

Pure Heroin

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In her first full length album, *Pure Heroine* (released 27 September 2013), Lorde revisits her past and present states of social class. Each track of Lorde's suggestive album details the inequitable commonality of social class, and her deeply rooted sentiments towards it. In her lyrics, Lorde alludes to the actuality that she was brought up in a low/middle class family. During her teenage years she became critically aware of the role distinctions within social class, and the lines that were drawn between those classes. Her music becomes an avenue for her to vocalize her fervent indignation for social class, especially the upper elite and their ostentatious guises. Lorde makes it very clear how she and her friends view the rich and famous. Her lyrical prose openly defines her compelling persuasions. Ironically, her bestselling album has launched Lorde directly into the limelight, and propelled Lorde up a few rungs of that social class ladder.

Lorde, born Ella Maria Lani Yelich-O'Connor, was raised in Devonport, Auckland, New Zealand (Glinow). At a young age Lorde took classes in singing and acting with one of her friends. In 2009, her and a friend, Louis McDonald, won their school's talent show. After their performance, McDonald's father sent recordings of Lorde's song covers to talent scouts. Scott Maclachlan of A&R heard the recordings and signed Lorde to Universal at the age of 13 (Ryan). Due to her fascination with royals and aristocracy, she picked up the name Lord, but added an "e" to make it sound feminine (Weber). Lorde started writing songs, but it was not until she was introduced to producer Joel Little that sparked potential songs including her now hit song, "Royals". These five songs were released for her debut extended play, *The Love Club*, released March 2013 ("Lorde Pictures..."). That summer, *The Tennis Court EP* was released, and was followed up in the fall by *Pure Heroine*, her first full-length album.

Pure Heroine is comprised of 10 tracks, each track including symbolism and overtones with respect to the social elite class. The album cover itself represents the simplicity Lorde strives to achieve through minimalism. It modestly presents her stage name and album title in white lettering on a black background. This cover art design, plain and simple as it is, makes an ingeniously bold, yet subtle, statement in respect to Lorde's feelings towards the absurdly garish social elite. Another purpose for her cover art design may be that Lorde is making a quietly shrewd affirmation as to how pointedly black and white the issue of class status is.

Social class is the dominant theme in Lorde's music. Her moderate upbringing led her to recognize the blatant disparity between social classes. Issues such as extravagant wealth, inequality, and fractured sodality challenged Lorde to employ her music as a mode of action, an outlet for her passionate convictions.

"White Teeth Teens", a track from her album *Pure Heroine*, is a brassy example of Lorde engaging her talent as a songwriter to portray tensions within classes. "I'll let you in on something big. I am not a white teeth teen." The listener deduces that a white teeth teen is basically a rich kid with perfect teeth. With this song, Lorde is telling her audience that a white teeth teen is more or less a perfect teen, living in a perfect suburban home, with a perfect family that is financially able to provide for their offspring. Lorde goes on to point out that she "tried to join, but never did." Reading between Lorde's cleverly composed lines, the audience understands that as a kid, Lorde "tried to join", but being so young, Lorde would not have had a grasp on the concept of social class. In a kid's world, life should be fair for everyone. So Lorde innocently "tried to join, but never did." Another thought provoking line in the song is "the way they are, the way they seem is something else, it's in the blood." Lorde is revealing that white

teeth teens have it in their blood; they are born into their elite class and learn their class' habits from a young age.

Another cut from *Pure Heroine* is the song "Royals". Verse one begins "I've never seen a diamond in the flesh, I cut my teeth on wedding rings in the movies." Lorde acquaints her audience again with the fact that she does not come from money. She says that she has only seen diamonds in the movies. Verse one also announces, "Jet planes, islands, tigers on a gold leash. We don't care. We aren't caught up in your love affair." Lorde tells us that the rich can flaunt their conspicuous and competitive consumption all they want, but that she and her friends are certainly not a part of such raffish grandstanding. Towards the end of verse one Lorde re-emphasizes a common theme in her works, "And we will never be royals. It don't run in our blood. That kind of luxe just ain't for us." She is reiterating the fact that she did not come from wealth. She also inserts an interesting innuendo within a couple of the words in that verse. She uses "bad English" in her line "It don't run..." She also uses the word "ain't". Is this a cunning reference to the sub-language of the lower classes?

"Tennis Court" is yet another track from Lorde's album *Pure Heroine*. Once again Lorde presents to her audience her conflict within social status. In this song she speaks about the fact that even though she is now a member of the social elite, her thoughts, views, and who she is will remain the same. "Because I'm doing this for the thrill of it... getting pumped up on the little bright things I bought, but I know they'll never own me." Lorde tells us that she is chasing her dreams of being a singer/songwriter, that she can still be excited about the small, bright things in life.

Lorde's rise to fame was a very sudden one. In her track "Still Sane" she writes, "I'm not in the swing of things..." In this song Lorde conveys to the listener that she has not gotten

acclimated to her life as a celebrity. “Everything I say falls right back into everything.” Lorde relates to her listeners that she has not yet learned how to talk to the media without them taking her words and twisting them into something she did not actually mean. Lorde tells her listeners that her sudden rise to fame has left her very naïve and vulnerable to the celebrity’s way of life. She writes, “Riding around on the bikes, we’re still sane.” This line brings to mind carefree, happy days that she is enjoying with her friends, in direct opposition to celebrities’ lives which are sadly focused on impressing their friends, accruing greater wealth, and amassing power. All the while, they are slowly going insane.

Throughout the ten tracks that make up her album *Pure Heroine*, it is clearly evident how Lorde feels about class differences. Even in her title, *Pure Heroine*, Lorde again presents another significant allusion. There are two levels of perception at play in her title. One can read that title and draw the conclusion that Lorde is using her music to possibly make a difference, which is the strained animosity between the classes. She refuses to become an empty-headed, bedazzled celebrity. In this way Lorde sees herself as a heroine in her quest to change society. Though if she were to fall into the audacious, drug-addicted, vulgar lives typical celebrities lead, you will in turn see the flip side of *Pure Heroine* as *Pure Heroin*. Lorde added the “e” to her chosen name Lord. It does sound more feminine, but is she making a clever allegation here? Lorde, minus the “e”, brings to mind the haughty, powerful attitudes of the rich and famous. *Heroine*, minus the “e” becomes the vice and eventual downfall of many of the members of the egotistical social elite. It is quite a divide. One more or less black and white.

Using her music as a channel to speak to the people, Lorde provokes her audience into truly listening to what she has to say. Since her audience is comprised of a majority of young adults, Lorde feels the urgent need to make a serious attempt to reach out to them. Young adults

are still impressionable and are not set solidly in their opinions. If any dent at all can be made in how social classes interact and respect each other, it lies within younger people.

Throughout her album, Lorde restates to her audience that she was born into a lower social class. This in itself will catch the attentions of the listeners; it is something that most of them can relate to. Once she has hooked her young audience, she paints detailed illustrations with her lyrics regarding how the elite class lives and rules. Her brilliant lyrics provide much food for thought for this young generation. Lorde presents the message that she is not a typical celebrity and that her identity is fiercely rooted in her humble beginnings. Unlike other artists that write about bling, drugs, private jets, and so on, Lorde's purpose is to bring meaning into her lyrical expressions of art. "We're not caught up in your love affair."

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