class values. Like Thompson, he soon sees his creative work with regret and bitterness. Therefore, Thompson and Lewis finally bridge the gap between them if only through their hatred of art production itself.

Initially, Thompson’s painting for the Royal Academy seems to skewer public expectation in just the manner he envisioned. Before gallery day begins, the narrator notes that Mr. Hilton’s “*Land of Hesperia* . . . was already spoken of in the art world as the rival picture” to Thompson’s piece (264). As the exhibition commences, “All sp[eak] in raptures of [the] poetry and passion” in Hilton’s painting, a work in the classical vein that features beautiful women cast...
against a “perfume of flowers” and a brilliant sea (273). By contrast, Thompson’s painting represents “a very dirty maid-of-all-work, in a dirty print dress, cleaning a dirty doorstep, or, rather, idling in her work, and talking to the milkman” (265). Not only does Thompson’s painting reflect his unique approach to art–like all of his work, this piece is “modeled with a mere nothing” and exists in a state of decomposition–but the subject of his painting, an “idling” maid, represents Thompson’s further satire of bourgeois labour. Like this maid, Thompson would rather resist toil than commit to it. As patrons and critics “pass[] through the rooms to and fro between the two pictures,” the narrator notes that “Thompson’s picture [is] the most talked about, but Hilton’s [is] certainly the most praised” (272-273). As such, the narrator implicitly devalues Hilton’s piece as a “crowd-pleaser,” while suggesting that Thompson’s work challenges the conventional tastes of the public. Bewildered by Thompson’s painting, the various patrons at the gallery deem it “coarse,” “immoral,” and “radical” (272). Their shock reflects Thompson’s avant-garde ideals, seemingly affirming him as an artist of provocation rather than populism.

As the exhibition continues, however, Thompson’s picture increasingly attracts the public’s fascination, leading Thompson to question whether he should have ever created it in the first place. Though it may mock bourgeois tastes, Thompson’s painting nevertheless becomes a focal point at the Royal Academy’s exhibition: the public cannot understand it, but they cannot resist discussing it. Glimpsing Thompson “surrounded by a crowd of journalists and artists,” Lewis proclaims him the “hero of the hour” (281). Repulsed by such pronouncements, Thompson ponders, “what, after all, would it bring him?” before asserting, “He had to thank

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34 Anna Gruetzner Robins specifically links Thompson’s piece to Manet’s Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère (1882). Robins notes that the image of the working class woman idling “is more than likely a veiled reference” to Manet’s depiction of a barmaid at rest. She also notes that “Moore cannot have been unaware of the controversy surrounding the risqué subject of Manet’s last great Salon picture.” Finally, she adds that Thompson’s success at the Academy “echoes that of Manet at the Salon of 1881 when he was awarded a second class medal ‘hors concours’, and his subsequent election as a Chevalier d’Honneur in December 1881” (52).
them for nothing” (268). The “them” of this sentence refers to people Thompson defines as “the establishment,” artists, critics, and patrons who preach bourgeois values and conservative aesthetics. Thompson then declares, “they had striven to retard the taste of the age, and, having failed, would now, when their praise or blame was valueless, join in the chorus of applause” (268). Summing up his ambivalence, Thompson turns his attention to his work itself, questioning the “cost and the worth” of a life “concentrated into a few yards of canvas” (269). Though he barely seems to labour at all and his painting of “idle work” shocks middle-class patrons, he still feels as though he has “sold his soul.” Apparently for Thompson, any degree of work, however slight, represents a self-abnegation when he exhibits the product of this endeavor to a bourgeois public. His sensitivity to fame emphasizes the almost impossible balance of the bohemian’s career in A Modern Lover: Thompson exists in a precarious state in which he may come to regard his own works with distrust if his pieces achieve any significant attention.

In this moment of crisis, Thompson thinks fondly of the “poor unknown artists and writers” that make up the Moderns, yet his connection to these lesser figures seems highly tenuous. To borrow Gluck’s words, Thompson, like the French Impressionists’ vanguards, seems on the brink of becoming “an integral part of the bourgeois establishment and invariably reflect[ing] its norms and values” (Popular Bohemia 119). Thompson resists his ascent into fame and notoriety, but his movement away from the counterculture seems inevitable. As Peter Brooker states, “[i]f the bohemian was also a ‘serious artist’ and chose fame and influence rather than dissipation and self-destruction (and the possible legend of an early death) he, since it was invariably a he, must gain recognition in the public sphere” (3). For all of Thompson’s efforts to rebel against this process through unorthodox approaches to art and labour, the bourgeois art
world still embraces him. While Lewis gazes on Thompson in all his apparent glory, he too begins to despise his submission to the Royal Academy.

Unlike Thompson, who provokes and fascinates his bourgeois audience, Lewis lacks the talent to create challenging pieces. According to the narrator, “[Lewis] suffered the pain of the imperious want to translate his thoughts, his visions, his dreams,” adding that “His pains were infinite but fruitless, for the impalpable something which tempted, tortured him, faded into nothing when he attempted to reduce the unapparent reality into apparent pictures” (167). From the beginning of the novel, Lewis’s awareness of his shortcomings as an avant-garde artist causes him to fantasize about sabotaging his works. While sick and penniless, he imagines a painting called Suicide and then almost throws himself into the Thames; in this case, this painting (fittingly, one he never creates) evokes his desire to destroy both himself and his creative output. Shortly afterward, when he fails to rectify his depression and his career by composing a painting of Venus, Lewis angrily takes his “palette knife[,] [and] scrape[s] the panel clean,” immediately “revert[ing] to the question of suicide” (21-22). Thus the close connection between Lewis’s life and his work always manifests itself through self-negation of some form. Adrian Frazier states that in Moore’s novel, “[t]he failure of the artist often generates a temptation to commit suicide, another way to scrape the panel clean.” He adds that Moore shows how “male artists find themselves trapped in a web of contradictory forces” that “force them to renounce their art and, literally and figuratively, to scrape the painting out” (20, 17).

Lewis’s self-destructive tendencies eventually lead him to ponder the boldest rebellion of the novel—his urge to destroy Clytemnestra, the painting he brought to the Royal Academy exhibition. Whereas Thompson receives a crowd of art critics gathering around his painting, Lewis finds only two “fashionable lad[ies]” admiring his piece. The “first fashionable lady”
declares his painting “sweetly pretty” and the “second fashionable lady” calls it “charming” (271). Overhearing them, Lewis feels “quite disgusted with himself” and, seeing his painting as the “most wretched and ludicrous thing he had ever seen,” “a cruel temptation r[ises] up in his mind to take a penknife from his pocket and cut it down from the walls” (276-77). A “cynical smile curl[ing] round his lips,” he “th[inks] of what a scene there would be were he, quite politely, to ask one of the people about to oblige him with the loan of a knife.” He then fantasizes that in “one-two-three [cuts] . . . the whole thing would be finished.” The narrator quickly dismisses Lewis’s urge as a “foolish fanc[y]” and Lewis becomes distracted by the attractive Mrs. Campbell Ward (277). Ultimately, Lewis cannot fulfill the role of a rebel painter or what Moore would call a “protest[er] against the so-called decencies of life” (Confessions 141).

Nonetheless, Lewis’s desire to cut apart a painting that two bourgeois ladies deem “sweet” evokes the Moderns’ apocalyptic visions. More specifically, the Moderns often present their movement through violent rhetoric: they envision their collective works as “a bombshell [that] will destroy without mercy all things [conventional]” as they “violate . . . recognized canons of art” (43, 216). An enemy of these rebels, Hilton even warns the public to “resist[] this modern vandalism” which “[is] sapping the very base of English art” (263). Like Thompson, Lewis finds his desire to become bohemian synonymous with his desire to deconstruct, destroy, or violate his paintings: as the public discusses Thompson’s provocative masterpiece and accepts Lewis’s charming imitation, both men question the value of work itself. That neither artist ends up actually taking a knife to his respective painting suggests that the bohemian remains forever caught between creation and destruction, regardless of his artistic abilities.

If Lewis were to slice through his painting, this act would not only stand as a rebellion against the artistic orthodoxy, it would also free the Moderns from their own strict schema for
artistry. To Moore, artistic production invariably leads to a “great division” between “those who have talent, and those who have no talent” (Confessions 78). Thus Lewis’s attack on art is also an attack on this binary. Through Lewis’s anarchic thought, Moore’s novel seems to suggest a new direction for the Moderns, envisioning bohemians destroying art together as a democratic collective, symbolically rejecting the hierarchies that suppress their group’s ideals; that is, if art itself creates a rift within the bohemian collective, then Moore’s text speculates on whether this group could galvanize around their renouncement of art production; together they could live eccentric lives free from the standards of even the most avant-garde art schools, potentially making their mark on the art world without actually making art. Yet, such speculation merely returns us to the original problem Elizabeth Wilson discusses, namely the “impossibility of the bohemian role” as an “artist who did not create” (25). By not creating art, the bohemian becomes an empty figure, an imposter, a charlatan who only adopts an empty lifestyle of self-fashioning. On a more pragmatic level, both Thompson and Lewis live a hand-to-mouth lifestyle in which they must constantly work and peddle their art to survive. An artistic collective that does not create or sell their works would clearly be unable to sustain itself, as the Moderns would plunge into total destitution and oblivion.

Thus the Moderns are damned if they do and damned if they do not: they can create art and endure a symbolic loss of self, or they may abstain from their work and suffer a literal loss of self. When they do work, they distinguish themselves through their talent or lack thereof, as the visionaries come to fear fame and their disciples come to fear obscurity. As such, the bohemian collective begins to break down the moment the artists pick up their brushes, a phenomena that

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35 Moore himself walks this fine line between an artist who creates and an artist who lives creatively: throughout Confessions, he describes his aesthetic tastes rather than contributing to the art world directly, and in his personal life, he favoured the conversation of Parisian cafés over the toils of the studio. Most importantly, he knew the pain of failing as a painter, regardless of his attempts to praise his artistic faculty (Frazier 69). In this context, Moore perhaps uses Lewis as a target for his own self-castigation.
seems all the more ironic because *A Modern Lover* attempts to champion an avant-garde movement. The novel’s strange optimism appears to stem from Moore’s propensity for artistic elitism, the assumption being that Thompson should rightfully lead while others follow. Yet the novel’s subtext always undermines the hopefulness of such a power dynamic, revealing the Moderns’ subsequent self-destruction and Thompson’s crisis of faith. Ending with its bohemian characters torn between creation and destruction, fame and anonymity, Moore’s *künstlerroman* thus lacks narrative closure of any kind, a structure that mirrors its subject matter.

Thompson’s rise at the end of *A Modern Lover* evokes the ascent of Édouard Manet, the artist who, as critics Anna Gruetzner Robins, Adrian Frazier, and Anthony Farrow argue, inspired Moore’s character. As Frazier notes, contemporary art critics point to Manet as one of the forefathers of Impressionism, but Manet distinguished himself from the movement he helped inspire and “never claimed to be a doctrinaire . . . Impressionist.” Frazier adds that when George Moore himself visited Manet’s studio, Moore was surprised to find that “it was not a bohemian workshop [but] the salon of a gentleman genius” (63). Michael Grenfell also explains that despite Manet’s revolutionary style and his influence on a “bohemia capable of sensing his mission,” Manet was a man of bourgeois values and customs (103). While Thompson shares Manet’s talents along with many of his characteristics, he fears this form of success, detesting the thought of becoming a “gentleman genius.” These apprehensions lead him to create a means of working without working, as he produces art made of a “mere nothing.” Yet, despite Thompson’s evasive maneuvers, his aesthetic skills nonetheless make his entrance into the bourgeois art community as inevitable as the lesser Moderns’ fall into the darker regions of bohemia. All the while, each of these painters feel betrayed by their own works, pieces that they must parade before the eyes of the masses. Ultimately, Moore celebrates a doomed bohemian
collective whose creations merely act as harbingers for the group’s inevitable destruction.

Moving from *A Modern Lover* to *The Emancipated*, Gissing depicts a bohemian painter who also struggles to balance his countercultural values with his dependence on the middle-class art world, though Gissing’s artist Mallard seeks isolation over involvement in any countercultural group.
Chapter Two

“A Place for Dreaming”: Work, Contemplation and the Solitary Bohemian in George Gissing’s *The Emancipated*

While George Moore’s *A Modern Lover* (1883) shows the bohemian collective’s opposition to bourgeois life and art, George Gissing’s *The Emancipated* (1890) presents the solitary bohemian’s rebellion against this world. Gissing’s text begins and ends with an eccentric painter, Ross Mallard, who remains detached from any movement of artists. Nonetheless, Gissing’s *The Emancipated* shares much in common with Moore’s *A Modern Lover*: both works critique the art establishment, celebrate tortured geniuses, and, most importantly, represent the bohemian’s conflicted approach to art.

Just as Thompson and Lewis seem intent on deconstructing and even violating their art, Mallard engages in his own form of creative provocation: he paints landscapes that middle-class patrons see as commonplace, but fellow visionaries see as revelatory. When viewing Mallard’s pieces, the latter appreciate that his seemingly simple depictions of nature evoke complex psychological states, as Mallard infuses these paintings with the dreams and creative visions he experiences throughout the novel. For Mallard, the artistic fulfillment of these meditative moments supersedes any attempt to recreate them—he may enjoy confusing the public through his deceptive paintings, but the joy of his artistic labours pales in comparison to what he feels when he explores his own creative mind.

Mallard, much like Thompson, sees even his most challenging pieces as a capitulation to bourgeois customs that require an artist to work, exhibit, and sell paintings: more directly, Mallard may show his wares in the Royal Academy, but he hates himself for doing so. From the start of the novel, the narrator notes Mallard’s “limitless contempt of the Royal Academy” (80).
In this context, Mallard’s paintings, with their dualistic depiction of apparent landscapes and unapparent dreams, evoke an artist who would rather not be working. In his vain attempts to resist a bourgeois art-market, Mallard seeks only the autonomy and freedom that comes with following his own creative thoughts. Despite Mallard’s hopes, Gissing’s *The Emancipated* follows the same tragic narrative as Moore’s novel: a gifted bohemian painter resists the status quo through avant-garde art that satirizes bourgeois concepts of aesthetics and labour only to later question the effect of his efforts. Mallard never achieves fame like Thompson, but he too questions the worth of his subversive art throughout his career. As Gissing’s narrator makes clear, this reclusive painter would rather dream his days away through contemplation, an act that would serve as the ultimate rebellion against bourgeois values that present art as the product of labour and craftsmanship.

Much like *A Modern Lover*, *The Emancipated* ends with a sense of resignation: Mallard realizes that he must churn out paintings to survive as an artist, and he loses faith in his strange paintings as aesthetic expressions. He marries, leaves his literal and mental bohemia, and vows to resist the creative dreaming that gives his life meaning and his art substance. Therefore Mallard’s struggle between working and dreaming, participating in the art market and following his own fancies, never comes to a satisfying resolution. Moore’s narrator in *A Modern Lover* may praise its bohemians even as they reach tragic ends, but Gissing’s narrator more openly acknowledges the hardships countercultural artists face; namely, when any form of labour seems synonymous with the selling of one’s integrity then how does an artist work for a living? Before *The Emancipated* comes to its own inconclusive ending, Gissing’s text shows Mallard’s rise and fall as an artist while always stressing his tortured relationship to artistic production.
By the time Gissing wrote *The Emancipated* in the late-nineteenth century, the concept of the bohemian as a figure of contradiction was hardly a new idea. Along with Moore’s lesser known tales of conflicted bohemians, Henri Murger’s aforementioned *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1851) celebrates the duality inherent to this archetype in its preface: “to live in duplicate, to keep one life for the poet in them – the dreamer that dwells on the mountain heights where choirs of inspired voices sing together – and another for the labourer that contrives to provide daily bread” (xxvi). Gissing, who read Murger’s work with great interest, explores a similar duality in *The Emancipated*; however, Gissing ultimately breaks from Murger’s joyousness through his characteristic pessimism: Mallard never seems able to synthesize these two parts of his identity.  

As such, Mallard’s character problematizes the bohemian’s union of the dreamer and the labourer. Haunted by the idea that his work may be a hollow exercise, or what Gissing’s narrator constantly refers to as “nothingness,” Mallard finds his only place of solace within his mind: during solitary moments amongst nature, Mallard engages in almost psychedelic visions of a world beyond his own. When not dreaming in this manner, Mallard endures an art world that prizes the archetypal professional’s prolific production and commercial aspirations, an artistic movement that Codell argues followed the art boom of the eighteen sixties (“Constructing the Victorian Artist” 283-84). Throughout *The Emancipated*, Mallard dismisses such professionalized artists for adopting a popular style of artistic conventionality to appease the public.  

Gissing’s sympathetic representation of Mallard’s mental escapism contradicts the prevailing assessment of the novel, as critics have consistently argued that Gissing advocates

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36 On May 22, 1878, Gissing wrote to his brother Algernon describing his interest in Murger (*The Letters of George Gissing* 31).
strenuous labour as the mark of one’s value. Andrew Dowling asserts that for all of Gissing’s complexity, his novels are governed by a “dominant ideal of self-discipline” exhibited through work (112). In a similar vein, in The Paradox of Gissing, David Grylls states that “in Gissing’s fiction, hard work and a resolute will are tokens of moral distinction,” adding, with particular reference to The Emancipated, that “the novel is in fact a kind of survey of true and false types of emancipation; and in every case there is a crucial emphasis on will power and hard work” (8).

Further, echoing Grylls, Françoise Dupeyron argues that The Emancipated centers on Mallard’s attempt to “regain[] his zest for work” (20). Very few critics have wavered from the position that Gissing presents labour as offering the most vital means of asserting one’s selfhood, specifying that Gissing’s belief in work reflects his weary pragmatism and his acceptance of reality at its most limiting (a scholarly assessment parallel to the critical opinion that Lewis fails in A Modern Lover because he does not work hard enough). Amongst this collective agreement, Gissing’s surprisingly strong affinity for “the dreamer,” the man whose contemplation supersedes his work ethic, has been neglected by critics.

Much of the critical consensus cited above draws from Gissing’s attempt to repress his own proclivity for musing, a challenge he articulated in his 1882 essay “The Hope of Pessimism.” In this work, the tireless workaholic George Gissing laments our “imprison[ment] in our universe of phenomena,” warily noting that we must “shut the mind against yearnings for transcendental flights” (80). Furthermore, in a letter to H.G. Wells, in which Gissing explains the ending of The Emancipated, he asserts that, “in Mallard and his wife . . . [he] wanted to show two people who had settled down to a wholesome, unpretending life of work and duties” (George Gissing and H.G. Wells: Their Friendship and Correspondence 49). Both of these examples seem to support the critics’ assertions that Gissing stresses the need for labour over one’s need for “pretending.”

37 As mentioned, Milton Chaiken and Richard Allen Cave argue that Lewis lacks this dedication to labour (27, 25).
Yet Gissing’s acceptance of labour as a social necessity in a world in which one must make money has been too often accepted as an all-encompassing reflection of his value system. Ironically, the intensity of Gissing’s desire to “shut the mind” and promote an “unpretending life” reveals his awareness of the alluring freedom of mental flights. In characteristically contradictory language, Gissing gestures toward an acceptance of reality’s limitations all while emphasizing why one would wish to forgo this imprisonment.

*The Emancipated*, in turn, depicts Mallard’s dreaming not as a useless indulgence but as a path to artistic adventure. Satirizing those characters incapable of Mallard’s visionary talents such as Reuben Elgar, the narrator distances Mallard’s desire to dream from Elgar’s desire for leisure. Neither artist particularly wants to work, but where Mallard’s hesitation stems from his preoccupation with his imagination, Elgar’s frustration stems from his desire for wine and socializing. Thus, when Elgar takes one of his many breaks from work, the narrator presents him as a lazy hack, and when Mallard does the same, the narrator presents him as a gifted visionary. Neither Elgar’s moments of relaxation nor Mallard’s moments of contemplation lead to anything tangible, but, the narrator assures us, Mallard’s visions possess worth in and of themselves. By distinguishing between Mallard’s quiet moments of thought and Elgar’s lethargy, Gissing offers differing conceptions of non-work. As such, to view the novel according to a moral demarcation between hard workers that accept reality, and languid individuals who resist it, reduces the nuances of Gissing’s vision and his depiction of the bohemian.

Throughout the text, Gissing’s narrator insists that Mallard finds artistic fulfillment only when he is absorbed in thought. Perhaps emphasizing that Mallard is not a stand-in for the author himself, Gissing’s narrator often stresses the distinction between writers and painters in this text. Whereas the writer must translate his view of the world into words, painters, Gissing’s novel
suggests, can more seamlessly reproduce the images they see through their visual medium.

Mallard can, in his words, reproduce “a bit of the world just as [he] see[s] it,” without the writer’s need for artistic “translation” (96). This is not to imply that Mallard may easily paint the impression that such a scene evokes in his mind. Rather, Mallard sees his paintings as mere allusions to the hallucinatory states he experiences when viewing the natural world; he inevitably regards his works as flawed because they pale in comparison to his cognitive processes. Further, Mallard sees his paintings as representing his servitude to London’s art market–when he dreams, he does not have to sell his creativity as he does when he exhibits.

As a result, Mallard recoils from the obligation of producing art, relishing in perfect mental pictures that remain the property of his mind rather than the property of public galleries. Hardly a typical mimetic painter, Mallard uses nature as a conduit for his own creative whims and, through numerous passages, Gissing’s narrator presents the imaginative fluidity of his mind as the mark of his genius. Mallard’s dreams are meaningful to him because they are ephemeral, indefinable, and self-enclosed entities, removed from the concreteness of reality. Yet, when Mallard’s social responsibilities interfere with his ethereal musings, the novel laments the eventual fall of Mallard “the dreamer” and the rise of Mallard “the labourer.”

**Bohemian Duality: A Lifestyle of Contradiction**

In the early stages of the novel before Mallard feels compelled to work, he has little trouble maintaining a paradoxical lifestyle. On one of Mallard’s few forays into society, he presents his inconsistencies with self-assurance. When he joins Spence on a visit to Mrs. Baske’s home and meets Miriam, his appearance defies their attempts to read him. According to the narrator, he “burn[s] up with inner fires,” his hair “tumble[s] in disorder,” his “black necktie . . . knot[s] into an indescribable shape,” and he possesses a “haggard but composed” face (7, 239).
Though each of these descriptions presents Mallard as a man of mystery, the “indescribable shape” of his “black necktie” is particularly revealing. The necktie itself evokes Mallard’s willingness to accept a degree of social decorum, while its unorthodox shape nevertheless shows his refusal to subscribe completely to a life of tidy gentlemanliness. Overall, Mallard’s identity as a bohemian refers less to a simplistic acceptance of all things avant-garde than it denotes highly personalized choices; for him, bohemianism represents his right to live his life as he wishes, without regard for simple binaries that pit the counterculture against the bourgeoisie. As such, Mallard’s acceptance of seemingly conventional, gentlemanly values is not a concession to the status quo but a mark of his complexity. In this way, Mallard evokes Mary Gluck’s assertion that the “cultural meanings and implications of the [nineteenth-century bohemian] remain[ed] full of contradiction” (351).

Throughout their interactions with Mallard, other characters note his inaccessibility. His close friend Edward Spence declares that Mallard maintains a “Puritan conscience” while dismissing Puritan dogmas, behavior which makes him all the more “curious” (15). Spence calls Mallard an indefinable, two-headed Janus, a reference to the Roman God whose two faces point in opposite directions (330). In a similar vein, Miriam is surprised when Mallard initially insists that conventional domesticity is “a danger” to the vagabond artist only to later ask her to join him in marriage (325). Summing up the inconsistencies of Mallard’s character, Cecily simply declares, “It isn't easy to know him” (26). Echoing Cecily, Mrs. Spence also laments that they “shall see nothing of [Mallard]” (9). Taken literally, her line refers to Mallard’s upcoming travel plans; on a symbolic level, Mrs. Spence also unknowingly reflects Mallard’s elusiveness.

However, complicating matters further, Mrs. Spence’s reference to “nothing[ness]” introduces a troubling, recurring motif in the novel: Mallard’s indefinable nature may ultimately
reflect his emptiness. By standing for nothing in particular, Mallard may become a hollow vessel of contradiction all in the name of bohemianism, a danger that Gissing refers to again and again throughout *The Emancipated*. If, as Henri Murger argues, the bohemian is a detached dreamer and an entrepreneurial labourer, a creative thinker and an artistic producer, an outcast and a member of society, then ultimately, what does this mysterious figure represent? Murger’s bohemian tales never seem to look for cohesion between these polarizations; instead *Scènes de la vie de bohème* merely celebrates the irony of the bohemian’s dualistic impulses. Gissing’s novel, by contrast, closely examines the subversive artist’s chaotic identity, sympathizing with Mallard’s burden while legitimizing his bohemianism.

*The Emancipated* insists that Mallard at the very least remains aware that he and his art may come to represent nothing at all, and the novel distinguishes his struggle against this threat from the careers of artists who remain blissfully unaware of the meaninglessness of their endeavors. Early in the novel when Elgar adopts a rebel pose to appeal to the middle classes, some misguided characters see this façade as similar to Mallard’s demeanor. After first meeting Elgar, Cecily evokes his inscrutability just as she does Mallard’s: “Possibly [Elgar] belonged to the unclassed and the unclassable, in which case the interest attaching to him was of the highest kind” (71). Like her attraction to Mallard, Cecily seems drawn to Elgar’s apparent individualism. Also, like Mallard, Elgar struggles to maintain a coherent identity. When Mrs. Lessingham perceives Cecily’s interest in Elgar, she ponders that if “Cecily [were] to marry Reuben Elgar, [it] would be a catastrophe,” citing his inability to commit to any goal or ideal (167). Regardless of the parallels these characters see between Mallard and Elgar, the narrator always reassures us of the differences between them: Mallard’s fluidity, however problematic, is

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38 This may be a reference to Gissing’s earlier novel, *The Unclassed* (1884). In the novel, Gissing explores the struggles of two writers as they endure the squalor of London. Based on the concept of the rebel artist in *The Unclassed*, Cecily errors in her assessment of Elgar; he represents a fraud rather than a genuine bohemian.
synonymous with his genuine artistry (revealingly, the narrator refers to Mallard alone as “the artist”); Elgar’s amorphousness reflects his lack of conviction, commitment and integrity. The latter’s refusal to take an assured stance in any facet of his life brings his sister pain, endangers Cecily, ruins his career, and eventually brings him to a tragic end. In many ways, he preaches bohemianism merely to legitimize a life of indulgence.

Always distancing Mallard’s authentic bohemianism from the charades of hacks, the novel shows how men like Elgar and Clifford Marsh pervert bohemianism’s ideals of individualism and individual art. Elgar and Marsh are indistinguishable from one another and from most aspiring bohemian artists. Describing them, Mrs. Lessingham finds it “curious how closely [Elgar] and Mr. Marsh resemble each other at times” (140). She clarifies that Elgar seems to be “better endowed,” yet affirms that “they belong to the same species” (140-41). In the same way that Moore’s Moderns all begin to look the same, Gissing’s eccentric artists adopt similar behavior. March and Elgar also declare their goal of artistic originality in similar language. When Elgar decides to make his mark by writing a book about Puritanism, Cecily gives voice to his lofty goals: “Elgar’s book [would] resemble[,] no other; it would [be], as he justly said, unique in its anti-dogmatic passion” (296). Marsh, too, speaks of the distinctiveness of his creative aspirations during his “Bohemian years,” stressing that his “present profound knowledge of the world is the result of experiences which do not fall to the lot of common men” (442). As they present themselves as original bohemians through their art and actions, the narrator mocks the uniformity of their respective visions and notes the futility of their endeavors.

Overlooking the novel’s demarcation between useful and useless modes of non-work, critics such as Françoise Dupeyron and David Grylls insist that Mallard rises above men like Edgar and Marsh through his unparalleled work ethic (20, 8). In the same way Milton Chaiken
and Richard Allen Cave contend that Lewis simply needs to work harder in *A Modern Lover*, Dupeyron and Grylls argue that Mallard succeeds through determined labour in *The Emancipated*. During a speech that follows closely with Marsh’s pronouncement on “common men,” Mallard seems to support this perspective: goading himself to leave for Pompei, he thinks, “I give you fifteen minutes to be on your way to the station. Miss the next train—and sink to the level of common men!” (97). However, the notion that Mallard’s labour sustains his genius, separating him from the “common men” of bohemia, remains at odds with this artist’s disillusioned view of work. As we will see as *The Emancipated* progresses, what truly separates Mallard from bohemian pretenders is his mind itself.

**“Nothing but a rough sketch”: Mallard at Work**

Though Mallard’s work gives him a sense of purpose, he sees it as hindering his cognitive freedom. Regardless of his feelings, other characters admire Mallard’s seeming devotion to his craft, as exemplified by Elgar’s assertion, “I am told that Mr. Mallard is quite exceptional in his power of disregarding everything but his work” (139). Also, Miriam admires how Mallard has “a purpose” and “follow[s] it steadily” (323). Of course, neither character errs entirely in these statements: when Mallard chooses to work, he commits to the task at hand, or, in the words of Mallard himself, he works like “a sound man” (309). Mallard also later admits, “[artistic] work gives [him] keener and more lasting pleasure than any other would” (95). All the same, presenting Mallard as a paragon of Victorian labour, or assuming that his work singularizes his character, simplifies his complex relationship to his art.

Mallard may see aesthetic production as the most pleasurable of all labour, but he refuses to believe in its intrinsic value. During a revealing conversation with Miriam, Mallard elucidates his aesthetic position: “I feel that life can be a satisfaction in itself without labour. I am naturally
the idlest of men. Work is always pain to me. I like to dream pictures” (334). In this instance, Mallard makes a clear distinction between the labourer’s life of necessity and the dreamer’s life of satisfaction. Mallard’s mention of the dreamer’s idleness is not to be confused with the mere laziness of the unsuccessful labourer. Further, Mallard undercuts his earlier reference to the comparative pleasure of artistic work by implying that even the most enjoyable labours still become deficient in comparison to the fulfillment of “dream[ing] pictures.”

Before he enters one of his meditative states, Mallard continues to outline the limitations of work in comparison to the possibilities of mental transcendence. In assessing his own progress as an artist, Mallard notes that he is “conscious of having progressed an inch or two on the way of infinity” but that this “brings [him] no nearer to an end” (323). Mallard’s devaluation of work stems not from simple indolence (as it eventually does with Elgar), but an awareness of the infinite, a world of mental impressions beyond the material realm. Due to his vast vision, Mallard cannot see work as offering any substantial progress because his “journey” exists on an entirely different plane; he disavows a teleological narrative of labour in favor of a more unsettled notion of achievement. In keeping with this ideology, Mallard later tells Miriam, “I work with little or no hope of ever satisfying myself—that is another thing” (95). This tension between Mallard’s aspirations and his obligations creates a rift in his identity that only intensifies.

Seeing his works as pale copies of his dreams, Mallard more and more often derides his finished paintings as meaningless. Revealingly, in these instances, the word “nothingness” returns once again, a description that recalls the way Thompson’s works seem “modeled with a mere nothing” (157). As a reaction against the English art world and its commercial market, both characters skirt conventional concepts of artistic production. After Mallard toils away on a painting of Paestum, he sees the finished product as a defeat: “I’m not satisfied with it, now I
come to look at it again. It's *nothing* but a rough sketch” (my emphasis, 316). When Miriam asks Mallard if his work serves a social function, Mallard replies, “Indeed, I claim *nothing* of the kind . . . Art may, or may not, serve . . . a purpose; but be assured that the artist never thinks of his work in that way” (my emphasis, 95). For all of Mallard’s technical ability and work ethic, he experiences a creative world he cannot encapsulate through painting, one that renders all of his works hopeless and empty.

If Mallard’s awareness of the “infinite” devalues his labours, this burden also gives him a deeper understanding of his creativity—his mental leaps of faith become as euphoric as his paintings become dissatisfying. Despite Gryll’s assertion that work separates Mallard from lesser men, Mallard affirms his genius by acknowledging the limits of labour. His assertion that the “artist never *thinks* of his work” according to its purpose, points the reader toward his cognitive processes: thus, only within Mallard’s mind—a place removed from the nuisance of labour as well as social and commercial responsibility—can his artistic vision remain most free (my emphasis, 88). Revealingly, *The Emancipated* dedicates endless passages to Mallard’s thoughts, but rarely shows Mallard at work: the periods in which Mallard takes up the brush are typically cut out of the narrative. Instead, the text focuses on Mallard’s struggle to keep his mind free from all forms of imprisonment, including the confines of a picture frame. The narrator insists that if Mallard were to accept his works as *the* proof of his artistic vision, he would do a disservice to the otherworldly power of that very gift.

Mallard understands that work, though worthwhile, becomes meaningless when viewed in light of the infinite realm of fancy, but other characters, such as Elgar, continue to look to labour as the answer to their artistic crises. If an artist can access true aesthetic value only

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39 As will be seen, Du Maurier’s *Trilby* also presents the sketch as a characteristically bohemian medium, suggesting that this rapid, informal art form suits the bohemian artist’s ambivalent approach to art.
through “dreaming pictures,” then the actual act of painting becomes redundant. While Mallard comprehends this phenomenon, Elgar remains vainly focused on art-making as a form of labour. At one point, he declares to Cecily, “I am sorry I never took up painting. I believe I could have made something of it. To a certain extent, you see, it is a handicraft that any man may learn; if one can handle the tools, there's always the incentive to work and produce” (275). Based on Mallard’s visions, Elgar’s error is his belief that aesthetics can be reduced to “handicraft.” To Elgar’s credit, he does qualify that artistry is only “to a certain extent” based on labour, but he still fails to discern the novel’s central logic: materialist works cannot compare to elevated ideas and, implicitly, classical painters cannot compare to bohemian dreamers. Later in the novel, Elgar will seek to write a “history of the English mind,” yet he clearly has no understanding that the vastness of a genius’s mind cannot be encapsulated through any degree of labour (266). Our view of Mallard’s talent ironically depends on the unseen, as he proves his bohemian individualism through passing thoughts rather than productive toils.

While assessing the hackneyed paintings of Clifford Marsh, the narrator takes the novel’s concept of art to its logical conclusion by breaking down the distinctions between laziness and work, rendering both similarly hollow. Even as Marsh and Elgar fail to apply themselves, they take solace in the assumption that through dedicated toil, they too could rise to Mallard’s standard. Oddly enough, however, little separates these artists’ moments of laziness from their moments of labour. When the painter Marsh regales his lover Madeline Denyen with his artistic goals, she counters by referring to his lack of actual production: “Your talk of art is nothing more than talk” (my emphasis, 50). In response, Marsh suddenly becomes aware of the “blank horizon” which literally and figuratively stands before him (51). Typically, one would expect that, if Marsh did commit to his projects, he would overcome this “blankness.”
Certainly, Marsh himself adheres to this perspective, affirming his aspirations by showing Cecily and the Spence family one of his few finished works, a water-color of natural scenery. Though Cecily has apparently seen “good work” in this style, “Mr. Marsh’s productions perplex[ ] her”: “It might just as well, for all Cecily could determine, have been a study of cloud-forms, or of a storm at sea, or of anything, or of nothing . . . Was this genius, or impudence?” (my emphasis, 41). Whether Marsh gazes into the blankness of his life or produces inane works “of anything, or of nothing,” neither mode reaps any significant reward.

Mallard may be significantly more talented than Marsh, but he also finds little recompense in his work. Again, Gissing does not present work as entirely akin to laziness—he sees that work provides people with a sense of direction and self-esteem. However, no amount of physical toil by lesser artists or by Mallard himself will lead to the epiphanies Mallard experiences through his daydreams. Like Lewis’s wish to destroy his painting, Mallard also wants to look beyond a world of work. For both artists, their bohemianism is inseparable from their fraught relationship with the canvas.

“Dreaming Pictures”: Mallard’s Mental Visions

As Gissing’s narrative moves from Mallard’s labours to his mind, the novel raises him above surrounding imposters. Direct references to Mallard’s mental state always evoke its remarkable lucidity and depth. When Mallard becomes absorbed in thought, he “escap[es] into quietness,” entering an almost trance-like condition (77). Further, the narrator often praises Mallard’s ability to attain a “balance of thought” in almost any situation (170). Elgar, in turn, struggles to attain mental harmony. Despite his confidence that art is a “handicraft that any man can learn,” he acknowledges that while “one can force one’s self to use pencils and brushes; it’s a different thing when all has to come from the brain. If you haven’t a quiet mind—” (132).
Ever the self-fashioning performer, Elgar sees his *unquiet* mind as a romantic mark of his tortured complexity, when, in actuality, it reflects his limits as an artist. When Miriam asks him what disturbs him during his creative pursuits, Elgar replies, “Oh, there’s always something. I wish you could give me a share of your equanimity” (132). Elgar’s reference to “something” recalls Cecily’s description of Mallard as someone who, in her words, “did something” (275). Whether Cecily praises Mallard’s labours or Elgar dismisses his own, both remain, to borrow Gissing’s phrase, “imprisoned in our universe of phenomena” (80). Ultimately, Cecily and Elgar fail to understand what Mallard knows all along: while the concrete world of “somethings” robs artistry of its meaning, the realm of the infinite shelters its significance. Thus, Elgar’s pursuit of “something” tangible in his art, a desire shaped by his need for pleasure, fame, and wealth, actually brings him farther from aesthetic transcendence. More specifically, Elgar will always vainly deal with things as Mallard euphorically deals with ideas.

As usual, Clifford Marsh echoes Elgar’s mental failings, as the former also laments that he is “not quite at ease in mind” (157). In an early passage that encapsulates these connections between art, mental clarity, and the material world, the narrator describes Clifford’s interest in the beautiful Cecily Doran: “Just as he had made a pretense of pursuing art, because of a superficial cleverness and a liking for ease and the various satisfactions of his vanity in such a career, so did he now permit his mind to be occupied with Cecily Doran” (155). Here the narrator associates Clifford’s search for worldly pleasure, both in art and love, with a mind easily “occupied” by whatever concrete stimuli catches his fancy. Certainly Mallard himself, like Elgar and Marsh, often directs his most amorous thoughts toward Cecily, but Mallard always maintains his focus on a world beyond his own.
Though the narrator’s references to Mallard’s view of work, as well as the quality of his mind, may hint at his exceptional character, his genius is most evident when the novel introduces Mallard’s mental journeys. Given his apparent role as a landscape painter, Mallard initially seems interested in the tangible world around him; to the average observer, for instance, Mallard’s portrayals of fields and trees appear conventional, though these natural settings mask underlying colors and shapes that evoke Mallard’s mental state during a moment of meditation. In this way, Mallard uses nature as a quiet place from which to escape reality: he does this both by visiting natural settings to engage in his visions, and by painting natural settings that secretly allude to these visions. Mallard’s first moment of this form of mental adventuring occurs when he walks through Italy on a sunny day mid-way through the novel.

Preparing himself for contemplation, Mallard finds “his mind . . . open to the influences of sunlight” and “dr[inks] deep draughts of air from the sea” (77). Undermining the certainty of Gissing’s “The Hope of Pessimism,” this valorization of Mallard’s mental “open[ness]” breaks from Gissing’s own assertion that one must “shut the mind against yearnings for transcendental flights” (80). As Mallard continues his musings, he makes his way through the “long grotta of Posillipo,” moving “with no definite purpose” while “absorbed in thought.” “Saunter[ing] forth to find a place for dreaming,” he soon settles by “chance [in a] path of public garden, with its shrubs and young palm-trees . . . look[ing] over [a] little port” (77). This passage recalls a letter Gissing wrote to his brother years earlier on September 22, 1885, in which he argues that the artist should “keep apart, & preserve [his] soul alive” because in the solitude of nature, the artist “can make a world within the world” (Letters of George Gissing 169). As Mallard enters this realm, he finds a spot where he can “sit as idly and as long as he like[s], looking across the
sapphire bay,” a moment that recalls Thompson’s painting of a maid-of-all-work “idling in her work” (78).

At ease in this place of seclusion, Mallard finally begins “dream[ing] pictures” (334). The narrator states, “with the help of sunlight and red wine, he . . . imagine[d] that time had gone back twenty centuries – that it was not Pozzuoli, but Poteoli; . . . that the men among the shipping talked to each other in Latin, and perchance of the perishing Republic” (78). Though Mallard is not a mere proxy for the author, he does share many of Gissing’s own ambitions as exemplified by yet another assertion by Gissing, this time in his travel book, *By the Ionean Sea* (1901): “[my] desire . . . is to escape life as I know it and dream myself into that old world which was the imaginative delight of my boyhood. The names of Greece and Italy draw me as no others” (13). Clearly Mallard, through his own musings, has journeyed much farther than his feet, or more importantly, his brush, could ever take him. In contrast to Mallard, Elgar boasts in an earlier passage, “I am before everything a man of my time” (67). When Mallard fully explores his fertile mind, he escapes his contemporary society by becoming a man of *all time*, able to instantly move through twenty centuries on a whim. If the bohemianism of Marsh and Elgar represents an empty, fashionable and commercial libertarianism, Mallard’s bohemianism possesses an expansiveness that moves beyond the confines of his contemporary milieu.

Similar depictions of Mallard’s mental escapes from “nothingness” occur throughout the novel. When Mallard arrives in Italy and laments, “Work! . . . the thought [was] a desolation in his mind,” he later gazes on the Italian countryside’s “luxurious life” of vegetation, noting how “the wide plain smiled in its desolation” (113, 307). Mallard sees a “smile[]” only in the latter “desolation” because this wide plain appeals to his vast mind, offering him an inviting setting for solitude and contemplation. Work, in turn, depresses his mental faculties.
Similar language occurs when Mallard, tortured by his responsibility to produce artwork, looks to the relief of sleep: “fortunately he was sure of sleep tonight; the bell of the cathedral might clang its worst, and still not rob him of the just oblivion” (170). In contrast, when Elgar’s lifestyle unravels near the end of the novel, he writes to Cecily that he has “been drinking [him]self into a brutal oblivion” (453). If Elgar’s “brutal oblivion” marks his laziness as a labourer, Mallard’s “just oblivion” connotes his ambitions as a dreamer. This demarcation, coupled with the distinction between a tragic desolation and a “smiling desolation,” legitimates Mallard’s cognitive emancipation from reality’s prison and elevates him above mere craftsmen.

Mallard’s later visions take him even further from the concrete. During the previous passages, Mallard’s “flights” reveal an entirely pleasurable practice of exploration. There are, however, moments when Mallard’s musing brings him into more foreboding territory, such as when he moves “towards the ruins of the Amphitheater” while still vacationing in Italy. Finding himself within a “dead stillness,” he imagines “the air gr[owing] alive with mysterious presences, murmurous with awful whisperings.” The narrator adds, “Mallard enjoyed it for awhile, but at length turned away abruptly, feeling as if a cold hand had touched him” (105). In his critique of Gissing’s image as a purely realist writer, Aaron Matz points to the author’s fascination with the “interpenetra[tion]” of the real and the fantastical (230). In a similar vein, Scott McCracken asks why critics have long ignored the “phantasmagoric in [Gissing’s] texts” (86). In a scene that exemplifies this particular interpenetration, Mallard weaves through both planes of experience, returning to the real only when his closeness to the supernatural has taken him too far into the abyss of creative imagination. By delving too deeply into the “mysterious presences” of his mind, Mallard feels the threat of madness and destruction.
By championing Mallard’s cause, *The Emancipated* presents a novel interpretation of art production: while labour facilitates the mean egotism of the professional, the dreamer’s journeys aid his escape from himself. Even so, the latter’s visions also bring the risk of total self-annihilation, a danger personified by the “cold hand” which touches Mallard. More pragmatically, Mallard must also work and participate in the art market to support himself; otherwise, a much more mundane destruction awaits him. By the end of the novel, these threats will limit Mallard’s ability to dedicate himself to his mental art and his willingness to forgo all connection with reality. Nevertheless, despite this caveat, this scene in Italy still shows the scope of Mallard’s talents. Before he returns to the material world, Mallard garners life from “dead stillness,” perceives bygone civilizations, and feels “mysterious presences,” all while maintaining an equanimity others cannot—revealingly, the bohemian’s moment of creative fulfillment occurs when he makes nothing at all.

**The Masses and the Elite: Aesthetics and Artistic Appreciation**

*The Emancipated*’s respect for Mallard’s casual daydreams seems especially odd given Gissing’s own rapid writing pace and massive output. Why, one cannot help but wonder, does Gissing present mental pictures as more vital and pure than actual paintings? The answer to this query lies within the development of Gissing’s aesthetics at the turn of the century. Diana Maltz argues that Gissing felt an early affinity for John Ruskin’s ideologies, sharing his belief in art as a catalyst for social change; however, Gissing’s hopefulness later gave way to a deep pessimism regarding art’s function in contemporary society. Maltz adds that Gissing “despaired at the way in which the mass culture of the 1890s seemed to render Ruskinian ethical and aesthetic ideals of social responsibility and sympathy impracticable” (“Practical Aesthetics” 57).
Thus, in Gissing’s early work, *Workers at Dawn* (1880), Helen Norman optimistically assures the painter Arthur Golding that “nothing [but art] works as powerfully for the ultimate benefit of mankind,” and in his later work, *The Emancipated*, Mallard declares that art “can claim nothing” (404, 88). According to Maltz, Gissing may have retained the Ruskinian belief “that art could redeem one, but unlike Ruskin, he felt art offered one transcendence only so long as one refrained from trying to influence others with it or convert others to it” (“George Gissing as Thwarted Aesthete” 212). Echoing this concept of the artist retreating within himself, Jacob Korg asserts that Gissing’s individualistic “belief in the special perceptive powers of the artist” compelled him to extricate this figure from society rather than affirm him as a voice of the people (72). This argument is reiterated throughout *The Emancipated* as both Miriam and Mallard mutually agree that, in Mallard’s words, “Art isn’t for the multitude. We know that well enough” (328). There is no irony in Mallard’s statement: the entire novel romanticizes his attempts to explore the “special perceptive powers” of his mind as a means of escaping society’s crowded “mob,” a mob that includes the patrons of the Royal Academy. According to Maltz and Korg, Gissing saw the “common” populace and the mass-market economy they represented as a direct threat to the artist’s originality. His distaste for professional artists stems from their willingness to pander to this very audience, thereby marketing themselves as “society’s own.”

By looking into the mind of a bohemian, *The Emancipated* celebrates a rebel without a cause, an artist who looks within rather than without. In his study of Gissing’s concept of art, Grylls highlights the importance of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, a philosopher Gissing studied intently (70). Grylls insists that Gissing adheres to Schopenhauer’s belief that “aesthetic contemplation was a purely intellectual process which involved a transcendence of conscious desire” (70). In support of Grylls, evidence suggests that Gissing felt that the artist’s
most pure, unconscious thoughts arrived in images, or what Mallard calls “dreaming pictures.”

Describing Gissing’s artistic practices, Bouwe Postmus notes that the author often prepared ideas for his upcoming novels by wandering around London, a process Gissing himself referred to as “filling [his] mind with pictures” (204). Postmus clarifies that this practice did “not mean he was content with a literal transcription from life” but rather he wished to “fuse [and] mint” realistic elements “in his imagination” (204).

Like Mallard’s gaze into the wide plain, this act represents the artist using “the real” as a gateway into the transcendent. If Gissing felt that writing translated the pictures in his mind to the public then these pictures themselves represented something pure, personal, and inaccessible. *The Emancipated* reinforces this suggestion: its narrator empathizes with Mallard as he “repaints” flawed approximations of his dreams; begrudgingly, he makes landscapes for the benefit of “philistines,” finding enjoyment only by inserting visual references to his hallucinations for those with a discerning eye. Were Mallard able to paint his visions then he would be left exposed to such spectators; more specifically, if Mallard’s paintings showed his deepest imaginings for all to see, then this private artist may find himself entirely vulnerable to public scrutiny.

Gissing’s novel quells this threat by insisting that a truly gifted painter could never “paint his mind” with mere tools. The narrator emphasizes that Mallard’s works of craftsmanship, no matter how technically proficient, can hardly encapsulate his vast mental visions. Further, though Mallard’s works gesture to a world beyond the material, such allusions are lost on the general public. As such, the average spectator’s inability to understand Mallard’s paintings as references to his thoughts mitigates the danger that Mallard’s mind will be assessed and appraised by a destructive market economy. In a letter to his brother in 1882, Gissing referenced his elitist displeasure with the masses frequenting the Royal Academy, who presumably threatened his
more astute assessment of the surrounding art: “The Academy was glorious, only so tremendously crowded that it was difficult to get near the pictures” (Letters of George Gissing 113). Maintaining his contempt for the multitudes, Gissing would also later satirize these art enthusiasts during correspondence with his sister in 1884: “[As] I stood before a splendid picture of Aphrodite swimming on the waves[,] I heard a little girl say to her mother: ‘Who’s that mamma?’ And her mother replied, passing on – ‘Oh, a goddess dear – that’s all.’ I put up my opera glass to hide my face” (The Collected Letters of George Gissing Volume 5 202). This moment recalls Lewis’s hatred for the bourgeois women who find his picture charming. Paralleling Gissing’s snobbery, The Emancipated mocks a bourgeois art public while also symbolically wrestling “pure art” from this public. When looking at Mallard’s works, attendants only see landscapes: they will never know a world beyond the concrete.

The public may struggle to decipher Mallard’s works, but Gissing’s novels imply that other talented artists comprehend his genius. Returning to his letter to his brother in 1890, Gissing describes his introduction to the paintings of Gabriel Dante Rossetti as a “dawn of beautiful imaginings” (The Collected Letters of George Gissing, vol. 4 181). Closely recalling his desire to “dream” himself into a timeless world of “imaginative delight,” this proclamation once again affirms Gissing’s tendency to valorize the ethereal visions of painters. Paradoxically, even as Gissing’s inspiration seems to stem from Rossetti’s work itself, his reaction distances the famous painter’s art from the labour that produced it, elevating its effect to the realm of imagination; revealingly, Gissing’s impression is highly poetic as he avoids describing brush strokes and other technical details. Thus, in a sense, Rossetti’s work remains protected from the mass market, or from the translation required by a verbal description; his paintings serve as allusions to mental states that can only be appreciated by a fellow visionary. Gissing locates the relationship
between the gifted artist and the gifted observer in an exclusive “world within the world” that is “kept apart” from others.

Despite the defiance suggested by Gissing’s aesthetic exclusivity, his ideology offers no relief from the market economy’s systematization of art: gifted artists must presumably still exhibit their work to all in an effort to make a living. John Sloan argues that Gissing long acknowledged that “the desire for intellectual freedom” would be mitigated by a “need for community and acceptance” (79). This limitation haunts the conclusion of *The Emancipated*; even as Mallard devalues his work, he still hopes a select few will discern his paintings as gateways to “the infinite.” This is not to say that Mallard believes that his works are transcendent in and of themselves; rather, Mallard’s works are counter-intuitive: he makes paintings with the hope that his viewers will not reduce them to colors or composition. Notoriously cagey, Mallard has little faith that this will transpire and thus detests showing his art, particularly within the Royal Academy. According to the narrator, “Mallard was deficient in those properties of the showman which are so necessary to an artist if he would make his work widely known and sell it for substantial sums; he hated anything like exhibition and dreaded an offer to purchase” (316). Mallard presents this deficiency as a badge of honor, a sign of his identity as a social rebel and artistic iconoclast. He often tries to avoid publicly displaying his paintings altogether, much like Rossetti once did, though financial need always forces Mallard to participate in gallery showings.40

Though Mallard denounces his own middle-class audience, a few more creatively attuned figures, such as his future wife Miriam, see the genius in Mallard’s art. In fact, this seems to represent Mallard’s ideal: a kind of cult status among free-thinking and progressive art lovers.

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40 As mentioned in the introduction, Rachel Teukolsky explains that Rossetti avoided public exhibitions for most of his career (120).
When Miriam catches a glimpse of Mallard’s painting of Paestum in a hotel room, her reaction encapsulates the tension between the Bohemian labourer and the dreamer. Though she admires the work as a technical achievement, musing that it is “rendered with great skill,” she also notes, “the temples stood in the light of early morning, a wonderful, indescribable light.” Despite her thoughts, Miriam makes “no remark on the picture,” wisely resisting the urge to explain images that cannot be explained through language (316). Miriam’s ability to even appreciate the confounding nature of this light reflects her artistic intuitiveness.

When Mallard reluctantly exhibits his paintings in the Royal Academy later in the novel, his works mystify the general public, but a few keen observers appreciate them. Describing Mallard’s exhibitions, Cecily notes “his pictures are neglected . . . but people who understand them say they have great value.” She adds, “If he has anything accepted by the Academy, it is sure to be hung out of sight” (26). Mallard seems to invite social obscurity—it frees him from answering to a general public that could not possibly ascertain his genius. Unlike Clifford Mash, who signs his paintings with dandified flair, Mallard resists the urge to mark his paintings as his own, nor does he seem to impress his own personality into his art in any readily accessible manner. Thus even when his close friend Cecily wanders through the Royal Academy with Elgar, she has to “look[] in her catalogue for” Mallard’s name because he cannot recognize his work. Further, when Cecily does locate Mallard’s piece, Elgar must ask whose it is before he alludes to the public’s lack of interest: “Nobody looks at it, you notice.” Such disinterest is not surprising given that Mallard’s work itself is far from a crowd pleasing venture: “The picture was a piece of coast-scenery in Norway, very grand, cold, desolate” (274). Again, there is a contrast here between the “cold desolation” of this materialist work and the “smiling desolation” of Mallard’s impressions. By showing his painting, Mallard is offering an obscure reference to the latter
vision, an act that simultaneously defies ignorant observers while inviting the watchful eyes of adept appreciators.

This tension between the general populace and the chosen few becomes more overt as this scene continues. Just after Cecily and Elgar locate Mallard’s painting, an “old and a young lady come in front of them” and carry out an exchange which seems based on Gissing’s own gallery experience as described in his letter to his sister. In response to the young lady’s question, “what is it?,” the older woman “carelessly replies,” “Oh, Land’s End, or some such place.” She then turns her companion’s attention to a more immediately pleasing work of triviality: “Do just look at that sweet little creature playing with the dog!” (274-75). As one of Gissing’s most heavy-handed presentations of his elitist ideology, this scene clearly separates Mallard from inattentive philistines. While Moore’s Lewis chides himself when his paintings appeal to fashionable ladies of the middle classes, Mallard seems to make sure that such individuals will never understand his works. Though the old woman obviously mistakes the location that inspires Mallard’s work, there is a sense that any of her attempts to understand the painting would be misguided. Even Cecily, a woman who seems to harbor far more artistic potential than her husband Elgar, cannot look through the “window” that Mallard offers.

As such, Mallard’s painting is a litmus test for highly rarified genius: this scene of “desolation,” which recalls the motif of “nothingness” that runs through the novel, invites those who can look beyond the work itself, who can see a “just oblivion” in a “blank horizon” or “beautiful imaginings” in a seeming void. The narrator ultimately affirms this point by stating that the painting was “not at all likely to hold the gaze of Academy visitors, but [was] significant enough for the few who see with the imagination” (274). This act of “see[ing] with the imagination” in Gissing’s novel always extricates art from the middle classes’ concept of reality.
Just as the text distances artistic achievement from simple labour, it also distances artistic
appreciation from common knowledge. While the professional artist was a paragon of the rising
cult of personality in late-Victorian England, Mallard seeks to remain inscrutable in his work in
the same way that he yearns for solitude in his life (Codell “Constructing the Victorian Artist”
283-84). In both acts, Mallard reinforces his distance from society, and its association with
limited phenomena and meaningless labours.

Despite Diana Maltz’s arguments regarding Gissing’s break from Ruskinian aesthetics,
the irony of Mallard’s painting is that it conforms quite strictly with many of Ruskin’s views.
Firstly, Mallard’s desire to “hide” himself in his painting, thereby shielding himself from the
public eye, echoes Ruskin’s view of artistic authorship. In *Modern Painters* (1843), a work
which Gissing read and studied, Ruskin describes how the landscape painter must approach his
art: “The artist has done nothing till he has concealed himself, – the art is imperfect which is
visible – the feelings are but feebly touched, if they permit us to reason on the methods of their
excitement” (vol. 1, xxii).\(^{41}\) Ruskin also urges painters to forego self-aggrandizing flourishes in
favor of “an earnest, faithful, loving, study of nature as she is,” a comment which, once again, is
closely aligned with Mallard’s own aim “to paint a bit of the world just as [he] see[s] it” (vol. 1,
xxxix).

Later, Ruskin’s treatise on painting seems to foreshadow Gissing’s own exploration of
materialist “nothingness.” Ruskin states, “Painting, or art generally, as such, with all its
technicalities, difficulties, and particular ends, is nothing but a noble and expressive language,
invaluable as a vehicle of thought, but by itself, nothing” (7). Ultimately, in an effort to promote
“true art,” Ruskin once more stresses that art that merely draws attention to the skills of the artist

\(^{41}\) In November 9\(^{th}\), 1884, Gissing calls Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* “a marvellous book” (*Letters of George Gissing*
150).
cannot teach “one wholesome lesson” to the “human heart,” nor will spectators depart such an exhibition with “the praise of God in [their] heart[s]” (vol. 1, xxii). Clearly many of Ruskin’s basic principles, from his belief in the self-effacing artist, to the purity of naturalism, to the emptiness of mere technique, seem to parallel the ideals espoused in Gissing’s novel. However, Gissing’s aesthetics break from Ruskin’s ideals in crucial ways.

While both writers stress the hidden nature of the true artist, they do so with far different aims. Ruskin certainly expresses his own wariness regarding the general public’s ability to understand great art, yet his language also evokes his belief in the artist as a possible teacher. By removing himself from his work and, in a sense, serving God and his world of natural wonder, the artist may use the “expressive language” of painting as a “vehicle of thought” to teach a “wholesome lesson” to the “human heart.” The goal of Ruskin’s aesthetics, as Maltz has noted, lies in its social benefit (“Practical Aesthetics” 57). Mallard, in turn, hopes to bring a few viewers pleasure, but he never implies that any observer will learn something from his work. Both Ruskin and Gissing celebrate the elusive artist, but Ruskin’s ideal painter hides himself in order to convey a pure, universal message to his audience, while Gissing’s bohemian remains shrouded, escaping into a cognitive world accessed only by artistic geniuses.  

In his works themselves, Mallard’s aims are more akin to those of Whistler than those of Ruskin. Initially there seems to be little similarity between Whistler’s impressionistic paintings of the city and Mallard’s depictions of nature. However, both the works of the real painter and the fictional painter provoke public confusion. Thus, just as Whistler’s Nocturne in Black and Gold – The Falling Rocket was an innovative experiment that many viewers, like Ruskin, saw only as a “pot of paint,” Mallard’s paintings are visionary masterpieces that most attendees

42 This distinction legitimizes Maltz’s claim that in his later career Gissing broke away from Ruskin’s belief in art’s social function (“Practical Aesthetics” 57).
dismiss as empty landscapes. Though not necessarily impressionistic in style, Mallard’s works are impressionistic in effect, as his most faithful reproductions of nature are ironically his most inscrutable; as such, he rebels against widely held assumptions among the novel’s public that regard landscape painting as a populist style of art.

In sum, Mallard, like Whistler, creates an evocative atmosphere rather than a “wholesome lesson.” In fact, the “cold, desolat[ion]” of Mallard’s unnerving painting could easily describe Whistler’s darkened sky, given that both works seem to serve as an affront to easy interpretations and Ruskinian populism (274). According to Gissing’s novel, this elevation of artistic impressions blends drastically different visual styles together, rendering technical distinctions between works as trivial in comparison to the effect alluded to by such works. Viewed in this context, Mallard appropriates the handicraft of the professional, exemplified by his commitment to detail and accuracy, only to counter-act the connotations of this technique. Ideally, in purely aesthetic terms, Mallard’s practices would allow him to usurp the archetypal professional: he shows that he can easily play the part of the labourer, all while affirming his movement beyond the limitations of this artistic type. While The Emancipated works to reinforce Mallard’s predominance by elevating his mind over his tools as well as his genius over his social membership, the novel also addresses how the sobering reality of the artistic marketplace ultimately undermines his standing.

**Back to Reality: Societal Pressures and the Limits of Mallard’s Artistry**

The significance of Mallard’s dream-like perspective becomes all the more poignant because it seems so impossible to sustain amidst his social reality. As Mallard must increasingly concede to the labour market throughout the late stages of the novel, his bohemian ideals become significantly tarnished. In many ways, the latter half of The Emancipated supports John Sloan’s
assertion that Gissing long acknowledged the artist’s “need for community and acceptance” (79). After being introduced as a character who thrives on contradiction, Mallard is eventually forced to live a life of hypocrisy due to financial need. When Mallard is invited to a dinner with the Spences late in the novel, we see hints of his need for compromise: “The necessity of donning society’s uniform always drew many growls from him; he never felt at his ease in it, and had a suspicion that he looked ridiculous.” The narrator then justifies Mallard’s opinion by stating, “Indeed it suited him but ill; it disguised the true man as he appeared in his rough travelling apparel, and in the soiled and venerable attire of the studio” (433). Though Mallard’s decision to put on a dinner jacket seems like a fairly trivial concession, these minor acquiesces reflect deep-seated anxieties on the part of the bohemian.

Such apprehensions are particularly pronounced when it comes to Mallard’s work itself. In an aforementioned quotation, the narrator notes that he developed a “limitless contempt of the Royal Academy” from an early age (80). While we are given insights into Mallard’s “anti-showman[ship],” his justification for seeking acceptance from an institution he has long abhorred is left curiously unexplored, the implication always being that Mallard must at least attempt to sell his works in order to survive. As with Moore’s bohemians, one can see the contradictions of Mallard’s career: his relationship to the public becomes a counter-intuitive charade of expression and evasion.

While Mallard may adopt the “uniform of society” for social events without much personal turmoil, his work itself, and the loss of controlled, self-enclosure it represents, increasingly plunges him into disingenuousness. In his assessment of Gissing’s view of bohemians, Sloan argues that “rather than indicating any insincerity or dishonesty, their attempt to live out the seeming contradictions of bourgeois and bohemian instincts, of inner freedom and
outer realities, marks them out as strong, well-balanced natures” (79). Sloan’s assessment quite rightly describes the ideal bohemian that Gissing alludes to throughout *The Emancipated*, but it does not take into account both the inevitable breakdown of these “well-balanced natures” nor why such a failure may take place. As the narrator’s early valorization of Mallard’s contradictory personality eventually gives way, the novel shows us a more sobering account of an artist working against himself. In summation, Mallard’s contradictory practices begin to border on the ridiculous: he is forced to exhibit works that he sees as meaningless in and of themselves within a gallery he denounces, all while hoping to baffle the majority of his spectators.

Much of Mallard’s labour practices are a means of rebellion against professional ideals; yet, given that he ultimately must participate in the professional world, his methods become empty symbols of bohemian self-righteousness rather than marks of strength. Mallard remains aware of this hypocrisy, showing his distaste for work and public showings while acknowledging their importance. Clearly the ideological and ethical issues that Mallard faces cannot be remedied through “good old-fashioned” hard work, but rather are exacerbated by these very efforts; for Mallard, the very act of exhibiting his labours threatens to transform him from a self-possessed artist to a man divided by insecurities.

Based on Mallard’s concessions, *The Emancipated* suggests that the ideal bohemian may be marginalized as a self-limiting professional. According to Gluck, “commentators have oscillated between visions of the bohemian as a creator of transcendental art and as a characteristic product of capitalist modernity” (“Theorizing the Cultural Roots of the Bohemian Artist” 351). Walter Benjamin, for instance, in his study of Baudelaire’s bohemianism in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, treats the commodity as the fulfillment of Baudelaire’s allegorical vision. During a letter to his contemporary Max Horkheimer
explaining his ongoing work on Baudelaire, Benjamin asserts, “that which explodes the experience of the ever recurrent under whose spell the poet was placed by spleen, is nothing other than the halo of commodity” (*The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin* 557). *The Emancipated* presents the bohemian’s love of dreaming as both a cause and a result of his struggles with the commercial art market. When Mallard complains to Spence about the nuisance of being the benefactor of Cecily’s fortune, he states, “It’s worse than being rich on my own account. I have dreams of a national repudiation of debt; I imagine dock-companies failing and banks stopping payment” (14). Mallard’s grandiose vision reinforces the purity of his bohemian ideals: he has no need for wealth and he wishes to break down the commercial mechanisms that control innovative artists.

All the same, Mallard remains incapable of activism of any kind because his rebellion consists solely of aesthetic escapism. Mallard’s notion that art can “claim nothing” is both a proclamation of the bohemian’s artistic transcendence and his social powerlessness. Thus, in terms of his actions alone, there is little that separates Mallard from “conventional,” professional artists. He works, exhibits and sells his wares like any other artist of his time, yet his ideals mitigate his success. As such, he participates in a system in which his imagined means of revolt would render him inconsequential. Mallard may be a true artist whose mind is rich with miraculous visions but, in the cold reality of the marketplace, he is a failing professional whose works hang neglected in the shadows of the Royal Academy. In this sobering truth, we can perhaps see Gissing’s sorrowful need to close the mind to fancy even as he prizes “beautiful imaginings” above all else.

“An Unpretending Life”: *The Precarious Conclusion of The Emancipated*
As *The Emancipated* moves from the public gallery to the domestic sphere, Mallard’s eventual commitment to Miriam, despite its inherent romance, forces him to forego his artistic pursuits in favor of confronting reality: he concedes his flights of fancy as a dreamer, all in the name of love, domesticity, and normalcy. Certainly Miriam’s affection propels Mallard’s marriage proposal, and yet, their union cannot be read as a straightforward celebration. Late in the novel, when Mallard asks Miriam to come to his studio, this gesture reflects his willingness to at least partially accept an “unpretending life of work and duties.” On her entrance, Mallard immediately asks Miriam if she can sew a workbook which holds his engravings and, while “she plie[s] her needle,” he paints two versions of her character: one is judgmental and severe, and the other represents an idealized, emancipated woman who is “freed from those bonds that numb the faculties of mind and heart” (437-38).

Just as Mallard reveals his two paintings to Miriam, he declares his love for her new liberated identity in a moment that initially seems like a highly romantic blending of the real and the ideal, the aesthetic and the material. Mallard symbolically paints his lover into existence, showing her how he sees her on a canvas before telling her how he feels about her in real life. A version of Miriam whose mind is as free as Mallard’s would be his best possible mate: a wife who could join him in the mental “infinite.” However, Mallard maintains his characteristic skepticism even in this moment of romantic harmony: speaking of Miriam in the third person as “her” (a reference to the woman of his painting), Mallard states, “When I say that I love her, I don’t mean that I am ready to lose my wits . . . I shouldn’t dream of allowing her to come in the way of my life’s work” (438). Based on Mallard’s recurring desire to dream rather than work, this sentence is highly ironic; in many ways, Mallard’s visions paradoxically seem to represent his “life’s work” in that they are far more important to him than the self-proclaimed “failures”
that he continually paints. This distinction would seem to indicate that Mallard is ultimately unwilling to concede his own “open” mind or “lose his wits” simply because of his attachment to Miriam. Yet, the context of this scene, namely the image of both characters labouring together, reflects how difficult it is for Mallard to maintain his fluid mind against his new commitments.

By conflating Mallard’s artistic work with Miriam’s sewing, Gissing evokes Elgar’s impression of aesthetic labour as “mere handicraft,” all while implying that Miriam’s presence limits Mallard’s solitary contemplativeness. Throughout this scene, Mallard and Miriam not only carry out their respective tasks simultaneously but both painting and sewing are subsumed under the generalized label of work, eradicating any artistic distinctions between the types of work they represent. Further, Miriam sews a “case in which [Mallard] keep[s] a large volume of engravings” and thus she seems to turn a symbol of art into a piece of domestic duty. This obsessive attention to labour continues when Mallard takes Miriam to a small table so she may begin her needlework, and then tells her, “I shall go on with my work, if you will let me” (435). Shortly thereafter, Miriam “look[s] up and [says] that [her] work [is] done” (437). Fittingly, Mallard finishes his own pursuit at the very same moment, further suggesting that artistic production and domestic chores have become essentially the same; both forms of labour require the same amount of time for completion and, based on the bond between these characters in this scene, appear to be intimately connected.

Mallard soon goes on to declare that if Miriam cannot help him carry out his “life’s work,” she “shall be nothing to [him] at all” (438). Miriam, ever the dutiful partner, promptly accepts his terms. Despite the apparent optimism engrained in this exchange, both characters are, in a sense, accepting a life of “nothingness,” as their reformed commitment to labour will significantly limit their access to meaningful art. More specifically, by entering an “unpretending” marriage “of
work and duties,” Mallard will carry out his artistic labours as if they were any domestic chores, never moving beyond the confines of duty to the freedom of introspection.

In a novel that constantly presents the meaningless of material labour in favor of celebrating cognitive exploration, the humble, dutiful romance of Mallard and Miriam masks the stark defeat their relationship connotes. Gissing certainly distinguishes these characters’ bond from his many dismal representations of married love: Mallard has found a partner whom he respects and one who, arguably, can appreciate his genius. Nevertheless, this very union also impairs Mallard’s genius. If Mallard’s marriage responsibilities reduce his artistic production to a simple domestic chore, one that he must carry out in order to support his future family, then Mallard’s duty depends on his acceptance of a tragically workmanlike ideology. For all of his love for Miriam, Mallard’s union with her transforms him from a visionary looking beyond the narrow confines of his time to a labourer embroiled in the everyday concerns of an “unpretending life.” His desire for Miriam seems to imply that even the most gifted, apparently autonomous artist cannot endure a purely aesthetic life of solitude as the warm hand of matrimony serves as a pleasant alternative to the “cold hand” of the infinite. Though this scene may end with Mallard asking Miriam if she knows “what is meant when one says of a man that he is a Bohemian?” Mallard has already forfeited his most quintessentially bohemian trait: his identity as a dreamer (439).

By the end of The Emancipated, Gissing has shown the heights of bohemianism while gesturing toward the limitations of this lifestyle. Despite Mallard’s desire to escape from society, the novel presents his quest to keep “his wits” as an ultimately futile exercise. Mallard eventually

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43 In The Nether World (1889), Gissing depicts the unhappy and poverty-stricken marriage of Sidney Kirkwood and Clara Hewett. In a similar fashion, New Grub Street (1891) centers on the trials and tribulations of Edwin and Amy Reardon. Though this couple reaches some degree of reconciliation before Edwin’s tragic death, their marriage is marked by emotional, artistic and financial conflict.
falls back into a life of labour, acquiescing to financial realities as well as his desire for domesticated partnership; his creative visions are not a sustainable means of rebellion against social pressures that constantly threaten to invade his quiet solitude. In fact, the novel often asks whether or not Mallard’s detachment can even be classified as a rebellion. Gissing’s narrator celebrates Mallard’s dreams for their ineffectuality, representing them as an affront to the cold functionality of commercial society or, as Maltz states, “the more ‘useless’ the gift of art, the more Gissing approved of it” (“Practical Aesthetics” 60). However, this spirit of uselessness renders Mallard unable to challenge professional artists in any way—he will never effect any real change within England’s art world, a point that the ending of Gissing’s novel makes clear. Mallard’s tactics ironically serve the interests of aspiring professionals: the bohemian’s aesthetic practices have little effect on the structure of the artistic marketplace and limit his commercial success, clearing the way for bourgeois artists to extend their influence and reap the spoils.

Whatever the limitations of bohemianism in Gissing’s novel, The Emancipated’s treatment of Mallard’s dreams emphasizes the need for critical reassessment of Gissing’s view on labour. For too long critics have pointed to Gissing’s own intense work ethic as proof of his belief in labour as the ultimate moral compass and then have judged his novels according to this simple schema. By focusing on painters, Gissing has seemingly distanced himself from the toils of his own aesthetic profession, indulging in visual artists’ presumably purer vision of “beautiful imaginings.” The Emancipated, with its focus on middle-class painters rather than on writers living in squalor, may be an anomaly in Gissing’s œuvre as Françoise Dupeyron suggests; yet, the theories Gissing puts forth in this novel cannot be detached from the rest of his literary works (13).
New Grub Street, in particular, contains traces of the poetic vision Gissing articulates in *The Emancipated*. When *New Grub Street*’s Edwin Reardon, reaches the commercial nadir of his writing career and plunges into sickness, even his dreams seem to be invaded by empty labours. During “periods of delirium,” Reardon “unconsciously . . . address[es]” his wife Amy, stating “My brain seems to be worn out” (487). As he finally relinquishes his life, Reardon whispers the following Shakespearean quotation to his beloved friend Biffen: “We are such stuff as dreams are made on” (529). Like Mallard, Reardon is hardly lazy; he works feverishly throughout the novel even when writing in a highly stylized, commercial style he abhors. Yet his fanatical work ethic brings only fatigue, coming at the expense of his faculties and robbing him of moments of unfettered inspiration that could rejuvenate him. By presenting his death as a tribute to dreaming, Reardon emphasizes his adherence to a mode of artistic fulfillment beyond mere toil. Thus Reardon’s life is not characterized by his inability to work, as Andrew Dowling suggests, but his inability to dream within a world of social constraints (100-105). Reardon’s labours will never encapsulate his vision regardless of his productivity. In many ways, Mallard serves as a precursor to Reardon, and yet his identity as a visual artist seems to allow him an even greater capacity to muse on imaginary vistas, freeing his mind from social responsibilities. However temporary his imaginative visions, the degree to which Mallard escapes his place and time through the power of his mind indicates that Gissing, for all his awareness of labour as a social necessity, felt a far greater sympathy for the dreamer than has been previously documented.

By the end of *The Emancipated*, Mallard has dreamed of a life beyond unpretending duty, but must ultimately concede his identity as a contemplative bohemian. As such, the novel provides a glimpse of hope by suggesting that Mallard and his unique aesthetics may be the future of the English art world only to question this hope as the narrative concludes. As with
Moore’s text, Gissing’s novel thus explores the state of British art through a figure who may be both provocateur and casualty: just as Mallard seems caught between his dreams and his duties, *The Emancipated* itself appears torn between its themes of artistic aspiration and disillusionment, as its bohemian tale ends on a precarious note.
Chapter Three

Little Masterpieces: Bohemianism and the Visual Sketch in Charles Baudelaire’s “The Painter of Modern Life” and George Du Maurier’s *Trilby*

Moore’s *A Modern Lover* and Gissing’s *The Emancipated* both present the bohemian as an icon of the counterculture, one who resists middle-class, mass conventionality. From collectives like the Moderns to solitary artists like Mallard, bohemians’ distaste for bourgeois society comes in tension with their creative production; forced to sell their wares to “philistines,” these painters see public exhibitions as undignified, an insult to their noble pursuits. Two other works of the second half of the nineteenth century, Baudelaire’s “The Painter of Modern Life” (1865) and Du Maurier’s *Trilby* (1894), challenge this conception of the bohemian by presenting him as an artist of the people.

In Baudelaire’s “The Painter of Modern Life,” the French poet-critic presents a romanticized portrait of a real-life artist, Constantin Guys (1802-1892), celebrating him for spearheading an innovative art period. Although the actual Guys lived a fairly conventional lifestyle, Baudelaire nonetheless aligns *his version* of Guys with bohemian ideals, presenting him as an eccentric visionary whose works ironically connect with all classes of people. Looking back on 1850s bohemia in London and Paris, Du Maurier’s *Trilby*, in turn, celebrates a fictional creation, Billee, as, at the same time, a hero of bohemia, a star to middle class audiences, and an artist of the future. Along with exploring the bohemian as a popular artist, these authors share an interest in the same visual medium: the sketch.

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44 Of course, this stance does not prevent these bohemian characters from showing their works in the Royal Academy.
“The Painter of Modern Life” and *Trilby* both feature bohemian sketch artists who appeal to middle-class tastes by capturing urban scenes with quickness, simplicity, and charm. Through their on-the-spot drawings, Guys and Billee connect to a public that wishes to see the city as vividly as they do. In contrast to Thompson’s unorthodox compositions and Mallard’s dreamscapes, works that confuse the masses just as Whistler’s *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* did in 1875, Baudelaire and Du Maurier’s sketch artists present an experimental art form predicated on accessibility. At the same time, these artists also distinguish themselves from classical painters, particularly through their labour practices: both Baudelaire and Du Maurier show that the sketch artist works spontaneously, unlike the classical painter who toils endlessly, a distinction that presumably makes the sketch artist more apt to capture the swiftness of modern life in urban centers. In this context, the sketch represents an art of the glance, a visual representation of the flowing, unstable experience of the city; much like French Impressionism, this art form expresses transitory, fleeting moments in these urban spheres, offering an aesthetic that reflects a new human reality. In sum, the works of Baudelaire and Du Maurier herald an artist who transcends the conventions of the avant-garde and the establishment through his unique approach to creation.

Yet, even as the sketch represents *the* bohemian artistic medium in the texts of Baudelaire and Du Maurier, this medium’s ephemerality nevertheless evokes the bohemian’s ambivalence toward artistic production. The sketch may allow the bohemian to capture the fluidity of the modern experience, but both Baudelaire and Du Maurier suggest that even this spontaneous art form obfuscates the bohemian’s view of the city, separating him (albeit only momentarily) from direct engagement with the urban experience. The bohemians’ vitality as artists stems from

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45 As I later explain, Constantin Guys himself did not explore a bohemian lifestyle, but Baudelaire aligns his highly fictionalized version of Guys with bohemian principles.
seeing and experiencing their environments, and while the sketch may represent their medium of choice, they would prefer to immerse themselves in the city. Tellingly, Guys and Billee enjoy looking at the city far more than capturing it through drawings: Just as Baudelaire’s “M.G.” has an “insatiable passion [for] seeing and feeling,” Du Maurier’s ideal artist remains sensitive to “all that he sees and feels” (9, “Social Pictorial Satire II” 32). In doing so, they seek to become ‘artist’s of life,’ individuals whose aesthetic endeavours extend beyond the limits of the material work of art.

Both authors challenge bourgeois notions of the Victorian work ethic through their illustrators’ swiftly made drawings, as their respective texts’ interest in art that requires little effort extends to art that requires no labour at all. The ease with which these sketch artists work evokes both their desire for artistic innovation (they create with a rapidity that suits the modern experience) and also, at the same time, their desire to forego art production (the speed with which they create allows them to spend less time working). As a result, “The Painter of Modern Life” and Trilby present the sketch as the least of all evils–if the artist must work, then the sketch represents a minimal compromise with that necessity–while suggesting that artists remain most free and imaginative when they resist any form of work in favour of creative experiences. These sketch artists may not despise their toils or the bourgeois art market in the way that Moore or Gissing’s iconoclasts do, but Guys and Billee nevertheless prefer the autonomy of a non-working, creative lifestyle.

The texts of Du Maurier and Baudelaire thus suggest that a bohemian who respects his middle-class audience may still remain sceptical toward any labour that forces him to externalize inner visions. Baudelaire and Du Maurier imply that even under ideal circumstances, members of the avant-garde should not limit themselves as mere labourers. In doing so, however, these texts
lessen the value of the very medium they seek to champion, as the writers insist that their bohemian heroes represent far more than producers of artworks. Therefore, much like the compositions of Thompson or Mallard, the sketch comes to embody both the bohemian’s acceptance of and resistance to a middle-class art market, reflecting the artist’s awareness of the tension between the inevitability of work and his desire to escape it. Based on these texts of the 1890s, the popular bohemian therefore differs from his rebel counterpart in degree only, as both archetypes struggle with the same fear of losing their creative freedom due to the responsibilities of an artistic career.

Presenting Baudelaire’s character study of Guys as a precursor to Du Maurier’s novel, I show how these authors express similar countercultural apprehensions toward art production at the turn of the century as those found in the texts of Moore and Gissing. Throughout “The Painter of Modern Life,” Baudelaire elevates Guys above artistic craftsmen in much the same way Gissing’s narrator raises Mallard over hacks like Elgar. Presumably these gifted figures, to borrow Moore’s words, “possess[] all the rarer qualities” of creative genius: they are men of feeling and sensitivity rather than hard-working professionals (Confessions 44). Just as The Emancipated makes this distinction by celebrating Mallard’s dream visions, “The Painter of Modern Life” does so by showcasing Guys’ vision of the city: neither bohemian seems to belong in the confines of a workspace. In a similar fashion, Trilby opens with Billee looking out of the window of his studio, a motif that recurs throughout the novel. When Billee gazes passionately at his muse Trilby or the scenes of Paris and London—he feels alive, free, and stimulated. But by the tragic end of Du Maurier’s text, following Trilby’s death, Billee finds himself alone with his ongoing sketches, pieces that mean little to him, and then he too soon passes away. Billee craves the direct experience of the city and all its inhabitants, a feeling he cannot find through
sketching. Thus, for all its celebrating of the popular bohemian, *Trilby* shows why avant-garde artists would wish to resist making art, exhibiting works, and “selling out” in the first place. Moore’s Thompson may resist his bourgeois audience and Du Maurier’s Billee may welcome it, but both men come to regret the extent to which they work for a living. Culminating in Billee’s demise, Du Maurier’s novel ends as solemnly as *A Modern Lover* and *The Emancipated.*

**An Artist’s First Thoughts: A History of the Sketch Artist**

Baudelaire and Du Maurier’s literary presentation of the bohemian as a populist icon aligns with many critics’ historical interpretations of this figure. Though scholars of bohemianism such as Mary Gluck and Kimberly Stern note the common conception of the historical bohemian as a rebel, they see him as ultimately serving the needs of a bourgeois public. Gluck argues that regardless of fin-de-siècle bohemians’ countercultural poses, their goal was “to transform modernity to the symbolic and experiential level, making it transparent, accessible, and emotionally expressive for ordinary people” (*Popular Bohemia* 125-26). Citing urban writers like Balzac and Baudelaire as examples, Gluck refers to such bohemians as “self-appointed chroniclers of modernity whose accounts lifted ordinary events beyond the fleeting moment of the present and exposed their epic possibilities” (*Popular Bohemia* 85). Echoing Gluck, Stern states that both French and English bohemians of the nineteenth century looked to quotidian scenes of “mainstream [culture] for the raw material of [their] aesthetic productions,” thereby offering a “critical perspective [on] normative values” for the consumption of the middle classes (548).⁴⁶

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⁴⁶ We may see Edgar Degas’ *L’Absinthe* (1875) as a possible example of this phenomenon; in the painting, Degas takes a dull scene in a café and, by focusing on two downtrodden customers, he transmutes this moment into something poignant and original. Presumably, a bourgeois viewer could comprehend these figures’ struggles because Degas singles out his subjects from the anarchy of the city and allows his viewers to see them more vividly.
“The Painter of Modern Life” and *Trilby* prize the sketch in particular because it brings artists closer to these “raw materials” so that they may capture such fleeting moments. According to Martina Lauster, the sketch gained legitimacy in the late-eighteenth century and early-nineteenth century “at a time when the genre’s seeming artlessness appealed to Romantic notions of the picturesque, of subjective genius . . . and truth” (2). She later defines the sketch as an easily “multipliable, open medium” that represents an artist’s vision at its most unfiltered (19). In a similar manner, Richard Sha argues that the sketch came to represent artists’ “first thoughts,” allowing illustrators to challenge bourgeois notions of art as painstaking, disciplined labour (4). Revelling in the freshness and informality of this art form, the texts of Baudelaire and Du Maurier set the sketch in opposition to classical styles, and even to the medium of painting itself. Going further, though, both texts also imply that the sketch may never reproduce an artist’s first thoughts exactly because he cannot simultaneously experience the world and reproduce it. Ultimately, Billee and Guys prize the immediacy of experience over the immediacy of the sketch.

Regardless of these complications, “The Painter of Modern Life” and *Trilby* criticize established art houses such as the Louvre and the Royal Academy because they feel their committees neglect sketch artists. As a famous illustrator himself, Du Maurier lobbied to modernize the Royal Academy, insisting that academicians induct draughtsmen into their ranks. Angered by the committee’s snobbish refusal to do so, Du Maurier expresses his frustration in his 1890 essay, “The Illustrating of Books from the Serious Artist’s Point of View–I,” declaring, “If the illustrator confine himself to his own particular branch, he must not hope for any very high place in the hierarchy of art. The great prizes are not for him!” (374). “The Painter of Modern Life” and *Trilby* imagine such obstacles breaking down in the near future, prophesizing
that sketch artists would soon revolutionize well-known art establishments and find a discerning audience.

Despite their misgivings toward creative labour and the art market, Baudelaire and Du Maurier both envision these cutting-edge visual artists becoming as beloved and respected as England’s most popular novelists. In The Victorian Painter, Paula Gillett argues that by the later nineteenth century, “English painting appear[ed] a poor relation” when compared with “the inexhaustible richness of English literature” (1).⁴⁷ Both Baudelaire and Du Maurier seem to reverse this relationship by suggesting that authors should look for inspiration in the rising realm of avant-garde art. Noting how William Makepeace Thackeray recognized Guys in a review, Baudelaire praises “Mr. Thackeray” for being “deeply invested in matters of art,” all the while suggesting that Guys also has the talent to reach a widespread public (5). In turn, Du Maurier spends much of his essay “Social Pictorial Satire II” (1890) imagining a “great [sketch] artist on the scale of Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot or Trollope”: “think of it – a collection of woodcuts or etchings . . . a series of small pictures equal in volume and in value to the whole of Thackeray’s literary work!” (35-36). Exploring the interplay between the textual and the visual, both Baudelaire and Du Maurier imagine their bohemian sketch artist achieving the kind of acclaim that seems antithetical to the bohemian’s typical role as an iconoclast at the margins. As we will see, however, their hopeful vision of the popular bohemian never seems sustainable.

In exploring Baudelaire and Du Maurier’s respective treatments of the bohemian, critics have overlooked their mutual interest in the sketch. Elizabeth Wilson, Mary Gluck and Jerrold Seigel note Baudelaire’s portrayal of the bohemian as modernity’s translator, but they neglect the sketch as this figure’s common medium of translation. In turn, critics Leonee Ormond and Richard Kelly do not address the significance of the sketch in Du Maurier’s novel. Kelly, a harsh

⁴⁷ In this context, Gissing’s attempt to gain literary inspiration from Rossetti seems all the more novel.
critic of *Trilby*, denounces the novel as a simplistic piece of sanitized bohemianism, arguing that Du Maurier’s conservative retelling of his youthful days in Paris robs bohemia of its vivacity (87). While Du Maurier certainly placates the middle-classes by making his bohemians gentlemen of upright character, his treatment is hardly a simple sanitization. Instead, he offers a comprehensive restructuring of the bohemian: Du Maurier gives the bohemian an art form, an audience, and attempts to legitimize him as a serious and prolific artist. Nonetheless, as we move from Baudelaire’s prophecy of the bohemian sketch artist to Du Maurier’s fictionalized account of his success, the popular bohemian begins to emerge as a figure as troubled as his rebellious counterpart.

**The Man of the World: Baudelaire’s Sketch Artist**

Though Guys himself was “free of any taint of Bohemia,” as Seigel notes, Baudelaire presents *his* Guys, a largely romanticized creation, as a bohemian icon (121). Baudelaire explains that Constantin Guys himself requested that Baudelaire call him “Monsieur G.” in “The Painter of Modern Life” to protect his privacy and detach him from the figure in Baudelaire’s text (5). By accepting Guys’ request, Baudelaire gains greater creative license: rather than view Guys as a subject for accurate biographical study, Baudelaire treats him as a projection of his own aesthetic goals. As such, Baudelaire can proclaim the wonder of “Monsieur G.” as an artist of the people with little regard for the real Guys’ discomfort with notoriety. Baudelaire praises Guys’ “insatiable passion” for viewing the endless subjects of the city, one that supersedes his commitment to making sketches (9).

In his autobiographical *My Heart Laid Bare* (1865), published two years after “The Painter of Modern Life,” Baudelaire presents this insatiable passion as the mark of a bohemian: Baudelaire “glorif[ies] vagabondage and what one might call Bohemianism, the cult of
multiplied sensation” (198). For Baudelaire, “multiplied sensation” refers to the bohemian’s ability to appreciate a variety of stimuli simultaneously; the term connotes the bohemian’s perpetual sensitivity to his surroundings, calling to mind Guys’ talents as an observer. By infusing Guys with the passionate qualities he would soon recognize as bohemian in My Heart Laid Bare, Baudelaire defines members of this cult as those who seek to see and feel the visceral experience of urban centers and their inhabitants.

To further distinguish Guys’ passion, Baudelaire contrasts him with the dandy, a figure who also roam the city yet remains at an emotional distance from it. Amongst Baudelaire’s catalogue of urban dwellers, he sets the dandy’s cold exterior in opposition to the bohemian’s irrepresible enthusiasm. Seigel, in particular, argues that these archetypes represent the two poles of Baudelaire’s contradictory aesthetics. Baudelaire’s dandy is surely a bon vivant, but throughout his search for indulgence, he remains self-contained and outwardly stoic. Seigel insists that unlike Baudelaire’s dandy, his bohemian never allows what Baudelaire calls his “reason and calculation” to overwhelm his “multiplied sensation[s]” (Seigel 98-99, “The Painter of Modern Life” 425). Even as the dandy walks through city streets, he stays detached from the very vagabond life that sparks the bohemian’s imagination. As such, Baudelaire stresses that “Monsieur G. [is] dominated as he is by an insatiable passion–for seeing and feeling” and thus “parts company decisively with dandyism” (9). Based on Baudelaire’s characterization, “M.G.” therefore bears all the marks of a bohemian.

Moving from Guys’ passions to his pieces, Baudelaire states, “in the daily metamorphosis of external things,” or what he later calls “the multiplicity of life and [its] flickering grace,”

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48 Though I examine the dandy only as it contrasts with bohemianism, the complexities of this figure have been the topic of exhaustive scholarly debate. For more in-depth discussion of the dandy, see Bernard Howells’ Baudelaire: Individualism, Dandyism and the Philosophy of History (1996), Rhonda K. Garelick’s Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender and Performance in the Fin de Siècle (2000), and Philip G. Hadlock’s “The Other Other: Baudelaire, Melancholia, and the Dandy” (2001).
“there is a rapidity of movement which calls for an equal speed of execution from the artist” (4, 9). If this flood of experiences represents the multiplicity of life, then it stands to reason that bohemians, with their “cult of multiplied sensation,” must serve as its translators. According to Baudelaire, the sketch artist understands “the pleasure we derive from the representation of the present” in a way painters cannot, especially the methodical painters of the classical school (1). Baudelaire makes this clear when he states, “It is doubtless an excellent thing to study the old masters to learn how to paint; but it can be no more than a waste of labour if your aim is to understand the special nature of present-day beauty” (13). He then adds that “the world – and even the world of artists – is full of people who can go to the Louvre, walk rapidly . . . come to a rapturous halt in front of a Titian or a Raphael,” and then “go home happy” with the belief they have “mastered” the visual arts (1). Baudelaire chides these patrons for “lov[ing] [the] general beauty [of] classical . . . artists” while neglecting the “particular beauty” of contemporary visionaries (1). He acknowledges the value of the Old Masters’ work, but compels audiences to see the “essential quality of being present” among more daring artists, insisting that “‘modernity’ [must] be worthy of one day taking its place as ‘antiquity’” (1, 14). Ending this diatribe, Baudelaire acknowledges, “Fortunately from time to time there come forward righters of wrong . . . to declare that Raphael . . . does not contain the whole secret” (1).

Baudelaire brings to the fore one such righter of wrong, exploring how Guys aestheticizes the “raw material” of the modern experience. Picturing Guys when he wakes in the morning, Baudelaire imagines Constantin’s internal monologue: “‘what a bugle-blast of life! Already several hours of life – everywhere – lost by my sleep! How many illuminated things might I have seen and have missed seeing!’” (10). Bursting from his home, Baudelaire’s fictional Guys rushes into the crowded streets of Paris. According to Baudelaire, Guys will “see[], examine[] and
analyze[] the bearing and external aspect” of his surroundings “in an instant,” as though he, much like Gissing’s Mallard, were creating compositions within his mind (11).

Afterward, Guys somehow creates masterful recreations of his city views. Baudelaire claims that the “external world is reborn upon his paper” and praises the “powerful . . . originality” of works that Guys “hastily sketched on the spot” (5-6, 12). If, to quote Baudelaire, modernity calls for a high “speed of execution from the artist,” Guys’ works seem to answer that call (9). In a quotation comparing Guys’ works to public newspapers, Baudelaire states that Guys’ viewers “read, so to speak, a detailed account of the Crimean campaign which is much preferable to any other” (6). Like a newspaper writer or urban novelist, “M.G.” brings the people an account of their world and, according to Baudelaire, even “amateurs [and] curious enquirers” may appreciate his art (1).

For all the hopefulness of Baudelaire’s treatment of Guys as an artist of the people, “The Painter of Modern Life” nonetheless hints at this figure’s conflicted relationship to his creations when Baudelaire states, “I saw at once that [Guys] was not precisely an artist, but a man of the world.” He explains, “I ask you to understand the word artist in a very restricted sense, and man of the world in a very broad one,” adding that the latter seeks to “know, understand and appreciate everything that happens on the surface of our globe” (6-7). Based on this reasoning, Guys’ instantaneous assessment of the city’s “external aspect” suggests that he transcends Baudelaire’s limiting definition of the artist: Guys reveals his gifts before ever having to put pen to paper. Ultimately, Guys can recreate his experience of the world through sketches but, as a man of the world, he can go beyond that to fully appreciate his surroundings.

Baudelaire makes this distinction clear when he examines Guys’ work habits later in his essay. Shortly after Guys experiences the aforementioned “bugle-blast” of life, Baudelaire states
that “in a few moments the resulting ‘poem’ will be virtually composed” in Guys’ mind, “endowed with an impulsive life like the soul of its creator” (11-12). Guys will then create sketches that are “natural and more than natural, beautiful and better than beautiful” (12). Recalling Baudelaire’s affiliation with Aestheticism, these lines suggest that Guys’ sketches heighten reality: perhaps rather than simply blocking his sensory appreciation of nature, Guys pieces could offer a supplement to nature, recreating it in a novel manner. Yet, Baudelaire still insists that Guys’ direct view of his surroundings represents his artistry in its purest form.

Again, whatever enhanced view of the city Guys appears to see when he “virtually compose[s]” mental works always seems more artistically fulfilling than his material works. Baudelaire describes him “bending over his table, darting on to a sheet of paper the same glance that a moment ago he was directing towards external things, skirmishing with his pencil, . . . in a ferment of violent activity, as though afraid that the image might escape him, cantankerous though alone, elbowing himself on” (12). In reference to this passage, Timothy Bell Raser states that Guys merely “traces [his previous impressions] in ink,” noting that “it is only when shielded from sensation that Guys can compose the drawings based on the day’s experience” (143). When Guys is not “shielded from sensation,” he feels enlivened by “many illuminated things” (10). At work, he feels only frustration as he desperately attempts to recreate his mental vision. “Elbowing” and “skirmishing,” Guys is “cantankerous,” “violent,” “afraid” and “alone” in the world, as he traces rather than creates. Such negative language suggests that even the most minute labours become painful to one who can see the world with such artistry.

Like Mallard, Baudelaire’s Guys appears to view his aesthetic work as in some ways limiting his infinite mind—if Guys did not have to sell his sketches, he too would presumably

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49 As we will later see, Du Maurier breaks from Baudelaire’s aestheticism by prizing more faithful recreations of reality.
have little need for them. Most revealingly, Guys’ anger stems from having to “dart[ ] on to a sheet of paper the same glance that a moment ago he was directing towards external things” (12). These lines do suggest that the sketch is the perfect medium for the modern world: if Guys uses the “same glance” when he makes art as when he experiences the city, then the rapidity of this art form suits a world of transient images. Yet, the discord between the joy Guys feels when he glances on Paris and the pain he experiences when he glances on his sketches remains telling. When Baudelaire imagines Guys waking and crying that he has lost “several hours of life” through his slumbers, he offers another moment when Guys is removed from the world around him (10). Like sleep, work forces Guys to miss external things by shutting off his direct view of his surroundings—both sleep and sketching seem like nuisances he would rather avoid.

For all his praise of the sketch as an art form suited to modern life and populist ideals, Baudelaire legitimizes Guys’ cantankerous attitude towards his labours: by trying to free his subject from the “very restricted” concept of the artist, Baudelaire prizes Guys’ personal predilections over whatever responsibilities the sketch artist may have to a public. According to Baudelaire, Guys may recreate the world in moments, take the artistic establishment by storm, and gain fame among a bourgeois populace, but all such opportunities become obstacles when Guys would rather simply “see and feel.”

In the year of Henri Murger’s death in 1861, Baudelaire wrote a preface for The Ridiculous Martyrs by Leon Cladel (1834-1892), criticizing young men who accepted Murger’s tales of bohemian adventure as though they reflected reality. Like Murger, Baudelaire warns artists who turn to bohemia as a haven for leisure, insisting on the importance of hard work. In “The Painter of Modern Life,” Baudelaire appears to forge a path to success for aspiring avant-

50 Cladel was a French novelist who would later write more substantial novels, Le Bouscassie (1869) and La Fête votive de Saint Bartholome Porte-Glaive (1872).
garde artists who wish to break from classical painting yet still reach a middle-class audience. However, much like Gissing, Baudelaire remains entranced by the idea of a workless existence as the truest rejection of bourgeois society’s narrow concept of artistic labour. The more Baudelaire insists that Guys is not simply an artist, the more his essay’s populism gives way to elitism: Guys could serve the middle-classes through his art and become the seminal artist of his age, but apparently Baudelaire understands why this visionary would rather just gaze at the city. Baudelaire wishes artists could “appreciate everything that happens on the surface of our globe” without the constant pressure to produce art, but he recognizes that they must work, an acceptance exemplified by Baudelaire’s own prolific career as a writer (7).

Turning from Baudelaire to Du Maurier, Trilby becomes the unlikely heir to “The Painter of Modern Life,” celebrating a bohemian who oscillates between watching his world and sketching it. As the turn of the century approaches, Trilby’s treatment of the pleasures of foregoing labour also undermines its celebration of the sketch.

“Just the Essence”: Du Maurier’s Aesthetics and Approach to the Sketch

Despite their mutual appreciation for the bohemian, Baudelaire and Du Maurier differed on most aesthetic subjects. Explaining why Du Maurier dismissed Baudelaire and his cult of beauty, Leonee Ormond states that Du Maurier simply “dislik[ed] affectation of any kind” (248). Du Maurier satirized Baudelaire along with Walter Pater and the Pre-Raphaelites in a piece for Punch magazine entitled “A Legend of Camelot” (1866), mocking their blind faith in art’s emancipation from the bounds of nature. Further, in his series of satirical illustrations running in Punch magazine from 1873 to 1882, Du Maurier mercilessly lampooned the aesthetic movement; in Trilby itself, Du Maurier presents the novel’s villain, Svengali, as a selfish and manipulative aesthete.
Distancing his own conception of visual art from the ostentatious aesthetes, Du Maurier championed a minimalistic style of illustration throughout his career, one that involved capturing only the most vital elements of a scene: this can be seen in his drawings for Trilby, many of which are meant to represent Billee’s fictional sketches. While Baudelaire’s sketch artist imaginatively enhances his urban subjects through depictions that are “more than natural,” Du Maurier’s sketch artist reproduces only the essentials. As such, Du Maurier stresses that the sketch artist must faithfully recreate a scene rather than indulge in artistic experimentation. All the same, these authors’ shared interest in the bohemian as a creator of informal, impromptu, and spontaneous art supersedes their aesthetic differences.

Baudelaire may hope that a sketch artist will rise to fame, but Du Maurier shows him doing so in Trilby: in little time, Billee gains critical acclaim, mass popularity, and entry into any possible exhibition. All the while, Du Maurier’s narrator insists that rather than seeking awards at places like the Royal Academy, Billee participates in such bourgeois undertakings only to reach his public, middle class people in desperate need of an art that clarifies the chaos of their current age. Though Trilby depicts a fictional hero rather than a biographical subject, Billee also offers the general populace a striking view of contemporary London and Paris while challenging conventional notions of art and labour. Throughout his essays on illustration and Trilby itself, Du Maurier stresses that the sketch artist is the artist of modern times, a claim that becomes all the more ironic when his novel shows Billee, much like Guys, preferring his mind’s “virtually composed” pictures over his actual sketches.

In his aforementioned 1890 essay “The Illustrating of Books from the Serious Artist’s Point of View–I,” Du Maurier defines the qualities of his own drawings. He states that he “prefer[s] . . . scratchy pen-and-ink designs, which give just the essence of what one most wishes
to see, and leave out everything else” (353). During his second installment of this essay for the *Magazine of Art*, Du Maurier imagines an artist who will “perpetuate[] what he has seen with his bodily eyes” through “unpretending little sketches” that may “faithfully represent[] the life of his time” (374). Like Baudelaire, Du Maurier believes that the sketch artist will become a celebrated figure of bourgeois society. He optimistically adds that the works of such an artist may garner “more interest . . . in another hundred years than many an ambitious historical or classical canvas that has cost its painter infinite labour, imagination, and research, and won for him in his own time the highest rewards in money, fame, and Academical distinction” (374).

Du Maurier’s reference to a sketch that transcends works of “infinite labour” and “Academic distinction” serves as a criticism of the Royal Academy’s unwillingness to induct illustrators into its ranks. As Ormond notes, Du Maurier believed “that the gulf which divided the best illustrators from the more minor painters was an invidious and artificial one” (185).

Certainly Du Maurier wanted his sketches to gain favour among academicians, but he insisted that critical acclaim was not his chief aim. In “Social Pictorial Satire II,” he stresses the exposure that establishments like the Royal Academy create for an artist while articulating his simple desire to reach “ordinary people” through his art. As a means of connecting with such an audience, Du Maurier champions “little pictures of black and white” which are “easy[] to read and understand [by those with a] humble” artistic education and aesthetic taste (34).

Despite his apparent distaste for Baudelaire’s affectations, Du Maurier’s blueprint for the sketch artist’s rise carries on the former’s prophecy. Both writers insist that rather than committing “infinite labour” to one painting, their illustrators may work quickly on drawings that match their environment’s “rapidity of movement” (374, 9). Further, Du Maurier’s assertion that the sketch artist could “represent[] the life of his time” echoes Baudelaire’s declaration that Guys
of the present” (374, 1). Finally, while Baudelaire envisions that “amateurs [and] curious enquirers” will appreciate his artist’s drawings, Du Maurier hopes that these simple visuals will appeal to those of “humble” expertise (1, 34). In their similar visions, both writers seem to present a coherent path for the popular bohemian: they give this figure a medium and a goal. Nonetheless, Du Maurier complicates his vision of the sketch artist in much the same way that Baudelaire does. Though they champion an art form that barely involves any labour, “The Painter of Modern Life” and Trilby both prefer even freer forms of artistic satisfaction. Turning to Du Maurier’s novel, I begin with the novel’s presentation of Billee’s visions before addressing this character’s conflicted relationship to his art.

“Impromptu Sketches”: The Work of Little Billee

During the moments when he views Paris with a creative eye, Billee represents the novel’s ultimate bohemian: an artist who refutes the Victorian work ethic of the new professional by making nothing at all. Of course, Trilby acknowledges that Billee must work to survive, but the novel’s joyful presentations of Billee’s early visions echo Baudelaire’s depictions of Guys’ seeing and feeling. Typically, Billee views his work as a distraction from the next possible scene of urban life. When “shielded from sensation,” he too finds that his art pales in comparison to his creative experiences.

The novel’s opening depicts Billee at his most liberated, as he looks out at Paris long before the chaos of art exhibitions or fame. Staring from the window of his Parisian studio, Billee exemplifies his talents when he “gaz[es] at the busy place below.” Discerning “nearly all of Paris laying before him,” Billee “look[s] over the roofs and chimney-pots of Paris and all about with all his eyes.” He then picks out certain scenes like “a glimpse of the river, the ‘Cité,’ and the ominous old Morgue,” the “gray towers of Notre Dame de Paris,” the “Place St. Anatole
des Arts” as well as the “old houses opposite” their studio. Compartmentalizing “nearly all of Paris” into his mind, Billee organizes his panoramic view into a never-ending series of visual postcards. Throughout this process, he feels immensely gratified and alive, at one point bursting out, “Paris! Paris!! Paris!!!” (7-8). Describing the intensity of Billee’s experience, the narrator declares, “Billee felt he had never known happiness like this, never even dreamed its possibility” (8). Billee never gains this level of satisfaction from his later sketches.

Early in the novel, the narrator presents Billee’s “emotional, over-excitabile, over-sensitive” character as “all a part of his genius,” a genius Billee exhibits most freely and spontaneously by making pictures in his mind just as Guys imagines visual poems (225). When Billee and his companions leave London for Paris, “each frame[s] unto himself, mentally, a little picture of the Thames they had just left—and thought of Waterloo Bridge, and St. Paul’s, and London” (196). Though Du Maurier represents their respective visions through an actual illustration of the Thames in his text, his novel stresses that these artists seem to have little need for a physical copy of their mental pictures.

Billee, in particular, distinguishes himself from Laird and Taffy through the speed with which he discerns the aesthetic qualities of urban scenes, a point the narrator makes when these bohemians meet Trilby. As Billee gazes at her with his “quick, prehensile, aesthetic eye,” he finds that Trilby’s foot lends an “Olympian dignity to a figure that seemed just then rather grotesque in its mixed attire” (15). If, as Gluck argues, bohemians were “self-appointed chroniclers of modernity whose accounts lifted ordinary events beyond the fleeting moment of the present and exposed their epic possibilities,” then Billee seems to have captured the epic (or Olympian) qualities of Trilby’s persona long before he recreates this vision through art (Popular Bohemia 85).
In fact, Billee’s famous sketch of Trilby’s foot comes to him as an afterthought. After Trilby leaves their first meeting, Billee eventually draws a sketch of her foot that finds order amidst her disordered and complex identity: Billee “in five minutes or so . . . scratches in white on the dark red wall a three-quarter profile outline of Trilby’s left foot.” The narrator then declares, “this little piece of impromptu etching, in its sense of beauty, in its quick seizing of a peculiar individuality, its subtle rendering of a strongly-received impression, was already the work of a master” (20). Though the narrator praises this work for its “quick seizing of a peculiar individuality,” the speed of Billee’s sketching will never match the speed of his “quick, prehensile, aesthetic eye” (20, 15). The sketch may seem to represent an artist’s first thoughts, but the bohemian composes pictures in his mind long before he ever puts them to paper.

In this context, Billee’s passionate approach to life explains his lackadaisical approach to art: he has already made Trilby into a composition in his mind and thus remaking that vision means foregoing an opportunity for the next “bugle-blast” of life. Billee’s sketches always serve as mere minor and partial recreations of his more pure visions. Though he takes some pride in his ascent in the art world, he remains oddly aloof regarding his aesthetic creations. In perhaps the most revealing moment of the narrator’s analysis of Billee’s work, he states that Billee creates “inimitable” art through “the lightest and most careless of his pencil strokes” (55). Like the talent of Thompson, Billee’s artistic gift comes so naturally to him that he may create effortlessly. If Guys sketches cantankerously, Billee does so “carelessly” because he too prefers watch the world around him.

Also, much like Mallard, Billee has little regard for his completed works. Treating his sketches as offhandedly as he creates them, Billee often gives his illustrations away without caring where they end up: he tosses his drawing of Laird and Taffy into a letter he “sen[ds] to his
mother and sister at home” and gives a “water-color sketch” of Taffy “to Trilby, who gave it to
le père Martin, who gave it to his wife” (11, 69). Commenting on this water-color piece, the
narrator exclaims, “Heaven only knows who has got it!” (69). By giving away his sketches, and
accepting that they may travel to unknown destinations, Billee further stresses their ephemerality
and insignificance. Though he later must exhibit his works in the Royal Academy to make a
living, Billee maintains a detached relationship to his art throughout the novel.

Billee also reveals his preference for direct experience when he and his bohemian
companions visit the Louvre. While Taffy and Laird gaze in awe at the masterpieces, Billee
“didn’t seem to trouble much about Titian […] or Rembrandt, or Velasquez, Rubens, Veronese,
or Leonardo,” a line that recalls Baudelaire’s description of those who “come to a rapturous halt
in front of a Titian or a Raphael” without ever exploring other art forms (1). The narrator then
states that Billee “look[s] at the people who look[] at the pictures, instead of at the pictures
themselves . . . and he look[s] a great deal out of the Louvre windows, where there was much to
be seen: more Paris, for instance–Paris, of which he could never have enough” (9).

Afterwards, as Taffy and Laird discuss “beautiful things about the old masters” over
dinner, Billee “makes the most delightfully funny little pen-and-ink sketches of them saying all
these beautiful things (which he sent to his mother and sister at home).” Assessing the merits of
Billee’s impromptu drawings, the narrator calls the pieces “so lifelike, so real . . . so beautifully
drawn that you felt the old masters couldn’t have drawn them better themselves; and so
irresistibly droll that you felt that the old masters could not have drawn them at all” (9-11).
Billee’s sketches thus offer a counterpoint to the celebrated pieces of the Louvre that require
“infinite labour,” as his rapid illustrations symbolize an aesthetic changing of the guard.
Nonetheless, Billee’s unquenchable desire to experience the city and its inhabitants remains his
foremost focus—his material compositions never seem as important to him as his desire to look
out the window of the Louvre or the window of his studio. Thus, like Guys, Billee is more than
just a producer of art, a quality that troubles *Trilby*’s narrative of its ascendant illustrator.

Recognizing his greatness, the Royal Academy later accepts Billee’s impromptu
sketches, and he soon becomes a phenomenon among critics and amateurs alike. Whereas
Thompson and Mallard view artistic success as a threat to their integrity, Billee initially feels no
qualms about exhibiting in this public forum. Describing Billee’s impact, the narrator states, “It
was a good time in England, just then, for young artists of promise; a time of evolution,
revolution, change, and development – of the founding of new schools and the crumbling away
of old ones” (151). According to the narrator, Billee’s fame may have begun “high up . . . among
the masters of his own craft,” but it “filtered quickly down to those immediately beneath, and
through these to wider circles” (144). Comparing Billee and another great sketch artist, Du
Maurier’s real-life contemporary Frederick Walker (1840-1875), the narrator notes that “to
compare and to contrast [them] as one compares and contrasts Thackeray and Dickens [would]
be a futile though pleasant practice” (151).51 Apparently sketch artists like Billee may stand
alongside the most cherished authors of their time, as the public now esteems sketches as it does
great novels. Ultimately, Billee’s success fulfills Du Maurier’s dream of a “great [sketch] artist
on the scale of Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot or Trollope” who creates “a series of small pictures
equal in volume and in value to the whole of Thackeray’s literary work!” (35-36).

*Trilby* does not end with its simple celebration of Billee’s artistic successes, but instead
goes on to explore how little satisfaction his masterpieces bring him. When Billee loses Trilby on

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51 Frederick Walker, one of Du Maurier’s favorite contemporaries, was not a bohemian himself but often sketched
vagrants and outcasts. In “The Illustrating of Books II,” Du Maurier touts Walker’s gifts: “[he is] a rock for the
foundation of others; for he has made school, as the French say, in wood-draughtsmanship.” He then adds that just
as Billee finds “the essence,” Walker locates the “inner significance” of his subjects (351).
multiple occasions throughout the novel, he denounces the sketches that made him famous. Throughout *Trilby*, Billee’s love for her symbolizes his commitment to life over artifice.

According to Elizabeth Wilson, bohemian artists generally sought to decipher not only vast cities but also the “new figures” born of these environments (28). Thus at the Louvre, Billee not only looks out the window at Paris, but also “look[s] at the people who look[] at the pictures, instead of at the pictures themselves” (9). Witnessing the immediate emotional reactions of the viewers seems to prove more stimulating to him than the carefully composed paintings.

Trilby herself represents an allegorical character who takes on the attributes of the cities in which she resides. Just as Du Maurier evokes the vastness of Paris throughout his novel, Trilby also brings on the threat of sensory overload. When she arrives in Billee’s Parisian studio, the narrator characterizes her as a “strange medley,” describing a “very tall and fully-developed” woman in a “mixed attire of military overcoat and female petticoat” with a “mass of freckles,” a “mouth too large,” and a “chin too massive” (13). Much to Billee’s shock, Trilby also tells him that she poses in the “altogether,” clarifying “l’ensemble, you know--head, hands, and feet---everything---” (15). All of Trilby’s initial attributes connect her to Paris and French culture at its most bold. Later, when Trilby joins Billee and his bohemian brothers in London, she acts “more English.” She “los[es] her freckles,” becomes “thinner, especially in the face” and, as her “cheeks and jaws beg[in] to show themselves,” “her mouth, always too large, t[akes] on a firmer and sweeter outline” (90). Reinforcing this connection between Trilby and the modern city, Billee wishes only to gaze at both and, when he loses Trilby, he loses the passion that seems to sustain him.

When Trilby first falls under Svengali’s influence and vanishes, Billee immediately disowns his sketches as empty endeavours, telling his mother and sister, “I’ll never paint another
stroke till I’ve got her back . . . never, never, I tell you—I can’t—I won’t!” (135). Work itself may not be the cause of Billee’s frustration, but it offers no remedy, as his “beautiful specimens of unfinished work [and] endless studies” of Trilby do little to bring him closer to his beloved (153). The narrator states that Billee then grabs his sketch “The Picture Goes to the Well” and, after “look[ing] at it for a while,” he “shrug[s] his shoulders and laugh[s]—a miserable sort of laugh, painful to hear—the laugh of a cold old man” (136). Further, when Trilby later dies, Billee suffers the “paralysis of his powers” as a sketch artist and loses his faculties, waking up in the middle of the night and stuttering the following to Taffy, “g-g-gone mad,” “oh! oh! oh!” and “She d-d-died” (287). The syntax here recalls the triplet lines, “Paris! Paris!! Paris!!!” therefore connecting this loss of life to the happiness Billee once knew at the beginning of the novel (7-8). In both cases, his desire to connect directly with the world always supersedes his desire to recreate it through art.

Just as “The Painter of Modern Life” insists that Guys is more than just a producer of art, *Trilby* makes the same assertion through Billee’s suffering in these passages. Long after Trilby and Billee have died later in the novel, Taffy visits their old studio: finding it “very spick and span, and most respectable,” he interrupts two professional painters “who are coldly civil on being thus disturbed in the middle of their work” (290). Unlike such men who wish only to work, Billee wished to look outside his studio into the world and to gaze at Trilby. While Billee becomes “cold” after losing his lover, these professionals become “cold” when they must forgo their labours. Billee’s sensitivity implies that he represents more than a mere labourer, but rather a *man of the world*, one who, like Guys, cannot lose one scene of the city or its inhabitants. In a revealing assessment of Billee’s demise, the narrator states, “it is not with the art of Little Billee,

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52 These figures represent the rise of artistic professionalization in the late-nineteenth century, a subject Julie Codell discusses extensively in *The Victorian Artist* (2012).
not with his fame as a painter, that we are so chiefly concerned . . . except in so far as they have some bearing on his character and his fate” (152). *Trilby* seems to champion Billee’s art, but the novel remains focused on his character, the aspects of his artistry that precede actual creation.

While Henri Murger once declared that bohemians would inevitably arrive at “the Academy” or the “the Morgue,” Billee makes his way to both destinations by the novel’s end, dying at the peak of his fame (xxiv). Had the novel ended with Billee’s ascent then *Trilby* would suggest that the British avant-garde would rise in the modern era. However, by implying that Billee may have no place amongst the professionals of this period, the novel questions whether such an artist should participate in a contemporary art market that favours workmanlike production. Based on this anti-teleological narrative pattern, *Trilby*, much like *A Modern Lover* and *The Emancipated*, offers no happy endings. If work offers Billee no escape from the nightmare he experiences at the end of the novel, his moments viewing the city in the opening stages of *Trilby* allow him to indulge in temporary dreams. By thus implying that Billee is more than an artist, Du Maurier’s novel questions the medium it seeks to champion: the sketch represents the bohemian’s reluctant compromise rather than the art form of the future. Separated by twenty-nine years, “The Painter of Modern Life” and *Trilby* share the same concern: how does an artist approach urban environments that overwhelm the senses? While seeking a solution to this problem, Baudelaire and Du Maurier look to a figure of “multiplied sensation” (the bohemian) and an art form (the sketch) that allows for the immediate recording of these sensations (127). Taken in tandem, these texts express characteristics of the bohemian that even an aesthete and anti-aesthete may agree on. If Baudelaire invents the bohemian sketch artist, Du Maurier sets him to work within the fictionalized world of *Trilby*. Furthermore, just as Billee
feels forever torn between the city he wishes to see and the sketches he must create, *Trilby’s* narrative remains caught between hope and apprehension regarding the future of modern art.

From Moore to Gissing to Du Maurier, these texts look to the bohemian visual artist for inspiration. While advocating this figure’s inventive approach to impromptu illustration, their narratives imply that the author too must find new ways of writing for the modern age: in *Trilby* in particular, Billee’s heroic rise as the new Dickens of the public suggests that authors should look to illustrators as the forerunners of aesthetic ideas at the end of the nineteenth century. As much as *A Modern Lover, The Emancipated*, and *Trilby* seem to support the artistic pursuits of their bohemian heroes, all three texts indulge in the fantasy vision of an escapist world beyond art production, thereby casting the role of the artist in doubt.
Chapter Four

“Extravagant conversation”: Sociability and Art in Arthur Ransome’s *Bohemia in London*

Despite their differing presentations of rebels and populists, *The Emancipated* and *Trilby* explore a similar focus: the individual bohemian and his internal struggle. In contrast, Arthur Ransome’s nostalgic *Bohemia in London* (1907) returns us to the bohemian collective, closely recalling Moore’s *A Modern Lover*. If *The Emancipated* and *Trilby* suggest that creative labour damages the psyche of the bohemian artist, *Bohemia in London* and *A Modern Lover* imply that such labours may destroy the ideals of the bohemian group. The constant among all of these works, however, remains the bohemian’s tortured relationship to art-making.

Though they do so in different ways, both *A Modern Lover* and *Bohemia in London* suggest that bohemian solidarity depends on individual failure. Whereas *A Modern Lover* valorizes Thompson’s movement away from a group of waning artists, *Bohemia in London* celebrates the camaraderie among such failures, presenting men drinking and laughing together while commiserating over their artistic frustrations. Ransome typically represents artistic failure by showing the distance between an artist’s vision and his output, implying that a bohemian’s success depends on his narrow assessment of his talents. However, *Bohemia in London* also reveals men who dismiss their works (or deliberately sabotage their pieces) to avoid the anxiety, shame or pressure of participating in art exhibitions; in this context, the bohemian painter may frame his apparent disappointment in his work as a rebellion against the responsibilities of professional artists, finding solidarity among many other iconoclasts who do the same. While relishing in the often comic conversations of these “lovable losers,” *Bohemia in London* attempts to show the charms of such an existence and yet, much like the texts of Moore, Gissing, and Du
Maurier, Ransome’s work remains conflicted and paradoxical. For all its celebrations of the wild bohemian nightlife among these artists, *Bohemia in London* nonetheless reveals how their “rebellions” against the art market trap them in a life of endless poverty and empty routine.

Like Gissing, Ransome admires a strong work ethic and understands artists must produce as well as sell their paintings to sustain themselves; however, also like Gissing, Ransome sees work as a limited endeavour in the world of avant-garde art. In response, both authors explore forms of artistry beyond the confines of labour, though with vastly different foci: Gissing looks to Mallard’s solitary hallucinations, and Ransome looks to his characters’ social aspirations. For the majority of Ransome’s avant-garde painters, each brush stroke brings, not the promise of artistic fulfillment, but the anticipation of a night out.

Early in the text, Ransome insists that bohemia’s cafés and clubs allow for a freedom of exchange not available within what he calls the “regularity, the routine, [and] the exactness” of middle class society (286). For creative youths who see bourgeois life as a “mill-stone” around “[their] neck[s],” Ransome promotes the “fun . . . precarious, haphazard existence” of bohemianism, even as he warns of the dangers of poverty (285-86). Celebrating the supportive spirit of bohemian society, Ransome implies that “talking, smoking and drinking” represents its own form of creativity, a concept that owes much to Oscar Wilde’s famous desire to *live* his art (209). Nonetheless, *Bohemia in London* complicates this celebration of the avant-garde community by alluding to the creative anguish that fuels the bohemian’s social endeavours: Ransome’s bohemians can maintain a community of harmony and equality only because none of them make anything of artistic worth—whether struggling to create or foregoing work altogether, these misfits connect with each other through their hardships. In this context, the bohemian seeks companionship, not because he possesses a special gift for sociability, but because he must flee
his studio. Subsequently, the bohemian’s nightly pursuits in the city become as inevitable as his daily failures in his workspace: thus, despite Ransome’s desire to present bohemia as a “fun . . . precarious, haphazard existence,” his bohemians also seek the comforts of social “regularity [and] routine,” an irony Ransome’s rebel characters, and Ransome himself, never seem fully to acknowledge (285-86).

The predictability of the bohemian’s creative mishaps always governs his social life: just as Ransome’s typical bohemian *always* fails at his current project, he *always* leaves the studio to meet the same people, at the same spots, for the same conversations. Therefore, this social behaviour ironically begins to parallel the very “exactness” of middle class society that Ransome’s bohemians supposedly denounce (286). While frequenting social haunts, these artists actually follow rigid patterns of “wild behaviour,” taking part in a nightly script of seemingly impromptu social customs, from drinking to singing. In the same way the Moderns make works of conventional unconventionality, Ransome’s bohemians perform their spontaneity. As such, though the customs of bohemia remain different from those of bourgeois life, both lifestyles’ uniformity runs counter to Ransome’s ideals of creativity and adventure, a fact that stymies *Bohemia in London*’s supposed narrative of development.

*Bohemia in London* implies that the bohemian’s labours will always govern his lifestyle—whatever spontaneity he “acts out” in public establishments will always be a reaction to the perils of the studio. As with the Moderns in Moore’s text, Ransome’s bohemians can only carry on a *charade* of individuality from the studio to the bar. Those who have talent, Ransome insists, soon leave bohemia, recalling Moore’s concept in *Vain Fortune* that great artists are never “*dans le movement*” (89). In Ransome’s bohemia, those left behind to represent this world will always

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53 Though Ransome gives a catalog of different bohemians, he generally focuses on artists with firm countercultural stances.
toute ideals of individualism and liberty, while living lives of conformity and imprisonment. Ultimately, *Bohemia in London* continues the trends of Moore, Gissing, and Du Maurier by suggesting that the bohemian’s identity rests on his *inability* to harmonize the discordant parts of himself, such as the labourer and the dreamer, as well as the aesthetic creator and social type. In Ransome’s bohemia, the pains of artistic creation always seems to infect his social endeavours, robbing them of any vitality or imagination.

Though critics have often dismissed *Bohemia in London* as a trivial text that romanticizes its subject matter, Janet Lyon has noted the text’s in-depth treatment of bohemian social life. Both Hugh David and Judith Walkowitz see Ransome’s bohemia as a tepid facsimile of the real thing, arguing that Ransome broadly nostalgizes his boyhood days rather than examining his experiences with any detail or distinctiveness (54-55, 34). Walkowitz in particular marks the derivativeness of the narrative, asserting that Ransome simply “adopt[s] a Parisian model of bohemia, derived from Henri Murger’s *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1845-9) as it was transmitted and modified over the century by Puccini’s opera *La Boheme* (1895), and domesticated for English consumption by George du Maurier’s bestseller *Trilby* (1895)” (34). In contrast, Janet Lyon presents the social world of Ransome’s text as transcendent, original, and thoughtful, using the phrase “true sociability” to describe the connections among his bohemians. Lyon borrows this concept from social theorist Georg Simmel, who wrote that “true sociability” occurs when people connect “purely as ‘human beings’” free from “all the burdens [and] agitations [of] . . . real life” (124). According to Lyon, bohemia offers this freedom, ameliorating modern alienation by allowing for “creative practices of re-enchantment arising in transient locations and sporadic interactions” (687).
However, if bohemians’ freedom from life’s burdens depends on “creative practices of re-enchantment,” then Ransome’s social bohemia does not meet the criteria of “true sociability.” Thus, despite Du Maurier’s prophecies of a “new bohemian,” Ransome’s text presents this figure still struggling between his artistic and social aspirations in the early years of the twentieth century. Whether creating artistic failures or posing as social successes, Ransome’s bohemians remain artists of contradiction, declaring their liberty from their bohemian prison.

**Unrealized Dreams: The Hopelessness of the Studio in Ransome’s *Bohemia in London***

From the early stages of his text, Ransome contrasts the apprehensions of the studio with the joys of socializing. Walkowitz notes that *Bohemia in London* was not only well received by critics, but offered aspiring bohemians a view of what she calls “the collective life of art” (34). More accurately, however, Ransome fantasizes about a collective life free of art: tellingly, Ransome chooses to open his story not with a painter at a canvas, but with a man who chooses not to work. Ransome gleefully describes a bohemian who declares, “I am an artist . . . who does not paint, and a famous man without a name” (18). For much of his text, Ransome explores similarly charismatic types, men he describes as poor artists but gifted conversationalists.

Ransome’s text may be a non-fiction account unlike those of Moore, Gissing and Du Maurier, but his interest in men who adopt characters or personas blurs the line between fiction and reportage. By exploring these bohemian subjects, Ransome questions whether one could achieve artistic satisfaction and fame (albeit a fame limited to bohemia) through artistic experiences alone.

Ransome’s constant tales of doomed painters cursing their paintings certainly gives every reason why young men would want to explore a life beyond the canvas. In a scene that encapsulates this distinction between the studio and the social club, Ransome describes a painter
who, after enjoying “smoking, playing chess [and] singing” at a nearby watering-hole, returns to his studio to look “anxiously” at an ongoing work (84). This man eventually sleeps inside his workspace and, in a quotation that could easily describe the plight of Lewis and Mallard, Ransome’s narrator describes this man “dream[ing] of work and of the picture as he would like it to be, unaccountably more beautiful than he can make it” (84). In characteristic fashion, Ransome’s tone remains empathetic as he soberly notes how this man’s aspirations outrace his aesthetic talents. This symbolic image of an artist dreaming inside his studio seems distinctively bohemian, especially when viewed in light of the works of Moore, Gissing, and Du Maurier.

For Ransome, most artists can never achieve their artistic dreams through work, but they may do so through social bonds. When describing a desperate man who shuts himself in his studio, Ransome presents his character’s workspace as a place of disillusionment: “All round the floor, leaning up against the walls, were unfinished canvases, half realised dreams that had not the energy to get themselves expressed before they were forgotten, and other dreams, to be abandoned in their turn” (267). Never finishing any of his paintings, this anonymous painter soon sends the “least unfinished of the lot” to exhibitions before “shutting himself up in his studio, refusing to allow anyone to interrupt his self-accusation and remorse” (269). Through this description, Ransome implies that other bohemians could curb this man’s self-castigation, freeing him from the literal and psychological confinement of the studio through mutual brotherhood. Therefore, before Ransome even turns to the artistic merits of sociability, he advises failing painters to seek relief from labours that will likely end in despair.

If Ransome’s characters ever complete their works, they are excited to leave the studio rather than proud of their efforts. Even when artists in Bohemia in London find some success and sell paintings, these characters seem more concerned with their dinner plans than their artistic
progress (whether professional or aesthetic). After Ransome’s friend finishes a piece and sells it to a buyer, the work itself becomes forgotten. Instead of presenting any details of the painting in question, Ransome recalls how he and his friend spent the latter’s payment of twenty-five pounds. With irrepressible excitement, he describes them entering a café: “we sat, refreshed and smoking (new opened packets of the best tobacco) while we planned our evening.” The men soon decide “to dine better that night [in Soho] than ever in their lives before,” and Ransome vividly details the joys of their first meal: “we dined excellently . . . the light was merry through the windows [and] the evening was young” (203). After eating, these friends, “without speaking a word . . . look[] at each other” and “decide[] to have dinner over again.” In response to those who may think him gluttonous, Ransome states, “remember the week’s diet of apples and cheese before you condemn us” (204). Of course the bohemians’ relish for dinner stems from their ongoing poverty. However, this scene presents much more than two hungry men gorging themselves: Ransome’s constant use of “we,” as well as his description of the wordless look exchanged between he and his companion, stresses the strong bond between these men. As such, his friend’s sale of his painting acts only as a conduit for these men to reach their true calling as smoking, drinking, and merry bohemians.

This theme continues when Ransome ends this scene with a warm presentation of two artists connecting as intimates. He states, “my last memory of the festival is that of my friend, usually a rather melancholy man, sitting on my bed drumming with his feet upon the floor, and singing Gaelic songs at the top of his voice, to a zealous accompaniment on my penny whistle” (204). Based on Ransome’s previous references to the pained man who locks himself in his studio, Ransome’s “usually [] rather melancholy man” would presumably return to sadness if he too were making art alone. Instead, Ransome and his friend participate in a different kind of art
form entirely, one that appears to be informal, unpressured, and based on a communal bond.

Though he presents this experience as a rare one among poor bohemians, Ransome fills his text with similar adventures. He never explains just how poor painters manage to afford nightly visits to pubs, cafés and clubs, and his assumption that they may find ways to live such a life perhaps reflects his sense of middle-class entitlement, as Hugh David attests (54-55).

In stark contrast to the joyousness of Ransome’s night out following his friend’s rare success, his text presents bohemian paintings and illustrations as almost always destined to fail. Describing the best-case scenario for the majority of bohemian artists, Ransome argues that painters with regular benefactors may at least avoid becoming destitute. He muses that a painter “free[d] . . . [from] the shackles” of poverty (though still trapped in bohemia) may at least “paint as [his] caprice[s] take[] [him]” (189). Nonetheless, Ransome contends that this liberated painter would probably fail creatively, stating that an “unshackled” artist might reveal an aesthetic target “which people have not aimed at before” but this painter would likely “overshoot the mark” because true genius remains so rare (189-90).

Ransome offers his iconoclasts another form of liberty, however, one he describes using the language of emancipation. Characterizing a typical bohemian café, Ransome states that as “your words express the mood you feel, the liquor hearten[s] you, and the smoke soothe[s] you in argument,” you become one of the “free men before the universe” (210). This second path to freedom seems free of any caveats or restrictions (though painters presumably must sell their works to pay for their social dalliances), and Ransome characterizes it with something approaching religious reverence. Through Ransome’s sensual descriptions, the bohemian’s common pastimes of talking, drinking, and smoking now seem like poetic pursuits imbued with creative value. His social bohemian has become an almost god-like figure “before the universe,”
a man who explores a higher plane of existence not only through chemical intoxication but social intoxication. In sum, Ransome’s “free men” of the pub seem to find a nightly fulfillment that transcends typical forms of artistic labour. As Ransome’s text continues, however, his social bohemia becomes far less wild and free than his narrative implies.

“Picture of the Life of Today”: Routines of Spontaneity in the Bohemian Social Club

With little hope of finding satisfaction through work itself, Ransome’s bohemians redirect their creative passions from canvas to conversation, as Ransome explores clubs and cafés. In a quotation that helps explain Ransome’s aspirations, Elizabeth Wilson offers a historical assessment of café life: “participat[ing] in café life was, however, more than a matter of alleviating loneliness, for it was by participating in the social institution of café life that the lonely artist became a bohemian” (34). She adds that while “many commentators dismiss[ed] café bohemians as poseurs, […] it was rather that theirs was a different approach to life, an approach which made of performance the truth of life” (37). Throughout his text, Ransome may praise great artists such as Whistler, but he refuses to dismiss artistically inept bohemians simply as “poseurs” (42-43). Instead, he insists that these men may attain this “truth of life” through their adventures together, finding meaning and significance in their friendships.

Yet Ransome’s autobiography nonetheless depicts bohemian society following a rigid script, as even the most seemingly spontaneous acts become routine. While Ransome sometimes advises his readers that one should not stay too long in bohemia, his merry scenes of partying and drinking suggest why one might wish to remain; during these moments, Ransome’s cautious tone typically falls away, and he gives in to the apparent bliss of each night out, never addressing the irony of calling the bohemian’s repetitive (and often desperate) social behaviour spontaneous, imaginative, or creative. Though bohemia may be a destination for Ransome and
his friend following the latter’s success, *Bohemia in London* more often features men commiserating in bohemia’s social spaces, as they talk about the artists that they could have been while spending their last pounds on drinks. Thus, regardless of Ransome’s glee for “crazy nights” in bohemia, his bohemian subjects seem to desire the *order* of their nightly escapes, though this need remains implicit for much of the text. When the emotional vagaries painters experience in the studio drive them mad, these men seek a public world that stabilizes these emotions, a place of structure and ritual. Ransome often insists that artists in a bar may leave their worries behind, but his characters’ compulsive habits suggest their flawed paintings never leave their thoughts.

Early in the text, Ransome praises such artists for living in the moment, suggesting that this skill may be *the* mark of the bohemian. Like Moore, Gissing and Du Maurier, Ransome admires the bohemian’s desire to experience life’s transitory, fleeting and ephemeral nature. Describing the bohemian lifestyle, Ransome states, “it is the best life there is [and] the most joyous[]” (292). He also notes that he wishes to present “pictures of the life of today” so as to capture the spirit of bohemia, a phrase which implies that Ransome views this social world as art in and of itself (285). With these ideas in mind, Ransome turns his attention to yet another “artist who does not paint,” a striking man in a “huge felt hat” whose charisma seems to compensate for his lack of painterly ability. Ransome spots this man leading a discussion at a table of bohemians, and immediately feels drawn to his presence. Noting this character’s “magnificent manner,” Ransome explains that the man’s “air of complete abandon to the moment and the moment’s thought” impresses him “tremendously” (130-31). Ransome later finds that this man writes poor poetry and cannot paint; instead, he merely “plays the wild Bohemian every night” (131). These facts do little to lower Ransome’s esteem for this man. Rather, his “complete
abandon to the moment” represents the fulfillment of Ransome’s bohemian ideals: Ransome later differentiates bohemians who live impulsively from middle class philistines who “live out their days, harassed, nervous, never giving a moment but to the moment itself” (159).

According to Ransome’s ideology, rarefied artists may capture a moment but, those without such gifts, can at least live in the moment. Men who spend their days working on failing paintings which will be “abandoned in their turn” can presumably “abandon [themselves] to the moment” when they enter their favourite haunt (267, 130). Describing the man with the felt hat, Ransome relishes how he “plays the wild Bohemian,” but he never thinks about the tiresome nature of performing this part “every night” nor the apprehensions that cause this compulsive behaviour. From the man in the felt hat revelling in café conversations to Ransome and his friend indulging in a second dinner, Bohemia in London champions men who seem socially intuitive, yet remain caught in a never-ending cycle of hedonism.

Ransome eventually presents bohemian society as a painting in itself, further imbuing socializing with aesthetic qualities. When commenting on the scene at a café, he frames a boisterous party as a visual tableaux: “There was the beautiful head of the pianist, swaying a little with her music, and the weird group beside her—Gypsy in the orange coat leaning over her shoulder, the two small artists, on tiptoe, bending forward to remind themselves of the words.” Ransome then recalls, “the hairy picture-dealer smiling on them benignantly, the actor posing against the mantelpiece [and] the plump American,” before observing “colours, that seemed, like the discordant company, to harmonise perfectly in those magical surroundings” (62-63).

Within the seeming disorder and excitement of this crowd, Ransome finds aesthetic perfection, marking the rich colors that make up this living painting. By describing life as art, Ransome once more suggests that communal gatherings act as creative pursuits. Yet, if a
bohemian must live in the moment, then Ransome’s artistic attempt to capture this moment through conventional practices seems to distance him from the “weird group” in question: Ransome may recount the creative jubilation of this scene, but only those abandoning themselves to this communal experience may feel its significance. Ransome’s perspective recalls Elizabeth Wilson’s assertion that “it was by participating in the social institution of café life that the lonely artist became a bohemian” (34). Within *Bohemia in London*, artists will always be lonely as long as they stay in their studios or remain committed to one form of art-making.

All the same, throughout his “picture[s]” of countercultural life, Ransome struggles to define what may be creative about bohemian camaraderie. According to Ransome’s general concept of bohemia, all of its members prize progress, newness and originality as a direct rebellion against the status quo of bourgeois life. Ransome notes that the most devoted bohemians bring the promise of a “new English movement” based on the “expression of individuality,” broad assertions that could easily come from the mouths of Moore’s Moderns (81, 285). Even as *Bohemia in London* frames bohemian society as a haven for self-expression, the text never clearly explains how drinking, talking, and smoking become artistically fulfilling. Speaking in vague and uncertain terms, Ransome notes an “inexpressible something” in the bohemians who converse at a café, and mentions the “magical surroundings” at the aforementioned party (116,63). *Something* appears to be transcendent about bohemian social life beyond the basic pleasures of debauchery, but Ransome goes no further to develop this concept. As it stands, Ransome’s endless descriptions of one “impromptu” party after another make these events seem quotidian and tedious.

If avant-garde art brings, at the very least, the hope of innovation in *Bohemia in London*, socializing largely depends on long-held rituals, a distinction that becomes clear when Ransome
discusses a day in the life of painters. He states, “[they] may do a little more work . . . after [evening] tea” but “it is more likely that [they] will wash [their] brushes, and go . . . to dine” at a club where “artists meet . . . regularly” (79-81). Ransome then declares that the “dusk was meant for indolence” and follows a hypothetical painter out into the night (45). On arriving at the club, the painter, according to Ransome, “will tell [his friends], of course, that [his latest work] is going to be a failure, and they will tell him not to be a fool” (84). Not only does the archetypal bohemian follow a predictable schedule, but his conversations also follow a set script: all the parties included, from the painter seeking comfort to his friends offering support, seemingly know “their parts” and play them every night.

In this context, bohemia’s nightlife does not offer a path to artistry, but rather a respite from the need to create. Even Ransome’s second dinner with his friend no longer seems to symbolize the spontaneity of bohemian life, but the anguish of living and dying by one’s art: after spending weeks enduring the ups and downs of making paintings, both men want comfort and predictability to the point of them going back to the same restaurant twice. These men not only run from the studio, they run from the emotional chaos it represents. Ransome hints at this possibility when he once more describes his dining excursions in bohemia: “the plan was to dine at a different restaurant every night, taking street by street, [but] the scheme fell through, partly because I fell in love with one or two places” (111). Like a conventional middle class man going home to dinner each evening, Ransome, in spite of himself, also craves such orderliness. While the disappointments of the studio exhaust the painter each day because he cannot help but hope for success, the pleasures of the pub comfort him each night because he can, ideally, forego the need to succeed. Ironically, their social lives come to parallel the routine of the bourgeois life.
that they feel they have escaped, and thus the bohemian lifestyle may also be a “mill-stone”
around an artist’s neck (285-86).

Near the end of his text, Ransome tries to explain how this counterculture has persevered
and stood the test of time: “the last fifty years, that have altered almost everything else, have left
the little Bohemian family life that there is very like this, at any rate in essentials” (36). Later he
reaffirms this point when he asserts, “that for those who have grown old, may this chapter
suggest the evenings of your youth [and] bring back something of the old goodfellowship that
made those evenings so hearty a delight” (226). Though Ransome sees the unchanging nature of
bohemian society as a sign of its vitality, his bohemia presumably does not change because its
inhabitants keep doing the same things every day and night: for “fifty years” young men have
blundered through the day and drank through the night. As Ransome’s text reaches an end,
Bohemia in London also evokes the danger that bohemians seeking companionship may even
interrupt truly talented painters, the rarest of men who could potentially succeed as artists. In
typical fashion, Ransome presents these party-seekers who disturb a painter’s solitude as comic
characters, never exploring the more serious implications of their actions.

The Interrupters: Society Invades the Studio

Again, Ransome presumes most bohemians will not paint anything of aesthetic value and
that an artist’s meagre, commercial successes serve only to pay for “magical” dinners and parties
that offer a temporary refuge from the studio. However, as becomes clear later in Ransome’s
text, many bohemians do not choose a life of sociability but find rowdy friends invading their
workspace, subsuming them within the collective. Representing these intrusive groups as saving
their brothers from futile drudgery, Ransome never imagines that by anticipating failure, his
system of sociability also reinforces it, as painters find themselves perpetually talking, smoking and drinking before they even attempt to succeed as artists.

For Ransome, social gatherings held in studios represent the spirit of the bohemian community, as places of potential loneliness become sites of celebration. Returning to Patrick Brantlinger’s quotation, he states, “the bohemian tradition provides a common front for the arts,” as opposed to “the Grub Street tradition [which] views writers in isolation from other artists” (35). Ransome makes this point repeatedly, distinguishing writers who work alone into the night from painters who join their fellow artists for evening endeavours. Perhaps this is why Ransome focuses so heavily on visual artists, as they seem to represent all the joys of a never-ending sociability, pleasures men of “pen and ink” will apparently never understand (158). Praising the group mentality of painters, Ransome notes, “few of the studios are isolated,” adding that “studio life is almost like a life of a university [in] its friendliness” (81).

Along with examining merry get-togethers in the studio, Ransome also discusses the special bonds between the painter and his model, relationships that transcend art. Describing a typical exchange between the artist and his subject, Ransome states, “as [the artist] paints he tries to keep up some kind of conversation with the girl, so that her mind may be alive, and not allow her to go rigid like a lay figure” (70). This scene serves as an anomaly in Ransome’s text: the social bond between the painter and the model actually aids the artist’s work. The painters’ words keep the model alert and, in turn, she helps him capture his aesthetic vision. For this brief moment, Ransome represents the social and the artistic aspects of the bohemian’s life working in tandem, as the bohemian existence no longer seems one of polarization. However, the arrival of a figure known as “the interrupter” soon breaks this balance (74).
Describing the interrupter’s entrance, Ransome characterizes this figure as a rescuer, a man who frees painters from the studio. He praises this new guest as “genial [and] full of chatter,” remarking that “surely enough, when the picture is all juicy and pliable, when all is going as a painter loves it best, there will come a tap at the locked door” (73). Rather than seeing the interrupter as a nuisance, Ransome defends his actions: “[the] virtue of the interrupter [is that] he keeps other people from overworking themselves” (74). Thus, according to Ransome’s problematic logic, this figure presumably re-enchants tired artists by emancipating them from the studio and into the public realm of drink and conversation. Ransome sees this scene as especially amusing because the interrupter arrives just as the painter feels his painting of the model progressing. The comedy here depends on Ransome’s assumption that this painter remains destined for failure despite currently “lov[ing] [his painting] best.” Ransome rests assured that the invader only disrupts aimless labours rather than future masterpieces. Shortly after the interrupter’s arrival, “work comes to an end for the day,” and the painter leaves with him to join others for dinner. Though Ransome describes an earlier painter who will let no one “interrupt his self-accusation and remorse,” he later implies that all painters, whether they feel hopeless or hopeful, may benefit from these social calls (269).

Amidst the intrusion of society and the lure of nights out, great bohemian artists may waste their talents, joining the crowds of pretenders who cannot make art. One wonders, for instance, how future “Whistlers” and “Rossettis” could develop as artists in Ransome’s bohemia. Declaring the ideal of bohemia earlier in his text, Ransome states, “the secret of the whole is a need for the emphasis and expression of individuality” (285). With the arrival of the interrupter, the “expression of individuality” gives way to the pressure of “the whole.” Ransome states that artists who do not leave middle class life will experience “the horror of being indistinguishable
from among the rest of the human ants about him,” but his text reveals painters disappearing into a different mass, one that hypocritically preaches self-expression (286). By following the interrupter, Ransome’s painter may forego a moment of aesthetic inspiration that he may never recapture.

**Contradictory Conclusions: The Denouement of Bohemia in London**

Mid-way through *Bohemia in London*, Ransome warns artists that they must eventually leave bohemia or find themselves trapped within this world. After agreeing with a friend’s opinion that “of all the kind of bondage, vagabondage [is] the most cruel and the hardest from which to escape,” Ransome nevertheless admonishes those who stay in bohemia for their entire lives (9). On seeing an “old fellow” in bohemia, Ransome states, “it [is] pathetic to think of the old Romantic as a relic of [a] glorious time, alone in his old age, still living the life of his youth” (113). He later sadly describes this elder “going . . . to tavern[s]” and staying out “till two in the morning” as though he were still young (291). According to Richard Miller, bohemian communities in Paris and London frequently glamorized youth culture through their art, framing the bohemian as a modern version of the Romantic poet. Voicing a common view amongst bohemian artists and their admirers, Miller states, “There is nothing so romantic as a young bum and nothing so revolting as an old one, particularly when his mind has been scrambled and hardened by alcohol and other forms of hard dope” (99). Ransome ascribes to this motto, insisting that bohemians must move on before they become too old; he speculates that because few may find artistic success on their own terms, the majority will exit bohemia by reluctantly accepting bourgeois occupations. Though Ransome notes the ridiculousness of an aged man going to “tavern after tavern,” he appears unaware that his bohemian society seems designed to produce such “old relics.”
Ransome’s insistence that bohemians must grow up seems particularly problematic considering much of *Bohemia in London* reads like an open invitation to eternal youth. Even artists who attempt to forego bohemia’s social charms find that bohemia comes for them, as overzealous drunkards constantly take painters to pubs. Ironically, the health of Ransome’s social bohemia actually depends on its members remaining distracted and creatively stagnant. Presumably, if more of Ransome’s artists found success, hierarchies would form and social interactions would become more guarded and competitive. George Moore’s *A Modern Lover* presents this process in action, as the Moderns form a “chain of influence” based on the varying skills of its affiliates despite promoting individual freedom for each of its members. In contrast, *Bohemia in London* quells any threat to equality by condemning almost all bohemians to creative frustration. Ransome romanticizes the relationships between these failing painters, only to later criticize the inevitable casualties of a lifestyle built on “all play and no work.” Ultimately, such paradoxes come to reflect Ransome’s divided bohemian: an artist who foregoes creativity and a party-goer who foregoes spontaneity.

Whereas Moore, Gissing, and Du Maurier present bohemians thoughtfully ruminating on the tension between life and art, Ransome depicts the social bohemian simply overwhelming the bohemian artist, negating the latter’s identity on a nightly basis. In her exploration of historical bohemia, Janet Lyon states that bohemian social spaces offered a “sociability . . . devoid of the logic of ulterior motives or instrumental ends,” free from the alienating and isolating effects of modern life. She concludes that the bohemian social space (from loud cafés to crowded salons) represents “the most important cultural formation[] of modernism” (687). Based on Ransome’s presentation, however, bohemia may simply represent the anxieties, contradictions, and
ambiguities of modern life rather than acting as a cure. Ransome’s vision actually alienates the bohemian from a part of himself, forcing him to sacrifice his labours for his leisure.

By the end of Bohemia in London, there seems no hope of reconciliation between the bohemian as social type and the bohemian as artistic creator: to enter Ransome’s ritualistic social world, his bohemian must give up the imaginative space of the studio. However indirectly, Bohemia in London thus reveals a bohemian as ideologically torn as those found in A Modern Lover, The Emancipated, and Trilby. Just as Ransome anticipates the failures of his painters, he also assumes his text itself will be a disappointment; in a fitting encapsulation of his tales, Ransome states, “When authors are honest to themselves, they admit that their books are failures, in that they are never quite what they wished to make them” (3). For all Ransome’s optimism throughout his text, this statement perfectly epitomizes these late nineteenth-century künstlerroman of “frozen youth” in which doom seems inevitable. Ransome’s assertion that his work will come to nothing recalls his reference to the hypothetical painter who “will tell [his friends], of course, that [his latest work] is going to be a failure” (84). Thus Ransome follows the same social script as his characters; even as he tries to romanticize himself as a struggling rebel enjoying the wild life, he too falls into the crystallized rituals of his own bohemia.

Through its depiction of bohemians stuck between working and living, Ransome’s text resists a teleological narrative of development, thereby evoking the finales of the previous three works: though they feature painters of varying degrees of skill who achieve varying degrees of success, Moore, Gissing, and Du Maurier also end their novels with a sense of loss and uncertainty. Moving from Thompson’s self-regret to Mallard’s self-denial to Billee’s self-destruction, Ransome’s depiction of men who either “shut[] [themselves] up in [their] studio” or
in their favourite pub represents the natural conclusion to the bohemian’s inconclusive story (269).

*Bohemia in London* cannot convincingly depict the bohemian social life as an alternative artform, but the text’s attempt to do so reflects the changing role of the historical bohemian at the turn of the century. Discussing the concept of a modern artist who does not create art, Wilson asserts that the artist became “a representative figure of a society unable to set clear limits for the identities and activities of its members,” a rebel who explored “marginal states of being and consciousness” and challenged the “limits of individual and social existence” (25). She adds that despite bohemians’ lofty aims, such men could come to represent nothing at all, mere “mountebank[s]” who acted as young Romantics (25). With its endless depictions of social performances, Ransome’s text would hardly alleviate such suspicions. *A Modern Lover, The Emancipated,* and *Trilby* may also feature bohemians struggling between social and aesthetic aims, but this tension sparks their innovative art. In Ransome’s bohemia, painters who look for new art forms at the café find nothing beyond the pleasures of pints and conversation. If, as Ransome states, “books are failures, in that they are never quite what [authors’] wished to make them,” then *Bohemia in London* serves as just such a failure (3). For all his hopes to inspire young bohemians, Ransome actually leaves them with few options: whether he labours in the studio or converses at the club, Ransome’s quintessential bohemian seems forever doomed.
Coda

“Work without Drudgery”: The Bohemian in Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier and Ransome

By establishing parallels between my four authors’ representations of bohemians, my dissertation brings us closer to understanding this avant-garde figure of fin-de-siècle England, as well as how and why Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome employ the archetype of the bohemian. Though Mary Gluck calls on scholars to find a “cultural middle-ground” to “connect[] the social and aesthetic dimensions of the bohemian,” my thesis finds the truest expression of English bohemian identity in the discordance between social and aesthetic dimensions (“Theorizing the Cultural Roots of the Bohemian Artist” 352). More specifically, these four texts suggest that what bohemians want to be seems in tension perpetually with what they make. Through their response to this conflict, bohemian characters challenge normative models of Victorian work in narratives that break from the conventions of the mid-nineteenth-century künstlerroman.

First, my examination of late-Victorian bohemianism offers a new perspective on conceptions of nineteenth-century labour. As mentioned in my introduction, critics James Eli Adams, Herbert Sussman, Tim Barringer, and Andrew Dowling analyze how predominantly middle-class, male artists negotiate a Victorian concept of masculinity based on self-discipline and hard work. Foregoing the well-researched topic of gender in my study of Victorian creativity, I instead focus on how the ideologies of the English counterculture shape its artists, articulating the ways that the bohemian problematizes critical consensus regarding the character of creative production in this era. Thus, while Adams examines how authors resisted the “feminized” domestic sphere in which they wrote by aligning with the masculine labour of the
outside world, my dissertation features male artists rebelling against such conventional concepts of work, refusing to see their art as mere craftsmanship. Further, the characters in these four texts do not view their unfinished or informal compositions as marks against their artistry; rather, their aesthetic approach reflects their anxious resistance to social expectations, namely the expectation that they must become hard-working, bourgeois professionals. Taken together, these four bohemian texts challenge accepted understandings of Victorian labour, while suggesting the need for further analysis of the English counterculture of this era.

By championing rebel artists who exist in a perpetual state of creative strife, the bohemian text itself also defies conventional expectations, breaking from the linear narratives of mid-century künstlerromane, like Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* (1849). In Dickens’s novel, David endures numerous struggles, but eventually becomes a professional writer of renown and nestles into a married life of bourgeois normalcy. According to the novel’s idealistic subtext, in order for the hero David to make a name for himself, the Victorian people and artistic community must support and respect “good art.” Whereas Dickens’s novel presents David’s life of professional conventionality as a victory, the bohemian novel represents such success as a defeat—the rebel who sells himself to the masses destroys his cherished individuality. In turn, the artist who spends his life in bohemia may die in obscurity. Based on such limited options, the young men in these texts either perish as tragic figures or surrender as bourgeois squares.

Stressing these finite choices, the narratives of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome end in dissatisfaction, as characters’ creative breakthroughs never lead to any lasting contentment. Thompson gains notoriety but fears for his integrity, Mallard finds love but relinquishes his vision, and Billee achieves fame, but promptly dies. Even Ransome’s autobiographical *Bohemia in London* becomes darker by its finale, moving from tales of
possibility to tales of tragedy. In each text, the oppressive forces that give rise to the bohemian’s aesthetic rebellion end up destroying him: bourgeois culture may provide the bohemian with something to rebel against, but he inevitably falls prey to this culture in one way or another. None of these rebel characters ever enjoys the relatively straightforward path to success that David Copperfield follows in Dickens’s novel.

The “doomed youth” storyline was always a convention of bohemian literature (even Murger’s early tales of rollicking bohemia end wistfully), but the late nineteenth-century texts studied here use this narrative to reflect timely concerns. The characters’ self-conscious approach to art, their distrust of the public, and their hatred for commercialism anticipate the struggles of modernist artists in the early twentieth century. This is not to imply that the four works are entirely without optimism—by showing artists creating original and important works, they suggest that the British avant-garde could continue to rise. However, in turning its characters into martyrs (whether real or symbolic), the texts ultimately cast the future of the counterculture in doubt. Discussing the transitional character of the fin-de-siècle novel, Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst echo Jed Esty’s treatment of the bildungsroman, arguing that these works evoke the “ambivalence of modernity” while providing “enduring cultural icons of ambivalence” (xiii). By featuring the quintessential artist of modern ambivalence, the bohemian novel offers a fitting allegory for a nation in the midst of artistic growing pains.

Along with reworking the conventions of the künstlerroman, these texts also challenge the genre of the novel itself: each text blends art appreciation with storytelling, looking to visual

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54 Many seminal Modernist thinkers, from Ezra Pound to Virginia Woolf, would closely echo the artistic ideals found in these earlier novels. Thompson urging his fellow Moderns to practice “individuality of feeling” by avoiding convention closely echoes Virginia Woolf’s famous assertion in 1921’s “Modern Fiction” that “any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express” (162). Further, just as Ezra Pound railed against the dangers of commercial art and the crudity of a philistine public in his 1920 poem, “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley,” Mallard spouts a similar manifesto throughout The Emancipated. Finally, by exploring the conundrum of the individualistic collective, these texts also anticipate tensions within future gangs of loosely organized iconoclasts, from the Bloomsbury group to the Hippie generation.
mediums to reinvigorate the novel as a literary form. Beyond simply offering illustrations to accompany their works, these writers often break from narrative structure altogether to indulge in textual descriptions of visual stimuli. In doing so, they create narratives that challenge simple categorization, much like their bohemian characters’ paintings. Commenting on the relationship between literature and art in this period, Shearer West states that “the visual artists of the fin-de-siècle shared with literature an engagement with prevalent ideas” such as Darwinism, Marxism, and Freudian theory (131). Based on the texts of Moore, Gissing, Du Maurier, and Ransome, literary and visual artists also shared another prevalent idea: the desire for aesthetic rebirth.

In this context, the bohemian painter becomes a lightning rod for literary experimentation, a muse across mediums. Like its effect on the art industry, the growth of England’s mass consumer culture led to the emergence of what Ledger and Luckhurst call “generic forms,” pulpy literary works made for the masses. They state that “detective fiction, the spy novel, science fiction – [all] take on the shapes that remain recognizable today” (xiv). Of course, the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries would also bring the rise of more innovative genres, such as the New Woman novel, as well as experiments in French realism among English authors.55 Nonetheless, the popularity of genre fiction posed a threat to more “serious” writers: Gissing’s New Grub Street (1891) in particular articulates these concerns by satirizing untalented authors who write in a popular style to make money. Based on the ideological cynicism of Gissing’s novel, one could easily denounce Du Maurier’s Trilby as a standard sensation novel, a work simply meant to excite its readers’ emotions. Yet, to define Trilby as generic would be to overlook its underlying polemic on visual art. Like the bohemian art it features, Trilby becomes something indefinable: the text masquerades as a silly tale of adventure but contains lessons on illustration and its place in the Victorian art world. Along with

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55 George Moore’s Esther Waters (1894) serves as a distillation of both movements.
Trilby’s blend of narrative and art commentary, A Modern Lover’s discussions of proper painting techniques interrupt Moore’s naturalistic narrative to repeat maxims from his own articles on aesthetics. Gissing’s realist novel, in turn, periodically drifts into the dreams of the painter, Mallard: when following the twists and turns of this character’s visions, The Emancipated hardly resembles a novel at all, especially one from Gissing’s oeuvre. Finally, Ransome’s Bohemia in London avoids categorization by seeming at once a tall-tale of bohemia, an autobiography, and a treatise on artistic originality. For all of my authors, interest in visual mediums leads them away from the “generic forms” of literature sweeping through Britain during the fin-de-siècle.

In the aforementioned 1890 letter to his brother, Gissing perhaps best sums up these writers’ approach to visual art when he declares Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s paintings as a “dawn of beautiful imaginings” (The Collected Letters of George Gissing, vol. 4 181). Even as they seem equally drawn to the raucous nightlives of painters, the texts of Gissing, Du Maurier, Moore, and Ransome look to paintings as a new “dawn,” a conduit for literary innovation at the approach of the twentieth century. None of these texts can be considered artistic breakthroughs by any means, but their strange blend of textual and visual art points anticipate more developed experiments by modernist authors such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Though critics like Rachel Teukolsky, Kate Flint, and John Plunkett have studied how writers of the late-Victorian period experimented with visual art like never before, the odd make-up of these bohemian texts represents a new discovery, one that adds another dimension to our understanding of these four authors.

In Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman, Gregory Castle argues, “the artist, who by the late nineteenth-century had become the most potent symbol of nonconformity and rebellion, became the normative Bildungsheld of the modernist Bildungsroman” (23). Throughout my dissertation, I have attempted to trace the path of the iconoclastic artist in late-nineteenth-century
fiction and explain how he came to embody this spirit of resistance in literature of the modern period. While scholars, such as Ruth Livesey and Nicholas Daly, as well as Seigel and Wilson, have brilliantly explored aesthetic movements from the fin-de-siècle to the modernist era, my examination of the oft-overlooked bohemian of English literature helps to explain how this countercultural archetype evolved into a modern rebel.

A Modern Lover, The Emancipated, Trilby, and Bohemia in London’s tales of iconoclastic artists at work, at play, and in crisis provide what Thompson would call the “individuality of feeling” so lacking in broad historical accounts of bohemian locales like Soho or haunts like the Café Royal. Imagining the everyday plight of inhabitants of this world, these texts humanize these tortured figures: to borrow the words of Edmond and Jules Goncourt from Manette Salomon (1867), my authors show young rebels looking to “those Bohemian horizons to which distance lends enchantment: romantic poverty, freedom from rule and restraint, liberty, absence of discipline, lack of responsibility, risk, adventure, [and] daily encounters with the unexpected” (18). While gazing at this “horizon,” the bohemian artist of fin-de-siècle English literature aestheticizes the unexpected moments of daily life and thus, in a larger sense, captures English society at a time of uncertainty. Forever on the cusp of destruction and creation, self-sabotage and self-fulfillment, the bohemian expresses the disharmony of his identity and his apprehensions toward his age through art as fraught as himself.
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