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Commodifying Creativity: Class, Labor, and Authorship in Isabella Whitney's "A Sweet Nosgay"

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COMMODIFYING CREATIVITY:
CLASS, LABOR, AND AUTHORSHIP IN
ISABELLA WHITNEY'S
A SWEET NOSGAY

A Thesis

by

JANETTE CAVAZOS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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August 2010

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CLASS, LABOR, AND AUTHOSHIP IN
ISABELLA WHITNEY'S
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August 2010

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ABSTRACT

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Isabella Whitney, the first woman to publish secular verse under her own name, is generally considered by scholars in terms of gender. My thesis argues she should be seen, instead, through her identity as a working-class writer. Her book of poetry, *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573), is shaped by her efforts to make her way in the world of print publication by commodifying creativity into a product. My thesis assesses the content of her poetry on the basis of class, which was the impetus for this commodification. My focus gives full authority to her as a Renaissance writer, one who resists many social and cultural constraints, and who used a variety of literary strategies to engage the working class.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about an underclass servant named Isabella Whitney writing centuries ago, an author who worked for a reorganization of society in her publication *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573). *A Sweet Nosgay* consists of versification of Hugh Plat's aphorisms, dedicatory letters and poems addressed to close family and friends, and a mock will. Whitney is most fascinating because she is among the first Englishwomen to print her poetry during a period when women, especially those in underclasses, were barred from a variety of social privileges. For instance, "The Manor of her Wyll," which concludes *A Sweet Nosgay*, offers a tour of England's capital city as seen by an unemployed maidservant who writes for better conditions as she negotiates a position, albeit tentatively, for the working class, while the lyric poetry in this book reasserts a connection with the working and delves into relevant issues such as labor, service, and patronage. *A Sweet Nosgay* shows readers how an underclass subject engaged the social and economic forces that prevented her class from gaining social equality. Therefore, Virginia Woolf was mistaken when she said, "That one would find any woman in [an] incandescent, unimpeded . . . state of mind in the sixteenth century was obviously impossible," (57, 58) for Whitney clearly saw—and was part of—the suffering of the working class and offered a possibility for an alternate future for the underclasses.

Debates about the work of Isabella Whitney tend to be feminist in orientation, focusing on her "female position of powerlessness," and arguing that she predominantly "[upholds]

gender ideologies” (Clarke xiv, xvi). Other critical perspectives address issues concerning the nature and the function of her work, and her position as a “single woman” (Ellinghausen “Literary Property” 1). Because feminist voices have been strong in cultural studies, scholars of the Renaissance have analyzed early modern women’s writing as defying the well-known English ideal of being “silent, chaste, and obedient” (Ferguson 145). Laurie Ellinghausen, for example, has focused on viewing Whitney’s self-representation as a woman without “a Husband, or a house” and the longing for companionship as the direct reasons for work (“Literary Property” 2). Likewise, Paul Marquis reads *A Sweet Nosgay* as “testimon[y] to the struggle she endured to make her voice heard in the male domain of published verse in the mid-Tudor period” (314). He argues her epistles “contain a profound cultural critique of gender inequality” (324). In contrast, I want to take the ‘woman’ out of ‘woman writer,’ when I discuss Whitney in this thesis. Feminist assumptions of women skew interpretation in a single direction, and it is for this reason I shift the focus on *A Sweet Nosgay* from gender to class. Whitney transforms her menial status into a powerful authorial voice. Analysis of how she combats her low social and economic status, her desire for her text to generate revenue, the process of labor Whitney uses to transform her writing into textual property, and the alliances Whitney creates among close kin is missing from typical Whitney scholarship with a few exceptions: Patricia Brace, Jill P. Ingram, and Wendy Wall have all commented on this. Brace explains the “economic motivation for [Whitney] producing her texts shows her actions to be transformative, as attempts either to call attention to or rectify her financially catastrophic situation (107, 108). Ingram situates Whitney in a context in which economic issues are central to her argument. She argues that Whitney’s writing “rehearses and advertises economic and social loss” (“A Case for Credit” 29). Wall views the *Nosgay* in “the print commodity with the reciprocity of social exchange” as she

“bewails her exclusion from prestigious circles in London” (47). My argument, however, tries to take account of the real force behind this work as I introduce socio-economic class status, kin, and culture to construct an alternative reading, complicating the category of Whitney simply as a ‘woman writer’ by designating her as a ‘Renaissance author’ instead.

Whitney questions social subordination throughout her work. She treats the existential conditions of a life in service as a challenge. Her treatment of service inscribes the concerns and experiences of underclass maidservants, and she draws upon her experiences within the culture of service to bring to light these actual experiences. I argue Whitney’s greatest virtue is that she establishes the unrecognized as equal in terms of dignity with the highest of rank. Whitney had a particular purpose to write, differing from that of an aristocrat. Through *A Sweet Nosgay*, Whitney steps beyond the confines of the household, seeking revenue through patronage in her lyric verses and familiar epistles, while simultaneously using her status as a maidservant to aid the working class. Her unusual autonomy is rooted in the firsthand knowledge of the vicissitudes of the working class experience, as a maidservant who moves beyond the expected protection of the household to produce book advocating social change. Her direct involvement in the workforce marks her as authoritative, and conveys an authentic, subjective account of working-class life, making her book a form of textual labor: “Whitney uses her pen to narrate a life imagined in terms of the peculiar rigors and freedoms available to an impecunious, but talented, woman of the metropolis,” as Bedford, Davis, and Kelly properly note (11). Rather than succumb to economic vulnerability, Whitney transforms her dismissal from service to show creativity still existed where exclusion on the basis of class was largely taken for granted.

Whitney sets out to explore the cultural and economic realities that characterize London. As a laborer, Whitney depicts “exile from domesticity as both a lapse and a liberty. . . simultaneously vocation and prodigality” (Phillippy 450). Whitney writes, “I know you huswifery intend, / though I to writing fall,” (“To Her Sister Misteris A.B.” line 22).¹ The activity of writing is simultaneously a “lapse” and “liberty” because she is able to engage in writing, something other than typical household chores, though she must “fall” to it since she needs an income (Phillippy 450). The poems she chooses to write, however, generally adopt the voice of a social critic. Whitney subverts dominant patterns and intervenes in a much larger regimen through the peculiar rigor and freedom the pen provides. When Whitney invokes the metaphor of her pen as a weapon, she suggests that her writing equivalent to the “male’s biological power of ‘dissemination’ or ‘penetration’” (Ferguson 153). As a laborer, an economic and social critic, and a beneficiary of patronage, Whitney tackles positions usually deemed as the province of male authority. Whitney “illustrates how a talented and determined woman unencumbered with a husband or father” could make her way into print as a writer (Ferguson 163).

A Sweet Nosgay consists of poems, letters, and epistles, and forms a single, coherent, unified whole, rather than a jumble of one hundred and ten stanzas, letters, and poems. *Nosgay* is a typical print miscellany in imitation of manuscript miscellanies, which were the accepted form of personal and social literary exchange for aristocratic authors. Whitney attracts readers with the imitation of manuscript, since it served as a working-class appropriation of elite forms of literary exchange. However, Whitney builds a tight-knit coterie of literary exchange to promote the

¹ All quotes of Whitney’s work are taken from Danielle Clarke’s edition, *Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemilia Lanyer: Renaissance Women Poets* (London: Penguin, 2000), unless otherwise noted.

interests, needs, and objectives of the working class. At times, Whitney stimulates class consciousness (particularly in the lyric poems) and challenges aristocratic literary culture, while in the “Wyll” Whitney provokes a class struggle that in the end looks forward to social harmony. She questions the hierarchical social structure by questioning why only the aristocracy is worthy of a more socially privileged activity and uses this practice as an example; the lower-class is able to participate in aristocratic practices, thereby constructing a position for themselves in which they can write for money. Bronwen Price claims that by “mixing genres and locating established ones in new poetic frameworks, Whitney’s verse shows how innovative a [working class member’s] poetry could be in spite of the restrictions which governed their literary production” (289). Whitney uses these arrangements to accomplish a sense of equality as far as abilities are concerned. Whitney is suggesting that the working class can be seen as potential source of literary exchange, and Whitney uses this to gain literary authority. Proving her class equality, in some sense, to aristocratic literary practices, Whitney is able to reach out to a broader audience by surrounding herself with a “network of family, friends and ultimately readers who are effectively her equals rather than her superiors or inferiors” (Walker 153). Because Whitney considers the working class honorable, serving both classes advances her ambition to build an “imaginary community” despite rigid social and hierarchical structures. The “illusion of closeness to a social context which is clearly absent” builds a unity with her kind and advances Whitney’s many ideas pertaining to the concept of the working class while reaching a wider audience (Clarke xvi). Whitney distinguishes between two types of readers: those equal to her and those above her. She wants those equal to her to ascribe worth to their service and those above her to recognize the value of the working class. Whitney structures an organization, a network of fellow “laborers” to reshape, reframe, and revalue their services as a worthy

enterprise. She wants laborers to reposition the role of a servant in contrast to the status quo values. Whitney advocates social value for the masses of the working class in a hierarchical society through literary exchange and cultural authority to improve the working class status.

Indeed, Whitney complains against injustice in *A Sweet Nosgay* and establishes a resolution by transforming her class's deficiencies into literary and cultural authority. Whitney is suggesting that the aristocracy is responsible for the disparity of wealth and the misery for laborers, and for this reason she targets them in her poetry. I argue that Whitney is also extending the idea to the working class that they must become aware of their own faculties and self-worth to transform themselves with the goal of bringing forth change. As an instrument of change, Whitney defends her class needs by targeting both lower and upper classes alike, and she explicitly uses personal relations as a tool in order to directly push her class forward. Meanwhile, she targets the upper classes to possibly regain employment once again, showing how the ruling class is entirely dependent on servants. The value in reaching out to both audiences is to exploit a novel form of labor, her writing, to the broad, upper classes *and* provide a connection within lower/working classes, enabling them to see injustices being perpetrated against themselves. As a buffer to soften the position of those in the upper class, *A Sweet Nosgay* is Whitney's attempt to deliver herself from the financial hardship she is in, at the same time as it repositions her class by reshaping their experiences "of social impotence into literary authority" (Brace 108).

Prior scholarship has set the foundation for my work. Wendy Wall regards "The Manor of Her Wyll" as privileging the generic effects of irony and sarcasm since Whitney "playfully transforms the legal form into an ironic meditation on property, power, and desire" ("Female

Legacy” 49), while others such as Betty Travitsky regard the will within the genre of the mother's legacy, even though the most defining characteristics of the female legacy -- its address to intimate family members, its advice to children, private farewell scenes – are not the foremost characteristics in “Wyll” (noted in Ingram, “A Case for Credit” 14). Whitney clearly is not solely concerned with the younger generation, for her chief concern is the betterment of the working class. Lorna Hutson explicitly places Whitney’s “Wyll” in the mock-testament tradition “in which unreliable travellers or dying festival fools expose the madness and hypocrisy of ‘things as they are’ in the real world” (quoted in Ingram, “A Case for Credit” 16). Danielle Clarke does not see a strong connection and says Whitney’s listing of several different categories reinforces a sense of chaos and disorder as she swings from areas to trades without any sense of connection, save the exclusion from abundance (xv). Ann Rosalind Jones intermeshes the “Wyll” with traditional textual genres and utopian fantasies and stresses Whitney’s poetry as having a private rather than a public significance (“Apostrophes to Cities” 156). The employment of the centuries-old mock-testament tradition is a robust strategy Whitney uses in engaging the attention of readers to expose economic inequality. I believe, in contrast to the dominant critical consensus, that Whitney’s will is an encoded political statement and form of social engagement. Through the objects she bequeaths, Whitney creates a kind of city of class equality. Whitney’s job is to fulfill deficient areas by inserting herself into the city’s generic responsibilities, obligations, and privileges. By doing so, Whitney formulates a specific future, one where the working class is not exploited. This imaginative, utopian, ideal city allows an otherwise powerless servant to exercise some control in the sixteenth century. Her authorial and charitable role allows her to escape her marginalized stance, accommodating the utopian city she has specifically created. The embodiment of this will is particularly important because it measures

participation of the working class and how they effectively fit into the wide social and economic frame, rather than stand out of it.

Undoubtedly, the underclasses were seen as though they were an undifferentiated mass. The point of Whitney's argument is that members of the working class should be treated as independent beings. Employers adopt a selfish outlook, "to become indifferent or even antagonistic towards everyone else in the work world" (Bender 21). Whitney implicitly criticizes those who are looking only to maximize gain at the expense of the servants. In the *Manifesto*, Marx finds that workers compete with one another for relatively scarce jobs; laborers "live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market" (Bender 61). Whitney's work fits into this scheme insofar as Whitney undertook writing for what Bender calls "social utility" (22) not for ravenous profit. Through her lyric poems and the adoption of aristocratic literary exchange, Whitney appropriates contemporary practices to demonstrate the utility writing has in transforming class.

In essence, Whitney, through the lyric poems, is building a bridge for the working class; however, she cannot cross the bridge for them. She recognizes the value of her class and uses her writing as a means of literary and cultural authority. Whitney concentrates on regulating social behavior of both classes by adjusting power accordingly. Though she is clearly not in position to adjust economic and social rules, Whitney speaks to all classes to invoke the need for change. She paints with a larger brush through "The Manor of Her Wyll." Her personal experiences are embedded in this poem, strengthening her overall argument. She wants readers to visualize a

society she has created and implement it accordingly. The relevance of such a mock-will is the projection of a brighter future; her text speaks personally and specifically. Whitney is a participant in social, economic, literary, and cultural exchange, while defending her class's abilities. Through *A Sweet Nostray*, a member of the working class constructs an authorial voice, and a laborer negotiates a difficult world beyond the protection and confines of the home (Phillippy 462). Whitney believes there is a seed of enlightenment in each person's mind, both high and low, that can be nurtured by inscribing her experiences, her contentions, and her philosophy.

CHAPTER II

A SWEET NOSGAY: THE LYRIC POETRY

Isabella Whitney was born to a family of lesser gentry that was not wealthy (Travitsky 341). She did not have access to elite coteries that circulated poetry in manuscripts. After serving others, the unemployed Whitney secured a publisher, Richard Jones, through whom she published *A Sweet Nosgay*. This publication, which consists of a dedicatory letter, one hundred and ten versified adages, a poetic epistolary exchange of lyric poems (where Whitney laments her loss of position to family and friends), and a concluding mock-will, shows Whitney's primary strategy was to promote her class interests in the social milieu and generate response. As a maidservant, Isabella Whitney steps beyond her social and political limitations, through publishing a book challenging social and political hegemony.

In this chapter, I argue that the dialectical position of *A Sweet Nosgay* is shaped by a servant's social and political position. The lyric poems, in particular, reinforce Whitney's central point: authority, capability, and self-worth exist among those in service. The lyric poems in *A Sweet Nosgay* are intended to link the working class together through labor, shared experiences, and kinship alliances by generating response and proposing cooperation. They present themselves as "intimate and private correspondence, offering the illusion of access to private thoughts" (Walker 153). My aim is to connect patronage, service culture, economic need, and poetry exchange through the common denominator of class in order to show how Whitney instigates class consciousness, and at times even a sort of social harmony in these poems. Appeal

for economic favors and the justification of literary endeavors are the purposes of her lyric poems, with laborer affiliation, kinship alliance, and social action as her goals. On the surface is the theme of generosity that will project throughout her lyric poems: a process of labor in return for exchange or expectation of compensation. Gathering her friends and supporters through print will enable Whitney—and her class—to advance through the very publication of her book, the processes of reciprocity, solidarity, and unity.

Though many writers from the gentry shunned print publication as conferring a “mechanic, stipendiary status,” for Whitney print was beneficial (Love & Marotti 56). The printer, publisher, and bookseller had the greatest financial stake in the sale of books (Voss 735). The author could expect nothing more than a negligible one-time fee; however, rewards from a patron could be substantial. Whitney utilizes lyric verse to transform her powerless state into a position of power both by dedicating the work to a patron and to family and to friends who could aid her. She uses print to anticipate what—Whitney hopes—is yet to come: general social advancement for the underclass. In short, Whitney exploits the aura of manuscript transmission in her print miscellany to promote to a wider audience her social and cultural goals. She actively questions notions of social privilege by promoting labor, merit, respect, communal relations, quality of life, and well-being of her recipients—acts of charity. Unlike impersonal market exchanges, the value of compassion and personal concern is promoted when Whitney asks her readers to see her “goodwill” (line 31). If George Mainwaring, her principal dedicatee, accepts her philosophical bundle of flowers, he will have peace, prosperity, and live a long happy life, with the blessings of wealth, good health, and respect—common themes she amplifies throughout her poems.

Patronage

Patronage figures significantly in the first part of *A Sweet Nosgay*. Tina Krontiris notes that unlike male contemporaries of her time, Whitney could not use the system of literary patronage, especially as secular writer, but, she nonetheless “attempts to solicit patronage” (32). I, however, will argue that Whitney uses patronage in complex ways. The theme of generosity will also project to the last poem of *A Sweet Nosgay*, “The Manor of Her Wyll,” where Whitney gives her readers a gift –a vision of a different kind of life. Patronage was used specifically to gain some sort of monetary gift or other reward from George Mainwaring and his family. Practically speaking, print texts needed “the name of a patron affixed in order to signal that a powerful figure stood behind the exposed and vulnerable author” (Parry 117). Marotti suggests that members of royalty or aristocracy, willingly or not, found themselves portrayed in print as protectors, even though their connection to the writer was trivial or even nonexistent (“Patronage, Poetry, and Print” 2). So, the named patron had not necessarily contributed financially to the author or project. A requisite for upward social mobility and economic relief was patronage; it was an attempt to gain some sort of reward, whether social, psychological, or financial. Little is known of addressee Mainwaring other than the Whitney siblings’ dedication to him. We do, however, know that Mainwaring’s name provides economic and social leverage, while simultaneously serving as a guarantee of *A Sweet Nosgay*’s worth. Mainwaring did in fact support Whitney from time to time. This is indicated in the dedicatory letter when Whitney speaks of the gifts “which I have from time to time even from our Childhood hetherto received of you” (line 9-10). Rather than dedicate to a prestigious member of the gentry, Whitney dedicates to Mainwaring instead because she is limited to do so within her restricted social status, whereas her brother Geoffrey Whitney is able to dedicate to a more prestigious patron, the

Earl of Leicester. In the dedicatory letter to patron Mainwaring, Whitney offers “to bestow some Present on you” (lines 21-22). This way her book acts as a kind of requital for an “unpaid debt” and also looks forward to something more from Mainwaring (Clarke 287). Work dedicated to a patron “also creates a store of personal credit to offset future insecurity” (Clarke xvi). The patronage process works in context of Whitney’s larger goal to build a tight-knit coterie of literary exchange to promote her class interests because Whitney prompts her patron (as well as her readers) to become part of a social circuit of exchange expanded to incorporate the book commodity, since the text serves as recompense for a previous act of generosity (Wall, “Circulating Texts” 42). Whitney looked to Mainwaring as assurance that her poems had merit and as a provider for monetary assistance for her labor. The patronage process works in the context of the laboring class’s needs because Whitney, constrained by norms of propriety, must respect sanctioned cultural boundaries and reassert connection in a socioeconomic arrangement conducive to attaining rewards. She dedicates to a patron because she must. On one hand, she must abide by patronage to fit within the social expectations of her time, while on the other, she is deploying patronage in a unique way to counter those very social expectations. The excessive concern with her patron in the dedicatory letter, and later the excessive concern of her readers, shows that she is trying to convince all to acknowledge the objectives of her class. By including a letter dedicated to patron, this book is placed as a commodity within a set of social relationships beginning with her patron (Wall, “Circulating Texts” 47). If her patron (along with her readers) “take pleasure in [her nosgay],” Whitney will “endeavour my selfe to make a further viage for a more dayntier thing (then Flowers are) to present you withall” (Dedicatory letter, lines 43-45). This shows how Whitney combines the inside world (patron and dedicatees) with the outside world (readers) to alleviate financial and social adversity in congruence with the

overall project of her publications as a whole—to produce class consciousness and prove the working class, too, is capable of equivalent practices.

Whitney's brother, Geoffrey Whitney, specifically dedicated Emblem 139 in his book, *Choice of Emblemes* (1586), to Mainwaring. As the eldest son, Geoffrey inherited the family possessions and had opportunity to earn a university education, something not in the scope of his maidservant sister. Geoffrey also obtained a political, public career and had an aristocratic patron (McGrath 287). Because he was of much greater social standing, he chose patron Robert, earl of Leicester to dedicate his *Choice of Emblemes*, and Leicester makes Mainwaring appear “comparatively small potatoes” (McGrath 286). Though both Isabella and Geoffrey apologize for entering into print, both proclaim their insufficient skills, and both refer to others to justify their actions, Geoffrey's dedication is filled with references to the classics, establishing his authority in education, whereas Isabella does not gesture to the same literary authority. In fact, Whitney categorizes her work as a process of labor, as I will explain later. Furthermore, Isabella and Geoffrey are working with the tradition of “imitation and copia” but Isabella's narrative of borrowing contains “a more heart-felt concern” that her renderings have damaged Hugh Plat's flowers (McGrath 286). The differences in wealth, social status, patrons, and education between Isabella and Geoffrey are very much evident in the material quality of the *Choice of Emblemes* and *A Sweet Nosgay* as well as their content, evidently showing the restrictions placed on the poor unemployed laborer, Isabella.

Whitney incorporates praise into her dedicatory preface to Mainwaring, the “vertuous yong Gentyelman,” to “make part of amendes for the much that you have merited” even though “the Garden of [his] godly mind be full fraught with vertuous Flowers” (lines 22-23, 36-37). This

encomium is to inflate Mainwaring's generosity and make him responsible for her: she positions herself as "the pore man . . . having no goods" (line 18), who gave a handful of water to the emperor Xerxes as a gift. Perhaps disingenuous, this encomium verse is nonetheless part of Whitney's strategy to seek patronage. In addition, she associates herself with a poor man, transforming her gender into a class-relevant point of reference. By foregrounding economics and class, Whitney as a "pore man" promotes class disparity through economic need. In emphasizing Darius' responsibility to his people as a Persian emperor who should demonstrate noblesse oblige to his subjects, Whitney accentuates class status to recount duties of higher ranks above her, in this case Mainwaring's. Though Mainwaring was hardly a powerful figure, she sought honorable behavior on his part to help alleviate some of her financial difficulties. As Xerxes' duty was to dispense justice to all, so is the duty of Mainwaring, shielding her from the many consequences an underclass writer could face. Although Whitney acknowledges the book's inadequacy, the value of labor embodied in her lyric poems she hopes will discharge her of debts she has yet to face.

Labor

The bulk of early modern England's population was situated at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy; two-thirds of England's population was cottagers, laborers, servants, and vagrants (Mendelson 59, 60). Occupations for poor women included service, prostitution, day-labor, scavenging, and begging. Often, their lives in service began very young; they were to acquire the skills to work menial chores. For some, servitude was temporary through adolescence, but many were forced to continue service as a permanent lifetime vocation. By the provisions of the 1563 Statute of Artificers, lower class women were compelled (unless married)

by the courts to find a place in service; however, aristocratic women did not have to submit to these constraints (Mendelson 61). Hierarchical order was an effective weapon in ensuring duty and expectations of maidservants. In early modern society, the imperatives of service “appear so profoundly woven into the structure and texture of the world as to be as natural as gravity or death” (Evet 28). Moreover, “economic developments of an emerging capitalism shifted the standard service relationship from long-term affiliations . . . to short-term arrangements for cash wages” (Evet 4). Thomas Fosset states the servant should willingly and cheerfully answer the call

. . . to obey, and to be in subjection, to have no will of his owne, nor power over him selfe, but wholly to resigne himselfe to the will of his Master. . . a voluntarie and reasonable sacrificing of a mans owne will, voluntarily, freely, and without any constraints: and reasonably, that is. . . obedience.

(qtd. in Evett 13)

Obviously, servants did not have access to what would later be considered the “Marxist analysis of power,” nor were they able to give rise to political mechanisms; yet Whitney is saying that they had opportunity to choose whether to live in a perpetual state of misery or find a way to ascribe value to the laborious work they did (Evet 17). Whitney preaches to “be modest in a meane,” yet “gentyll unto all” (“A modest meane for Maides In order prescribed, by Is. W. to two of her yonger Sisters servinge London” line 27) because a fuller awareness of service suggests a kind of liberty within constraint.

In her lyric poetry, Whitney develops her hope of social harmony and finds a fulcrum in the role of the servant; through emphasizing labor, Whitney promotes character, a work ethic, and the value of retaining a service position to fellow servants. Whitney uses the attitude of a cheerful, willing obedience as a “rhymed homily” to give advice from a “superior position” (Jones, *Maidservants of London* 23) in order for “hope of future bliss” (Evet 13). In a sense, the servant becomes the agent of her individual self since power relations from the master “demand almost impossible patience and diplomacy” from servants (Jones, *Maidservants of London* 23). Whitney’s allusions to loyal service construct the role of a servant as an active, courageous endeavor on a personal level. In “A modest meane for Maides In order prescribed, by Is. W. to two of her yonger Sisters seruinge in London,” Whitney softens her need to counter social expectations by advocating obedience. Still in light of her class interest, Whitney offers and shares this practical advice with her fellow servants, so they, too, can be more likely to defend their interests. Bound by vows of a maidservant, Whitney wants others in a menial position to advance at social and economic levels by exercising power over their attitude. The servant must embrace this outlook, for these virtues are very important in the subsistence economy of the poor. Whitney uses this strategic tactic in hope of social harmony because she sees no immediate possibility for a class struggle. A servant making sense of life and believing they count is the only “Marxian formulae” available to them that underlies a “supervenient reality” (Evet 15). By straining limitations of all servants and reinforcing this common ground, Whitney examines all social levels. More importantly, she reaffirms the potential of her class by illustrating it is “the informed and willful maidservant [who] may finally triumph” (Phillips 452). Whitney transforms the notion of menial labor into a positive thing—a self-reliant attitude, which needs to permeate the underclasses.

The sense of social class reflected in the correspondence with her coterie demonstrates an acute awareness of the downfalls that come with a lowly background, and Whitney uses her poems to transform hardship into literary and cultural authority while waiting to regain employment. She transforms her economic necessity into literary and cultural authority by emphasizing her writing as material work; it is understood she must be paid for her services or at least be compensated. The lyric poems are some of the few from the early modern period to reflect on the position of maidservant, and I wish to underscore her vocation as a servant because Whitney herself emphasizes it. Indeed, as Ann Rosalind Jones indicates, she transforms her writing into a mode of housekeeping (quoted in Walker 152). With no opportunity to change the material conditions of her life, Whitney “draws on the success of commonplace moral wisdom” by emphasizing her vocation as a maidservant (Walker 152). Whitney takes up the position of a speaker who, in terms of cultural and literary authority, is an equal to her dedicatees rather than an inferior, thus boldly asserting her identity as a servant to help her forward her goal of class consciousness. As a servant, Whitney molds fellow servants to possess qualities of self-reliance. This way Whitney may be diplomatic in her writing “if she did not wish to be considered a rebel or an oddity” (Krontiris 32).

Whitney transforms menial labor into a site for demonstrating agency and control by suggesting that servants should take pride in their work. Likewise, Whitney preaches doing one’s work well as a class responsibility: “Then justly do such deedes, as are to you assynde” she writes in “A modest meane for Maides In order prescribed, by Is. W. to two of her yonger Sisters seruinge in London” (line 11). The role of a maidservant is one that requires dignity and work ethic; the goal of class consciousness is to prove that without servants tending to their employers, society would collapse. Even the most difficult underclass jobs and duties of service can be noble

or be invested with dignity, and Whitney wants all to be aware of this. The advice Whitney shares is one of experience, formally training her fellow maidservants by offering her good counsel to help as best as she may. Given the conditions and a low chance of immediate resistance, Whitney rebalances social power when she speaks for laborers. For that reason, she addresses those similarly employed giving maidservants implicit recognition to stress the hardships and difficulty that are part of the duties of service. Again, Whitney is creating an alliance, this time with fellow maidservants to provide another moment of class connection for those whose duty is to obey the “dominant/conceptual ideology” of the period (Evet 71). As she defends them, she strengthens their usefulness to their city employers and to the commonwealth as a whole (Jones, *Maidservants of London* 22). She advises, “Your Masters gon to Bed, your Mistresses at rest. . . See Dores and Windowes bolted fast for feare of any wrack” establishing herself and her kin as a team of “watchwomen” having the power to preserve the materials and keep the peace of their owner’s property (line 39, 42) (Jones, *Maidservants of London* 27). Whitney meticulously makes public the several duties and tasks that a position of service entails and reminds her London readers of the urban “wrack” or dangers such workers of labor had to turn aside. Servants must make sure doors and windows are bolted to prevent any damage or injury that may arise from potential corruptors (Clarke 287). In addition, Whitney addresses those in power to pinpoint their dependence on these laborers, indirectly reminding them how functional the role of a maidservant really is.

David Evett makes a cogent analogy in *Discourses of Service in Shakespeare’s England* of a hop and pole to invoke the master-servant relationship at all social levels. He claims the hop (servant) is fruitful, but alone it is lowly “a mere vine, crawling along the ground” competing with taller plants for light (Evet 29). The pole (master) “stands tall” but by itself it is “fruitless, a

mere dry stick” (Evet 29). By lifting the hop above the ground and sustaining it, the master raises both status and productivity of the master. Evett continues: “by depending from the pole, the hop makes the pole productive, meaningful, and valuable” (29). The relationship, therefore, is mutually useful. Whitney refers to this interdependence in *A Lettere Sent by the Maydens of London* (1567): “For as ye are that care and provide for our meate, drinke, and wages, so we are they that labor and take paines for you: so that your care for us, and our labor for you is so requisite, that they cannot be separated: so needful that they may not be severed” (quoted in Evett 29). Without servants, the ruling class is radically lessened, and the intrinsic worth of the servant becomes evidently recognized, for “the hope is more valuable than the pole: even lying on the ground, it is productive whereas the pole is not” (Evet 29). In sum, Whitney wants employers to recognize the merits or even the humanity of the duties of their employed maidservants. Hence, Whitney brings awareness and perhaps even a condemnation, of the dynamics of power, and “set[s] up a model for better conduct by servants and masters alike” (Jones, *Maidservants of London* 27).

Whitney’s allusions to loyal service and interrupted employment suggest that lies and defamation have been the cause of her bad fortune (Jones, *Maidservants of London* 24). In fact, Krontiris suggests that the *Nosgay* was “composed under social scrutiny” (Krontiris 40). Perhaps pressure from cultural constraints was intensified by possible social criticism accrued from her previous publication (Krontiris 40). Perplexed Whitney says, “You know mine endlesse miserie, you know, how some me / spite” (“Is. W. to C.B. in bewaylynge her mishappes,” line 22). Whitney’s suffering has plumbed below any hope and understanding of her “luckless lyfe” (“The Auctor to the Reader” line 23). Chivalrously, her cousin immediately replies to her complaint (regarding spite) as an affirmation of her integrity against slander,

If evil words and other wants,
have brought thee to this woe
.....
Thy Friends that have thee known of long,
Will not regard thy enemy's tongue.
The virtue that hath ever been,
within thy tender breast:
Which I from year to year, have seen,
in all thy deeds expressed:
Doth me persuade thy enemies lie,
And in that quarrel would I die.

(“In answer by C.B. to Is. W.,” lines 31-2, 35-42).²

Here, another threat to the underclasses is evident; because they are socially inferior, they are prone to slander: “words may hurt you so,” she laments (“A modest meane for Maides In order prescribed by Is. W. to two of her yonger Sisters servinge in London,” line 19). Jones notes that Whitney makes it a point to not name the city dwellers that have used their power to damage her reputation and career (*Maidservants of London* 27). I believe this, once more, suggests dignity. Whitney refrains from naming names which proves her “nobility,” and she uses this to her advantage to target potential employers and perhaps regain a position in service once more. Still, by containing it in a published book, Whitney found a way to solicit a new community of sympathizers, even potential employers.

² *A Sweet Nosegay, or Pleasant Posy: Containing a Hundred and Ten Philosophical Flowers*. Eds. Nick Broyles, Tara Devenny, Karen Lee, Jessica Lode, Krista Patten, and Travis Pownall, Autumn 1995. 15 Oct 2009. <<http://sjsteen.blogs.plymouth.edu/files/2008/04/a-sweet-nosegay.pdf>>.

Laurie Ellinghausen argues that Whitney uses professional authorship to locate herself within discourses (“Literary Property” 2). I believe Whitney knows exactly where she stands and uses her position as a form of cultural discourse to offer advice to her sisters; they, too, should find a way to make their way in the world. As an arbiter, Whitney firmly voices the social expectations of her class and is compelled to adopt a powerful position. While the elite classes usually received formal education, Whitney “trains” fellow servants by combining servitude, dignity, and character within the same lesson. Because “poor women, like poor men, received no formal education whatsoever,” Whitney teaches servants to perform household functions since this character is suitable to the hierarchical economy in which Whitney must abide (King 164). Her advocacy for service culture suggests class consciousness because it reveals the particular social practices of those who are required by aristocrats for the proper functioning of society. Servants had to function properly in the households of aristocratic families; deference for employers is an obligation in exchange for some kind of remuneration. Nonetheless, Whitney uses this custom to accrue cultural authority. She peremptorily corrects and instructs those “below” her in “A modest meane for Maides In order prescribed, by Is. W. to two of her yonger Sisters seruinge in London,” “Hencefoorth my lyfe as wel as Pen shall your examples / frame,” placing herself “as an instrument or tool to be used” (line 38; Jordan 411). Though the hours are long and the work is hard, Whitney makes her point explicit: while much is expected from a servant, she nonetheless instills virtue, character, and work ethic that are the hallmarks of a vocation in service. By framing herself as an authority by publishing her instructions, however, Whitney transforms her social impotence; when she presents her work she is also presenting herself by promoting the work of a servant (Ellinghausen, *Labor and Writing* 6).

Indeed, Whitney also emphasizes learning as labor. In “The Auctor to the Reader” she champions her capacity for learning when she writes,

I Harvestlesse, and serviceless also:

And subject unto sicknesse, that abrode I could not go.

Had leasure good, (though learning lackt) some study to apply:

To reade such Bookes, wherby I thought my selfe to edifye.

(lines 1-3)

Whitney edifies herself by reading books, and she associates idleness with “sicknesse.” She composes her text since she “had leasure good.” Whitney “apologizes indirectly first for spending her time reading and then for not reading religious books” (Krontiris 28) when she writes, “Somtime the Scriptures I perusd, but wantyng a Devine: / For to resolve mee in such doubts, as past this head of / mine / To understand: I layd them by” (lines 5-7). But unlike members of the aristocracy who had tutors, Whitney was an autodidact and deployed “cultural stipulations advantageously” to educate herself above her status (Krontiris 28). The popular material she has taken the liberty to educate herself in further posits her learning as a process. Therefore, Whitney’s work is especially important, for it demonstrates how an underclass servant achieves through labor the attainments of an aristocrat. The line “though learning lackt” highlights her lack of formal education; but she positions herself a figure that, through her labor and experience, has attained a sort of cultural authority.

However, Whitney must be careful of the cultural connotations of a woman writing. Kim Walker sets up a useful model: “If writing for a public audience could be interpreted as unchaste, then writing for financial gain could be read as a form of prostitution” (quoted in Ellinghausen, “Literary Property” 3). The idea of paying a lady for her services is, indeed, a form of

prostitution, but for Whitney, selling her writing is not analogous to prostitution because Whitney is categorizing her poetry as a product of labor that is *exchanged*, not as a commodity to be bought and sold: “accept this my labour, / for recompence of al that which you are unrecompensed for” she writes to Mainwaring in the dedicatory letter (line 46-57). Although as an unemployed maidservant she is aligning herself with a group prone to prostitution, Whitney counters and refutes this defamation by establishing herself as a writer worthy of remuneration. Whitney uses intellectual labor to try to regain her position as a servant or recompense from her dedicatees and addressees.

Whitney creates a self-image for what it meant to occupy the social role of a maidservant and that of an underclass writer. She accentuates both roles by punctuating her special status of lesser gentry and using her skills in temperament for her life-long vocation, service. We see this when she refers to her writing in anticipating the role of a maid or household servant in “To her Sister Misteris. A.B.,”

Had I a Husband, or a house, and all that longes therto
My selfe could frame about to rouse, as other women doo:
But til some houshold cares mee tye,
My books and Pen I wyll apply.

(lines 24-28).

Though limited to the household, Whitney bears an apron on one hand and a pen in the other. Whitney undertakes a sort of “public service” by way of publishing her writing to better others and to shine a light on underclass suffering, with herself as example. However, the act of writing allows Whitney to address her responsibility to her patron. Whitney emphasizes labor is what produced her verse. Thomas Berrie, one of Whitney’s verse epistle correspondents, recognizes

the value of “such labor lieth finished with the life” and acknowledges “her work is plainly to be seen” (“T.B. in commendation of the Author” lines 30, 27).³ Philosophical flower 47 also shows this. She compares herself to a plowman (not a woman) to foreground her status as a laborer and reveal the much obscured judgment of her class, “The Plowman is accompted small his reputation none: / Yet of the members in a Realm / of chiefest he is one.”⁴ The laborer is exceedingly significant.

The concept of labor to Whitney is a sort of calling, and she applies her literary labor by presenting this bundle of flowers to patrons, family and friends, explaining how she worked diligently to compose one hundred and ten philosophical verses/flowers. Bidding farewell to her readers right after presenting these, Whitney calls attention to this process by presenting her work as an act of labor, “Good Reader now you tasted have, / and smelt of all my Flowers: / The which to get some pain I took, / and travailed many hours” (“A farewell to the Reader,” lines 1-4).⁵ In fulfillment of domestic labor, she requests her readers to “spoil them not, / nor do in pieces tear them” (lines 5-6). The gentle care she requests from readers is to protect her laborious gathering of poetic flowers from the garden of Hugh Plat. As a working class writer, Whitney wants her audience to know her printed product is a result of a labored process. The manual labor she provides to households through service is similar to how she has labored in publishing.

³ *A Sweet Nosegay, or Pleasant Posy: Containing a Hundred and Ten Philosophical Flowers*. Eds. Nick Broyles, Tara Devenny, Karen Lee, Jessica Lode, Krista Patten, and Travis Pownall, Autumn 1995. 15 Oct 2009. <<http://sjsteen.blogs.plymouth.edu/files/2008/04/a-sweet-nosegay.pdf>>.

⁴ *A Sweet Nosegay, or Pleasant Posy: Containing a Hundred and Ten Philosophical Flowers*. Eds. Nick Broyles, Tara Devenny, Karen Lee, Jessica Lode, Krista Patten, and Travis Pownall, Autumn 1995. 15 Oct 2009. <<http://sjsteen.blogs.plymouth.edu/files/2008/04/a-sweet-nosegay.pdf>>.

⁵ *A Sweet Nosegay, or Pleasant Posy: Containing a Hundred and Ten Philosophical Flowers*. Eds. Nick Broyles, Tara Devenny, Karen Lee, Jessica Lode, Krista Patten, and Travis Pownall, Autumn 1995. 15 Oct 2009. <<http://sjsteen.blogs.plymouth.edu/files/2008/04/a-sweet-nosegay.pdf>>.

Whitney invites readers to imagine her authorship as the extension of domestic work and her text as a book handy for everyday use (Wall, “Circulating Texts” 43).

Straddling the line between patronage relations and that of early capitalism, Whitney insists on the importance of labor, making *A Sweet Nosgay* a tangible complement to “proletarianization” (Ellinghausen, *Labor and Writing* 63). Whitney capitalizes on the advantages of being marginalized by “manipulat[ing] events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’” (Ellinghausen, *Labor and Writing* 4). The transformation of labor into writing represents a “currency” that constructs relations with her patron and target audience (Brace 99). Because of the steps required in production, gathering, framing, shaping (borrowing from another “garden”), Whitney deliberately attaches economic worth to this innovative labor.

Gift Exchange

Texts function as material objects that can be constructed as gifts used to cement social bonds, earn money for the authors, or influence major political decisions (Clarke xxii). To contribute to our understanding of Whitney as an individual writer, we must regard Whitney’s verses as taking part in the gift-exchange system that includes –as Whitney says– “a great number of benefits” to situate her within social relations and as a result, social communities (line 8). The Renaissance writer apparently had to overcome a great deal of “social malevolence” (Parry 118). By envisioning their poetry as part of a gift exchange, members of the working class were able to overcome this malevolence. The exchange relations Whitney creates through textual property are personal, not merely the abstract relations within a large-scale market. Although the reciprocal independence of the market would produce profit that Whitney would never see, Whitney’s preface and letters establish a “reciprocal dependence.” It has been

suggested as a craft produced in the home and as a vehicle for the production of values (other than those prevailing), women's poetry of this period was associated with an older "remnant" of the cultural system (Donawerth et al. xxiii). The imperatives of personal loyalty and respect are recurrent themes in the social hierarchy of the working class. The reciprocity of giving and receiving in a system of nonmarket exchange of goods can be judged as signs of intimacy (Donawerth 14). I believe Whitney re-conceptualized the growing hegemony of early forms of capitalism by re-articulating more traditional forms of social relations; she wants value to be based on merit, rather than on rank or monetary value.

Llana Amos-Ben clearly states of the Renaissance idea of gift giving: "[U]nlike market transactions where personal relations may be irrelevant or undesired, the gift is predicated on the existence of personal interactions and reciprocity" (299). Just like the personal and the public are intertwined in her imitation of manuscript, the ideas of gift-giving and manual labor are likewise related and predicated on exchange. She "requires her readers to undergo a process of self-examination by interrogating their own values and motives" thereby "demanding complicity with her reading of her work and its production" (Price 283). This is accomplished through gift-giving in her poetry because gift giving is about reciprocal relations. As the employer has a duty to maintain the servant and repay him/her for his services, Whitney believes her readers, too, must "perfourme the dutie of a / friend, to expresse the good wyll that should rest in Countrie / folke" (Dedicatory Letter, line 23-25). Both giver and receiver have an obligation; in this intimate relationship, each must consider what he is willing to do for another. More importantly, the receiver of the gift must recognize the receiver's power in authority and determine what they owe to society in obligation by accepting her gift. In terms of exchange, "he who receives benefit gains, but he who gives one does too; a benefit ultimately redoubts to both giver and receiver"

(Jordan 419). Whitney is asking others to consider her gift as a form of labor. She wants other readers to see her gift as a response to the needs of the poor and therefore, specifically respond to it as if the readers were the intended recipients. Just like masters were expected to reward their servants for their service, despite Whitney's inferior position, she implicitly hopes for rewards for the act of gift giving.

Aside from the friendly benefits Whitney speaks of in the preface to the lyric poems, Whitney, "having no goods," writes to Mainwaring in hopes that he not "disdayne [this] simple Guift" (lines 18-20). Whitney is

willinge to bestow some Present on you, by the same thinking to make part of amendes for the much that [he has] merited, to perfourme the dutie of a friend, to expresse the good wyll that should rest in Countrie folke

(Dedicatory letter, lines 21-25).

When asking her patron to accept her flowers (her verses), Whitney asks him to consider they "be of my owne gathering and makeing up: respect labour and regard my good wil, and not onely receive them, but vouchsave to be a protector of them for the spightful" (lines 30-33). As textual property, Whitney's verses are a derivative of labor that she hopes will make an ample gift. Likewise, she writes in 'The Auctor to the Reader'

And now I have a Nosegay got, that would be passing rare:
Yf that to sort the same aright, weare lotted to my share.
But in a bundle as they bee, (good Reader them accept:)
It is the gever: not the guift, thou oughtest to respect.

(lines 47-50)

Whitney therefore also includes the reader in the process of gift-giving to invite him/her into the intimate process of reciprocity, sharing, and community.

Furthermore, Whitney culminates the lyric poems through the metaphoric usage of the book as a cure for the diseased mind. She wants readers to feel gratitude for her distribution of cure. Her “curative nosegay” provides protection by warding off moral, economic, and physical disease of the culture (Wall, “Circulating Texts” 43). She writes her book after a friend warns her to stay out of pestilent public avenues, and she sends her moral *Nosgay* as preventive medicine against “stynking streetes” and “lothsome Lanes” that underclasses were prone to (Wall, “Circulating Texts” 48; “The Auctor to the Reader,” line 37). Whitney staves off this infection with the act of reading and writing in the composition of the *Nosgay*. The aggrandizement of her bundle is shown in the lines, “And for thy health, not for thy eye, did I this Posye frame: / Because my selfe dyd safety finde, by smelling to the same” (“The Auctor to the Reader,” lines 51-52). The flowers she offers are also for a distinctly *social* purpose to all readers who find themselves “ill, poor, unemployed, lonely, or otherwise in need of solace or instruction as she is” (Bartolovich 415). Using the flexible metaphor of contamination, Whitney employs the *Nosgay* as solace to the problems of social exclusion of working class laborers. She exploits her publication to its fullest, framing her bundle of flowers as soothing medication. This is far more valuable than materialistic goods, for even copious possessions are worthless if they serve no purpose, “For to abound in every thing, / and not their use to know: It is a pinching penury: / wherefore, thy goods, bestow” (“Philosophical Flower 6”).⁶ Jane Donawerth suggests the *Nosgay* is a metaphoric remedy of herbal medicine used to alleviate the illness that has caused

⁶ *A Sweet Nosegay, or Pleasant Posy: Containing a Hundred and Ten Philosophical Flowers*. Eds. Nick Broyles, Tara Devenny, Karen Lee, Jessica Lode, Krista Patten, and Travis Pownall, Autumn 1995. 15 Oct 2009. <<http://sjsteen.blogs.plymouth.edu/files/2008/04/a-sweet-nosegay.pdf>>.

Whitney to leave her employer's service (13). Whitney invites her readers to indulge in the excess of good health her bundle of flowers offers. In speaking of her illness Whitney says, "it dyd mee help, I no infection felt / But sure I think they kept mee free, because to them I smelt" (lines 55-56). Because the underclass was prone to abysmal conditions, cultivating the lyric poems might even be seen as enhancing class conciliation, promoting both a cure for the discrepancy amongst class conflict and a cure for good health. Finally, these flowers are also put together for the moral health of her readers: "For these be but to keepe thee sound, which if thou use / them well" ("The Auctor to the Reader," line 61). Her text is bundled together for a popular readership and the moral health of her readers and their sound minds.. Whitney hopes readers will "Refer [her counsel] to some friend of thine, tyll thou their vertue / see" (line 64). Therefore, warding off any "sicknesse" (being in an idle state) is reason for its circulation. Thomas Berrie recognizes this and writes of Whitney's flowers of philosophy, "No branch of perfect wisdom here doth lack/ But that the bruised mind, refreshed may be," confirming the *Nosgay* at work in serving the moral health of its readers ("T.B. in commendation of the Author," lines 38-39).⁷ The act of reading and writing has protected Whitney from the association of idleness as a "sicknesse." Therefore, the numbers of "such pleasure finde" readers will experience with the perusal is means for its circulation and a physical, mental, and social cure to the under classes.

Along with the goal of wishing her readers good health of mind and body, another goal of Whitney's literary gift is to cross a class boundary more freely. Whitney adopts the genre of an epistle in the context of gift exchange to oblige the generosity of her readers. Because the concept of gift giving takes place in a context of reciprocal interactions, it is meant to build a

⁷ *A Sweet Nosegay, or Pleasant Posy: Containing a Hundred and Ten Philosophical Flowers*. Eds. Nick Broyles, Tara Devenny, Karen Lee, Jessica Lode, Krista Patten, and Travis Pownall, Autumn 1995. 15 Oct 2009. <<http://sjsteen.blogs.plymouth.edu/files/2008/04/a-sweet-nosegay.pdf>>.

social regime that unifies the community. Her philosophical flowers are borrowed from Hugh Plat and bundled together into a nosegay “to prevent pestilence” as “recompense for past benefits” in order for Whitney to receive a gift of her own (Donawerth 14). After all, the poems end with a “souerainge receipt” that involves “moral maxims” encouraged to “sketch the virtues expected of those involved in gift exchange” (quoted in Donawerth 15).

Conclusion

Whitney uses her lyric verse as a catalyst in relations of exchange to question behaviors of both lower and upper class, and examine the status quo and the nature of the morality of the working class. Unable to utilize her service (since she has been let go of employment), Whitney transforms the stereotypical feminine activity of flower gathering to emphasize the labor involved in the development of her verses. She represents the lyric poems in *A Sweet Nosgay* as the work of a member of the working class. Her labor is a major component of this self-representation. She transforms her writing-as-labor into a platform on which to comment on social and economic issues. In addition, Whitney forms a collaborative literary group, from which she expects contributions and responses to her generous textual gift. Immediately following is a mock-will and testament where Whitney’s literary authority takes full effect. Rather than request aid from a patron as Whitney does in the lyric poems, in “The Manor of Her Wyll” Whitney, again, utilizes role reversal. However, this time Whitney embodies the role of a patron, giving and taking from the city as she passes out her bequests. Ultimately, Whitney acts a critic of London’s economics, making a demand for social equality and a distribution of wealth.

CHAPTER III

A SWEET NOSGAY: "THE MANER OF HER WYLL"

The Digger tract of 1649 asserts: "We. . . the poor oppressed people in England declare unto you that the earth was not made purposely for you to be lords of it, and we to be your slaves, servants and beggars; but it was made to be a common livelihood to all" (quoted in Bartolovich 408). Isabella Whitney expresses similar views in "The Maner of her Wyll" because throughout the "Wyll," Whitney speaks for the common good of all. "Wyll" is particularly important, for it demonstrates Whitney's lucid ability to comment critically on her social and economic environment through a mock will and testament that evoked a London inimical to the working class, who suffered from economic and legal inequality. I seek to expand the critical understanding of Isabella Whitney and her work by considering "Wyll" in terms sympathy for the oppressed. Many critics insist that Whitney's poetry shows her to be an intellectual who pursues "her self-interest in the public realm" (Ingram, "A Case for Credit" 29); however, through her poetry, I believe Whitney is seeking benefits for the larger commonwealth while rejecting social and economic norms. Whitney claims status as a writer particularly to overcome the household boundary as a domestic servant to give a voice to the voiceless. Whitney's motivation is represented by her choice to publish a book concerning the working class. Ann Rosalind Jones has argued that Whitney "wrote to and for women as a group" (quoted in Crawford, "Women on Top" 23). I believe, however, that Whitney targets a broader group than

just women. Whitney finds utility in her underprivileged social position because it provides a connection with the oppressed in general, giving her the ability to voice all underclass concerns. Danielle Clarke argues, “Her listing of places, persons, professions, and commodities reinforces a sense of chaos and disorder, and she swings from area to area, and trade to trade, without any apparent sense of connection” (xv). By contrast, I believe Whitney’s mock will maintains a unified set of concerns, thus formulating an image of an entirely different world, one of social equality as she provides a solution to each obstacle. Not only does Whitney strategically exclude herself from the personal and financial abundance she describes, but she also maintains order throughout the will giving and taking as she pleases to suit economic necessities.

Some scholars situate Whitney’s poem in terms of the “female legacy” in a broad category that involves Renaissance women writers. Because mothers’ legacies were often in the form of “advice books,” they were an acceptable outlet for women wanting to publish their writings (Ingram, “A Case for Credit” 13). Wendy Wall notes that although Whitney was not a mother, she found it “advantageous to draw authorizing strategies from these doomed mothers” (“Female Legacy” 49). Wall views Whitney’s “Wyll” in light of the mother’s legacy tradition, which served as an advice book and religious exhortation handed from mother to child, relying on the sanctity of the final departure (“Female Legacy” 44). Rather than see the will as a clever literary device chosen as the grand finale of *A Sweet Nosgay*, Wall locates the “Wyll” in a genre that allows “women writers to come forth as authors within a culture that denied them public expression” (“Female Legacy” 49). Most scholarship on Whitney is focused on the “male-coded dynamic” of Petrarchism; Renaissance women writers are depicted as using the female body as a medium for articulating power (Wall, “Female Legacy” 36). Tina Krontiris believes Whitney “manages to speak creditably in print and [shows] how a complex group of factors revolving

around gender interconnect and finally shape her work. It thus reveals much about the interrelation of gender and style and the negotiating process at work with the text” (28). Scholars such as these tend to read the attributes of “Wyll” as determined by the sex of the author. Feminist scholarship has dominated Whitney’s criticism because reading her poems in this context allows scholars to glimpse gender differences within the culture and how they intervene in emerging masculine paradigms of authorial presentation (Wall, “Female Legacy” 58). Whitney “is rarely put into dialogue with male writers” because she is treated as a “woman writer first and foremost, privileging her gender identity” above important characteristics that are elemental to Whitney’s poetry: occupational displacement, poverty, economic constraints, and communal relations (Ellinghausen, *Labor and Writing* 18).

Ellinghausen suggests “Wyll” departs from convention because Whitney makes her losses economic rather than sexual or familial, casting her struggle as a woman who claims to write for lack of other options (“Literary Property” 14). I disagree. The stress Whitney places on economic hardships underscores her economic argument for the underclass. For this reason, Whitney chooses the persona of a patron, to give to her class freely. Indeed, a more penetrating analysis involves viewing her as a struggling writer or as Ingram says, an “economic agent who is also a woman” (“Response” 4). Ingram makes a brilliant analysis: “Obviously, it is the denial of credit rather than the absence of a penis that is the speaker’s most important handicap: her sex contributes to her difficulty, but does not determine it” (“Response” 4).

To analyze Whitney’s poem properly, we must break away from the idea of the traditional female legacy to contextualize the mock testament within the economic roots of the mock will. She is not showing women’s struggle for equal access to “male prerogatives”

(Bartolovich 410). Instead, she is offering an alternative by pointing to and criticizing the prevalence of poverty, therefore, arguing for a wider distribution of wealth. Whitney bases the nucleus of her argument substantially on common class needs and interests, linking together her personal experiences and poverty as representative of a substantial layer of society. Though indeed recognizing the oppression of patriarchy, the dangers of poverty outweigh patriarchal oppression, thus becoming *the* reason for the creation of what Bartolovich calls the “anti-will” (410). Whitney’s complaint is applicable to both men and women of the working class. All its citizens, not women alone, can indulge in what she bequeaths to London. Whitney’s argument is far more complex than merely examining the female/male inequality but instead moves towards challenging the restrictions of class.

There are some scholars who have commented on the class and socio-economic dimensions of “Wyll.” Patricia Brace acknowledges Whitney’s marginal social position and believes the focus of the will is on the poor (Brace 106). Jill P. Ingram focuses closely on Whitney as critic of the failure of London’s mercantile society; however, Ingram is committed to keeping “Wyll” in the center of the marketplace (Crawford, “Women on Top” 26). In fact, Ingram argues Whitney’s intention shifts in the center of the poem; Whitney becomes “primarily concerned with her own gain” (“A Case for Credit” 14). I disagree, and I believe Whitney uses print as venue on which to speak on behalf of her family, coterie, kin, and fellow laborers. Whitney’s will undoubtedly attacks social and economic structures and implies a complete reorganization of society. Therefore, I will analyze how Whitney’s will deals with issues regarding the struggles of the working class and the search for social harmony. I will then examine the “Wyll” as serving a critical function rather than treating it as entirely part of the

mock-will genre. Rather, Whitney transforms economic and cultural obstacles into opportunity in this poem.

This mock will is broken up into four parts: it begins with an economic complaint, followed by the will itself, including first a distribution of wealth to *all* people, continuing with bequests of the city's riches to the poor, and ending with a meditation on Whitney's own fate and departure from the world. Though many scholars place Whitney's poem in the mock-testament tradition, Whitney's characteristics vary from the norm, forming a category of her own. For instance, Betty Travitsky places her in the mock-testament tradition but views her as a "trend-setter" for its unique composition (quoted in Ingram, "A Case for Credit" 16). Unlike typical sixteenth-century amatory / social complaints in mock-wills, Whitney envisions a new refurbished London (through what she bequeaths), one not oppressed by social hierarchy. Whitney strategically deploys a combination of adroit rhetorical methods—sharp criticism, complaint, manifesto, and wit.

The fact of *writing* a will is crucial. Whitney uses her "private" written will to enter the public arena to articulate a platform for those that are silenced, particularly the working class. Whitney seemed to be working towards professional authorship to serve the goal of transforming the working class largely incapable of ruling even itself in order to argue for common ownership and the distribution of wealth. The need to preserve familial relationships with close kin in the lyric poems and the distribution of wealth through the mock will compelled Whitney to be imaginative and poetic. In Karl Marx's terms, as a proletarian, Whitney can inaugurate a society with no forced division of labor developing the capacity of the working class to become fit to found society anew (Bender 32). Through this newfound ownership, the working class can

become class-conscious and therefore capable of their mission. By attracting critical attention to her authorship as an act of labor, Whitney hopes to overturn the constant domination of the working class, which is deemed as “inevitable and as historically determined by economic forces” (Davidson 100). Her text as symbolic capital aids in class struggle because Whitney is able to transform her economic and social frustration into a trope on which to base her argument. The symbolic capital Whitney thus formulates is a commodification of an authorial voice; she is able to express her usefulness by assuming individual authority as a writer. This way, Whitney is able to serve her class differently through her literal and symbolic industry. Not only does her writing encourage class consciousness, but Whitney also shows there is more to condemn than to praise in a class divided society and demonstrates how the act of writing can be associated with the class position and interests of laborers. Through Whitney’s symbolic textual labor, readers see London as a representation from the working class’s point of view.

While her method is often satirical, Whitney’s motivation is to be critical. Bartolovich notes if such a will were actually executed, it would be the last will since it would “dissolve the system of unequal property that wills uphold” thus making the city “a common livelihood to all” (408). Democracy, as Marx indicated, “implied the organization and guarantee of political, social, and economic freedom equality of opportunity for all classes” (Davidson 101). With a democratic structure in mind, Whitney is able to imagine a civilized, orderly world. Because Whitney cannot wield political power, she chooses to write this will publicly as her contribution to the interests of her class to provide for them. Just as in chapter two, where I argued that patronage relations exhibit social connections that are far more important than the depersonalization of capitalism, social connections are once again exhibited as Whitney becomes the patron to all her beneficiaries, and she “casts this world as the object of her own generous

bequeathing” (Wall, “Female Legacy” 50). Similar to the lyric poems, in which the imitation of manuscript verse circulation was used as a mechanism to participate in literary exchange, another mechanism is carried out when Whitney “takes a stroll through London” thus displaying her knowledge of urban life and revealing her mastery of a public world (Wall, “Female Legacy” 53). “Wyll” thus grants a privileged vantage point of the city. Her sense of familiarity is conveyed throughout the will through specific mentions of shops, places, clothing, and relations among them as a high-ranking individual would.

Before the “Wyll”

Whitney squanders little time in the commencement of her testament by switching gender codes to class codes when she writes of a faithless lover,

Wherefore small cause ther is, that I
should greeve from thee go:
But many Women foolyshly,
lyke me, and other moe.
Doe such a fyxed fancy set,
on those which least desarve.

(lines 5-10)

The speaker is, on the surface, a wronged woman. Spurned by her lover, the speaker is forced to leave the city. Yet London shows little pity for her departure. Whitney’s critical purpose in gendering London as male is to transform what is perceived as an unstable love affair into a turbulent relationship with her social environment. Thus, we should understand Whitney’s metaphor as coding class because she insinuates London simultaneously offers different

possibilities, opportunities, and limitations to different classes. Hence, gender is transformed to highlight London's underclasses—those in positions of abjection and inferiority. To the working class (in Marx's terms the proletariat) London is cruel; they live under abysmal conditions. However, to the ruling class (in Marx's terms the bourgeoisie) London "controls all centers of power—legal, ideological, political—that it can use against the proletariat" (Bender 31). The personification of London as a "neglectful male lover" as Jones suggests, pinpoints the social imbalances that make life in London both a spectacle of misery for the working class and splendor for those who get to enjoy/manipulate it ("Apostrophes to Cities" 157). The city has done nothing more than treat her with contempt. As a lover mourning "desertion, abandonment, infidelity," Whitney is forced to part from the goods and riches her lover is cruelly withholding from her due to her lack of wealth (Wall, "Female Legacy" 50). In turn, Whitney uses the reference of a treacherous lover to set up complaint and sharp criticism of the power gradient by transferring emotion typically used by a lover to express a social frustration rather than a romantic one.

Moreover, Whitney, through the power of her imagination, seizes control of severe financial straits by transforming London's greatest flaws into a form of ownership. She takes on the role of a benefactor despite her personal destitution, which leaves her possessing absolutely nothing of real value except her literary property, which she frames as having symbolic worth. Wall writes, "In doing so, she makes clear that London is an analogue to the stingy lover, whose bounty she never enjoyed except now in this written act of possession" ("Female Legacy" 52). Wall's analysis of Whitney's strategic method is instructive: "Whitney's literary 'Wyll' playfully transforms literary language into an ironic meditation on property... power, and desire. She writes of her alienation from a position of power by simultaneously bewailing her loss of worldly

goods and exercising control over the ‘common wealth’” (“Female Legacy” 49). As Jones aptly puts it, “From actual want, Whitney makes plenty” (“Apostrophes to Cities” 157).

The will, emphasizing Whitney’s exclusion from London’s abundance (while people live amidst it), is used as a tool to specifically critique London for the social imbalances it perpetuates, marking poverty of household servants as the primary economic complaint:

Thou never yet, woldst credit geve
to boord me for a yeare:
Nor with Apparrell me releve
except thou payed weare.

(lines 21-24)

As a maid Whitney was never offered contracts or given any financial stability or “apparel” (further into “Wyll,” Whitney will describe, in great detail, these types of clothing), but as a member of the working class, Whitney broadens this claim, taking her experience as a maid and generalizing it for a specific class. Because servants were repaid with clothing, food, and apparel, Whitney explains how she lacks food, apparel, and credit even when holding a position of service. She continues her economic complaint by specifying her spurned lover’s “great cruelnes” –never helping her to ease “me in distres” (lines 18, 20).

Now, why would Whitney leave anything to one who was treacherous? One does not typically bequeath things to a person one dislikes; however, Whitney is careful not to fall into belligerence, as she departs London without feelings of animosity. Ellinghausen states that “financial solvency and material comfort would have continued her presence in the city; conversely, her lack of wealth conditions her disappearance” (*Labor and Writing* 30). Whitney

frames a sort of charity as she takes on the role of a beneficent donor, which starkly contrasts with the city's exclusion:

Yet am I in no angry moode,
but wyll, or ere I goe
In perfect love and charytie
my Testament here write:
And leave to thee such Treasurye,
as I in it recyte.

(lines 27-32)

Jones suggests Whitney upholds an attitude that is wishfully participatory; criticism is carefully maneuvered as Whitney inaugurates an alternative social environment that she wishfully hopes to produce (“Apostrophes to Cities” 159). Michael Felker writes that the irony of Whitney’s will is gentle rather than bitter; she found way to “overcome much of her self-pity and sorrow” (quoted in Ellinghausen, “Literary Property” 16). In keeping this optimism, Whitney is gesturing toward a transformation of the city to all his inhabitants by creating a vision filled with abundance, which she bequeaths by virtue of her own cultural or symbolic capital: the poem itself.

Inside “The Wyll”: Critiquing London’s Economic Disparity

Whitney sees an obvious problem with the economic inequalities betrayed by London; thus, she examines them in her testament to critique the very society that generates these inequalities. She speaks of laborers such as “Butchers,” “Brewers,” “Bakers” (lines 33, 35, 36) along with drapers and fishmongers; her image of the proletariat workforce characterizes the city. In the lyric poems, Whitney attaches cultural authority to a position in service as well as

labor, demonstrating how dependant the employer is on the servant. In the same way, Whitney speaks of “Butchers,” “Brewers,” and “Bakers” to formulate the same effects; the specialized workforce is integral to the city and the prominence of service is associated with their daily tasks. Whitney again acts as a critic of society as she scorns the fact that London prohibits crediting those who are in most need of it by ironically leaving “Mercers” with “silke so rich” (line 48) and “goldsmiths” with extravagant “Jeuls” (line 51).

One may assume Whitney very much wants to become part of the very community she critiques as she partakes in a fantasy that transforms her from an unemployed servant into a purveyor of wealth. It is my argument that Whitney wants her class to be included in this community. She leaves expensive items to exemplify a class system where those doomed to the working class are alienated from affluence, as well as social and political equality. We see this by the bequests of women’s clothing. Such knowledge of these fanciful luxuries shows she has paid significant attention to the desire to own “French Ruffes, high Purles, Gorgets and Sleeves” sold in the upper gallery of the Royal Exchange (line 63). She adopts aristocratic dress to prove the working class, too, should have access to expensive luxury items through the imaginative powers of this will. The desire to obtain such riches emphasize, as Ingram suggests, a class divide; such indulgent buyers are relegated to serving their fashionable taste (“A Case for Credit” 4). The interest of the ruling class prevails in a society’s economic life except for exceptional periods of revolution or social transformation because the dominant class has its members convinced, as well as the rest of society, that its social hegemony is justified (Bender 30). Since Whitney is clearly outside of this dominant class, her purpose in bequeathing fancy items is to challenge this hegemony (as she does through the imitation of manuscript verse in the lyric poems) and gain access to the very channels she targets. The undercurrent is that Whitney does

not exactly reject capitalism; she wants all classes to have access to the joys of a capitalist system. By registering her own experiences, Whitney serves as a mediator between “comfort” and “despair” (Ellinghausen, “Literary Property” 14). By giving all citizens the right to indulge in such fancy dress, Whitney offers a reclassification of what is readily available to some classes and not to others. Whitney gives equal access to goods in the existing society, making social life possible and desirable.

The unusual stance of personal authority Whitney adopts is extended to give a remedy to those who are injured and wounded such as “Poticaries” for those suffering from hunger, as well as “Phisicians also for the sicke / Diseases for to stop” (lines 93, 95-96). As a consequence of competition and bias in the market system, necessities are provided in great abundance showing inequalities of London. While Whitney provides “Bootes, shoes, or Pantables” for the people in Saint Martin’s, “Beds” to the people in Cornwall, “Taylors” to women, she distinctly fills areas where no filling is needed, therefore, creating –as well as limiting prospering– “sections” of London (lines 73, 75, 77). The city’s bounty is shown later to undercut the city’s working class deficiencies (lines 189-192). By carefully undercutting these deficiencies, Whitney can categorize the lack of necessity in more areas than one, as she lists several shortcomings experienced by the working class. While stresses are clarified with solutions, the paradox of the situation arises when she writes: “In many places, Shops are full, / I left you nothing scant” (lines 107-8). Although these shops are full (to the upper class), they are indeed in short supply to the working class. The evident contradiction of a London that is simultaneously lacking and abundant shows its double sides. It is a different city when serving its elite and changes entirely for the working class; Whitney challenges readers to assess class relations that maintain and combine these two ethically incompatible cities (Bartolovich 421).

Aside from a social critique, Whitney is what Jones calls a “pragmatic observer,” looking to understand what could be improved in London’s public including issues of crime and punishment (“Apostrophes to Cities” 160):

Now for the people in thee left,
I have done as I may:
And that the poore, when I am gone,
Have cause for me to pray.
I wyll to prisons portions leave,
what though but very small:
Yet that they may remember me,
occasion be it shall:

(lines 133-40).

The “greatest gainers,” the working class of Whitney’s bequests in the beginning of her poem, are now the biggest losers. Her tactics here are quite different; her allusions to the poor now include prisoners. Her legacies reveal another result of class inequality: crime. To assess class relations, it is important to reflect on the previous categorization of abundance and lack through the empty/full shops. Whitney offers both abundance and a summary of social deprivation within the city, which is concurrently “a documentation of poverty and plenty” (Wall, “Female Legacy” 53). The prosecution of debtors in a debtor’s prison perversely marks laborers as criminals. Poverty is therefore criminalized. In fact, “in both the popular and the official mind, vagabond and rogue were synonyms” (Briggs, et al. 19). Whitney, unemployed and with no source of income, might fall under this category, and the judicial response to such a class was “crude and cruel” (Briggs, et al. 23). Because the common people became poorer, rulers came to fear the

common people as more poor people meant more crime; hence, “the criminal law became increasingly an instrument of social control, or, as Marxists would say, of class dominance”

(Briggs, et al. 17). A Winchester monk wrote:

When you reach England, if you come to London pass through it quickly. Each race brings its own vices and its own customs to the city. No-one lives in it without falling into some sort of crime. Every quarter of its bounds with grave obscenities...if you do not want to dwell with evildoers do not live London.

(quoted in Briggs et al. 22)

In order to cut down on vagabonds, the law mandated any unmarried woman “to serve and be retained by yeare, weeke, or day, in such cost and for such wages as they shall thinke meete, and if she refuse, they may commit her to prison, till she shall be bound to serve” (quoted in Jones, *Maidservants of London* 22). Through no fault of their own and with little control over harsh periods of unemployment, people’s failure to find work often landed them in a debtor’s prison (Jones, *Maidservants of London* 22). Whitney is concerned with showing the evident contradiction of the city’s system of government to differing classes. Further, she leaves those “whose deedes deserveth death” to “be drawne up Holborne hill, / to come to further shame” (line 157, 159). Holborne Hill was a place of public punishment (Clarke 293). Whitney’s lengthy account of various notorious prisons includes Newgate, Fleet, Ludgate, and Counter, along with places of punishment Thumb and Holborne Hill. These prisons were long notorious for the cruelties inflicted on prisoners as well as the “overcrowding unhealthy environment” and “lack of air and water, and epidemics” (Allen, Taylor, Bonifield). Physicians often refused to enter the prison to give medical attention (Allen, Taylor, Bonifield). Although all criminals were expected

to pay for their own food and cells, they were not given bedding or clothing (Allen, Taylor, Bonifield). In addition to this cost, criminals were expected to pay a fee upon admission and continue to pay a fee for the ordinary comforts of life which included bedding and clothing (Allen, Taylor, Bonifield). They were expected to pay another fee when released, and if they were unable to do so, they had to remain in prison (Allen, Taylor, Bonifield). For this reason Whitney leaves “A Boxe” for the “behoofe” of “the poore within the same” (lines 172, 171). This alms box she bequests to benefit the poor, for they are in dire need of charitable donations to even survive in such horrid conditions. In the same fashion, it reflects the “desire of ruling elites to destroy working-class culture and impose an alien discipline on the poor in order to produce a malleable proletariat” (Briggs, et al. 150). Poverty disrupts the city’s networks; hence, legal structures are a hindrance to the working class. Including crime and punishment of the government in her analysis of society shows how two economically incompatible cities coexist together.

Ironically, the goods she leaves to London’s citizens are those not in her power to bequeath. Whitney has no goods of her own and no property (save the literary property *A Sweet Nosgay*); she cannot be in debt because London never gave her any credit. If, however, she managed to gain credit and, therefore, had the opportunity to be in debt, imprisonment would be an option:

When dayes of paiment did approch,
I thither ment to flee.
To shroude my selfe amongst the rest,
That chuse to dye in debt:

(lines 181-84).

These lines specifically argue *if* Whitney were able to get credit and was unable to pay creditors, she would end up in a debtor's prison (Jones, "Apostrophes to Cities" 161). People in debt in this period of history are prone to dying in debt with little chance to repay their debts. Just like debtors who cannot be released from debtor's prison without money to pay a release fee, Whitney, too, cannot partake in any of the city if she cannot pay for it. Those who cannot pay must remain confined in Ludgate prison. Her concern "does not mock utopian dreams of abundance but rather the social relations that keep it from emerging for everyone" (Bartolovich 426). Although we might interpret this as bitterness, the reasoning behind her logic is to unravel the economic atrocities and effects of inequality the working class suffers from.

Whitney continues the reproach when favoring prisoners: "I wyll to prisons portions leave, / what though but very small" as she donates to prisoners "the Counter they shal have / least they should go to wrack" (lines 137-38, 141-42). Because she is bequeathing to prisons, prisoners become the "synecdoche for her generosity" (Ingram, "A Case for Credit" 7). Each prisoner faces differing punishments: "burning nere the Thumb" while there are others whose "deeds deserveth death" (lines 154, 157). Again, we see another critique of both social and legal justice as she acknowledges these dimensions of urban crime that form a social order "grotesquely unequal and uncaring" (Bartolovich 423). Whitney also questions the actions of justice as both "honest men" and "Coggers" are thrown into prison (line 143). She also leaves "a certayne hole, / and little ease within" for "Friends wyl not them bayle / whose coyne is very thin" (lines 145-148). Whitney is a poor unemployed ex-servant who communicates with close kin in the lyric poems. Therefore, her "Friends" are generally social and economic equals. Because criminals in a debtor's prison needed to fund themselves, Whitney (along with her friends), who cannot attain an indebted state to possibly be imprisoned for debt, are consigned to

the “hole,” which is “the most wretched site in the early modern prison, reserved for inmates lacking means to pay for more comfortable accommodation” (Bartolovich 423). An escape for those whose coin is thin cannot be conceived and with little means of paying for a cell, individuals of her class suffers from poverty and exceeding punishments that corrupt this unjust society; only the working class is susceptible to the stresses of this hostile environment. However, Whitney so narrowly escapes this only because she cannot find herself in an indebted state.

In short, Whitney points out major weakness in London’s market economy. Money is not the enemy; its distribution is. Whitney solves yet another economic catastrophe in this redistribution of wealth from young adolescents to rich widows: “And wealthy Widdowes wil I leave, / to help yong Gentylnen,” extending her bequests to an even broader audience, which extends from men to the wealthy (lines 205-206). By directing her attention to “yong Gentylnen” and “Maydens poore,” Whitney gives equal attention to both men and women, and both wealthy and poor classes. The plight of youths (both sexes) shows her concern with the relationship between poor maids and rich widows and how their lives distinctly vary. Shortly after, she intensifies the perversity of the “hoarding” when she leaves “wealthy Widdows” to young men (lines 209-212). Because marriage secures economic functioning, Whitney allows these goods to serve social needs, not the needs of the market. Whitney’s intentions are not to “mock social groups” or mark “certain individual behaviors as deviant” but to draw critical attention to the “city of lack which cohabits with the city of abundance” (Bartolovich 425). By critiquing the city’s failures, Whitney calls for a more successful marketplace that would correct such failures by distributing the wealth, and open credit channels to all classes, showing hospitality to struggling writers such as those in the lower end of society.

At this point, Whitney shifts the spirit of the bequests to a different tone, one with a reasonable argument not blurred with irony. By abolishing “ignorance,” which is held responsible for the negatives of existing society, Whitney can redistribute goods owned by *all* as she has previously done. Marx and Engels referred to their communist society in which “an association in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all” (72). Imaginatively, Whitney bequeaths her symbolic capital to all, through an economic transaction that benefits her bookseller, Richard Jones:

To all the Bookebinders by Paulles
because I lyke their Arte:
They e[ver]y weeke shal mony have,
when they from Bookes departe.
Amongst them all, my Printer must,
have somewhat to his share:
I wyll my Friends there Bookes to bye
of him, with other ware.

(lines 193-200)

She invites readers into Jones’s shop, offering something of worth. Because she is a working-class author asking friends to buy her books, she is illustrating the very society she promotes. Whitney emphasizes the personal in promoting intimacy and social connection, a theme reoccurring from the lyric poems. These personal relations are the antithesis to the impersonal transactions of basic capitalism. Whitney, indeed, moves beyond typical transactions, instilling a form of personal embodiment through her will that creates kinship among her readers, serving the betterment of all classes. Richard Jones “serves as a reminder that others will benefit from the labors of the author, who can claim no profits from her text other than a small, flat fee for a

manuscript” (Ellinghausen, “Literary Property” 18). Representing the lower strata of society, Whitney defines the “Wyll” as a response to restrictions and has professed poverty to negotiate this position. “Wyll” is on some level an attempt social conciliation, creating a rapprochement between different classes. It is hoped that interaction will better all classes, creating cooperation between low and high. Her proposed dissemination of her book is her spending or bequeathing of her symbolic capital. She claims her book as a valuable enrichment to the marketplace for all readers, hence, all classes. Whitney wrote “this Wyll with mine owne hand / and it to London gave” (lines 317-318). Furthermore, Whitney highlights her charitable motives in writing that “my Printer must, / have somewhat to his share” (197-198). She is not seeking to profit herself, but Jones, her publisher. The professional success she is staging through this commodification speaks against her prior complaints of the denial of room, board, and credit. The sale of her book is compatible with the concern for the poor and a contribution for the common well-being. The “concern for the city’s poor is coincident with the speaker’s desire that credit channels be opened to her” (Ingram, “Response” 3). Openly engaging the public would assert “a normative ideal of a neighborly moral community” (Ingram, “A Case for Credit” 27). To do so, Whitney no longer harps on injustice; she has planted a seed of hope which serves as a “counterfactual” to the poem’s central complaint in staging a new, transformed London that will flourish socially and economically. Her goal as a writer is to enter the system as a commodity producer calling for a system that socializes circulation and encourages social equality through this very example. She is now able to produce in this world, from which she has always been economically barred, and she produces a vision of social equality.

Whitney exaggerates her bequests to imagine an ideal social system for those in weaker classes, in this case, the mentally insane –the lowest of the lowest class:

And Bedlem must not be forgot,
For that was oft my walke:
I people there too many leave,
That out of tune doo talke.

(lines 225-228)

Whitney is providing St. Mary of Bethlehem hospital with “many people” who talk “out of tune” (Clarke 294). Ingram suggests that “For that was oft my walke” can suggest two things: Whitney was one of the Londoners who visited Bedlam to watch the ravings of the mad for amusement, or because she skirted the fringes of insanity herself (“A Case for Credit” 1). However, I do not agree with either. The first reason is impractical because the first part of *Nosgay* is put together for the moral health of her readers. Why then would Whitney turn a new leaf and watch the mad for her own amusement? The second reason undoubtedly cannot be true, for the speaker’s insanity would contradict the entire will, since a will—even a mock will—can only be valid if it is made with a sound mind. What Whitney is doing is two things --criticizing Bedlam with this “impractical gift” (as Ingram suggests) of hoards of the mentally ill, while curing the mentally ill with assistance (“A Case for Credit” 1). Her relationship to the recipient is one of generosity; a donor is providing alms, assistance, and relief to those in most need of it. Therefore, Whitney’s visits to Bedlam are not to ridicule the crowd, but rather to provide a solace to them. The mentally ill and handicapped were considered part of the inferior classes: Whitney’s bequest crams an already full asylum with even more patients, which affirms that society itself is guilty of negligence of the mentally ill. In addition, Whitney leaves a “good store” (line 222) of horses and oxen to those in “Spittle,” (line 223) which was a charitable foundation that provided for the old, poor, and sick (Clarke 294). Though “Wyll” is itself “out of tune,” the mockery lies in the poem’s central irony: “the things she wills to London are the things she is without, things

London has already” (Ingram, “A Case for Credit” 4). The primary goal of these particular lines is to emphasize the accurate portrayal of London’s shortcomings, even through a mental hospital.

Among the last lines are:

When I am gon, with consience
let them [needful things] dispearced bee.
And though I nothing named have,
to bury mee withall:
Consider that above the ground,
annoyance bee I shall.

(lines 259-264)

If she is left unburied, she will be considered an annoyance, so she asks the city for “a shrowding Sheete / to cover mee from shame” (lines 255-56). Despite her being seen as a victim of economic destitution, Whitney leaves behind her critique; she does not go quietly into her good night.

Conclusion: After the “Wyll”

In essence, Whitney is suggesting London’s need for radical change. With the shift to capitalist individualism, people like Whitney were left with little value other than their services in hopes of future profit. Clarke nails down Whitney’s purpose of “The Maner of Her Wyll,” which is that Whitney “points to London’s commercial power, its financial rapaciousness, and its lack of charity, and by seeming to praise its prosperity criticizes the difficulties which accompany its growth, in particular changes in social structure and hierarchy” (xiv). In short, Whitney imaginatively transforms the city into her property that she can bequeath at any time,

giving her the power the upper class holds. Her purpose in doing so is to show members of all classes it is possible to create a more just and fulfilling system. Whitney, though her symbolic capital, seeks to convince those of power and wealth to undertake the creation of a better society; it is possible to ameliorate distress. Her lines “Amongst them all, my Printer must, / have somewhat to his share” (lines 247-8) remind readers that others will benefit from the labors of her authorship. The “Wyll” concentrates not on wealth, but on the distribution of it and the “lapse into poverty” pertaining to the working class (Ingram, “A Case for Credit” 18). Emphasizing the dehumanization of workers, Whitney pleads that a new organization is necessary, a communal desire that does not include giving a certain class control over the other. This is reiterated when she says, “And thee I put in trust, to geve / the goodes unto the rest” (lines 279-280). Though the working class is not acknowledged, Whitney continues to have faith in London possibly restoring its generosity to all classes. The theoretical sophistication behind this poem serves as a patina to the overall consistency of argument: social structure should be organized in a more equitable manner. Isabella Whitney challenges and subdues her superiors intellectually through her book with nothing other than “lucrative cheap print” declaring from far down on the social ladder (Brace 97).

The primary echo one hears in Whitney’s “Wyll” is the injustice of poverty through the unequal distribution of inaccessible goods, luxuries, and abundance. Whitney carried *A Sweet Nosgay* to its logical extreme by enjoining a mock will to show the activity and concentration of London is indeed superfluous. The principles, method, and characterization of her will anticipate features in the *Communist Manifesto*. The proletariat cannot compete with the upper classes because they have no capital, education, or opportunities. Isabella Whitney attempts to be the exception.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

“All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn. . . for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds” (66), writes Virginia Woolf. However Isabella Whitney dared to venture into print when publishing *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573), and indeed spoke her mind in her book some 100 years before Behn. This thesis viewed Whitney as an active participant of the working-class community, using her publication as a form of symbolic capital. Whitney defends the interests of her class and supports its community. As symbolic capital, her publication is a lasting document that she hopes will influence her patron, George Mainwaring, her family and friends as well as her readers. Producing these verses gives Whitney the ability to take active part in the community in the only way which was available to her, negotiating the cultural ideologies of both running a household and reinventing London. Despite not having the prerogative of direct rule, armies, or wealth, I argue, that Whitney uses her authorial stance as a laborer, social critic, testator, and writer to re-shape the Renaissance culture for the lower class.

In spite of unfavorable conditions, Whitney breaks ground by exploiting her loss of service and uses economic deprivation as a springboard for her argument. Patricia Brace notes that Whitney’s orientation is clearly “towards both labour and print markets,” (108) but her awareness, I argue, is exploiting the limited boundaries of the working class by speaking for the commonwealth of laborers. As Jean Howard puts it, “Whitney’s own plight is folded quietly into

the plight of many others” (229). For instance, due to Whitney’s expertise in London’s notorious prisons, we can assume that Whitney, too, has been in one or has contemplated escaping future debt. This thesis focuses on how Whitney’s social position is transformed into an “authoritative discursive stance” (Brace 108). Whitney uses her marginal status as a platform for which to erect literary authority, and this transformation, in turn, attempts to transform the misinterpretations of laborers. The working class can intervene in ideologies imposed on them as they reshape their social and economic culture. In other words, social impotence becomes the impetus for negotiation of literary authority, profit, and voice.

While focusing on the poor, Whitney is saying there is an answer and humanity can be redeemed in this anything but perfect society, and uses the process of labor as a key component of the literary authority to capitalize on her position. Accumulated labor is a means to “widen, to enrich, [and] to promote the existence of the labourer” (Marx 69). Hence, she transforms service in the aristocratic household into an opportunity for learning and authority. In the lyric poems, Whitney uses patronage and print to profit in some way and create cultural capital to revalue the role of the working class. She found it advantageous to draw from her strategy of authorship to build a community based on the shared experiences of laborers. Whitney shows how vital this role is to society, particularly to the upper class. She views her fellow laborers a strong driving force. Figuratively, Whitney is an ambiguous double: a poor, humble servant and a speaker for the working class. Whereas she first enjoins her readers to read her translations from Plat’s “plot,” she later invites them to buy her book, transforming personal worth into exchange value through commodification. Whitney acknowledges her effort to bundle her flowers together as a process of labor, but she leaves their “sorting” out to others, observing this activity is not “lotted to my share” (Burke et al. xxx). She transforms Plat’s book into more general terms of her own

devising; this tactic is enhanced to invite readers “into the pages of her own, rather better, florilegium” (Howard 222). She invites her readers into a set of neighborly relations which allow for mutual exchange of economic assistance, a concept that recognizes reciprocal obligations.

In the “Wyll,” I argue she uses class status to authorize appropriation of the typically masculine role of a critic, testator, and writer. As she ironically bequeaths to London all London already has, Whitney is improving the conditions of every member of society, regardless of class, bestowing all her goods despite her own destitution. She constructs a city entirely under her own control that she disposes through the role of a patron. The distribution of wealth and advancement in the world of print publication would mean a gain of dignity and security, the chance to become human again and evade a lifetime in a debtor’s prison. As a servant, writer, thinker, and most importantly, patron, Whitney is creating an atmosphere of openness as she distributes “every sort of newfangledness in dress, diet, and manners into the Commonwealth” (Howard 228)

It is just over four centuries later since Whitney composed *A Sweet Nosgay*, and it has barely left a trace. Though we are able to see the emerging pictures of the early modern English society as a whole, Whitney looks forward to later developments. In fact, her fundamental conception was carried out three centuries later with the birth of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). The broad strokes in Whitney’s publication are more valid today than ever before; many economists believe we have entered “The First Great Depression of the 21st Century” as incredibly wealthy countries suffer from poverty. Economist Dr. Anwar Shaikh discussed the reasons and consequences behind the recent economic decline: “Several factors have [...] lead me to the view that capitalism is a powerful shaping force which steadily transforms all cultures and institutions in its path, bending those which will bend and breaking those which will not.”

Karl Kautsky writes, “Today more than ever the proposition is accepted that the history of all (civilized) society so far is history of class struggles, and it has never been clearer than it is now the great driving force of our time is the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat” (127), but the recurrent pattern of resistance to capitalist economic forces has roots in early modern London. In the sixteenth century, Whitney was the laborer who undauntedly used wit and cleverness to reverse power dynamics and assert ownership of a book as a driver for social, economic (and even political) growth. A similar struggle is going on before our very eyes. The modern bourgeois society has sprouted from the early modern period but has established new classes, new conditions of oppression, and new forms of struggle (Marx 56). With the economic and financial crisis deepening, the global economy is plunging deeper into poverty. The analysis of poverty in *Nosgay* shows its relevance to a broader analysis of class in the modern period.

The focus of this thesis has been regarded in the aspect of class, categorizing Whitney as a Renaissance author rather than a woman writer, but gender was clearly an issue. This reading does not decrease the role feminism plays in Whitney’s work, but rather increases it. Whitney, as a female laborer of the early modern period, identified with two oppressed groups. Imposed with the double disadvantage of being a female of lower rank, Whitney articulates her social role when she threatens the upper classes with infection, “All wanton toyes, good sisters now exile out of your minde, / I hope you geve no cause, wherby I should suspect: / But this I know too many live, that would you soone infect” (“A modest meane for Maides In order prescribed, by Is. W. to two of her yonger Sisters serving in London,” lines 10-14). As a woman with no financial income, Whitney is liable to prostitution. Unemployed maidservants contributed high numbers to the prostitution group since women in economic straits often resorted to this (Ellinghausen 3).

It is important to negotiate class and gender when examining Whitney's work. Whitney was externally excluded from the social sphere due to her loss of position in service and internally "infected" with the cultural connotation of what being a female meant during this time period. Whitney's previous publication, *The Copy of a Letter* (1567), laments on feminine despair, something Richard Jones, her publisher, informs his readers is something "new" and "trew" (quoted in Marquis 314). Jones believes Whitney achieves a level of authenticity because there is truth to her feminine internal complexity (Marquis 315). By reading Whitney in this context, we are able to see how gender differences add another layer of complexity to Whitney's analysis of labor and class. In fact, it is the position of a *female* laborer that enriches the quality of her work. Whitney valuing her writing as a process of labor was critical in a period denied women the right to ownership. The weak reception of Whitney's text developed limited success since it was not given a second edition (Marquis 324); however, the modern reader may appreciate her work because "they contain a profound cultural critique of gender inequality, accompanied by proposals for constructive change" during a time when women were meant to be seen and not heard" (Marquis 324).

Little is known of Whitney after her publication. It has been suggested that Whitney may have written other unassigned poems printed by Jones (who specialized in popular ephemeral works) in two miscellanies: "The Lady Beloved Exclaimeth of the Great Untruth of Her Lover" and "The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman upon the Death of her Late Deceased Friend William Gruffith, Gent.," In *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* (1578) (Travitsky 344). Another hypothesis is that Whitney also wrote "Another by I.W.," an introductory poem in Thomas Morley's *Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music* (1597) (Travitsky 344). Still, despite her later anonymity, she "commands attention for the complex way she utilizes" the established

“social role of a maidservant and eventually that of writer, in London” because she inserts herself in legal, economic, and social spheres (Howard 218). Though Whitney was unsuccessful at changing political, social, and economic power for the working class during her time period, her publication shows how the central ideas which *Nosgay* rests on — labor, class consciousness, authorship, and literary and cultural authority, social harmony, the distribution of wealth, and civic responsibility— are to bind the proletariat more tightly and look forward to better society. Reading Whitney in light of this highlights her attempt to mitigate conflict classes, and she voices her way of exercising power by attempting to influence both lower and upper classes. Whitney’s communal goal is progress in breaking away from a capitalistic enterprise that disregards masses of people to produce one which is not so steadfastly divided. Whitney’s project is a small, incremental step towards the defense of the future interest of her class.

This thesis has argued that *A Sweet Nosgay* is not about a war between aristocrats and the working class. Rather, Whitney is concerned with dearth and abundance and fends for those who cannot actively take part in the distribution of wealth. *Nosgay* is a representation of common class people; this is not a publication that represents the elite. Though the underclasses could not compete with the ruling class because they had no education, capital, or opportunity, Whitney shows how a working-class laborer could intervene in an unjust class system. But questions still remain: why was Whitney only one of the very few from a working-class background to make it into the canon of early modern writers anthologies? Why were servants not able to rival their upper-class canonical poets from that period? Moreover, what role does the labor Whitney infused in her work determine its significance? These questions need to be addressed in future research.

Whether Isabella Whitney had a room of her own or not, she shaped the way in which she fashioned service and literary culture. Travitsky notes that Whitney is “inexplicably the embodiment of a ‘Judith Shakespeare,’ the imaginary Elizabethan woman whom Virginia Woolf conjured up –before Whitney’s poems were ever analyzed—and imagined to have been ‘as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as [William Shakespeare] was’” (Travitsky 344). Despite Woolf’s presumptions that restrictions absolutely prevented women from writing, Whitney transformed her marginalized position into one of literary and cultural authority basing her writing as a process of labor. Whitney deployed an assortment of creativity in the lyric poems and “Wyll” in order to maintain herself by pitting energy and wit to combat an economic system that oppressed the working class. This underclass author demonstrates the striking similarities between the criticism of society in the sixteenth century and that which continues to be characterized by the exploitation of class at the expense of another. “How a country could be rich and poor at the same time,” Shaikh says, “is what brought my attention to the study of economics. Seeing a developed country misuse or squander its resources, the affect of social interests, etc. I wanted to find out why that is, and what I could learn about preventing it.” Proletariats have nothing to lose by revealing their views and aims but their chains; instead, they have a world to win (Bender 86).

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